

Ministerial Care



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From the Editor

Several years ago, when I was in the Willow Grove offices of the OPC, I had a remarkable conversation with David Haney. He told me about the Obadiah Fund and his ideas about a committee on ministerial care. A few years later, after the Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) was initiated by the general assembly, Matt Miner asked me if I would be interested in publishing something about the new committee in *Ordained Servant*. I have embraced the idea enthusiastically. As a journal for church officers, this is the best place for the CMC to explain various aspects of its very timely ministry and to pass on its wisdom and advice on various aspects of ministry. We begin this month with Matt Miner's explanation of the new committee's history, mandate, range of tasks, and future in "Introducing the Committee on Ministerial Care of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church."

Having studied the phenomena of electronically mediated church since 1990, when TV ministry was all the rage, and having been critical of many of the ways the church has used electronic media, I found that not only was the coronavirus novel, but so also was doing virtual church meetings each Lord's Day. Experiencing almost two months of tuning in to virtual church presentations, I thought it might be helpful to share some of my reflections on the benefits and liabilities of such presentations in "Reflections on Virtual Church Meetings in the Time of Coronavirus."

David Noe and Joseph Tipton give us the fifth and final portion of their translation of "Chrysostom's Commentary on Galatians." This lively commentary is given in its entirety.

Alan Strange continues his "Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church." He is well qualified to write this commentary, having taught church polity at Mid-America Reformed Seminary for more than twenty years and the MTIOPC Form of Government Course for the OPC for more than a decade. He also received a Ph.D. in the study of ecclesiology and polity in the writings of Charles Hodge. Along with his service on the general assembly Committee on Appeals and Complaints since 1992, this commentary will be very useful to church officers. Eventually, it will be printed as a book along with a commentary on the Book of Discipline.

Richard Gamble reviews Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis*. Kidd examines evangelicalism as he knows it in light of recent shifts in voting patterns, especially the 2016 election.

T. David Gordon reviews *The HTML of Cruciform Love: Toward a Theology of the Internet*, edited by John Frederick and Eric Lewellen. My friend and fellow media ecologist highly recommends this compilation: "This collection consists of a thoughtful introduction

and twelve insightful chapters by fourteen scholars from three continents.” Such theological reflection on the electronic environment from an orthodox Christian *and* a media savvy perspective is a rare find.

Charles Wingard reviews *The Christian and Technology* by John V. Fesko, a fine brief treatment of a topic that is germane to every Christian life.

Our poem this month is, again, a timely one, except that instead of a contemporary poet this poet—who was also a playwright—Thomas Nashe, lived through the 1592–93 bubonic plague in London. “In Time of Plague” is a poignant poem from a Christian perspective.

The cover pictures for this and the last two issues were taken by me in Zermatt, Switzerland and Chamonix, France. April was the Matterhorn from Zermatt, and May and June-July are taken from the French ski resort village of Chamonix.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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- “Sabbaticals for Pastors.” (David VanDrunen) 18 (2009): 93–97.
- “Taking Care of Your Pastor.” (Chad Van Dixhoorn) 16 (2007): 47–50.
- “Fatigue in Christian Ministry – Its Causes (and Cure).” (Lawrence Bilkes) 12:2 (Apr. 2003): 32–33.
- “Face-to-Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 21 (2012): 20–26.
- “The Wired Church.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 16 (2007): 26–34.

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

Servant Thoughts

Reflections on Virtual Church Meetings in the Time of Coronavirus

by Gregory E. Reynolds

“Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12).¹

There is nothing like my black raspberries in early July. The ones I get from the grocery store are good, but the first-hand experience of picking and eating my own is much more satisfying. So, the mediated connection with other people, especially people we love, whether by phone or teleconferencing, is good in certain circumstances, but nothing can replace their actual presence. The apostle John felt this keenly as we all do each Lord’s Day during this time of coronavirus. I will use the word “actual” to refer to our physical presence in gathering for worship. I do so because worship is an act, an act of bowing and adoring our Lord body and soul: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” (Ps. 95:6). Worship is an act of the whole person which cannot be done mediated by a screen. The present necessity is like John’s paper and ink—better than nothing—but making us long for a better day. As we shall see teleconferencing platforms are unsuitable for worship and preaching.

Permanent self-isolation would be a denial of the incarnation. This has been an increasing problem in the church ever since the internet became a household reality in the 1990s. The First Church of Cyberspace was a pioneer in this sad folly. We live in the midst of many who believe we can lead disembodied lives. This present crisis will only tend to fuel the fire of radical individualism and enable cybergnosticism—living in cyberspace as if without a body. The writer of Hebrews warned of this tendency long before the electronic environment: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24–25). My pastor and another nearby, whose Lord’s Day presentation I have viewed, have done their very best, given the weaknesses of the various electronic means of communicating, to feed their congregations. I believe this is true throughout our communion. For this I am grateful.

Having studied the phenomena of electronically mediated church since 1990, when TV ministry was all the rage, I have been critical of many of the ways the church has unreflectively used electronic media. But now not only is this version of the coronavirus

¹ Gregory E. Reynolds, “Face to Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life” *Ordained Servant Online* (December 2012).

novel, but so also is my experience of live streaming church meetings each Lord's Day. Experiencing almost two months of tuning in to virtual church presentations made me think that it might be helpful to share some of my reflections on the benefits and liabilities of such presentations both to immunize church officers to the temptation to have such meetings regularly and to help them appreciate why it is so good to gather for corporate worship each Lord's Day.

On the spectrum of responses to the sudden need to have something available each Lord's Day to the church during the COVID shutdown are two poles of approach: those who have a devotional via audio or video prepared beforehand and those who live stream something close to a full liturgy, and in a few cases in the church building, and even with a few people (in line with local and state requirements). My experience is with a live streamed liturgy reduced essentially to confession, assurance of pardon, preaching, and prayer. The fact that we as a presbytery and local church do not do this very well speaks highly of our commitment to corporate gathering for public worship because it means that we have no experience with live streaming any church meetings. And because we know one another as a small congregation, the live streaming is probably more meaningful than if we had never met or were a large group.

However, using backgrounds, having proper lighting, using the full screen to block out distractions, and practicing a host of other more technical aspects of live-streaming in particular, require experience and the proper knowledge required of the speaker and the audience on how to use the Zoom application. Paying better attention to these things helps to mitigate the negatives of a medium that is in itself essentially unsuitable for worship. I recommend Zoom over other live-stream applications because it is free for the limited use we will make of it. And, unlike Facebook or other social platforms, you do not have to join the platform to join the meeting. With Go-To-Meeting one must subscribe for a fee in order to use the system settings, so those who join the meeting are not able to have backgrounds to filter out what's happening in the viewer's home. There may be other platforms that are being used that are better than Zoom, but this is one I am experiencing in my local church, presbytery, and its committees.

The efficiency of such platforms as Zoom in terms of cost and convenience will tempt many, even in Reformed churches, to make this a standard practice at some level. In our general culture we already see the temporary being made permanent. Twitter is letting its employees work from home permanently. Consider these statements by evangelical pastors recently interviewed by Sarah Zylstra for the Gospel Coalition:

“I think the Lord is showing us a new strategy, if we'd just pay attention,” he said. He's seen unexpected fruit from the online worship he never wanted to have—members watching services at home with unbelieving family members, more people in more small groups, a higher number in the discipleship class for new people.

“There hasn't been a [ministry] retreat at all,” Mabry said. “I think this is a strategy God wants us to hang on to.”²

² Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “How 6 Pastors Are Thinking About Reopening,” The Gospel Coalition (May 2, 2020), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-6-pastors-thinking-reopening/>.

Even though I believe that OPC officers and people will be less tempted, we should never take that for granted in rapidly changing times. The Lord's Day worship hill is the one I am prepared to die on; but I would also argue strongly that a lack of personal presence in all sorts of meeting and teaching venues is an impoverishment.

There are two fundamental errors that I wish to address at the outset. First, the idea that the introduction of electronic media is the same as the introduction of other technologies in history, such as the printing press. Recently a prominent evangelical leader wrote that

For centuries faith has flourished when technology could meet spiritual need. The Gutenberg Bible transformed Christianity, combining a hunger for faith and disdain for hierarchy with the printing press. . . . Necessity has sparked innovation during the coronavirus outbreak as well. Recently a church in Nashville, Tenn., offered drive-through communion, distributing consecrated bread to congregants in their cars. . . . Ministries also have shifted from physical spaces to digital platforms. Online viewers at First Baptist Church in Dallas, for example, surged from 50,000 before the coronavirus outbreak to over 200,000.³

There is a vast difference between the cultural effect of the printing press and the electronic environment, even though both media inventions radically changed culture. Canadian scholar Arthur Boers observes that modern technological change is unique in five ways:⁴ 1) Change is occurring at an unprecedented rate, leaving little time to adapt discerningly, and thus technology is overpowering culture. By contrast the change from handwritten manuscripts to the printed word took several centuries. 2) Change is artificial, separating us from nature and the real world. Matthew Crawford demonstrates the importance of the integration of manual and mental competence for living in the actual world.⁵ Wendell Berry contends that the Bible is an "outdoor book."⁶ 3) Change is pervasive, dominating everything from communication to irons, restaurants to family. It tends to intrude on vacations and the Sabbath. 4) Change is not related to personal skills; rather, change is marked by such things as self-driving cars and automated airplanes. In contrast, on January 15, 2009, Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger landed an Airbus A320 in New York's freezing Hudson River by human skill that no automated system, at least at the time, could replicate. 5) Change demands universal conformity, tending to eradicate the unique, local, and diverse. The title of James Howard Kunstler's book emphasizes this point relative to our built environment: *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*.⁷

³ Ralph Reed, "A Coronavirus Easter," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 10, 2020): A13.

⁴ Arthur Boers, "Open the Wells of Grace and Salvation: Creative and Redemptive Potential of Technology in Today's Church" (lecture at the conference From the Garden to the Sanctuary: The Promise and Challenge of Technology, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, June 6, 2013).

⁵ Matthew B. Crawford, *The World beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

⁶ Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Random House, 1993); reprinted in *Cross Currents* 43, no. 2 (Summer 93): 149, <https://www.crosscurrents.org/berry.htm>.

⁷ James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

That leads me to the second error, the idea that all technologies are simply tools. Because various technologies are designed with certain functions and consequences in mind, each has a genius of its own, a suitability to a particular purpose or purposes. There are, of course, also unintended consequences. The automobile was intended to make travel more efficient and far reaching, but it also disintegrated the social structures of family and community. In analyzing the new electronic environment and its devices, a good steward of technology will become familiar with both the intended and unintended influences and consequences of human inventions.

Suitability is a useful lens for the wise assessment of various technologies. A hymn would not be suitable music with which to begin a baseball game; just as a Sousa march would be unsuitable as an opening hymn in worship. Television is suitable for drama because it captivates us with faces and visual stories. This is why Neil Postman argues, I think convincingly, that television is not suitable for preaching or worship.⁸ It diminishes the transcendence of God while amplifying the importance of the preacher.

So, we come to the question of the suitability of a live-streaming application like Zoom, which is the platform I have experienced regularly for church meetings since the stay-at-home orders in March. Some of us have a problem with calling them worship services. While live streaming is, I believe, unsuitable for many things, its place in education, business, and elsewhere should be discussed in terms of suitability and also with an eye to what is lost in the absence of actual human presence. This will vary at various times and in different situations. Being able to see a loved one in a nursing home or the hospital when it is not possible for a physical visit is a great blessing. Not being part of an actual community in learning or business may not be.

One caution: we must be careful in this fluid, and hopefully temporary, situation to be generous in assessing the practices of various churches in response to this pandemic. This is why my remarks in this article are called “reflections.” While I hope to articulate principles rooted in God’s Word which we can all affirm, I do not expect everyone to agree with every detail of my analysis, especially of the liabilities of virtual church meetings. I am also limited in terms of the kind of virtual platform I have become familiar with as well as the particular form and content of the presentation at the church of which I am part.

BENEFITS

In such a time as this we would simply be unable to meet without virtual conferencing platforms or some form of electronic communication. And if churches actually met as usual during a pandemic, many more deaths would likely occur. It is also my opinion that with people we know well face to face, seeing them mediated via a screen is helpful, perhaps similar to the way that carrying a picture of one’s family is meaningful while traveling.

Modern electronic technologies have made possible the analysis of a virus like COVID-19, the rapid manufacture of medical materials, the gathering and analysis of data, and communication of information and guidelines that have saved many lives.

In my recent experience with Zoom, sermon discussion often took place unplanned after the meeting. This was unusual because everyone heard the discussion and benefited

⁸ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1985), 114–24.

from it. Ordinarily, after worship, discussion takes place one-on-one or in small groups. Of course, this may be implemented, and often has been, in the corporate setting by holding an actual meeting for just this purpose after worship. But this unintended consequence reminded me of the value of such discussions, not that we should continue using live streaming for Lord's Day meetings.

Also, some of us have been able to attend, actually to see and hear, the evening meeting, which we, for various reasons such as distance, health, and little children, are not normally able to attend.

LIABILITIES

The Nature of Lord's Day Public Worship

It has often been thought that I do not like electronic media because I engage in critical analysis. This is not true. Because we as Americans are generally positive and even enthusiastic about every new invention, I have found it important to be alert to ways in which the electronic environment diminishes and alters embodied existence and personal presence. In a fallen world our inventions always have liabilities as well as benefits. Consider atomic power.

If we examine words that we often take for granted, like congregation, corporate, or public we will be reminded that our physical presence in Lord's Day worship is essential to the nature of worship and the visible church. The congregation *congregates* on the Lord's Day. Congregate is derived from the Latin verb *congregare*, meaning flock together. Corporate is from the Latin *corporare*, to form into a body or social group. The accent on bodily or actual presence is pronounced. When we refer to the *visible* church and public worship we are also accenting the personal presence of a group of believers.

Since Lord's Day public worship is a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in history, the physical presence of gathered worshippers is an essential expression of that reality. The visible and tactile nature of the sacraments accents the embodied character of corporate worship. The Directory for the Public Worship of God of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (DW) says this eloquently, "Because God's people worship, not as an aggregation of individuals, but as a congregation of those who are members of one another in Christ, public worship is to be conducted as a *corporate* activity in which all the members participate as the *body* of Christ" (emphasis added, DW I.B.4.d). Some may be tempted to think that the spiritual nature of public worship obviates the necessity of bodily presence. But, since Paul refers to Christ's and our resurrected bodies as "heavenly" or "spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:40, 44–45), and Christ ate fish with the disciples after the resurrection, it seems clear that whole persons, body and soul, are called to gather for worship in space and time.

The Unsuitableness of Virtual Lord's Day Meetings

The Importance of Space

The "gallery view" in Zoom reminds me of the sixties game show Hollywood Squares, except that they were social distancing whereas we are not actually present. Individuals in little boxes are the focus rather than the corporate reality of a gathered people. With the pervasiveness of visual media we do not need one more venue in which to focus on ourselves. In "speaker view" the preacher is the visual focus, rather than God

and his gathered people, as I have said above. These are the limits of screens, which can never replicate space. We *view* others, clustered on a screen but not actually present together. Instead of focusing on the pastor leading worship, the “gallery view” has us looking at ourselves; even in “speaker view” some viewers can see themselves, although that can be turned off. I chose to turn off the video so that a still picture of me shows up. But this is still distracting.

One of the great joys of actual gathering on the Lord’s Day is the informal, serendipitous fellowship we enjoy after worship. The screen does not allow the one-on-one of small group conversations after worship. Those who are more reserved tend to say nothing.

Live streaming is also a threat to the reality of the local church. It may tempt us to go elsewhere electronically on the Lord’s Day because the preacher is better at another site. This is a denial of the vital importance of the local assembly of God’s people with the preacher whom God has called to that place. Paul emphasizes the importance of locality when he addresses the various churches in his letters, such as “To the church of God *that is in* Corinth (emphasis added, 1 Cor. 1:2)”

The Danger of Informality and Distraction

The home environment is by its nature informal. Mediated through a screen, social and cognitive space are altered radically. The formalities of our culture have been under attack for a long time. What I call the Cult of Informality is the extreme implementation of egalitarianism, and certainly one of the weak tendencies of a democratic society. I love lose-fitting sports clothing and have not strapped a tie around my neck in nearly two months; but the way we dress should be appropriate to the various occasions of our lives. I have never worn my three-piece suit for gardening. A home is a place of refuge where informality is appropriate. Also, when we dress for church it gives us a sense of the difference and the importance of what we are doing. We are essentially paying attention to coming into the presence of the living and true God in his resplendent majesty and marvelous mercy.

In actual worship, worshippers face the minister; in Zoom we are looking at each other as I have mentioned. If the preacher fails to mute everyone, even a sneeze or a screaming child will take center stage momentarily. Also, even when muted, if viewers do not use backgrounds, everyone sees the many ordinary things that go on in a home: children and pets walking through rooms, people reaching for coffee across the kitchen table, the chiming of clocks; all of these draw our attention away from what is supposed to be holding our attention. Also, we can turn ourselves off at will and walk away. With this medium we tend to lose our focus and the seriousness of worship is diminished. We are naturally distracted; worshipping in a single space with one another minimizes distraction and enhances our sense of mutual accountability. Fortunately the sensibilities we have formed over many years of actual worship will, I believe, enable us to endure this temporary challenge with its temptations.

The Impossibility of the Sacraments, Singing, Confession, and Many Other Things

Nothing reveals the unsuitableness of streaming church meetings more than the physical impossibility of the elements of worship. Some elements like preaching, the assurance of pardon, and fellowship are seriously impaired and awkward; other elements

such as singing, corporate confession of sin and faith, the offering, and especially the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are impossible. Not being in the same space, especially with varying qualities of microphones and internet connections, conjoin to undermine true worship and preaching.

Our Directory for the Public Worship of God reminds us of what Scripture teaches concerning the administration of the sacraments:

Because the sacraments are ordinances of Christ for the benefit of the visible church, they are to be administered only under the oversight of the government of the church. Moreover, in ordinary circumstances they are properly administered only in a gathering of the congregation for the public worship of God . . ." (DW II.A.4.b)

Many have asked about having the Lord's Supper administered virtually. Because the sacraments include physical elements and the physical actions of the minister of the Word, they require our presence body and soul. The sacraments are part of the worship of the gathered congregation and "under the oversight of the government of the church." This is not possible virtually.

Evangelism is made more difficult with platforms that require a meeting identification number and password. While unbelievers may be invited, they cannot simply attend. Churches with livestreaming coming directly from their website have the advantage of being publicly accessible.

May our Lord keep us from the digital temptation to live disembodied lives. May he bless us as we return to actual worship with a renewed enthusiasm and commitment. There is a longing in John's statement quoted above (2 John 12), a deep desire for personal presence, which is one of the great unintended blessings of social distancing: it makes us yearn for the presence that the psalmist longed for, "My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God" (Ps. 84:2).

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Servant Work

Introducing the Committee on Ministerial Care of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

by Matthew R. Miner

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Tim. 5:17–18)

Ministers (even missionaries!), are men “of like nature” to all the rest of us (Acts 14:15). I have experienced this truth through hundreds of hours spent with ministers in two decades of ordained service as an elder and a deacon. Ministers need the gospel applied in their lives. Ministers need prayer for their ministries. Ministers need friendship and fellowship in the local church. Ministers need money to buy groceries and housing, and beyond that, to prepare for a future when they no longer serve actively in the ministry. Ministers need encouragement and help on an ongoing basis and at specific times in their ministries.

There are two kinds of ministers as it relates to retirement-readiness: ministers in retirement and those who, in the ordinary course of life, will retire in the future (Num. 8:24–26). There is one kind of minister as it relates to “care” broadly construed: ministers who need care for their bodies, minds, and souls (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A #1). The Committee on Ministerial Care (“CMC”) exists to care for the ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as these men face unique challenges because of their calling. That care comes to ministers through means—primarily through the work of congregations, sessions, presbyteries, and the general assembly.

In Matthew 6:25–26 our Lord says,

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

The Lord gives this command and in his glorious wisdom supplies the means of obeying his Word. Ministers are freed from anxiety when they cast their cares on the Lord in prayer and when their congregations and sessions pray that their minister may rest in Christ. The Lord answers these prayers and ministers receive food, drink, and clothing when the terms of their calls unstintingly provide these necessities throughout their ministries with enough income left over (ideally at least ten percent plus of the total

call amount) to be invested wisely for the future. In some cases—ministers who opted out of Social Security, began investing after age forty, live in a manse or rent a home, are burdened with high student debt, or have children with special needs—even more is needed.

Calvin, after affirming the distinct work given to ruling elders and ministers of the gospel, comments on 1 Timothy 5:17–18:

Paul . . . enjoins that support shall be provided chiefly for ministers, who are employed in teaching. Such is the ingratitude of the world, that very little care is taken about supporting the ministers of the word; and Satan, by this trick, endeavors to deprive the Church of instruction, by terrifying many, through the dread of poverty and hunger, from bearing that burden.

“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox” This is a political precept which recommends to us equity and humanity . . . for, if he forbids us to be unkind to brute animals, how much greater humanity does he demand towards men!

. . . “The laborer is worthy of his hire” [Paul] does not quote this as a passage of Scripture, but as a proverbial saying, which common sense teaches to all. In like manner, when Christ said the same thing to the Apostles, (Matt. 10:10,) he brought forward nothing else than a statement approved by universal consent. It follows that they are cruel, and have forgotten the claims of equity, who permit cattle to suffer hunger; and incomparably worse are they that act the same part towards men, whose sweat they suck out for their own accommodation. *And how intolerable is the ingratitude of those who refuse support to their pastors, to whom they cannot pay an adequate salary!* (emphasis mine).¹

Calvin believed inadequate care and compensation for pastors was a trick of Satan to deprive the church of teaching! In striving to care for ministers in the OPC, the CMC’s mandate addresses physical needs and spiritual needs of our pastors as Satan preys upon an entirely understandable “dread of poverty” in the ministry.

The CMC’s History and Mandate²

The CMC’s mandate is to care for ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CMC got its start in 2014 as The Temporary Committee to Study the Care for the Ministers of the Church. This group was asked to “investigate needs of OPC ministers and suggest ways [to provide or enhance care for these men and their widows] during all phases of ministry.”

The study committee worked throughout 2015 and 2016 considering two main approaches for the future. First, they considered expanding the roles of several existing standing committees whose work touches on aspects of ministerial care: The Committee on Diaconal Ministries, The Committee on Pensions, The Committee on Christian Education, and the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. However, after wrestling with how this could work out to serve OP ministers, the study committee

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 139–140.

² Portions excerpted from Matthew Miner, “Caring for Ministers in the OPC,” *New Horizons* (Dec. 2018): 9, 16.

determined that the wide range of work would be hard to fit into an existing committee structure and would be difficult to coordinate across so many committees.

The second idea was a single, new committee, with a mandate to handle all areas of ministerial care. The study committee concluded that this would be the best way forward, and so in 2016 the committee asked the eighty-third General Assembly to approve the establishment of a Committee on Ministerial Care and to propose to the eighty-fourth General Assembly a change in its standing rules that the Committee on Ministerial Care would replace the Committee on Pensions. The CMC would consist of nine church officers: ordained ministers and ruling elders (or deacons), with “the purpose . . . to provide financial direction and ministries of encouragement and support to ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.” The eighty-fourth General Assembly ratified this plan, and the Committee on Ministerial Care was born; its inaugural meeting was held July 5th, 2017. The assembly determined that:

“The mandate of the CMC shall include:

- Maintaining, managing, and providing oversight of the OPC Pension Fund.
- Providing and recommending counsel and assistance in risk management (health, life, disability, counseling, and such other types of insurance as may be advisable).
- Providing or recommending counsel and assistance in financial planning.
- Including retirement planning and investment portfolio management.
- Maintaining, managing, and providing oversight of the OPC Obadiah Fund; and providing for the diaconal needs of all OPC ministers.
- Informing presbyteries and local sessions of tools available for the care of their ministers.
- Consulting with North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches regarding their experience and best practices in the care of their ministers.
- Assisting presbyteries with resources to improve the terms of calls.
- Maintaining denominational salary scale guidelines.
- Maintaining a comprehensive and confidential database of OPC ministerial compensation.
- Providing direction to the general assembly regarding our Book of Church Order and retirement related matters.
- Providing financial instruction and counsel in educational venues, e.g., the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC.

- Considering other means of strengthening the care of ministers, e.g., ministerial mentoring, counseling, retreats, and sabbaticals.”

The committee began work to fulfill its GA mandate. The initial membership included Rev. Lendall Smith, Elder Bruce Stahl, Rev. Darren Thole, Elder David Nakhla, Elder David Vander Ploeg, Rev. Clark Brooking, Rev. Douglas L. Watson, and Elder Greg DeJong. It also included Elder David Haney who became the CMC’s director.

On August 11, 2019 the committee received an email from Vice President Greg DeJong titled “Urgent Prayer Request & Meeting Postponement.” We learned that David Haney had collapsed in the exercise room of his hotel in Milwaukee. Five days later, on August 16 at the age of fifty-six, David finished his earthly race and was welcomed into glory by our Lord Jesus. He is deeply missed by his wife Becky and his children and grandchildren. His death is mourned by the OPC at large, including the CMC. David’s death created new challenges for the young committee.

Describing the start of the CMC in a eulogy to David Haney, David Nakhla, administrator of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries writes,

The newest denominational committee, the Committee on Ministerial Care, which was inaugurated in 2017, was David’s brain-child. The CMC became the successor to the work of the previous Committee on Pensions, and it also absorbed some of the work of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, specifically the care of ministers and their widows through the administration of the Obadiah Fund. David was serving as the Inaugural Director of the CMC at his passing.

Throughout the fall of 2019 and early winter of 2020, the CMC labored without a director. At the committee’s January 2020 meeting, the work of our search committee bore fruit in the unanimous decision to call Rev. John Fikkert as the Committee on Ministerial Care’s new Director. John began his work April 1, 2020.

Tasks of the CMC

The CMC strives, by God’s grace, to fulfill its mandate by providing tools and resources that are specifically useful to ministers and their wives and that equip sessions and presbyteries to care for ministers.

Members of the CMC have addressed most of the presbyteries of the OPC, and John Fikkert will continue this work in coming years. John Fikkert and Greg DeJong presented a well-received session at the ReChex conference in Orlando, Florida in November 2019. The CMC conducted focus groups with ministers’ wives at the Church Planter’s conference in January and at a Chicago-area ministers’ wives’ brunch in March 2020. Matt Miner is scheduled to present to the OPC interns on the topic of financial planning for pastors in the summer of 2020.

Much of the committee’s work resides on our website, opccmc.org. This includes previously recorded video content on investing for retirement, avoiding burnout in ministry, and structuring financial terms of pastoral calls to take full advantage of the Minister’s Housing Allowance in the Internal Revenue Code.

The website includes resources on Salary Scale Guidelines, the recently re-released Pastoral Compensation Tool, and Sabbatical Guidelines (new in 2020).

Future of the CMC

Per our general assembly mandate, the CMC exists to provide “encouragement and support” to care for ministers. That care comes to OP ministers through congregations, sessions, presbyteries, and the general assembly. Further, ministers have a responsibility for godly self-care, getting adequate rest and exercise, stewarding the gifts they have received, and praying that God would provide and bless in every way.

The Lord gives unique callings to each of his servants, but we do not fulfill those callings alone. The minister is upheld in his preaching by the prayers of the elders. Elders are freed to lead in prayer, to teach, and to discipline by the loving work of the deacons. Deacons are supported in their ministry to the emotional and physical needs of the congregation by church members who lay down their lives for the cause of Christ. All believers are blessed as we care for one another by lifting up our prayers, sharing our time, and by giving out of the abundance which we have received. The church is blessed as each member works and prays that the gospel may advance all around the world and in the hearts of believers everywhere. The prayer of each member of the CMC is that the Lord himself would care for the ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—God’s gifts to his church!—and that all God’s people would be richly blessed through the work of these beloved men.

Matthew R. Miner *serves as a ruling elder at Pilgrim Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, and is a member of the OPC's Committee on Ministerial Care.*

ServantClassics

Chrysostom's Commentary on Galatians¹

Parts 1–5

by David C. Noe and Joseph A. Tipton

Part 1

This introduction teems with much passion and great fervor. In fact not only the introduction, but indeed the whole letter, so to speak, is like this as well. For those who always speak calmly to their students, when the students require sternness, this is characteristic not of a teacher but of a corrupter and an enemy. Consequently, even our Lord, though he often spoke gently with his disciples, sometimes used a more rough style, at one time blessing, at another rebuking. So, when he announced that he will lay the foundations of the church on Peter's confession, he said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah."² But not long after these words he said: "Get behind me, Satan. You are my stumbling block."³ And in another passage, again, he said, "Are you also so completely foolish?"⁴ Moreover, he inspired them with such fear that even John said that when they saw him conversing with the Samaritan woman and reminded him about eating, yet: "No one dared to say to him, 'What are you looking for?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'"⁵ Paul understood this, and following in the steps of his teacher he varied his speech with an eye to the need of his students, at one time cauterizing and cutting and at another applying a gentle salve. Thus, to the Corinthians he said: "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?"⁶ Yet with the Galatians he took a different tack, "O you foolish Galatians."⁷ And not just once but even a second time he employed this sort of threatening. He upbraided them at the end of the work, saying, "Let no one cause me troubles."⁸ And again he seeks to minister gently as when he says, "My little children, whom I again bring forth with labor pains."⁹ There are in fact many such expressions as these.

But it is evident to all, even on a first reading, that this letter is full of passion. So, we must explain what it was that had aroused Paul's anger against his students. For it was no

¹ This translation is based on the text provided in *Sancti Patris Nostri Joannis Chrysostomi, In Divi Pauli Epistolam Ad Galatas Commentaria*, Oxford 1852, Field.

² Matthew 16:17.

³ *Ibid.*, v. 23.

⁴ Matthew 15:16.

⁵ John 4:27.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:21.

⁷ Galatians 3:1.

⁸ Galatians 6:17.

⁹ Galatians 4:19.

minor issue, nor something trivial, since Paul would not have employed such a marked thrust.¹⁰ Becoming angry in the face of misfortunes is typical of cowardly, cruel, and miserable men, just as losing nerve at major obstacles is the habit of those more sluggish and dull. But Paul is not such a person. So then, what was the particular sin that had stirred him up? It was something great and excessive, and something alienating them all from Christ, as he himself said a little further on: “Look! I Paul tell you plainly that if you submit to circumcision, Christ will do you no good at all.”¹¹ And again, “Whoever of you seek to be justified by the law, you have disqualified yourselves for grace.” So, what in the world was this sin? We must identify it rather precisely: those of the Jews who had come to faith were at the same time both holding to their former commitment to Judaism and inebriated by empty doctrine. And wanting to arrogate to themselves the prerogatives of teachers, going to the people of Galatia they began to teach that it was necessary to be circumcised, and to keep sabbaths and new-moons, and not to tolerate Paul who was removing such practices. “For Peter, James, and John (the first¹² of the apostles who were with Christ),” they say, “do not forbid such practices.” And truly they did not forbid them. Yet in doing this they were not presenting it as authoritative teaching, but rather accommodating the weakness of the believers who came from the Jews. But Paul, because he was preaching to the Gentiles, had no need of such accommodation. Therefore, when he was in Judea, he himself also employed this sort of accommodation. But his opponents, in their deception, were not stating the reasons why both Paul and the other apostles were making an accommodation. Instead, they deceived the weaker brothers in claiming that they should not tolerate Paul. For he had shown up “yesterday and a moment ago,” while they had been with Peter. He had become a disciple of the apostles, while they were disciples of Christ. And he was by himself, while they were many and the pillars of the church. So, they were casting at him the charge of hypocrisy, alleging that he was himself abrogating circumcision, “though he has clearly made use of such things elsewhere and preaches one thing to us, but differently to others.”

Therefore when Paul saw that the whole gentile world was aflame, that a troubling fire had been lit against the church of the Galatians, and that the whole structure was tottering and ran the risk of falling, he was gripped on the one side with righteous anger and on the other with despair. He made this very clear indeed when he said, “I wanted to be present with you then, and to change my tone.”¹³ He is writing the letter to respond to all this. And from these opening comments he refers to that which they were saying while undermining his reputation, saying that the others were disciples of Christ, though Paul himself was a disciple of the apostles. Thus, he began like this: “Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men.”¹⁴ For those cheats were saying (as I mentioned before) that he was the last of all the apostles and had been taught by them. For Peter and James and John were called first, and were the main leaders of the disciples. They received their teaching from Christ, and thus more obedience was owed them than him. They, moreover, did not forbid circumcision nor keeping the law. Thus, making these claims

¹⁰ The vivid metaphor Chrysostom employs here is military. *καταφορά* (*kataphora*), prevalent in the Roman historians Polybius, Josephus, and others, is typically used to describe the sudden downward stroke of a sword.

¹¹ Galatians 5:2.

¹² *πρῶτοι* (*prōtoi*) indicates both chronological priority and preeminence.

¹³ Galatians 4:20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:1a.

and others like them, Paul's opponents were seeking to diminish him and were at the same time exalting the glory of the other apostles. This they did not in order to extol them, but that they might deceive the Galatians by inappropriately persuading them to pay attention to the law. So, naturally he began in this fashion. For because they were treating his teaching with contempt, saying that it was from men, while Peter's was from Christ, he immediately, from the introduction, set himself against this notion, stating that he was an apostle "not from men, nor through men." For Ananias baptized Paul,¹⁵ but he had not freed him from error and did not lead him to faith. Instead, Christ himself after ascending sent that astounding voice to him, through which the Lord caught him like a fish. For while Christ was walking along the sea, he called Peter and his brother and John and his brother. But Paul he called after ascending to heaven. And just as the other men did not need a second voice but immediately, dropping their nets and all their other affairs, followed him, so Paul also from that first call ascended to the most important position, was baptized, and undertook an implacable war against the Jews. And it was in this respect most of all that he surpassed the other apostles. "For I labored more than they," he said.¹⁶ But for the time being he does not argue this. Rather, Paul is content in claiming equality with the other apostles. For he was eager not to show that he surpassed them, but to refute the premise of the error. Thus, his first statement, "not from men," was common to all men. For the gospel has its origin and root from above. But the second statement, "not through men," is particular to the apostles. For Christ did not call them "through men," but of his own accord "through himself."

Why did he not mention his call and say, "Paul, called not from men," but instead mentioned his apostleship? It is because his whole argument concerned this point. For his opponents said that the apostles had been entrusted with this teaching by men, and thus it was necessary for him to follow them. But Luke made clear that it was not delivered to him "from men" when he wrote: "And while they were worshiping and fasting before the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now set apart for me Paul and Barnabas.'"¹⁷ From this it is clear that the authority of the Son and the Spirit is one. For Paul says that in being sent by the Spirit he was sent by Christ. And it is clear from elsewhere that Paul attributes the things of God to the Spirit. Thus, when he is speaking to the elders of Miletus he says, "Keep watch for yourselves and for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has set you as pastors and overseers."¹⁸ And yet he says in another letter, "Those whom God has established in the church, first apostles, second prophets, then pastors and teachers."¹⁹ So, he uses this expression indiscriminately, saying that the things of the Spirit are of God, and those of God are of the Spirit. And in another way he also stops up the mouths of heretics, saying, "through Jesus Christ and God his Father."²⁰ For because heretics say that this word was attributed to the Son as though he were lesser, see what Paul does: he

¹⁵ Acts 9:18.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:10.

¹⁷ Acts 13:2.

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 20:28ff.

¹⁹ Chrysostom has here conflated, whether deliberately or as a consequence of quoting from memory, two different passages: Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. From the latter he took the words οὗς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας (*hous men etheto ho theos en tē ekklēsia prōton apostolous, deuteron prophētas*), while he finished the quote with a portion from Ephesians 4, namely ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (*poimenas kai didaskalous*).

²⁰ Galatians 1:1b.

uses the word in the case of the Father thereby teaching us not to apply any principle whatsoever to an inexpressible nature, not to establish measures or degrees of divinity between the Son and the Father. For after he said, “through Jesus Christ,” he added “God the Father.” If in mentioning the Father by himself he had said, “through whom,” then they would have devised some sophism,²¹ saying that this expression “through whom” is applied to the Father, since the works of the Son reflect on him. And yet Paul mentions the Son and the Father at the same time; and in applying this expression to them jointly he no longer allows their argument any place. For he does not do this as though attributing now the deeds of the Son to the Father. No, he shows that this expression admits no difference in substance whatsoever. And what then would those say who, with respect to baptism, consider it somehow lesser because one is baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit? For if the Son were lesser than the Father, then what would they say now that the apostle here begins with Christ then moves on to the Father? But we shall speak no such blasphemy. We must not in contending with them depart from the truth. No, even if they should rage ten thousand times, we must keep our eyes on the standards of piety. Therefore, just as we would not say that the Son is greater than the Father simply because he mentioned Christ first—for that would be the very height of absurd foolishness and consummate impiety—so neither would we say that because the Son is placed after the Father we must suppose that the Son is lesser than the Father.

Next we read “who raised him from the dead.”²² What are you doing, Paul? Though you desire to lead the Judaizing men to faith, you do not bring before them any of those great and brilliant expressions such as you wrote to the Philippians. You said, for example, “Though being in the form of God he did not consider equality with God something to be laid hold of.”²³ You also later said to the Hebrews that “He is the radiance of God’s glory, and the express image of his nature.”²⁴ And then the son of thunder in his introductory words shouted forth that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”²⁵ Many times Jesus himself, when discussing²⁶ with the Jews, used to say that he is as powerful as the Father, and that he possesses the same authority.²⁷ But do you, Paul, not say here any of those things? Instead, omitting them all, do you mention Christ’s dispensation according to the flesh, making his cross and death the main point? “Yes,” he says. For if Paul were addressing people who had no grand conception about Christ, then saying those things would be

²¹ Chrysostom uses here the verb σοφίζω (*sophizō*), “to act like a sophist.” In this he alludes to a long tradition stretching back to Gorgias, Prodicus, and other opponents of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues who made the weaker argument the stronger.

²² Galatians 1:1c.

²³ Philippians 2:6.

²⁴ Hebrews 1:3.

²⁵ John 1:1.

²⁶ Chrysostom uses here the somewhat unusual participle φθειγγόμενος (*phthengomenos*). This is done apparently *variationis causa*, since he has in previous sentences made use of a range of synonyms including γράφω (*graphō*), λέγω (*legō*), ἀναφωνέω (*anaphōneō*), and ἀναβοάω (*anaboāō*).

²⁷ In his use of the terms δύνανται (*dunatai*) and ἐξουσίαν (*exousian*), Chrysostom registers the long-held distinction between ability and authority and ascribes both to Christ. This distinction is perhaps more common to students of the Latin language, where it is represented by the terms *potentia* and *potestas*. Though the two do not mutually entail the other, in the persons of the Trinity the distinction is not consequential.

called for. But since those who believe that they will be punished if they depart from the law are opposing us, Paul thus mentions the acts through which Christ abolishes the need of the law. I mean, to be precise, the benefit that arose for all from his cross and resurrection. For the statement “in the beginning was the Word,” and “He was in the form of God” and “making himself equal to God” and all such—these would suit someone demonstrating the divinity of the Word, not someone adding anything to the present topic. But the statement “who raised Him from the dead” is characteristic of someone calling to mind the chief point of the kindness on our behalf, the very thing that serves Paul’s purpose for the question under discussion. For many people are in the habit of not attending to words that represent God’s majesty as much as they are to those that manifest his kindness toward men. Therefore, declining to say those kinds of things he spoke about the kindness that was done for us.

Part 2

But then heretics counterattack, saying, “Look, the Father raises the Son.” But now that they have become diseased, they are willingly deaf to lofty doctrines and select the lowly doctrines as well. And these statements were expressed this way: 1) for the sake of the flesh, 2) for the Father’s honor, or 3) for some other purpose. The heretics, by selecting from among these and scrutinizing them one by one, disparage themselves (for I would not say that they succeed in harming the Scriptures). Such persons I would gladly ask, “Why do you make such claims? Do you want to prove that the Son is weak and not strong enough for the resurrection of a single body?” And truly, faith in him made even the shadows of those who believed in him raise the dead.²⁸ Then those men who were believing on Him, though remaining still mortal, by the mere shadow of their earthen bodies and from the shadow of the clothes that were attached to those bodies raised the dead.²⁹ And yet Christ was not strong enough to raise himself? So then how is this lunacy not obvious and the intensity of this madness? Did you hear him saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up?”³⁰ And again, “I have the authority to lay down my life, and I have the authority to take it back again?”³¹ Why then is the Father said to have raised him up? To show that the Father does all the same things as the Son. And yet this is especially said for the sake of the honor that is due the Father and for the weakness of the listeners.

Paul says, “And all the brothers that are with me.”³² Why has he never once done this elsewhere in the course of his letter writing? In other places he provides only his own name, or that of two or three others by name. Here he speaks in terms of a whole group and consequently does not mention anyone by name. So why does he do this? His opponents were slandering him as the only one who was preaching as he did, and that he was introducing something new into his doctrines. Thus, because he wanted to remove suspicion and show that he counted many who shared his opinion, he wrote the

²⁸ Acts 5:15.

²⁹ Acts 19:12.

³⁰ John 2:19

³¹ John 10:18.

³² Galatians 1:2a.

“brothers.” By this he makes clear that the very things he is writing he also writes in accordance with their judgment.

Next he adds “to the churches of Galatia.”³³ For this fire of false teaching was spreading not just to one city, nor two or three, but to the whole nation of the Galatians. Look with me here how Paul felt so much indignation. For he did not say, “to the beloved,” nor “to the saints,” but “to the churches of Galatia.” This expression was indicative of someone irritated in spirit and exhibiting his distress, that is, not addressing them by their names with love nor with honor, but by their assembly only. And he does not address them as the churches of God either, but simply “the churches of Galatia.” In addition he hurries to engage the rebellious element. Therefore, he also used the name “church,” shaming³⁴ them and drawing them into unity. For since they were divided into many factions, they could not be addressed by this title. For the designation “church” is a designation of harmony and concord.

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁵ Paul everywhere uses this tag by necessity, but he especially does so now when writing to the Galatians. Since they were in danger of falling from grace, he prays that it might be restored to them yet again. Since they made themselves God’s enemies, he beseeches God to lead them back again to that same peace. He says, “God our Father.”³⁶ And here the heretics again are easily caught. For they claim that when John in the introduction to his Gospel says, “And the Word was God,”³⁷ he says this clause without an article for this reason: so as to diminish the divinity of the Son. And again that when Paul says the Son is “in the likeness of God,”³⁸ he did not say that concerning the Father because of the fact that this too is used without the article, what answer would they make here when Paul says, not, “from God”³⁹ but, “from God the Father”?

Then he calls God “Father,” not with a view to flattering them, but vigorously upbraiding and reminding them of the reason why they have become sons. For it was not through the Law but through the washing of regeneration that they were counted worthy of that honor. Therefore, he sows the traces of God’s kindness everywhere, even in his introduction, as though he were saying, “How is that you, who were slaves and enemies and estranged from God, suddenly call him Father? Surely it is not the Law that gave you this kinship? Why then indeed, abandoning the one who has led you so close to him, are you running back to your tutor?”⁴⁰ It is not only in the case of Father, but also in that of the Son that these titles suffice for demonstrating their benefaction. For the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when carefully examined, clearly shows all his kindness. Indeed, he shall be called Jesus for this reason, it says, “Because he will save his people from their sins.”⁴¹ And the appellation “Christ” calls to mind the anointing of the Spirit.

³³ Ibid., 1:2b.

³⁴ The word Chrysostom uses here, ἐντρέπων (*entrepōn*), Paul employs in a similar context in I Cor. 4:14.

³⁵ Galatians 1:3.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:4.

³⁷ John 1:1.

³⁸ Heb. 1:3.

³⁹ Here the article τοῦ (*tou*) is used with θεοῦ (*theou*), while in the subsequent clause it is anarthrous.

⁴⁰ Chrysostom here references Galatians 3:24, in which Paul compares the Mosaic Law to a tutor, leading the underage Israel to himself.

⁴¹ Matthew 1:21.

We come next to the phrase “who gave himself for our sins.”⁴² Do you see that he did not merely submit to the service of a slave nor a compulsory service, nor was he handed over by someone else, but rather “gave himself”? Consequently, whenever you hear John saying that the Father gave his only-begotten Son for our sakes, do not for this reason disparage the value of the Only-begotten, nor suspect anything merely human is meant. Even if the Father is said to have given him up, this is not said in order that you should consider his service that of a slave, but in order that you might understand that this was also acceptable to the Father. The very thing Paul here makes clear when he says, “According to the will of our God and Father.”⁴³ It is not “according to a command” but “according to the will.” For since the will of the Father and the Son is one, whatsoever the Son desired, these things also the Father willed.⁴⁴ Next we read, “For our sins.”⁴⁵ We pierced ourselves, he says, with a thousand evils and were liable to the harshest punishment. And the law did not free us but condemned us in rendering our sin more manifest and not being able to free us or turn God away from his anger. But the Son of God both made possible that which was impossible – doing away with our sins and turning us from enemies to his friends – and gracing us with myriad other good things.

So, Paul next says, “That he may free us from this present evil age.”⁴⁶ Other heretics again snatch at this phrase, casting aspersions on this present life and using Paul’s testimony to do so. “For look,” the heretic says, “Paul has dubbed the present age evil.” And tell me, then, what is an age? Time, measured in days and hours. So what? Is the mere passing of the days evil, and the course of the sun too?⁴⁷ No one would ever say that, even if he veers to the extremes of stupidity. “But he did not say, ‘time’,” the heretic says, “no, he called the present life evil.” And to be sure the actual words do not say this. But you do not stop at those words which you twisted into an accusation: instead, you are hacking out a path for your own interpretation. You will therefore permit us also to interpret what has been said, all the more so since what we say is pious and reasonable. So, then what should we say? That none of those evils would ever be responsible for good things, and yet this present life is responsible for thousands of crowns and such great rewards. The blessed Paul himself, at any rate, unmistakably praises this life when he says as follows: “If my living is in the flesh, this is for me fruitful labor; and as to what I shall chose, I do not know.”⁴⁸ And as he sets before himself the choice between living here and casting off this life to be with Christ, he prefers to pass through the present life. But if it were evil, then he would not have said such things in his own case, nor would anyone else be able to make use of it for the end of virtue, no matter how zealously intent on doing so. For no one could ever use wickedness and turn it to a good end. Such a person could not use prostitution as a stimulant to self-control nor envy as a goad to friendliness.

⁴² Galatians 1:4a.

⁴³ Ibid., 1:4c.

⁴⁴ Chrysostom here varies the vocabulary in each clause, from ἐβούλετο (*ebouleto*) in the first to ἠθέλην (*ēthelen*) in the second. Presumably this is to demonstrate both the unity and distinction of the will of the Father and Son in their intra-Trinitarian relationship.

⁴⁵ Galatians 1:4a.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:4b.

⁴⁷ Chrysostom means here that by which the days are measured, i.e. the sun’s rising and setting.

⁴⁸ Philippians 1:22.

For indeed, Paul says about the presumption of the flesh that “it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it do so,”⁴⁹ he means this, that wickedness which remains wickedness cannot be virtue. Consequently, whenever you hear “wicked age,” understand that it means that its deeds are wicked, that its will has been corrupted. For neither did Christ come in order that he might kill us and lead us away from the present life, but that, when he has freed us from this world, he might make us ready to become worthy of dwelling in heaven. For this reason he said while speaking with his Father: “They are also in the world, and I am coming to you...I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one,”⁵⁰ that is, from wickedness. And if you are not content with these words, but still persist in holding that this present life is evil, you should not criticize those who commit suicide. For just as he who extricates himself from wickedness does not deserve reproaches but rather commendation, so also the man who ends his own life by a violent death as through hanging or other things like that would not, according to you, deserve to be blamed. But as it is God punishes such persons more than murderers, and all of us, quite appropriately, find such persons loathsome. For if it is not a good thing to destroy other persons, it is much more ignoble to kill oneself. Yet if the present life is evil, we ought to reward murderers because they free us from that evil!

Still, apart from these things, they also trip themselves up because of what they themselves say. For when they claim that the sun is god, and after that the moon, and they worship these as the causes of many good things, they make mutually contradictory statements. For the use of these and other heavenly bodies does nothing else but contribute to the present life for us, which they call evil, sustaining and illuminating various objects and bringing fruits to their ripeness. So how then do those who are gods in your view introduce into the composition of an evil life such a great public benefit? But neither are the stars gods—heaven forbid; they are the works of God made for our use—nor is the world evil. But if you object to me that there are murderers, and adulterers, and grave robbers, I answer that these do not at all pertain to the present life. For such are not sins that come from life in the flesh, but from a corrupted will. Because if these were the deeds of the present life, as part and parcel with it, nobody would be free nor pure. Yet see how it is impossible for anyone to escape the peculiar qualities of life in the flesh. What are these? I mean things like eating, drinking, sleeping, growing, being hungry, thirsty, being born, dying, and all things similar to these. Nobody would be exempt from these things—not the sinner, not the righteous man, not a king nor private citizen—but we all are subject to the necessity of nature. Consequently, no one would escape the performance of even sinful acts if such were apportioned to the nature of this life, as such actions are not.

Do not tell me that the those who succeed are scarce. For you will find that no one has ever overcome these natural necessities. So, until even one person succeeding in being virtuous is found, your argument will not be at all diminished. What do you mean, you wretched and miserable man? Is the present life evil, when in it we have come to know God, in it we philosophize about the things to come, in it we have gone from being

⁴⁹ Romans 8:7.

⁵⁰ John 17:11a, 15.

men to angels, and join in the chorus of the heavenly powers?⁵¹ And what other proof will we look for that your understanding is evil and corrupted?

“Why then,” our opponent says, “did Paul say that the present age is evil?” He was using a common manner of speaking. For we are quite accustomed to say, “I had a bad day.” We mean by this not the time itself but lay the blame on what transpired or the circumstance. Thus, Paul used a common expression when he blamed acts of the wicked will. And he shows that Christ has both freed us from our former sins and secured our future. For by saying, “who gave himself for our sins,” he made clear the former. And by adding “that he might free us from the present evil age,” he indicated safety for the future. For the law was weak compared to the one, but grace has proven effective against them both.⁵²

Next we read, “according to the will of our God and Father.”⁵³ For because they thought that they were disobeying God, as the one who had given the Law, and they were afraid of abandoning the old covenant and come to the new, he also corrects this assumption of theirs by saying that these things also seemed good to the Father. And he did not say simply, “the Father,” but “our Father.” So, he uses that word immediately, reprimanding them by saying that Christ has made his Father our Father.

Part 3

There follows this: “To whom be glory forever. Amen.” This expression is also unfamiliar and strange. For we find the word “Amen” placed nowhere at the beginning or the introductory remarks of a letter, but rather after many other words. Then, showing that the things he used already are a sufficient charge against the Galatians, and that his argument is adequate, he added this preface. For incontrovertible charges do not need a long build-up. So, reminding them of the cross and resurrection, of the ransom for sins, of security for their future, the intent of the Father, the will of the Son, of grace, of peace, of all God’s gifts, he ended his argument with a doxology. Paul did this, not only for the reason I just mentioned, but also because he was contemplating what God did in a single blow and in the smallest amount of time to us, given who we were.

These ideas, which he was unable to set out plainly in argument, he summarized with a doxology—offering up praise on behalf of the whole world. It was not one worthy of the subject, but simply what he was able to express. Therefore, he afterward used an even more forceful expression, just like one greatly inflamed by consideration of God’s kindnesses. For after Paul says, “To whom be glory forever, Amen” he embarks on a quite pointed rebuke. So, he says, “I am astonished that you are so quickly moving away from him who called you in the grace of Christ for another gospel.”⁵⁴ Because they supposed that they were pleasing the Father through keeping the Law, as the Jews thought when they were persecuting Christ, Paul first shows them that they are not provoking Christ alone in behaving this way but also the Father. For he says that in doing this they are defecting not just from Christ but also from the Father. In the same way that

⁵¹ Chrysostom may have in mind such passages as Ephesians 2, where Christians are said to be “seated with Christ in the heavenly places.”

⁵² Sc. present and future.

⁵³ Galatians 1:4c.

⁵⁴ Verse 6.

the old covenant is not only from the Father but also from the Son, so also grace is not from the Son alone, but also from the Father, and all things are held in common between them. “For all that belongs to the Father is mine.”⁵⁵

And yet when he said that they abandon even the Father, he posits two faults: that there was a change and that this change was very rapid. Yet surely the opposite is worthy of accusation as well, namely, to have abandoned the Father after a long time. But here his argument deals with a deception. For the one who abandons after a long time deserves accusation, and the one who falls at the first charge, and in the light skirmishes, furnishes a singular example of total weakness. He in fact charges them with this, saying:

What is this, that those who deceive you need no time at all, but a first assault was enough to subdue and capture all of you? So what sort of excuse do you have? For if this arose among your friends, I mean the accusation, and someone had abandoned his former friends and useful intimates, he would be worthy of reproach. But the man who runs away from the God who calls him, just think how great a punishment he would be liable to!

So, when Paul says, “I am amazed,” not only does he say this to upbraid them because—after such a great gift, after such a great forgiveness for their sins, and an extravagance of kindness—they deserted to the yoke of slavery. At the same time he is also showing what kind of opinion he holds about them, that it is a sort of serious and earnest one. For he would not have been surprised at what happened if he had supposed that they were the sort to be deceived easily. “But since you are of noble character,” he says, “and of the type that have suffered a good deal, this is why I am amazed.” This should have been adequate to regain them and bring them back to their former beliefs. Paul makes this clear in the middle of this letter when he says, “Did you suffer such serious trials in vain, if indeed it was in vain?”

Next Paul adds “You are changing your position.” He did not say, “Keep going,” but “you are changing your position.” In other words, “I do not yet believe, nor do I suppose that the deception is complete,” which itself also is, again, the statement of one who is recovering. Consequently, he makes this point more clearly later on: “I am confident in your case, that you will consider nothing else.”⁵⁶

Next Paul adds that they are departing “from the one who called you in the grace of Christ.”⁵⁷ The calling is of the Father, and the reason for the calling is the Son. For the Son himself is the one who reconciled and gave that reconciliation freely. For we were not saved according to works in righteousness.⁵⁸ But rather these belong to the Father, and those works belong to Christ.⁵⁹ “For my things are yours,” he says, “and yours mine.”⁶⁰ And note that Paul did not say, “You are turning back from the Gospel,” but

⁵⁵ John 16:15.

⁵⁶ Cf. Galatians 5:10.

⁵⁷ This is the continuation of v. 6 of chapter 1.

⁵⁸ Cf. Titus 3:5.

⁵⁹ Chrysostom very artfully employs here a concatenation of pronouns with specific referents to Father and Son in an interlocking ABAB order, also known as *synchysis* or sometimes *chiasmus*: Μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ἐκείνου, καὶ ἐκεῖνα τούτου (*Mallon de kai tauta ekeinou, kai ekeina toutou*). Cf. H. W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), §3020.

⁶⁰ A paraphrase of John 16:5, quoted above.

“from the God who called you.” For the latter expression was more likely to inspire horror; and he has used this to strike them more deeply. For those who were wanting to deceive them did not do this all at once, but while gently drawing them away from the idea, they did not draw them away from the terms. For this is how the devil’s cunning works: it does not set obvious traps. For if the deceivers had said, “abandon Christ,” of course they would have been on guard against such tricksters and corrupters. But as it is, allowing them to stay in the faith yet attaching the title of “gospel” to their deception, they were undermining the whole structure with great impunity. The speech concealed the wall-breakers, through their phraseology, like a curtain.⁶¹

Thus, since they were calling their own deception the “gospel,” Paul himself does well to fight back verbally and speaks quite boldly. He says, “You have gone over to another gospel, one which is not another gospel at all.” Well put! For there is not another one. But nevertheless, the very thing that those who are diseased suffer—that they are harmed by healthy foods—Marcion⁶² suffered. For he snatched at what was related here, saying, “Look, even Paul said that there is not another gospel.” For they do not accept all the evangelists, but only one, and they mangled and rendered them of no effect, however they pleased. So then, what about whenever Paul himself says, “According to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ”?⁶³ Therefore, the things they have said are really ridiculous, except that even if they prove to be ridiculous, it is necessary to disprove them for the sake of those who are easily beguiled. What then shall we say? That even if tens of thousands write gospels, and write the same things, these many are one, and the fact of their being one will not be at all harmed by the multitude of the authors. Therefore, just as if someone writes one thing and then on the other hand says something opposite, the things written would not be one. For what is one and what is not one is judged not by the number of those writing, but by the identity and difference of what is said. Thus, it is clear that even the four gospels are actually one gospel. For whenever four say the same things, they are not different things because of the difference of the persons, but there is one because of the complete harmony of the things they say. For Paul is not here speaking about the number but about the discordance of the things said. So if, then, there is one gospel in Matthew and a different one in Luke as far as the meaning of the contents and the sense of their doctrines is concerned, they rightly criticize the Word. But if these accounts are really one and the same, they should stop acting so foolishly and pretending that they do not understand things that are really very clear to mere children.

Next Paul says, “Unless perhaps there are some people harassing you and wanting to distort the Gospel of Christ.” This means, so long as you remain of sound mind, you will not recognize another gospel; so long as you look at things that are right and not imagine those that are perverted, those that do not exist. For in the same way that the eye mistakenly sees one thing for another, so also the mind, roiled up by an admixture of

⁶¹ The metaphor which Chrysostom employs is that of siegers and sappers seeking to undermine a city’s defenses. Concealing screens were carried by some, behind which the engineers sought to dig beneath the walls’ foundations in order to topple them.

⁶² Marcion of Sinope (c. 85–c. 160). Much of our knowledge of him and his thought comes from Epiphanius of Cyprus in the fourth century. Briefly, he held that the God of the Old Testament, whom he labeled a “demiurge,” was different than the God who sent Christ Jesus. This heretical view involved him in, among other things, a wholesale rejection of continuity with the church of the old covenant and a radically truncated canon of Scripture.

⁶³ Cf. Romans 16:25.

wicked arguments, typically suffers this same kind of disruption. So, for this reason, those who are addled in their wits, mistakenly imagine one thing for another. But this kind of madness is more troubling than what I just described: it is not the kind that produces harm in our sense perceptions but in the things we think about; not that kind which occasions destruction in the pupil of the eyes of the body but in the eyes of the understanding.

“And wanting to distort the Gospel of Christ.”⁶⁴ And surely they were introducing only one or two commands, instituting anew only the command of circumcision and of special days. But in showing that a whole, when slightly modified, is ruined, he says that the gospel has been rendered void. For just as in royal coins the one who cuts off a small part of the impress renders the whole coin counterfeit, so also the one who distorts even the least significant portion of a healthy faith thereby defiles the whole of it, moving away from the original toward things that are worse. Where then now are those who criticize us as lovers of strife on account of our disagreement with heretics? Where now are those who say that there is no gap between us and them but that the difference arises from a lust for power? They should heed what Paul says, that those who innovate even just a little bit have distorted the gospel. And these people⁶⁵ are not changing just a little. For how could they be, since they claim that the Son of God is something created? Have you not heard that even in the Old Testament someone who gathered wood on the Sabbath, violating only one commandment, and not even the greatest one, paid the ultimate penalty for it?⁶⁶ And when Uzzah steadied the ark as it was about to topple over, he immediately died because he touched a ministerial function⁶⁷ that was not permitted to him. Thus, both the transgression of the Sabbath and touching the ark when it was about to fall rendered God so indignant that those who dared such acts received not even a little leniency. So, the one who defiles the awe-inspiring and ineffable articles of the faith, will such a person find any defense or leniency? No, not so. But this very thing then is the cause of a whole host of evils, namely, when we do not become irritated over the small matters. For this reason greater sins were introduced among them because the lesser ones did not receive the required correction. And just as those who ignore the wounds in their bodies provoke fevers, putrefaction, and death, so also when it comes to souls, those who overlook even the smallest problems compound it with greater ones.

A certain person, one might say, stumbles over fasting, and it is no great concern. Another man is strong in the faith that is correct, but acting like he is not for the moment loses his confidence. Nor is this anything very terrible. Still another man became irritated and threatened to abandon the correct faith. But neither is this worthy of punishment. For he sinned in anger, one might say, and by impulse. And someone could find ten thousand such examples of sins introduced into the churches each and every day throughout the churches. Therefore, we have become utterly ridiculous to both Greeks and Jews since the church is splintered into ten thousand pieces. For if those who were attempting at the beginning to turn away from the divine ordinances and cause some slight disturbance had

⁶⁴ Verse 7.

⁶⁵ Sc. heretics.

⁶⁶ Cf. Numbers 15:32, 36.

⁶⁷ Cf. 2 Samuel 6:6ff. The noun Chrysostom uses, *διακονίας* (*diakonias*), is surprising, as one might expect here a reference to the actual object which Uzzah touched, *διακόνημα* (*diakonēma*). He apparently has in mind, however, not Uzzah's act of touching the ark but his usurpation of an office that did not belong to him.

met with a deserved rebuke, the plague that is present would not have arisen, and such a great storm would not have overtaken the churches.⁶⁸

Note that Paul at least says circumcision is an annulment of the Gospel. And yet now there are many among us that observe the same day of fasting that belongs to the Jews and similarly keep the Sabbaths. And we bear with these things generously, or rather like the wretches we are.⁶⁹ And why should I talk about the practices of the Jews since some of our people also observe many customs of the Greeks, like watching of omens, the flight of birds, signet-rings, the observance of days, an interest in genealogy and booklets, which when their children are being born, they compose to their own detriment.⁷⁰ In this they teach their children at the outset to give up efforts at virtue and lead them, for their part, under the yoke of the deluded tyranny of fatalism.

But if Christ is no benefit to those who are circumcised, how much will faith, in the end, work for the salvation of those who have carelessly involved themselves in such great wickedness? And though circumcision was given by God, nevertheless since it was defiling the gospel by not being performed at the proper time, Paul did everything so as to cut off⁷¹ circumcision. So, then since Paul showed such great zeal in the case of Jewish customs, when they were being observed in an untimely fashion, will we not cut off the Greek custom? And what sort of a defense might we have? Because of this our affairs are now in disarray and confusion, and those who are studying, filled with much presumption, upended the proper order. What was right side up has become upside down. If someone raises some small objection, they spit on their rulers, since we “trained them poorly.” And yet even if their superiors were quite wretched and filled with ten thousand evils, it would not be right for the student to disobey. For if Christ says about the Jewish teachers that since they sat in the seat of Moses it would be right for them to be listened to by the disciples⁷²—and yet they possessed works so evil that he ordered his students neither to emulate them nor to imitate those things they do—what leniency would they deserve, those that spit upon and tread underfoot the presiding officers of the church, they who by the grace of God live morally? For if it is not proper to judge one another, how much more improper it is to judge one’s teachers.

“But if even I, or an angel from heaven should preach to you something other than what you have received, let him be anathema.”⁷³ Notice Paul’s apostolic wisdom. For, so that someone won’t say that for the sake of self-aggrandizement he was cobbling together dogmas peculiar to himself, he even anathematized himself. And since they were fleeing for excuse to titles of dignity, that is James and John, he also mentioned angels. “Don’t talk to me about James and John,” he says. “For even if it is one of the firstborn angels from heaven who corrupts this preaching, let him be anathema.” And he did not simply say, “from heaven,” but since the priests were called angels: “For the lips of a priest will guard knowledge, and they will seek out the law from his mouth, because he is an angel

⁶⁸ Chrysostom perhaps has in mind here, in addition to the conflict in Galatia, Paul’s mention in 1 Corinthians 11:30ff. of those who had died as a punishment for their abuse of the Lord’s table.

⁶⁹ Note Chrysostom’s typical change of mind, for rhetorical effect, in the midst of conveying an exegetical point.

⁷⁰ This is a reference most likely to the composition of horoscopes.

⁷¹ Chrysostom here and in the next sentence introduces two puns for dispensing with circumcision, namely *περικόψαι* (*perikopsai*) and *περικόψομεν* (*perikopsomen*).

⁷² Matthew 23:2ff.

⁷³ Verse 8.

of the almighty Lord.” Now in order that you not think that priests are now called angels, he implicitly refers to the powers above with this addition “of heaven.” And he did not say if they proclaim things that are opposite or if they pervert the whole. But he said even if they preach something “just a little different” from that which we have preached, and if they disturb something minor, let them be anathema.

Paul continues, “As I have said before, I also say again now.” For lest you suppose that these are impulsive words or were said with exaggeration or a kind of haste, he uses the same things again a second time. Someone driven to say something in anger would likely soon have a change of heart. But the man who says the same things a second time shows that he spoke after weighing matters carefully, and after earlier becoming sure of it he stated it. Abraham, for example, when asked to send Lazarus, said, “They have Moses and the prophets. If they do not heed these, neither will they heed the risen dead.”⁷⁴ Christ introduces Abraham as saying these things thereby showing that he wants the Scriptures judged more valuable than those raised from the dead.

And Paul (and when I say, “Paul,” I again mean Christ) places Scripture on a higher level than angels descending from heaven, and quite rightly. For the angels, though they are very important, are but in reality servants and ministers. But the Scriptures were all delivered not by slaves but by God, master of all, to be written down. That is why Paul says: “If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you.” And with a great deal of understanding and inoffensively, he did not say, “a certain so and so.” For why would it, after all, be necessary to mention peoples’ names since in employing such comprehensive language he includes all entities, both those above and those below? For through his anathematizing of evangelists and angels, he encompassed every rank. And through himself he included everyone similar and like unto himself. “Don’t tell me that your co-Apostles and others are saying these things. For I do not even exempt myself if I preach such doctrines!” And he does not make such comments as though he were condemning the apostles, nor as though they were turning aside from proper preaching. Far from it! “Whether we, or they,” he says, “this is how we preach.”⁷⁵ But he wants to show that he does not make allowance for persons whenever the message deals with the truth.

Part 4

“For am I persuading men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? Yet if I were now seeking to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”⁷⁶ “So even if I were deceiving you,” he says, “in saying these things, can I really mislead God who knows the secret things of the conscience, whom it is always my entire goal to please?”

Do you see the apostolic high-mindedness? Do you see the sublimity of the gospel? Writing to the Corinthians he said the same thing: “We do not defend ourselves to you, but we give you cause for boasting.”⁷⁷ And again, “From my perspective it counts for very little that I am judged by you, or by a human tribunal.”⁷⁸ For when a teacher is

⁷⁴ Cf. Luke 16:29–31.

⁷⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:11.

⁷⁶ Verse 10.

⁷⁷ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12.

⁷⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:3.

compelled to defend himself to his students, he both submits to this and chafes against it. He does this not because of rebellion—heavens no—but because of the fickleness of the knowledge of those who were being deceived and because they do not trust him much. Therefore, he said this and all but made the following point:

Is my message really before you? Is it men that are going to pass judgment on me? My message is actually before God, and for the sake of the scrutiny that rests with him we do all things. And we would not have come to such a great degree of wretchedness as to defend ourselves to the master of all things for what we preach, for corrupting his doctrines.

Consequently, at one time making a defense and at the same time struggling against such persons, he has said this. For it is appropriate not that students sit in judgment on their teachers, but that they trust them. “And when order is turned upside down, and you sit as my judges,” he says, “understand that I do not have a long argument against you as my defense, but everything we do is for the sake of God, and thus we defend ourselves to him concerning these doctrines.”

The one who wishes to persuade men causes many ills and perversions and uses deception and deceit, so that he can win over and capture the sentiment of his listeners. But the one who seeks to persuade God and is eager to please him has need of a simple and pure conscience. For the divine is not subject to deception. “From this it is clear that even we,” he says,

not for the sake of lording it over others, nor merely to gain students, nor desiring from praise do write and send these doctrines. For we are not eager to please men, but God. If we were wishing to please men, I would still be with the Jews; I would still be persecuting the church. But one who has disdained his whole nation, and his family, and his friends, and relatives and such a reputation, and has exchanged these things for persecutions and hostilities and wars and daily deaths – it is quite clear that even these statements that I now make, I say them and send them to you not desiring glory from men.

And he said this, since he intends to narrate the earlier part of his life and his sudden conversion and to show through clear proofs that he truly had changed, lest they suppose that he is defending himself to them in doing these things and become agitated. For that reason he said to them in advance, “So am I pleasing men?”

You see he knows how to say something lofty and great at the right time, to correct those who are learning from him. And yet he could have made use of other proofs that he was preaching truthfully, that is, with signs, wonders, dangers, imprisonments, daily threats of death, hunger and thirst, nakedness, and other such things.⁷⁹ But since his argument at this point was not against false apostles, but against the true Apostles, and the latter had shared in these things—I mean Paul’s dangers—he aims his argument from another vantage point. For, when he went against the false apostles, he develops the comparison thusly: he introduces the notion of his patience in the midst of dangers, saying, “Are they servants of Christ? I speak like one who is delirious. I am a servant

⁷⁹ Chrysostom’s sources for these experiences of Paul are Romans 8:35 and 2 Corinthians 11:25ff.

even more. I have been in hardships more abundantly, been beaten more, imprisoned more, at the very brink of death so often.”⁸⁰ Now, however, he speaks of his former way of life, and says, “I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not one that is according to man. In fact I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁸¹

Note how confidently and thoroughly he affirms this point, that he became a disciple of Christ, with no man as his mediator, but with Christ deigning through himself to reveal to Paul all knowledge. And what sort of a demonstration could there be to those who disbelieve that God has revealed to you by himself, and not through someone else’s mediation, these inexpressible mysteries? “My former way of life,” Paul says. “For I would not have experienced such a sudden conversion unless God were the one who made the revelation.” For those that are taught by men, whenever they are impetuous and incendiary toward those who oppose them, need time and much skill in order to be persuaded.

But Paul was converted so suddenly and became absolutely sober while at the very pinnacle of his raving, that it is quite clear that he encountered a divine and instructive vision and immediately returned to complete health. Therefore, he is compelled to give an account of his earlier way of life, and he calls them as witnesses of the things that happened.

You do not know that the only-begotten Son of God condescended, from the heavens, to call me. How could you know, unless you were there? You know though that I was a violent persecutor. Indeed, my violence had spread even toward you. And yet there is such a great distance between Palestine and Galatia that my reputation would not have crossed so much distance, unless the things that were happening were truly excessive, and none could endure it.

So then, he says, “For you heard about my former way of life, that I was persecuting the church of God excessively, and seeking to destroy it.”⁸²

Do you see how he sets down each point emphatically and is not ashamed? He did not simply persecute the church, but he did so with all vehemence, and he did not only persecute the church but even sought to destroy it, that is, he tried to snuff it out, to overwhelm, ruin, and obliterate it. Such is the work of one “seeking to destroy.” “And I was excelling in Judaism beyond many of those of my own age in my own nation, abounding in zeal for the traditions of my fathers.”⁸³ Now lest you think that this was a deed of passion, he shows that he was doing all of it with zeal. Even if his persecution was not according to full knowledge, it did not arise from vainglory, nor was he avenging some private injury, but “abounding in zeal for the traditions of my fathers.” And in saying this he means the following:

If I was doing these things against the church not because of man but because of a righteous zeal—misguided for sure, but zeal nonetheless—how could I now, as I

⁸⁰ Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23.

⁸¹ Vv. 11–12.

⁸² Cf. v. 13.

⁸³ Cf. v. 14.

strive on behalf of the church, since I know the full truth, be doing these things from vainglory? For if that kind of passion did not rule me when I was deceived, but zeal for God led me to that, how much more now that I know the truth would it be right for me to be exempt from this suspicion? At the same time I was converted to the teachings of the church and put off the whole Jewish system, then I took on at that point a far greater zeal. This is proof that my conversion was genuine and was brought about by divine zeal. If this were not the case, what else was it, tell me, that caused so great a change to happen, to forfeit honor for contempt, tranquility for dangers, and safety for hard work? There is nothing else at all, but only the love of the truth that would do this.

When God, who set me apart and called me through grace, was well pleased to reveal his Son in me that I may proclaim him among the gentiles, I did not immediately take counsel with flesh and blood.⁸⁴

See what he is eager to point out here, that for the time during which he was passed over he was disregarded for a certain inscrutable purpose. For if he had been foreordained from his mother's womb to be an apostle and to be called to this ministry and was called at that time and when called obeyed, it is clear that God was postponing it for a certain reason. So, then what was this dispensation? Perhaps you expect while listening to the introduction to hear an exordium as to why in the world God did not call him with the twelve apostles. But in order that I may not get distracted from the matter at hand, prolonging my explanation too far, I appeal to your love, that you not learn everything from me, but seek them out from among yourselves and appeal to God to reveal them. We have, in fact, already received some explanation of these matters when we were discussing with you the change in his name and why God renamed the one called Saul, Paul. And if you have forgotten, when you read this very book,⁸⁵ you will come to know all the details. But for the time being let us keep to what follows; let us also examine how he again shows that what happened to him was not at all of human origin, but rather that God managed all things for him with great foresight.

“And he called me through his grace.” God said that he had called Paul because of his excellence: “For he is my chosen vessel,” he said to Ananias, “to make my name known before the Gentiles and kings.”⁸⁶ That is, he was sufficient both to serve and to display a great work. And God set this down as the cause of his calling. But Paul himself says everywhere that the entire business was of God's grace and inexpressible benevolence. For he says, “But I was pitied,”⁸⁷ not because I was sufficient, nor because I was suitable, but “in order that in me God might display all his long-suffering as an example for those who were going to believe in him unto everlasting life.”⁸⁸ Do you see the extreme perfection of his humility? Because of this, he says, I was pitied, so that no one would despair, learning that the worst of all men enjoyed God's benevolence. For he makes this clear when he says, “In order that in me God might display all his long-suffering as an example for those who were going to believe in him.”

⁸⁴ Cf. vv. 15–16.

⁸⁵ The *NPNF* identifies this as the *Hom. de Mut. Nom.* iii, p. 98.

⁸⁶ Cf. Acts 9:15.

⁸⁷ Cf. I Timothy 1:16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Paul next says, “To reveal his Son in me.”⁸⁹ In another passage Christ says, “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son desires to reveal him.”⁹⁰ Do you see that the Father reveals the Son, and the Son reveals the Father? It works the same way also when it comes to glory: the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father the Son. “Glorify me,” Jesus says, “that I may glorify You.”⁹¹ And, “Just as I have glorified you.” So then, why did Paul not say, “to reveal his Son *to me*,” but “in me”? He shows that he not only heard those things which concerned the faith through words, but also that he was greatly filled with the Spirit, that the revelation completely illumined his soul, and that he possessed Christ speaking within him.

So, he says, “That I may proclaim him among the nations.”⁹² For it is not only his believing that has come from God but also that God elected. “Thus, he has revealed himself to me, not only so that I may see him, but that I may carry him to others.” And Paul did not say simply to “others,” but, “That I may proclaim him among the nations.”⁹³ He is hereby giving a sampling of a not insignificant point in his defense, the identity of his disciples. It was not necessary to preach similarly to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Paul next says, “I did not immediately consult flesh and blood.”⁹⁴ Here he mentions the apostles obscurely, referring to them by their nature. And if he also says this about all men, we do not at all deny it.⁹⁵ “Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me.”⁹⁶ If then someone should examine these very words individually, it might seem like they are full of much boasting, and that they are far from an apostolic disposition. For self-endorsement and taking no one as a partner in your knowledge seems to be the mark of foolishness. The Scriptures say, “For I saw a man who seemed to himself to be wise, and yet the fool has more hope than he.”⁹⁷ And, “Woe to those who are understanding in their own eyes and seem knowledgeable in their own sight.”⁹⁸ Again, Paul himself says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes.”⁹⁹ So, one who has heard so much of such admonitions from others, and who himself gives the same admonitions to others would not fall victim to this, not just Paul but really any man at all. But, as I was just saying, when this expression is scrutinized by itself, it can raise suspicion and give offense to some listeners. So, let us establish the reason why Paul was making these claims, and then all will applaud and be amazed at him for saying this.

We proceed as follows. We do not need to pour over the mere words, since many other absurdities will follow. Nor is it necessary to interrogate the expression itself but to pay close attention to the writer’s intention. In our lectures if we do not use the same procedure and examine the thinking of the speaker, we will incur much hostility, and

⁸⁹ Verse 16a.

⁹⁰ Cf. Luke 10:22.

⁹¹ Cf. John 17:1, 4.

⁹² Verse 16b.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ In other words, Chrysostom means that Paul received instruction neither from the Apostles nor from anyone else but only Christ.

⁹⁶ Verse 17.

⁹⁷ Cf. Proverbs 26:12.

⁹⁸ Cf. Isaiah 5:21.

⁹⁹ Cf. Romans 12:16.

everything will get thrown upside down. For in our own arguments we would not have used this kind of figure, and we would scrutinize the knowledge of the one who said such a thing. We will be subjected to much hatred, and all things will become confused. And why is it necessary to speak about particular words, when even in the case of deeds if someone does not keep to this standard all things become topsy-turvy? Even doctors cut and break a person's bones, and thieves often do such things. Therefore, how wretched would it be if ever we are unable to tell the difference between a thief and a doctor? Another example is murderers and martyrs when they undergo the same tortures. But there is a very great difference between them. And if we do not hold closely to that standard, we will not be able to know these things, but we will say that even Elijah was a murderer, and Samuel and Phineas as well, and that Abraham was indeed a killer of children, if we intend to scrutinize just the bare actions.

So then, let us examine Paul's intention, the reason why he wrote these things. We must look at his purpose and how he behaved, generally speaking, toward the apostles. Then we will understand his comments and his thinking in saying these things. For he was not disparaging others, nor was he exalting himself when he said these things, nor when he made the prior comments. How could he be, when he also anathematized himself? But everywhere he maintains the steadfastness of the gospel. For because those who were destroying the church were saying that they had to follow the apostles—who were not forbidding the practices at Galatia—and not follow Paul—who did forbid what they were doing—then little by little a Judaic deception was introduced.

So, Paul is compelled to stand nobly against these practices. He does this, not because he wants to speak ill of the apostles, but from a desire to repress the folly of those who were improperly elevating themselves. Therefore, he says, "I did not consult flesh and blood." For it would have been extremely inappropriate for someone who had learned from God to subsequently refer to men. The one who learns from men naturally accepts men again as partners. But he who has been counted worthy of that divine and blessed voice and has been taught all things by the one who possesses the storehouse of wisdom, what reason does he have subsequently to refer to men? Such a man would be acting justly not in learning from men, but in teaching them. So then, he did not make these claims insolently but to show the value of his own message.

Part 5

He next says, "I did not go up to those who were apostles before me." For since they kept saying this over and over—that they were apostles before Paul, that they were called before he was—he says, "I did not go up to them." And if it had been necessary to associate with them, the one who revealed his message to Paul would have ordered him to do this. So then, did he not go up there?¹⁰⁰ Indeed, he surely did go up, and not only that, but he also did so in order to learn something from them. When was that? When in the city of Antioch, a city that had again shown much zeal, the public discussion became concerned with this very topic which now lies before us. And they were asking whether it was necessary to circumcise Gentile believers or whether it was not at all necessary to subject them to any such thing.

¹⁰⁰ I.e., to Jerusalem.

Then Paul himself and Silas went up.¹⁰¹ Therefore, why does he say, “I did not go up, nor did I consult anyone?” It is because, first, he did not go up on his own initiative, but was sent by others. Second, because he was not there in order to learn from others, but to persuade them. For he himself had this opinion from the beginning, the opinion which afterward the apostles confirmed, namely, that circumcision was unnecessary. So, since those in Antioch did not for the time deem him trustworthy, but relied upon those in Jerusalem, he went up, not so that he might gain some greater knowledge, but to persuade those who were speaking against him that even those in Jerusalem were voting with him. Thus, even from the beginning Paul could see what things were required and had need of no teacher. But the apostles, after much discussion, were intending to confirm the very doctrines that Paul himself possessed firmly within himself, from above, even before that discussion.

Luke clarifies these matters when he says that Paul had many long debates on these topics against those men even before coming to Jerusalem.¹⁰² And because it seemed good to the brothers¹⁰³ to learn from them, he went up, but not for his own sake. So, if he says, “I did not go up,” this is what he means, that he did not go up in the beginning of his ministry, nor, when he went up to Jerusalem did he go up to learn. He makes both of these points clear when he says, “I did not immediately consult flesh and blood.”¹⁰⁴ He did not simply say, “I did not consult,” but “immediately.” So, if he went up after those events, it was not in order to gain something.

Paul continues: “But I went away into Arabia.”¹⁰⁵ Observe how fervent his soul is. He was striving to lay claim to places that had not yet been planted, but lay still mostly uncultivated. For if he had remained with the other apostles, not able to learn anything, his preaching would have been hindered. For they needed to distribute the Word everywhere. Therefore this blessed man, bubbling over with the Spirit, was completely devoted to teaching barbaric and rustic peoples, choosing a life of contention and one that contained much labor. And look with me at his humility. For after saying, “I went to Arabia,” he then followed it with “I returned to Damascus.” He does not talk about his accomplishments nor list what sort they were and how extensive, and yet at the same time as he was baptized, he showed such great zeal that it confounded the Jews and so exasperated them that both they and the Greeks wished to ambush and kill him. This would not have happened unless he had made a great addition to the believers’ number. For since Paul’s opponents were inferior in their teaching, they at length resorted to murder. This was an unmistakable indication of Paul’s victory.

But Christ, watching over him for his message, did not allow him to die. Nevertheless, Paul says nothing of these accomplishments. Thus, all the things that he says he does not mention for love of glory, nor so that he can be thought better than the other apostles, nor from a sense of irritation at being so greatly disparaged. No, he does so because he is afraid that some harm might befall his message. He calls himself one “late-born,”¹⁰⁶ and the “chief of sinners,”¹⁰⁷ and “least of the apostles,”¹⁰⁸ and “unworthy

¹⁰¹ I.e., to Jerusalem. Cf. Acts 15.

¹⁰² Cf. Acts 15:2.

¹⁰³ Sc. in Antioch.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. v. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Timothy 1:15.

of such a great title.”¹⁰⁹ And he was saying these things even though he labored more than all of them, so pronounced was his humility. The one who knows that there is nothing good within him and says such humble things about himself is actually just reasonable, not humble. The one who is conscious of no good in himself is reasonable, but the one who says such things after so many crowns knows how to be modest.

Paul continues with these words: “And again I returned to Damascus.” And yet how many successes is it likely he accomplished there? Concerning this city, he says that the governor under king Aretas was keeping guard over all of it, wanting to catch the blessed man as a fish in a net.¹¹⁰ This would be a clear sign of his gaining great and forcible victories over the Jews. But here he says nothing about these events, nor would he then have mentioned them there¹¹¹ unless he saw that the particular occasion required a recounting of what happened. Otherwise he would have kept silent. Therefore just as also here, when he said that he came and then went away, he no longer gives an account of what happened there.

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to inquire of Peter.”¹¹² What could be more humble than this soul? After such great and unusual accomplishments, having no need of Peter nor of conversation with him, but instead being equal to him in honor (I will not say for now anything more), nevertheless, Paul goes up as to a superior and an elder. And inquiring of Peter was the only reason for his journey. Do you see how he renders proper honor to the Apostles and not only does not consider himself better than they¹¹³ but does not even consider himself their equal? This is evident from his travel there. For just as now many of our brothers leave their homes to go visit holy men, so also Paul, being at that time so disposed towards Peter, went to him. But in his case it is rather far more humble. For those now leave home to gain some benefit. But this blessed man did so then not in order to learn something from Peter, nor to receive some kind of correction, but for this reason alone: that he might see Peter and honor him with a personal visit.

Paul says he went “to inquire of Peter.” And he did not say, to see Peter, but “to inquire of Peter,” as those say who go to examine big cities. Thus, Paul thought that it was worth much effort merely to see the man. And this point is also quite clear from the book of Acts. For when he went to Jerusalem, after converting many Gentiles and performing works of great note—more than any of the other apostles had done, like reconciling and leading to Christ Pamphylia, Lycaonia, the nation of the Cilicians, and all those throughout that region of the world—he first approaches James with tremendous humility, as to someone greater and more honorable.

Then Paul patiently endures while the other apostle gives counsel, advising things that were opposite of what we are now discussing. “For you see brother,” James says, “how many thousands of Jews there are that have believed? But shave yourself and be purified.”¹¹⁴ And Paul shaved and fulfilled all the Jewish requirements. So, where the

¹⁰⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:32.

¹¹¹ I.e., in 2 Corinthians.

¹¹² Chrysostom here continues with v. 18 of chapter 1.

¹¹³ Chrysostom alludes here to Paul’s exhortation in Philippians 2:3–4.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Acts 21:20 and 24. Chrysostom recasts the verb “to shave” here, namely ξυρήσονται (*xurēsontai*), as a second person singular imperative. He also concludes that James is the speaker who addresses Paul in vv.

gospel was not being harmed, Paul was humbler than everybody. But when, due to his position of humility, he saw certain men being treated unjustly, he no longer made use of this excessive virtue. For to do so, in the end, would not be acting humbly but horribly mistreating and corrupting those who were learning from him. “And I remained with him¹¹⁵ for fifteen days.”¹¹⁶ Therefore it was indicative of high honor that Paul left his home for Peter’s sake; and the fact that he remained with him for so many days shows how intense were Paul’s friendship and love toward him.

Paul continues in verse nineteen as follows: “But I did not see any of the other apostles, except James the Lord’s brother.” Note how he holds Peter in greater affection, since he journeyed there for his sake and stayed with him. I say these things repeatedly and think it worthwhile to keep them in mind so that whenever you hear the things which Paul seems to have said critically of Peter, you will not mistrust the apostle. Indeed, Paul himself makes these comments for this reason, to forestall this misunderstanding, so that whenever he says that he opposed Peter no one might think that these are words said in rivalry and enmity. No, Paul honors him and loves him more than all the rest. For he does not say that he went up because of any of the apostles, but rather for Peter alone. “But I did not see any of the other apostles,” he says, “except James.” “I saw,” he states; not “I was taught by.”

But note also how honorably Paul mentions James. He did not simply say, “James,” but also adds a mark of distinction. This shows he was free of all envy. Because if Paul were wanting to signify whom he meant, he could have made this clear using some other mark and said that James was the son of Clopas, which is how the evangelist identifies him.¹¹⁷ But this is not what Paul said; instead, because he believed that the dignifying titles of the apostles pertained to himself, he dignifies James as though elevating himself. Paul did not call James that, as I said. So, what did he call him? “The brother of the Lord.” Still he was not really a brother of the Lord according to the flesh, but was only considered to be so. Nevertheless, Paul does not in this way refuse to uphold the man’s dignity. He shows in one passage after another that he was disposed towards all the other apostles as he ought.

Next he says, “With God as my witness, I am not lying about the things I write to you.”¹¹⁸ Do you see how the humility of this holy soul shines in the same way through every circumstance? Just as though he were in a courtroom and about to undergo examination, he is eager to vindicate himself. “Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia”¹¹⁹ after seeing Peter. Paul now resumes his argument and the conflict that lies before him, not touching on Judea. This was both because of his commission to the gentiles and because he would not have chosen to build upon another’s foundation.¹²⁰ Therefore Paul did not visit them as a mere chance occurrence, and this is evident from

20–26, though the verb in verse 20, namely εἶπον (*eipon*), is third person plural, not singular, and therefore likely refers to a plurality of leaders and not merely to James.

¹¹⁵ Sc. Peter.

¹¹⁶ V. 18b.

¹¹⁷ Cf. John 19:25. By comparing this text with Mark 15:40, Mark 16:1, where a Mary is mentioned as the mother of James, Chrysostom and others have held that the James of Acts 20 was the half-brother of Christ and the son of Clopas, Clopas in turn being the brother of Joseph, husband to the virgin Mary.

¹¹⁸ Cf. v. 20.

¹¹⁹ Cf. v. 21.

¹²⁰ Cf. Romans 15:20.

the comments that follow: “For I was,” he says, “personally unknown to the churches of Judea. And they had only heard that ‘he who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith, which before he sought to destroy.’”¹²¹

What could be more moderate than this man’s soul? For when he was discussing those things brought against him as a charge—for example, that he was persecuting the church and seeking to destroy her—he set out those items with much detail, parading out his former life. But the things that are likely to show his excellence he bypasses. Yet though he could speak about all his fine accomplishments if he wanted to, he mentions none of them but passes over the vast sea of them with a single word and says, “I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia,” and “they heard that ‘he who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith, which before he sought to destroy.’” He does not add a word more.

And what does he mean by the statement “I was unknown to the churches of Judea”? Paul says this so that you may learn that he was so far from preaching circumcision to them that they didn’t even know him at sight. He next adds, “And they were glorifying God in me.”¹²² Notice here as well the standard of his humility, how he keeps that standard very carefully. For he did not say, “they were astonished at me,” “they were praising me,” “they marveled.” Instead he showed that everything which happened was of grace: “For they were glorifying God, “he says, “in me.”

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¹²¹ Cf. v. 23.

¹²² Cf. v. 24.

Servant Standards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter I Christ, the King and Head of the Church

1. Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government is, whose name is called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice, from henceforth even forever, having all power given unto him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come, and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all; he being ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, received gifts for his church and gave offices necessary for the building of his church, for making disciples of all nations and perfecting his saints.

Comment: The Lord Jesus Christ is indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the ruler of all creation. He is particularly the king and head of the church. Those outside the church do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord, even though he is. He bears moreover a particular headship, or rule, over those who acknowledge him as Lord. One may think of it this way: Christ is Lord of all and Savior of those who bow to him as such; this stands in contrast to those who teach that Jesus is Savior of all and Lord of those who acknowledge him as such. A short sentence summary of this section might be that the resurrected Christ, having all power, is head of his church, which he rules through the gifts and callings that he gives to it, gathering and perfecting that church even to the end of the age.

This assertion at the very beginning of FG 1 of the lordship of Christ makes it clear that he is the focus and source of the church's life, particularly in his resurrection and ascension, which makes patent his triumph over sin and death, including fulfilling all righteousness and satisfying divine justice, both defeating all his and our enemies and giving all needed gifts to the church to carry out her calling in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).¹ This grand, glorious sentence typically begins Presbyterian church

¹ The sorts of considerations contained in the beginning of the OPC FG are still, along with clearly liberal commitments, present in the PCUSA *Book of Order 2019–2021* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly of the PCUSA, 2019), 1–15, the first section entitled “The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity.”

orders,² going back to the Westminster Assembly of Divines and the “Preface” in *The Form of Presbyterial Church Government* (1645).³ This long sentence cites or echoes various passages of Scripture (Isa. 9, Matt. 28, Eph. 1:20–23 and 4:10–12) that set forth the character of our king, Jesus Christ, and the spiritual nature of the character and rule of his kingdom. The language of this section is so exalted as to need no further comment but rather calls forth admiration and adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ, the focal point of the church’s mission in and to the world.

2. There is therefore but one King and Head of the church, the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who rules in his church by his Word and Spirit. His mediatorial office includes all the offices in his church. It belongs to his majesty from his throne of glory not only to rule his church directly but also to use the ministry of men in ruling and teaching his church through his Word and Spirit, thus exercising through men his own authority and enforcing his own laws. The authority of all such ministerial office rests upon his appointment, who has ordained government in his church, revealed its nature to us in his Word, and promised his presence in the midst of his church as this government is exercised in his name.

Comment: The head and king of the church is no earthly person, no pope in Rome, no executive presbyter in Philadelphia or elsewhere. The sole supreme governor of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Before the twelfth century the occupant of the papal throne, the Bishop of Rome, styled himself as the “Vicar of St. Peter” (the one “sent” in Peter’s place); by the time of Pope Innocent III (r. 1160-1216), the Roman pontiff had gone further and had claimed himself instead to be “Vicar of Christ,” the one sent to minister in place of Christ.⁴ This audacious claim of the pope to be “the Vicar of Christ” continues to this day and highlights one of Rome’s ongoing problems: the Roman Catholic Church, and particularly her pope, claims to be the sent one of Christ, when, in fact, the Holy Spirit is that one; the Holy Spirit is the Vicar of Christ, the one sent to minister in place of the ascended Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church, in other words, tends in practice to replace the Holy Spirit with itself, seeing itself as the agent bestowing God’s grace in the world.⁵ This

² This stands in contradistinction to reformed church orders, which typically begin, as do the Church Orders of the RCA, CRCNA, and URCNA, with “Ecclesiastical Offices” or “Assemblies.” The RCUS Constitution begins with a section on “Members” and “Congregations” before proceeding to “Offices.” Reformed church orders, then, tend not to begin with great statements of polity principles as do the Presbyterian orders but proceed rather to practicalities right away. Even the Church Order of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, which denomination is a hybrid Reformed/Presbyterian body, begins with “Offices.” Many of these denominations have church order commentaries; see especially for the RCNZ, D. G. Vanderpyl, *Church Order Commentary of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand* (np: National Publishing Committee of the RCNZ, 1992).

³ The Presbyterian Church in America *Book of Church Order (BOCO)* begins with the same sentence as does this FG. For commentary on the BOCO, which will also serve analogously for assistance in interpreting our own FG and BD, see Morton H. Smith, *Commentary on the PCA Book of Church Order*, Sixth Edition (Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2007), 15–16 *passim*.

⁴ R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 104–105.

⁵ This is a Reformed assessment of the effects of the various doctrinal aberrations of the Roman Catholic Church. Nothing said herein should be taken as a personal attack on Roman Catholics but rather as a criticism of the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, which may be seen in its most positive

section of the FG restores and testifies to the biblical truth that there is but one head of the church, King Jesus, and only one mediator between God and man, not a sacerdotal intercessor—the church and her priesthood— which dispenses grace. The agent of Christ who dispenses grace (to whom it belongs) is the Holy Spirit. Jesus retains rule in his church, governing either directly from his throne of glory or through the ministry of men, by his Word and Spirit. This rule then is not by a mere man, a pope, who pretends, as vicar, to rule in Christ’s name; rather this rule is by his Spirit, in and by God’s Word. Note that in the FG and elsewhere the rule of Christ is always said to be through Word *and* Spirit, properly coupled together as they always are in the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches: this is because the Word without the Spirit is rationalism (or dead orthodoxy), and the Spirit without the Word is mysticism.

The Lord does, to be sure, rule the church through the ministry of men, through the agency of established offices. Jesus Christ, however, retains headship, ceding it to no earthly vicar and governs his church by men gifted and called to minister the Word in and by the power of the Holy Spirit and by others (ruling elders) who join ministers in the governance of the church.

The church is the place that his grace is ordinarily conveyed to us, though it is not the church itself that grants the grace. It is the Holy Spirit who does, through the agency of the Word, as ministered by those appointed thereunto. The Spirit, who is sovereign, giving grace irresistibly to God’s own, is the only one who makes the means of grace efficacious. The means are never *ex opere operato*, which the Roman Catholic Church teaches about its sacraments, meaning that they are efficacious by their mere administration to all who receive them, insofar as the recipients do not positively refuse the grace offered. Contrariwise, we, as Protestants, believe that the means of grace are efficacious only when and as the Holy Spirit makes them so.⁶

Presbyterians, then, acknowledge the legitimacy of the church and church office, but not in place of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the minister, particularly, through his preaching the Word and administering the sacraments, together with leading in prayer, offers all this as means of grace made effectual to God’s people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Note that Rome does not call its sacraments “means” but views them as (idolatrous) ends in themselves, bestowing grace upon all who receive them and not requiring faith of the recipient. This “magical” view of the priesthood doling out God’s grace, however, does not cause us to reject church office. Unlike certain Anabaptists and other sectarians, we affirm church office, a rather remarkable retention on the part of the Reformers in light of Roman Catholic abuse of office; unlike Rome, we do not so identify office with effectual ministration that we allow office (and the church) to replace the Holy Spirit. Rather officers are to act faithfully and to wait upon the Spirit working in and through the Word and Sacraments for the blessing that he alone can bring.

The last sentence of this section can also be taken to highlight the glorious reality that Christ is the ultimate office-bearer in the church. We often speak about the question of the number of offices in the church, particularly whether ministers and elders hold the

light as presented by that church itself in 1992, in the pontificate of John Paul II: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1994).

⁶ Alan D. Strange, “Sacraments, the Spirit, and Human Inability,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 12 (2001): 223–246.

same office, which will be subsequently treated at some length.⁷ This sentence suggests that all the offices of the church find their focus in Christ—both the extraordinary and ordinary offices of apostles, prophets, ministers, elders, and deacons—who is the great office-holder; thus, all the merely human office-holders carry out their offices by Christ’s appointment and empowerment. Christ is the ultimate minister, elder, and deacon; and all ministers, elders, and deacons have warrant for all that they are and do because they do such in the name of and on behalf of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Christ orders his church by the rule of his Word; the pattern of officers, ordinances, government, and discipline set forth in Scripture is therefore to be observed as the instruction of the Lord. Church government must conform to the scriptural pattern and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament. In those circumstances not specifically ordered by Scripture the church must observe the general rules of the Word. Among the biblical admonitions applicable to all circumstances are those requiring that all things must be done decently, in order, and for edification. A particular form of church government is bound to set forth what Christ requires for the order of his church and to arrange particular circumstances only in the manner, to the degree, and for the purposes that the Lord of the church has appointed in Scripture. The Presbyterian form of government seeks to fulfill these scriptural requirements for the glory of Christ, the edification of the church, and the enlargement of that spiritual liberty in which Christ has set us free. Nevertheless, while such scriptural government is necessary for the perfection of church order, it is not essential to the existence of the church visible.

Comment: Christ has not left his church without direction for her well-being, ordering his church by the rule of his Word.⁸ We need not consult our own resources to “figure out” how the church should be ordered. Rather, God has given us in his Word the guidance that we need to set up proper order for the church. To be sure, as noted in the introductory materials, the Word of God contains principles that we flesh out in our church order, not a detailed blueprint. Having said that, the Word does contain the pattern, as our FG has it here, of officers, ordinances, government, and discipline.

This pattern is elucidated in the Book of Church Order, at least as we have agreed to act together, especially in what pertains, for our purposes in this commentary, to her government (and in the following commentary, her discipline). We should act in accordance with the Word in all necessary cases, even when we have not (or not yet) agreed and expressed such in our church order as pertains to government. The Word itself does not specifically address, or order, every conceivable situation of government, at least it does not do so in respect to all the details and circumstances. On such occasions, and in such situations, we should act nonetheless in keeping with the general rules or principles that pertain to the ordering of the church. We must always act decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40): that injunction applies first and foremost to worship specifically (particularly in what we have come to call “the regulative principle of worship”), but it

⁷ Alan D. Strange, “Do the Minister and the Elder Hold the Same Office?” in *Ordained Servant: A Journal for Church Officers* 22 (2013): 25–32.

⁸ This is an affirmation in our FG of *jus divinum* (or “divine right”) Presbyterianism: the conviction that not only does God’s Word furnish us with Reformed doctrine, but it also sets forth a pattern of Reformed, i.e., Presbyterian, church government. For a classic historical statement of this at the time of the Westminster Assembly. see *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici, or The Divine Right of Church Government, by sundry Ministers of London* (c. 1646; repr., Dallas: Naphtali, 1995).

also applies more broadly to all that we do in the government and discipline of the church.

Christ has given us a Presbyterian government for the good of the church in every respect. We do not, however, place Presbyterian government at the center of the church's being in the same way that we do the doctrine that we confess (contained in Westminster Standards). We do not thereby unchurch all but Presbyterians. Rather, we understand that Presbyterianism pertains to the perfection of church order and is not essential to its existence. The church can exist without Presbyterianism; one needs Presbyterianism, however, to have the church as Christ has called it to be.

Note the blessings that embracing this biblical pattern of Presbyterian church government brings. It maximally makes for the glory of Christ because it is the government that Christ has given to his church and intends her to have. When we most glorify Christ, we ourselves are best built up in our most holy faith. So Presbyterian government, that which most glorifies Christ, at the same time most builds us up, making the best use of all of God's people, whether they hold the general office of believer or, in addition to that, the special offices of minister, elder, and deacon.

Because Presbyterianism is the form established by Christ in his Word, it also promotes the spiritual liberty of his people; it frees God's people equally from the tyranny of Episcopacy and Congregationalism. Episcopacy denies the proper role of the people in their own governance (as Presbyterians have through their representatives in the ruling eldership), and Congregationalism lays burdens on all the people that they are not gifted and called to bear. True biblical Presbyterianism renders God's people most free, because following God's Word, in and by his Spirit, always yields the greatest liberty and blessing.⁹

4. Jesus Christ, having ascended into heaven, abides in his church by the Holy Spirit whom he has sent. Through his Spirit he has given his Word revealing his ordinances; through the Spirit also he exerts his saving and governing power in the teaching of his Word and the administration of his ordinances. Only by the gifts and calling of the Spirit are men endued and qualified for office in Christ's church.

Comment: Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father and is thus no longer physically present. But we are not thereby bereft of his presence, or that of his Father. Rather, the Father and Son have come to us by the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). At and after Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the church in New Covenant manifestation, application, and power.¹⁰ Our Lord promised his disciples in the Great Commission that he would be with them even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). He then went back to heaven. How then is he with us, though he is now on high? He (together with the Father) is with us in and by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b).¹¹ The Holy Spirit uses

⁹ Thomas Witherow, *The Apostolic Church: Which is It? An Inquiry at the Oracles of God as to Whether Any Existing Form of Church Government is of Divine Right* (Belfast, UK: C. Aitchison, 1869) remains perhaps the best treatment of the biblical warrant for Presbyterian government over against the leading contenders.

¹⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit in Contours of Christian Theology*, Gerald Bray, series editor (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 35–56.

¹¹ Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) furnished us broadly with Gaffin's view on the non-repeatability and significance of Pentecost as does these articles of Dr. Gaffin on the relation between Christ and his

those means that Christ ordained in the Great Commission and on the night that he was betrayed when he ordained the Holy Supper. Those means are called means of grace because through them the Spirit conveys God's grace to whom it belongs, to his own, even to the end of the world.

Chapter II The Church

1. Jesus Christ, being now exalted far above all principality and power, has erected in this world a kingdom, which is his church.

Comment: There are various ways theologically of speaking of kingdoms. The Bible sometimes speaks of a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness: Augustine's two cities correspond to this.¹² One may also speak of the civil sphere, or kingdom, and the ecclesiastical one, the church. It is this last notion that is in view here. The church is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36), but one that has a heavenly origin and will eventuate in a new heavens and earth.

2. The universal church visible consists of all those persons, in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise submission to his commandments.

Comment: The church, as seen above, is a kingdom not of this world, a communion of saints. It is, in its essence, invisible. We confess this over against the Roman Catholic doctrine that identifies the church with the visible church. But such an invisible, spiritual entity always manifests itself in this world in a visible organization. We believe that the church is both an organism and an organization, an institution. That the church always manifests itself visibly stands over against the Anabaptist and similar views that would reduce the church to a communion of saints and deny the proper efficacy, by God's Spirit, of its ministry, oracles, and ordinances. This church, which is catholic (universal), exists throughout the world, consisting of all those that profess faith in Christ and their children.

Unlike the baptistic churches, which recognize as members only those who profess faith in Christ, the Presbyterian church contains both those who profess faith and their baptized covenant children, who have not (yet) professed faith. Such baptized children are properly regarded as members of the church. They become members with all the rights and privileges of membership, including admission to the Lord's Table upon a credible profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. In accordance with the teaching of Scripture, the many members of this church universal are to be organized in local and regional churches, confessing a common faith and submitting to a common form of government.

Spirit: "Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition, Part 1," *Ordained Servant* 7:3 (Jul. 1998): 48–57 and "Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition, Part 2," *Ordained Servant* 7:4 (Oct. 1998): 69–74.

¹² Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans In Seven Volumes* in the Loeb Classical Library (413–426 AD; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

Comment: The church extends from its most far-flung manifestation, the church universal across the world, to every local or regional manifestation of such. So, the universal church makes itself visible throughout the world in every nation, or people-group, in regional churches (governed by presbyteries), and local churches (governed by sessions). What binds all these many parts into one church is the confession of a common faith (expressed for us in the Ecumenical Creeds and the Westminster Standards) and submission to a common form of government (the sort expressed in our BCO). This broader worldwide connection expresses itself in ecumenical bodies of which the OPC is a part, like the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

4. The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. The means appointed by Christ through which the church does this work include the confession of the name of Christ before men; the exercise of fellowship in encouraging one another; the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God; praying; singing; fasting; administering baptism and the Lord's Supper; collecting and distributing offerings; showing mercy; exercising discipline; and blessing the people.

Comment: The church is in union and communion with its Savior and with each other. As such we are in fellowship with our Savior and each other as well as called to submit to our Lord and to each other, as appropriate to our station and calling. In that mutual fellowship and obedience, we conduct the work of the church. Central to that work is divine worship, publicly, privately, and secretly. The public exercise of worship is of first importance here and works both to gather and perfect the saints, which is to say, mutual upbuilding of the body and gospel witness both to the church and to the world.

This work is carried on through the means appointed by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, including all listed herein: confessing Christ before men, both by profession of faith and corporate recitation of the church's creeds and confessions; the mutual encouragement that is part and parcel of body life; all the proper uses of the Word of God, especially its preaching; praying without ceasing by all saints for all sorts of persons; singing psalms and hymns unto the Lord; proper fasting, both upon personal practice and when called to by proper parties; a proper administration of the sacraments of initiation (baptism) and continuation (Lord's Supper); the receiving and distribution in all the proper ways from the giving of God's people; showing kindness and care for one another, especially in personal needs; placing oneself under the due authority of the church and the church censuring the sinful and impenitent; and, lastly, the minister of the gospel pronouncing, on God's behalf, his blessing upon his people.

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ServantReading

Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis by *Thomas S. Kidd* A Review Article

By Richard M. Gamble

Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis, by Thomas S. Kidd. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, 191 pages, \$26.00, paper.

In the 2020 presidential election, American citizens face the same decision they confront every four years: they can vote for the candidate of one of the two major parties; vote for a third-party candidate, an independent, or a write-in; or not vote at all. If they choose to vote, they may support the candidate who best exemplifies the standards of character and domestic and foreign policy they favor; they may vote strategically and choose the proverbial “lesser of two evils” to throw their weight against the worse option; or they may chalk up a protest vote by going third party and having the satisfaction of not accepting the candidates handed to them by the political establishment and the quirky primary process.

Christians may and do disagree over which of these options is best pragmatically and even which of these options is morally and theologically defensible. For many believers voting is simply a matter of prudential judgment necessary under a representative system that depends upon popular elections to choose office holders. The principle of consent embedded in this imperfect process has been an essential part of American government since colonial times, and for four hundred years now Christians have had to exercise the rights and privileges they share with unbelievers within the constraints of the existing political system. They may hope and work for change, but they cannot engage in participatory government outside the given institutional structures of this present age. If they happen to consider voting to be part of their civic duty under the earthly powers ordained by God, then they must choose and live with the consequences of their actions.

With Donald Trump’s victory in 2016 and his position as the presumptive Republican candidate in 2020, some Christians find themselves impaled on a dilemma. Ought they to vote for a man whose character repels them if, in the very act of voting against him, they help ensure the victory of someone whose character and policies they find even more objectionable? For the so-called Never-Trumpers among evangelicals, this question is more than a dilemma; it is a crisis. For some vocal critics of the president, that sense of crisis has been intensified by the ardent public support high-profile evangelical leaders have given to Trump since 2016. These equally outspoken defenders of the president have, so the charge goes, wedded the evangelical agenda to the Trump agenda in spite of his multiple marriages, vulgarity, and reputation as a racist and bigoted champion of “America first.” That fusion has led a number of evangelical pastors, scholars, editors, and pundits to try to

rescue their endangered movement from a pact with the devil pursued for the sake of power and influence.

In *Who Is an Evangelical?* Baptist historian Thomas S. Kidd calls Trump's 2016 election "the most shattering experience for evangelicals since the Scopes Trial" (143). A prolific historian of American evangelicalism, the Baylor professor and blogger lays out his case against Trump in the context of a short book about the long history of the movement with which he wholeheartedly identifies himself. Kidd is scandalized by the 81% support rung up for Trump among white evangelicals. It is difficult if not impossible to gauge why these voters vote the way they do, and polling data is generated by questions that might say more about what the media wants to prove than the complexity that marks the amorphous group called "evangelical." Kidd finds the simplistic media label inadequate and misleading and wants to do his best to show readers a wider, deeper, and older evangelicalism—older, that is, than the current election cycle.

Kidd works hard to drive a wedge between historic evangelicalism and the most prominent leaders of what he repeatedly calls the "Republican insider evangelicals" (not a compliment), namely Franklin Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jr., John Hagee, Robert Jeffress, and others with access to a large national audience thanks to Fox News. His heroes are the #NeverTrump evangelicals Beth Moore, Albert Mohler, Russell Moore, John Piper, Marvin Olasky, such media outlets as The Gospel Coalition, and historians like John Fea, who in 2018 published his own jeremiad against Trump (*Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump*).

Kidd places his assessment of Trump at the end of the book in what he calls a "Coda," but the chapter is more than a concluding remark to his overview of American evangelicalism. What he chooses to emphasize as the movement's defining attributes keeps one eye steadily on Trump. This may not amount to the historical sin of "presentism," but it does shape his selection and exclusion of evidence. Kidd's evangelicalism is multicultural, politically diverse, and open to a prominent role for women. He highlights the breadth and inclusiveness of evangelicalism. While he populates his story with the expected Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Dwight Moody, and Billy Graham, he emphasizes the contributions of blacks, Latinos, and women as well.

In other words, evangelicalism's family lineage does not lead inevitably to white Republicanism.

Kidd targets his book at an audience of "journalists, pastors, people who work in politics, and more" (3). He wants to set the record straight for these shapers of public opinion. To that end, he begins by defining "evangelical." He sets out in this brief "primer" to clear up confusion about the label, especially in the media, to extend the scope of evangelicalism beyond white Republicans, and to depoliticize the evangelical identity while at the same time lamenting that black and white evangelicals are separated by such deep political differences.

Evangelicalism is "the *religion of the born again*," he emphasizes (4). It adheres to the authority of the Bible, the new birth, the centrality of Christ, "a relationship with God mediated by the Holy Spirit" (17), the need for revival, transdenominational cooperation, support for foreign missions, and an active faith demonstrated through benevolence. He acknowledges some of the inconvenient facts of evangelicalism, such as Edwards and Whitefield owning slaves, but he ignores other features, such as the degree to which rabid anti-Catholicism united evangelicals in the nineteenth century.

Kidd insists that while evangelicals throughout their history have been politically engaged, such engagement did not define the movement as they fought for religious liberty and such reforms as temperance and abolition. Evangelicalism was first and foremost a spiritual movement and only secondly political, he argues. Nevertheless, he singles out for praise the kind of political activism that championed the marginalized and oppressed. Evangelicals took wrong turns whenever they attempted to impose their views as a cultural establishment, as in the effort to outlaw the teaching of evolution in public schools culminating in the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. Political activism per se is not the problem, but the *kind* of political activism, that is, whether it grows out of evangelical doctrinal commitments or betrays them.

A good half of the book focuses on the emergence of the link between evangelicals and the Republican Party. Kidd sees evidence of this strategic alliance already in Billy Graham's support of ardent anti-communism and the Nixon administration but attributes the current politicization of evangelicalism to Ronald Reagan's success in mobilizing neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists with such issues as school prayer and the pro-life agenda. Jerry Falwell, Sr., and his Moral Majority proved key to this effort. Today, Kidd claims, "evangelical insiders look back nostalgically at Ronald Reagan's two terms as a golden age" (133). Even the born-again George W. Bush "proved vaguely disappointing to Republican evangelical insiders because of his lukewarm approach to key social issues" (139) and his insistence that "true Islam was a religion of peace" (137). And the Obama presidency simply left them in the "wilderness" (140).

Enter Donald Trump. His candidacy had no hope of attracting black evangelicals away from Hilary Clinton, and liberal white evangelicals rejected him as well. But for Kidd, the key development came with the opposition of conservative evangelicals who otherwise would have been expected to vote Republican. This stance marked a rupture in evangelicalism. Kidd and his fellow Never-Trumpers are scandalized that so few evangelicals seem to agree with them and persist in their "obedience to the GOP" (147). But exactly why voting for Trump amounted to a posture of submission is not clear. People vote the way they do based on a calculation of a whole range of economic, social, cultural, and foreign and domestic policy grounds. Religious affiliation is but one of these complicated factors. Voting for a candidate does not equal endorsing everything about that candidate. Evangelicals and confessional Protestants and Catholics and others may vote for Trump in spite of his character, not because of it.

The way in which and the degree to which some celebrity evangelicals support Trump does indeed signal a woeful politicization of Christianity in modern America. The pursuit of power and influence always burns the Church in the end and jeopardizes theological orthodoxy in a quest for alliance-building that subordinates the faith to success in politics and victory for social activism. But surely outspoken opposition to Trump by pastors and through the agency of parachurch organizations also politicizes Christianity. Unintentionally perhaps, Thomas Kidd gives confessional churches the opportunity to think carefully at a turbulent time in American history about the need for an apolitical pulpit.

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ServantReading

The HTML of Cruciform Love by *John Frederick and Eric Lewellen*

By T. David Gordon

The HTML of Cruciform Love: Toward a Theology of the Internet, by John Frederick and Eric Lewellen. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2019, xx + 187 pages, \$26.00, paper.

I sometimes exhibit a facial tic whenever I see the words “Toward” and “Theology” in the title of a book; this time I did not (or, if I did, I should not have). This collection consists of a thoughtful introduction and twelve insightful chapters by fourteen scholars from three continents (three Australians, a Scot, one Canadian, five Californians, and one each from Minnesota, Ohio, Texas, and my native Virginia—no partridge, no pear tree). It is only merely “toward” a theology of the Internet in the sense of being a collection of papers by individuals with different competences and different estimates of the Internet; but the thinking in each of the papers is very well-developed and exhibits reflection that is both informed and seasoned. Many of the papers were originally delivered five years ago during a webinar hosted at the University of St. Andrews; several others were solicited for this publication.

The authors write from a consistently orthodox Christian perspective; all are trained in theology or philosophy (or both), and their competences cover the range of the theological and philosophical disciplines. Notably, the contributors are not only well-versed in the literature regarding the Internet, but they exhibit also a solid acquaintance with Media Ecology; McLuhan and Ellul are a regular part of the conversation, and I was delighted that four different chapters exhibited familiarity with MIT’s Sherry Turkle.

After a helpful introduction by John Frederick, Ben Myers and Scott Stephens take us way back to the early church (Chrysostom, Tertullian, et al.) and its characteristic non-attendance at the Roman spectacles, due to their rigorous beliefs about “the morality of the eyes,” and “fasting with the eyes,” ancient warnings to the shallow ease with which third millennium believers will watch almost anything. Subsequent chapters address such things as the unavoidable nature of interfaces of some sort, anonymity, how databases shape our biblical hermeneutics, narcissism, a “Theology of Work for a Virtual Age” (Scott B. Rae), that would be as valuable for its theology of work as for its application to the web, Jesus’s community (according to Mark) and the Internet community, the relation of technology and theology (with special reference to the Solomonic temple, Walter Kim), an exposé of both the quotidian nature and the surveilling nature of Internet usage, a fascinating introduction to rabbi Emmanuel Levinas’s 1964 idea of “The Temptation of Temptation,” and its prescient anticipation of the web world, the tension between efficiency and incarnation, warnings about the myth of perceiving our tools as neutral, and much more.

This book should probably be read differently than most books; ordinarily I promote the practice of reading a book at a single sitting (if not literally, at least without the intervention of reading anything else). These chapters, however, each have peculiar insights about particular aspects of digital life; to be appreciated, I believe each chapter should be considered on its own, and perhaps the ideal way would be to read and discuss one a week with several other people until the book is finished. There is too much to savor, critique, and ponder in each of the chapters to rush to the next one. In God's providence, I ended up reading some chapters in London, some in Nantes, some in Paris, and some in the Cradle of Civilization, Grove City, Pennsylvania, and this afforded a decent amount of pondering time.

Some other Christian books have wrestled with the digital world in primarily a practical way, answering people's frequently-expressed requests for some practical guidance. The authors in this volume provide a slightly different service; they wrestle with a "Theology of the Internet," how to begin to think about it in theological terms, armed with serious reflection informed by creation/fall/redemption, the two natures of Christ, Incarnation, love for God and his image, and the cross. Such a contribution provides practical help indirectly, but probably more lastingly, because the particular devices and technologies may change a little, but a theology of human communication and human technology will flex with such merely technical changes. For this reason, I might recommend this as the first place to start for people who wish to think seriously and Christianly about our tangled digital web.

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ServantReading

The Christian and Technology by John V. Fesko

By Charles M. Wingard

The Christian and Technology, by John V. Fesko. Durham, UK: EP Books, 2020, xx + 104 pages, \$8.99, paper.

Winston Churchill observed, “We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us.” The same is true of technology. In six crisp chapters John Fesko explains how six technological advancements have shaped Christian thinking and behavior, for better and for worse:

1. Screens: computer, phone, tablets, TV, and jumbotron.
2. Social media.
3. The automobile.
4. The book: both the mass production of books for the past 500 years and the recent phenomenon of e-books.
5. Virtual reality.
6. Internet access both to helpful services and soul-defiling evil.

The theme throughout this book is this: *You must learn to use technology, or technology will use you.*

The invention of home computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones presents special problems for Christians. Not only do they bring what Fesko describes as “unfettered access to evil” into our homes and offices (a fact that should be obvious to every Christian), but they also produce unwanted and often overlooked effects: alteration to the brain’s wiring—and with it, distraction, reduced attention spans, and the loss of “deep reading” ability.

Social media generates profits by bombarding us with ads and links based on our “likes.” Without realizing it, the author wisely warns, we become immersed in a virtual realm shaped by our likes and dislikes, creating an idolatrous world made in our own image.

To believe that we can (if we had the power) or should turn back the tidal wave of technological tools is a fool’s dream. They are here to stay and will certainly grow in number and influence, molding our society in ways we cannot foresee. Whether we should use computers and virtual technology is no longer a debatable question. With the exception of groups like the Amish, who attempt to separate from the modern world, this is not an option. Fesko challenges his reader by asking the Christian how he is using this technology.

The chapter on the automobile is an example of the author’s careful reflection of the benefits and costs of technology, and what they mean to the church. Many of us can

remember life without computers and smartphones. None of us can remember life without the automobile. How has the automobile shaped church life? Before the automobile congregational life centered on a parish church within walking distance for most. It was the church into which you were born, baptized, married, and buried—a vital part of its community’s life. On Sundays and throughout the week, members remained close to their pastor and to one another.

With the automobile came an autonomous mobility. For the first time Christians could travel to churches outside their communities. On the positive side, rural believers could easily find their way to church assemblies, and doctrinally-sound believers could leave a theologically liberal church and find an orthodox one. On the negative side closeness of community was forfeited and, where still practiced, church discipline became less weighty—just leave and go to a church that will accept you. Finding a church home became a matter of taste and just another consumer choice; the practice of biblical church discipline waned.

Although church vows and wedding vows are not identical, Fesko urges readers to treat the former more like the latter. Sacrifice for the church; labor and pray for its members; submit to its leaders. “Your car may give you the ability to run away,” he writes, “but you might be running from the very thing that you so desperately need” (40).

One of the most attractive features of this book is its strong devotional character. Chapters begin with the advantages that each technological advancement brings, followed by a careful delineation of their potential threats and actual harms, and it concludes with a summons to satisfaction in Christ, watchful obedience, and the diligent use of the ordinary means of grace.

The spiritual tone is set in the book’s introduction:

When Christ fills our vision, we will be able to use technology aright—we will not allow it to lead us into temptation and will be savvy to the tendencies toward idolatry and spiritual sloth that accompany it. When we feed upon Christ, the manna from heaven, all else pales in comparison. We find satisfaction in the Lord and seek no other table at which to feed our hungry souls: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matt. 5:6). (xix)

The book’s brevity makes each chapter suitable for devotional use and group study (high school age and older). The bibliography shows the breadth of the author’s research in media ecology and points readers to resources for additional studies.

As a pastor and professor, I will be sharing this book with both parishioners and students.

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ServantPoetry

Thomas Nashe (1567–1601)

In Time of Plague [Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss]

Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss;
This world uncertain is;
Fond are life's lustful joys;
Death proves them all but toys;
None from his darts can fly;
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Rich men, trust not in wealth,
Gold cannot buy you health;
Physic himself must fade.
All things to end are made,
The plague full swift goes by;
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour;
Brightness falls from the air;
Queens have died young and fair;
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Strength stoops unto the grave,
Worms feed on Hector's brave;
Swords may not fight with fate,
Earth still holds ope her gate.
"Come, come!" the bells do cry.
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Wit with his wantonness
Tasteth death's bitterness;
Hell's executioner
Hath no ears for to hear
What vain art can reply.
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Haste, therefore, each degree,
To welcome destiny;
Heaven is our heritage,
Earth but a player's stage;
Mount we unto the sky.
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us.