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for
Church
Officers

Village Baptist Church in Kennebunkport, Maine / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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✦ From the Editor

This is the fourteenth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* as we enter our twenty-ninth year of publication in 2020.

A new feature in 2019 is now part of this printed edition: David Noe's original translations of Theodore Beza's correspondence and theses on the essential subject of the Holy Trinity.

The cover picture is of the steeple of the Village Baptist Church in Kennebunkport, Maine. It is refreshing to see that the gospel is still preached in this historic building. The building was built on land donated by Kennebunkport Baptist Society by Captain Eliphet Perkins in 1838. The steeple was beautifully restored in 2013.

Once again I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange (Chairman of the Subcommittee on Resources for the Churches), and the Subcommittee on Serial Publications, Darryl Hart (chairman), Glen Clary, Stephen Tracey, and David Winslow, for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Diane Olinger, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, and the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal. I want to specially thank Diane Olinger for her copy editing over the past fourteen years. Ayrian Yasar has taken up this task for 2020 and beyond. Finally, I want to thank Ann Hart for her meticulous editorial work, and Judith Dinsmore for her excellent final proofing and formatting of this printed volume.



—Gregory Edward Reynolds
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Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Thoughts

Editorials

A Word Fitly Spoken

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2019¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

*A word fitly spoken is like apples
of gold in a setting of silver.
(Prov. 25:11)*

Tennis whites, ladies and gentlemen matches, ball handlers in ties, all at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon. At Skytop Lodge in the Poconos: “no hats, T-shirts, torn or faded denims.” All little holdouts against the deconstruction of Western culture, the rejection of standards everywhere, except, of course, in computer programming and surgery. Even the word “tradition” has taken on a sour flavor.

When I went to first grade, it was one of six grades called *grammar* school—yes, one of the three disciplines of the trivium, the lower division of the seven liberal arts. In other words, in order to study any subject one must first know how to write, think, and speak properly: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. To be educated is to learn the language and literature of one’s own culture. Moses and Daniel are good examples of this in the Bible.

Why am I concerned about this subject? Some may think me a grammar or speech Pharisee, but

I think the risk is worth taking, since, especially in preaching and teaching the Word of God, the integrity of what we say is at stake. For ministers of the Word, words and grammar are the media of their ministries. Thus, preachers should be wordsmiths, crafting oral communication of the Bible that will open, clarify, and apply God’s wisdom with simple, direct clarity from Sunday to Sunday. Those who are unaware of proper grammar will have no problem with the preacher’s improper grammar, but those who know the rules will lose confidence in him if he fails to use proper grammar. Renowned English professor Leland Ryken rightly insists:

speakers who use incorrect grammar and usage lose clarity of communication and credibility. The rules are not arbitrary; they serve the purpose of effective communication. Furthermore, people who know the rules lose respect for speakers who lower the bar of competence.²

Someone might object that Paul was not a good preacher in the eyes of the Corinthians. But they criticized him because he was not a polished, persuasive rhetor not because he had poor grammar. “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account’” (2 Cor. 10:10).

As we listen to the political and social discourse around us, we must be aware that we are in an Orwellian language world. In San Francisco, convicted criminals are now euphemistically called “justice involved persons.” A freshman congresswoman recently referred to border detention centers as “concentration camps.” This is a dangerous linguistic environment, so care in crafting clear and honest speech is crucial.

One of the great questions regarding grammar and dictionaries is, “Are they descriptive or prescriptive?” *Ordained Servant* uses the *Chicago Manual of Style*, the bible of English usage and American writing style, as its guide. Drawn to its logical conclusion, dismissing a linguistic stan-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=785&issue_id=151.

2 Leland Ryken, email message to author, July 5, 2019.

dard ends in solipsism—leaving one able only to communicate with oneself. Had Humpty Dumpty followed the logic of his assertion, “When I use a word...it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less,”³ the conversation with Alice or anyone else would have become impossible. Without useful, pleasing, and appropriate forms of speech, manners, or anything else, civilization is impossible.

Recently in reviewing a book titled *Semicolon* by Cecelia Watson, Barton Swaim takes issue with her chastisement of prescriptivists.

Almost everybody who cares about this subject, even the vanishingly small number of grammar snobs left in the world, understand that writers who know what they’re doing can bend and break the rules to good effect. Do we need to be told one more time that all those “prescriptivist” grammarians of the 18th and 19th centuries failed to grasp the always-evolving nature of language? Do we need one more book alerting us, as Ms. Watson does, to the fact that an insistence on rule-following can exclude people of less privileged backgrounds? . . .

Like most grammarians in our latitudinarian age, Ms. Watson enjoys her status as an elite user of language but can’t bring herself to pronounce judgment of any kind, except to dismiss those who do. But language is like any other field of human endeavor: Before you master it, you’re bound to feel inadequate and look stupid sometimes. Ordinary literate people understand this, which is why they buy Strunk & White and the Chicago Manual of Style. They aren’t interested in “seeing, describing, and creating beauty in language that rules can’t comprehend,” as Ms. Watson puts it; they are interested in stringing words together without appearing ignorant. Ms. Watson has shown us she’s been to college, but for what reason?⁴

I close with several examples. I recently heard a well-educated person say, “me and her went to the beach.” Beyond being grammatically incorrect, it may well be that this rule is rooted in Christian ethics, which requires that we put others first. But even then, it’s not “her and me,” but “she and I.”

Then there are cases where a word is misused, diminishing its proper meaning. “Awesome” comes immediately to mind. A standard dictionary definition would be “extremely impressive or daunting; inspiring great admiration.” Adding to its misuse is the tiresome fact that it has become a cliché. Such overuse diminishes the value of a word and betrays thoughtlessness.

Finally, there are words that are used improperly, thus removing the nuance of the original meaning. “Enormity” is a classic example. A recent eulogy for a supreme court justice referred to the enormity of the shoes that would need to be filled. This word means “a great evil.” When confused with immensity, it eventually removes the original meaning from English usage.

I realize that poor grammar is largely caused by poor education. I am grateful to have been forced (I hated grammar in school, until I studied Greek) to learn good grammar and to have been reared in a household with two well-spoken parents, neither of whom, by the way, went past high school. And, I am still corrected on occasion (my adult children delight to do so), for which I am grateful, since good speaking is a lifetime learning endeavor. Since we serve the Word made flesh, it behooves us, especially those who preach and teach, to pay constant attention to good grammar. Good manners, of course, will dictate that we correct others graciously and often remain silent. But good grammar glorifies God. ☉

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

3 Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1872), 124.

4 Barton Swaim, review article “Between a Stop and a Hard

Pause,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2019 A-13, reviewing *Semicolon* by Cecelia Watson.

Servant Word

The “Peter Principle” of Church Leadership

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
August-September 2019¹

by Douglas A. Felch

Good morning!² It is a double honor to be with you this morning. First, I am honored to have been asked to lead in devotions during the concurrent meetings of the United Reformed Church Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church General Assembly. Second, I am an alumnus of Wheaton College (1973), and after waiting at the phone and pining away for forty-five years, this is the first time that I have been asked to preach in Edman Chapel! So, thanks!

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

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:24–27)

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=765&issue_id=148.

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

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31–34)

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54–62)

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

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15–17)

Introduction to the “Peter Principle” of Church Leadership

Several decades ago a popular book took the business and management community by storm. The title of the book was *The Peter Principle*, named after Dr. Laurence Peter who authored it.³ Its basic thesis was quite simple and rather devastating. Dr. Peter argued that, in the field of management, a person tended to become promoted to the level of his or her incompetence.

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

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

The Principle Illustrated in Peter’s Betrayal and Humiliation

Throughout the Gospels, Peter is again and again presented to us as one who has tremendous natural leadership ability. He is frequently

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

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

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

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

I can hardly begin to fathom the sorrow that must have wracked Peter’s body as he sobbed uncontrollably over his denial of the Lord. I have had some dark nights of the soul, as we all have, but they do not hold a candle to Peter’s experience. Surely no more bitter tears were ever shed than those of Peter. And the reason is not hard to

³ Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: William Morrow, 1969).

see. Peter *really* loved Jesus. I don't think Peter was being arrogant or presumptuous when he told the Lord that he was ready to die with him. He said those things because he really loved Jesus. He was absolutely committed to him. But here is the sober reality that Peter experienced. We can genuinely love the Lord and still horribly betray him.

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

The Principle Realized in Peter's Restoration and Service

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

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

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

Summary and Takeaways

At the beginning of this devotional, I drew a

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

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

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

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

Let's admit it. There are difficult temptations connected with being a church officer: temptations to pride, discouragement, to lord it over others, to become impatient; the painfulness of criticism coupled with the likelihood of it because we are public figures; the stress of endless de-

mands (because there is always more to do); and the temptation to make odious comparisons of our ministries with others that appear to be either more, or even less, successful than our own.

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

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

This does not require some type of gross sin. We don't need to explicitly betray Jesus or commit adultery or provoke a public scandal to be humbled by our sin. Each day, despite our love for Jesus, we are capable of betraying him—and frequently do. Let us use these day-to-day failures to promote humble service. Finally, and we don't have time to give this the attention it deserves, remember that Jesus is praying for us in the midst of all our weakness: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but *I have prayed for you* that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31–32). None of what happens to us is accidental. Jesus knows our circumstances and our weaknesses, and he prays for us. This is very comforting and hopeful.

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

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going

to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1–4)

Amen.

Hymn of Response: Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 500

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

Douglas A. Felch is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is a retired professor of theological studies at Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, MI, and serves on the session of New City Fellowship OPC, also in Grand Rapids.

✦ Servant Truth

Why We Should Not Revise the Standards: Three Reasonable Reasons (and a Proposed Alternative)

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by T. David Gordon

The general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has appointed a committee to consider revising the Westminster Standards, as adopted by the OPC (The Confession of Faith, the Larger, and the Shorter Catechism, as modified by the American churches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Even before the conversation begins, some of us (if asked) would be able to “count noses,” as it were, and predict beforehand which individuals we know would approve the proposed revision and which would not. Most who made such predictions would be correct about 90 percent of the time, but for the wrong reasons. Progressivists tend to dismiss conservatives as fuddy-duddies, and conservatives tend to dismiss progressivists as unwitting Modernists (or fad-chasers), so neither takes very seriously their opponents’ respective arguments, since they have already dismissed one another as not to be taken seriously. However, a small (and, one may hope,

influential) minority within the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (NAPARC) communions will actually listen to one another, and will consider fairly and honestly whether the time has come to revise the standards to accommodate the ever-changing nature of the English language. I hope to be in that minority.

English, like all other living languages, continues to change. We probably all agree that the Old English of *Beowulf* (AD c. 975–1025) is simply beyond our capacity to read with understanding. To examine *Beowulf* in manuscript, most of us would think the manuscript was written in Latin. Chaucer’s Middle English *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387–1400) is a little closer, but still not really readable; the versions we read in high school and college/university were translations: “When in April the sweet showers fall . . .” is easy enough, compared to “Whan that April, with his shoures soote . . .” All of us who are in the non-dismissive, willing-to-think-honestly-about-the-matter category, recognize that our language has changed sufficiently that Old English and Middle English are beyond the comprehension of most of us. I suspect we also agree, on the other hand, that Elizabethan English is early Modern English, considerably more comprehensible to us than Old English or Middle English. So the fair and general question (before the specific question of revising a catechism) is the question of knowing how to address linguistic change in such a manner that the substance of valuable literature (sacred or secular) can be retained. What I will suggest below is that there is a preferable middle ground between retaining the original language and revising the original language, a middle ground that should work for several generations. That preferable middle ground is annotation. But I begin with three reasons for why revising the language is not yet necessary.

1. Catechisms Are to Be Memorized and (Then) Studied

Part of the rationale behind revising the Westminster Standards is that they are allegedly too

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=758&issue_id=147.

difficult; ostensibly, such reasoning goes, a confession or catechism should be easy. I suggest that this expectation falls somewhere between unreasonable and impossible. If the purpose of a confession or catechism is to summarize, in a fairly brief space, the teaching of the entire Bible consisting of sixty-six books, how could such a summary be easy? The only way to include a summary of all of the important biblical teaching in a brief space is to employ the most circumspect concision. Such conciseness demands the use of technical, precise language; otherwise, you have such bland generalizations that there is little left of substance. One could replace the entire Confession of Faith with a general statement: “Some sort of deity has something to do with the material order and with humans.” This would be true, general, and easy, but hardly worth the trouble of memorizing.

A catechism is designed to be memorized, so that its content can be placed in the mind where it can be reflected upon, meditated upon, discussed, and studied for a lifetime. Its meaning is not intended to be self-evident upon *careless* reflection, but rewarding to *careful* reflection. Consider what B. B. Warfield said in the opening paragraph of his very interesting essay “Is the Shorter Catechism Worth While?”:

The Shorter Catechism is, perhaps, not very easy to learn. And very certainly it will not teach itself. Its framers were *less careful to make it easy than to make it good*. As one of them, Lazarus Seaman, explained, they sought to set down in it not the knowledge the child has, but the knowledge the child *ought* to have. And they did not *dream* that anyone could expect it to teach itself. [emphasis mine]²

This quote is as enlightening as it is refreshing. (He may have been the last human to admit that sometimes people purposefully make something that isn’t easy.) Twice in that brief statement,

2 In *The Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), 381.

Warfield expressly stated that the catechism’s instruction would not be self-evident, but would require instruction (“*certainly* it will not teach itself . . . did not *dream* that anyone could expect it to teach itself”). If, a century and a half before our day, Warfield believed that the catechism would require instruction, would it require too much of such instruction that it explain the occasional word that might be archaic or unconventional (even in Warfield’s day)? If, in other words, the necessary instructors (because it could not “teach itself”) could explain *theological* words like “justification” or “sanctification,” could they not also explain words or expressions that are mildly archaic (e.g., “any *want* of conformity . . . keeping of *stews*”)? Surely any instructor capable of explaining the technical theological vocabulary in our standards would be able to read the *Oxford English Dictionary* to determine the range of meaning of English words in the mid-seventeenth century.³

2. Synonyms Are Rarely Purely Synonymous

When translators of Holy Scripture update it to make it conform to more contemporary English, they routinely “translate” in such a manner as to create interpretive problems, because what they thought was merely a contemporary update (a modern synonym) was actually a change in substance. Here are two “updates” from the original NIV that were later changed:

1 Corinthians 7:1 “It is good for a man not to marry.” (Later version: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”)

3 If I were asked by the moderator of the general assembly whether I had any advice regarding how to debate the matter, I would suggest that he rule out of order any speaker who says the current standards are “too difficult to understand,” because such a public acknowledgment would constitute *prima facie* evidence that the speaker had taken his ordination vows insincerely. If he could not understand them, how could he vow to teach in accord with them? Of course, any moderator who did this (I would) should certainly expect the following motion: “Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?”

This is still not very good, but it is an improvement, and it is not a mere synonym).

Galatians 4:15 “What has happened to all your joy?” (Later version: “Where, then, is your blessing of me now?” These are not even close to being synonymous.)

I applaud Zondervan and the NIV committee for making these changes, for listening patiently to those who suggested the corrections. I cite these two examples merely as examples of the reality that there are very few pure synonyms; most translational “updates” are actually changes in substance. Each of these two updates is not a synonym for the other, nor for the translations that antedated it.

Closer to our immediate concern (updating catechetical language) is an example from the Heidelberg Catechism. One English edition of the lovely first Q&A of the Heidelberg Catechism includes these words as its fourth and final stanza: “Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me *heartily* willing and ready from now on to live for him.” Another English version puts it this way: “. . . and makes me *sincerely* willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.” These two (*heartily/sincerely*) are not pure synonyms. The second (“*sincerely* willing”) is almost negative: not insincere or hypocritical; the first suggests that the Spirit actually renews the heart to produce *heartfelt* willingness to live for the Savior. I could “sincerely” acknowledge who the two presidential candidates were in the last election without doing so *heartily*. I have a preference for “heartily” here in HC 1, but my point is primarily that the terms are not, in fact, entirely synonymous; and I suppose a second point is that neither is especially more contemporary than the other; “heartily” is hardly archaic (and “from now on” is less archaic than “henceforth,” but neither is unintelligible).

It is entirely possible that one man’s synonym is another man’s non-synonym; there are probably some people who regard “heartily” and “sincerely” as synonyms. I do not, but here we come upon a

potential problem: What do the ordination vows mean for men whose second ordination vow embraced a different version of the Westminster Standards? I have actually met people who have stated that “justification” and “sanctification” mean the same thing; for them, they are synonyms. If such people serve on the committee, they could negotiate away hard-won, important theological distinctives of our tradition under the sincere effort to “modernize” the standards. I doubt this would happen frequently (and surely not with these two terms), but it could happen. Such confusion would not happen, however, if we retain the current language and merely provide marginal explanations of the meanings of archaic terms (see below).

3. Pan-Generational Fellowship

Our grandson Tripp is only nineteen months old, and his parents have not yet begun catechizing him (nor do I intend to offer any unsolicited advice on the matter). But if they do catechize him, and if they select the Westminster Shorter Catechism, I would like to think that Tripp and his Papa might have the occasional conversation through the years about the meaning of the catechism; Papa might even ask Tripp the occasional catechism question, to reinforce his parents’ instruction. If I do so, I don’t wish to “correct” his memory work when he has memorized a different *version* than I have; this would just confuse him. And while I put this example in a personal form, it would be true of all younger and older followers of Christ within the Westminster tradition. Would the ostensible gain in intelligibility compensate for the reinforcing gain of all Westminster catechists being able to join one another in reciting and discussing a common document?

A *Tertium Quid*

I am actually sympathetic with the concern that our confessional standards be intelligible (though I may have a higher regard for the intelligence of the average adult than the proponents of the revisions do), but I think we can address the

matter with a few strategic marginal notes. We already publish some editions of the standards with proof texts, how difficult would it be to put in the occasional marginal note at the bottom of a page, explaining older terms, the way Bible translations often put alternative translations at the bottom of the page?

Such an approach would greatly expedite the work of the committees entrusted with the project. Instead of re-editing the entirety of the text of both catechisms and the confession of faith, they could first study them to discover truly archaic expressions, and then propose explanatory notes for those occasions, rather than re-edit all three documents, seeking to “improve” them stylistically. Once editors begin editing for style, they will encounter, in almost every paragraph, some clause or phrase or word that could be improved in some way, each of which would have to be deliberated on in committee. For how many minutes or hours do we really desire the committee to discuss “from now on” v. “henceforth,” or even “sincerely” v. “heartily”? If they merely located the genuinely archaic expressions (expressions that probably less than half of the adult, educated population would know, such as “keeping of stews” in the seventh commandment), they could then merely add an explanatory gloss at the bottom of the page that would not need to be debated in fine detail. I would even recommend that such annotations simply quote the pertinent examples from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to make clear that the annotations are not theological judgments but linguistic ones.

For nearly a century now, published editions of the complete works of Shakespeare have had marginal annotations, to assist readers in understanding genuinely archaic forms of speech. Such annotations, I suggest, are the proper middle ground between retaining or revising the original language of an original text. Our confessional standards may have reached the moment in the development of the English language where some well-considered annotations would prove beneficial. I propose, therefore, that those who regard the standards as borderline unintelligible (I am

not there yet, but I am told that others are) consider annotating them with marginal explanations. Such annotations might very well serve adequately for several generations before revised language becomes as necessary as it is for Old English and Middle English.

Not all decisions in life are irrevocable. If a couple tries a new restaurant, and doesn't have an especially pleasant evening, they may simply determine not to return. The decision to try the restaurant once does not make the decision irrevocable. Other decisions, however, are practically irrevocable: giving a child his first piece of chocolate, for instance. Once an alternate form of the Shorter Catechism is “out there,” it cannot be returned to Pandora's Box. The confusion will enter the language of our Reformed traditions, and the damage will not be undone. Recall how this happened just a couple decades ago with the decision to “revise” the Apostles' Creed in the Revised Trinity Hymnal. The several stylistic changes introduced there meant that congregants can no longer recite the Creed in worship from memory, because there are at least two versions out there. So now, the assembled saints have to ruffle through their hymnals, looking for the right page to find a copy of the revised Creed, a creed they had previously cited for many years from memory. The same confusion will now attend the Shorter Catechism; people discussing it will not know whether their conversation partner memorized it incorrectly, or simply memorized another version, and their conversation will likely turn from the catechism's meaning to discussing whose memory was “right.”

And now for the elephant in the room: If the standards are revised, they will be worsened. When the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals met initially in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the early 1990s, there was some informal conversation about framing a new creed, free from some of the differences about sacraments or church government that characterized the existing creeds. My friend (and then-colleague) David Wells made an insightful comment: “While I appreciate the sentiment, I am afraid we must face the reality

that ours is not a creed-making generation. We have neither the linguistic nor theological training that previous generations had, and anything we produced would likely be inferior to the existing confessional standards” (this is my paraphrase, from memory, so don’t hold David to the exact language). I agreed with him then, and nearly three decades and a billion Tweets have not persuaded me that the situation has improved since then. What David said about creed-making would also be true about creed-revising, because the sensibilities and abilities needed for the one are needed for the other.

Since it would be too easy, however, for me to predict the likelihood that the revision will be inferior to the original, I will predict four specific ways in which it will be precisely inferior: the revision will be vague, verbose, sexist, and infantile. The revision of Heidelberg Q/A 1 that I mentioned earlier is an example of the vagueness that will occur. “Heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him” is not the same as “sincerely willing,” and “heartily” conveys something that is very precise and very important, to wit that the Holy Spirit works within us “to will and to work according to his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). By contrast, “sincerely” is somewhat vague: it could mean merely “without hypocrisy,” or “truthfully,” or it could mean, “earnestly/heartily.” But it is vague (compared to “heartily”). In our cultural moment, words are chosen as much (perhaps even more so) for their connotative value as for their denotative value, and those words are almost always less precise than the ones they replace.

Second, we may safely predict that the revision will be longer than the current standards, because imprecise language is always more verbose than precise language. The concision that makes our current standards both memorable and worthy of memory will be replaced with the contemporary tendency to use more words to say less.

Third, the virile, forceful language of the current standards will become effete; Westminster’s granite will become smoothed. In short, it will be (for some) a tad easier to understand (at a superficial reading), but for everyone much more

difficult to memorize, which is the purpose for which a catechism exists. If the current standards are like traditional hymns, the revised standards will be like contemporary worship choruses: easy, sentimental, wordy, and vapid (though they will not be nearly as bad as contemporary worship choruses, they will lean in that direction).

Finally, such revisions will almost surely be as infantile as so many of the recent translations of Scripture have been. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15–23 is a single sentence in the original, consisting of nineteen verbs. Both the KJV and RSV were able to retain this prayer as a single sentence (and therefore a single petition). Note, however, what happened with other, more recent English translations:

ESV	2 sentences
NASB	4 sentences
NIV	5 sentences
HCB	5 sentences (with a paragraph break and subtitle)
GNB	6 sentences
The Message	9 sentences (and one breathless exclamation point, right in the middle of it all)

Note, then, that the “revisions” are moving closer and closer to the syntactically simple sentences of children. But this leaves open the possibility, e.g., in the NIV, that Paul was praying for five things, rather than for one, highly-qualified thing. The nature of his single request was revised/converted into five requests (and, in The Message, into nine).

As a closing consideration, I would recommend that when the time comes to revise the language itself (rather than simply provide annotations), the revision begin with the Confession of Faith, then proceed to the Larger Catechism, and only as a final stage revise the Shorter Catechism. The Shorter Catechism is the most memorized of the three standards, the one most likely to be discussed, whether in formal or informal settings, and therefore the very last one to revise, because

such revision would diminish the reinforcing effect (so important in a memorized document) of rehearsing and discussing a common text.⁴ Listen to Martin Luther on this subject:

*First, the pastor should most carefully avoid teaching the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the sacraments, etc., according to various texts and differing forms. Let him adopt one version, stay with it, and from one year to the next keep using it unchanged. Young and inexperienced persons must be taught a single fixed form or they will easily become confused, and the result will be that all previous effort and labor will be lost. There should be no change, even though one may wish to improve the text.*⁵ ©

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4 If I am even partly right, the OPC should either abandon the revision project or restrict it severely, to this: Instruct the committee to study the standards, creating a list of demonstrably archaic (i.e., the dictionaries say “archaic” as part of their entry) words, phrases, or clauses, with a proposal for change in each case; and then to present these seriatim to the general assembly, for each to receive a vote of “approve,” “disapprove,” or “remand to committee for further revision.” This would have the likely result of the committee producing a shorter list of proposed revisions than if they are turned loose to make as many as they deem needed. If they are so turned loose, by the time they report their work to general assembly it will have many changes, some more needed than others (none, by my estimation). Then what will the assembly do? Go through the entirety of all three documents, debating every proposed change? Instruct the committee to propose their revisions seriatim, arguing in each case for the necessity of a revision, and for the propriety of the particular proposal.

5 Martin Luther, preface to the Small Catechism, Concordia, <http://catechism.cph.org/>; a printed version of an older translation: Joseph Stump, *An Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1935), xi–xii.

Excerpt from “The Report of the Committee on Christian Education” in the Minutes of the Eighty-Fifth General Assembly (2018)

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RESPONSE TO OVERTURE ONE OF THE EIGHTY-THIRD (2016) GENERAL ASSEMBLY (620–23)

A. Action of Eighty-third (2016) General Assembly

The Eighty-Third (2016) General Assembly granted the request of Overture 1 by directing the CCE to consider the preparation of a “Modern English Study Version” of the Westminster Shorter Catechism that would modernize the language of the catechism without changing its meaning, and report to the 84th General Assembly.

1. CCE Recommendation to Eighty-fourth (2017) General Assembly

The CCE considered the preparation of a “Modern English Study Version” of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (MESV) and presented the following recommendation to the Eighty-fourth (2017) General Assembly: The CCE recommends to the Eighty-fourth (2017) General Assembly that it, in accordance with FG 32.3, elect a special committee or authorize a standing committee to make specific proposals for changes to the doctrinal standards of the OPC (The Confession of Faith and Catechisms) that are morphological in nature (e.g., “thee” to “you” and “hath” to “has”) and update clearly obsolete and archaic words (e.g., “stews” in Larger Catechism 139).

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=758&issue_id=147.

Grounds:

- a. This recommendation permits a committee to propose the narrowest sort of linguistic changes that would not alter a theological term or doctrine.
- b. While there may be things in Scripture that are hard to understand, the church's summary of what Scripture teaches should not use language that is hard to understand. Doctrinal standards by their very nature should use the language commonly used in the church today.
- c. Given the widespread use in our church of modern English versions of the Bible, it is unseemly that our members (and particularly our youth) find the language of our doctrinal standards less accessible than the Bible translations in general use. There are some archaic forms and words in our doctrinal standards that grow more foreign with the passing of time.

B. Action of Eighty-fourth (2017) General Assembly

The 84th General Assembly acted in the following way upon this recommendation:

43. ACTION ON RECOMMENDATION. The recommendation of the Committee on Christian Education was placed on the floor (See §37). On motion it was determined that the pending motion be referred to the Committee on Christian Education for any perfections that may help the Assembly, and to confer with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations as to whether or not it is necessary to communicate this recommendation to other churches that adhere to the Westminster Standards, and if so, how, and report to the 85th General Assembly (84th GA Minutes).

C. CCE Consultation with Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR)

The CCE endeavored to follow such instructions of the General Assembly and took the following actions:

It committed the matter to its Special Committee to Consider the Preparation of an MESV of the WSC.

That Committee met on several occasions and reported to the October 2017 meeting of the CCE, at which the CCE authorized Messrs. Olinger and Strange to confer with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations at its meeting on Friday, November 17, 2017, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, about whether it is necessary to communicate the CCE's recommendation regarding changes to the doctrinal standards of the OPC to other churches that adhere to the Westminster Standards, and if so, how. Messrs. Olinger and Strange met with CEIR as instructed and interacted with the CEIR members. The CEIR then communicated their counsel to the CCE in a letter.

D. Observations

The CCE through its Special Committee appreciates its consultation with the CEIR on this matter and offers the following observations.

1. The suggestion of the CEIR that, with the approval of the General Assembly, the CEIR request NAPARC to form a study committee to recommend specific changes that update the language of the Westminster Standards, seems at odds with the NAPARC Constitution, which says one function of NAPARC is to "Promote the appointment of committees to study matters of common interest and concern, and when appropriate, make recommendations to the Council with respect to them" (Constitution, IV.3), and the NAPARC Bylaws, which state, "Study Committees are established to study matters of mutual concern to the Member Churches and, when appropriate, to make recommendations to the Council with respect to such matters (bearing in mind the nature and extent of the Coun-

cil's authority, Constitution, V)" (Bylaws, V.2). This suggestion would seem to put NAPARC in the position of recommending something to one of its member churches that said member has not even decided to undertake.

2. What is in view here is not doctrinal modification of the Westminster Standards but linguistic updating. This is a work that the OPC can, and should, do if it is to be done. To look to an outside body to give us its suggestions before the General Assembly even decides to undertake linguistic modifications is unprecedented and unwarranted.
3. We do believe that consultation with NAPARC should occur if the OPC determines that it should modify its standards as proposed. If the GA erects a committee to update the language of its doctrinal standards, then it should, at that point, notify the members of NAPARC as to its actions and invite any input that they care to offer. Such a procedure (especially the invitation for members' input) would more than fill the NAPARC mandate in this regard and would be the appropriate interaction with NAPARC (as opposed to what CEIR proposes).

E. Conclusions

In addition to interacting with CEIR and its advice, the Special Committee has engaged the arduous work of attempting to produce a version of the Westminster Shorter Catechism with updated language. Subsequent to the meeting of Messrs. Olinger and Strange with the CEIR, the Special Committee met in phone conference twice and in person once (at Mid-America Reformed Seminary). The Special Committee agreed on morphemic changes ("hath" to "has" and the like) as well as that certain words are obsolete or archaic and warrant changing. However, the Special Committee was unable to agree in every case on what such words should be changed to as well as what to do with other matters such as Bible translation.

The Special Committee has concluded that

deciding in detail what should be changed and to what it should be changed is properly the work of a special committee elected by the General Assembly to make such proposals to a subsequent Assembly (following the constitutional process of FG 32.2). While this Special Committee of CCE had anticipated providing the General Assembly a completed example of updating the language of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Special Committee has concluded that such an offering would be presumptuous and might unduly tie the hands of any committee elected by the General Assembly to propose updated language for the doctrinal standards of the OPC.

Thus, the Special Committee has concluded that it would be better to clarify the principal issues in such an undertaking (see attached summary), rather than provide an example of a finished product, and bring to the 85th General Assembly the recommendation that we brought to the 84th General Assembly, with this change: we have come to believe that a committee whose members are all elected by the General Assembly would be preferable to undertake such work (rather than giving it to an already extant committee). Electing a committee to do this work would give the GA maximal control over its membership as well as its mandate and best serve the Church.

Accordingly, the special committee recommends to the CCE that it propose the same recommendation to this Assembly with this change: "...the Assembly elect a special committee to make specific proposals for changes...." The Special Committee believes that the grounds brought to the 84th GA should be retained, though the CCE may wish to add additional grounds. The Special Committee also recommends that the CCE add a second recommendation regarding communicating with member churches of NAPARC should the Assembly adopt the first recommendation.

F. Recommendations

1. The CCE recommends that the Eighty-fifth (2018) General Assembly, in accordance with

Form of Government XXXII.3, elect a committee of seven members, with two alternates, to propose specific linguistic changes to the doctrinal standards of the OPC (The Confession of Faith and Catechisms). The committee is authorized to propose only such changes as do not change the doctrine or meaning of the standards. The kinds of changes that the Assembly authorizes the special committee to consider are limited to the following:

- a. Morphological changes, such as “executeth” to “executes” and “hath” to “has.”
- b. Replacing archaic pronouns, e.g., “thou” to “you.”
- c. Replacing obsolete and/or archaic words, e.g., “stews” in LC 139. This includes, as in the example just given, replacing words that are still current in the language but are used in obsolete or archaic senses in the standards.
- d. Substituting a modern translation of the Scriptures for the text of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer.

In all cases, the committee is to strive to propose changes that preserve the cadence, memorability, and dignified style of the standards.

Grounds:

1. This recommendation permits a committee to propose the narrowest sort of linguistic changes that would not alter a theological term or doctrine.
2. While there may be things in Scripture that are hard to understand, the church’s summary of what Scripture teaches should not use language that is hard to understand. Doctrinal standards by their very nature should use the language commonly used in the church today.
3. Given the widespread use in our church of modern English versions of the Bible, it is unseemly that our members (and particularly our youth) find the language of our doctrinal standards less accessible than the Bible translations in general use.

There are some archaic forms and words in our doctrinal standards that grow more foreign with the passing of time.

2. If Recommendation 1 passes, the CCE recommends that the Eighty-fifth (2018) General Assembly notify the member churches of NAPARC that it has erected a special committee to propose linguistic updating of the doctrinal standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and include details of the specific mandate, and that it welcomes any input that the churches of NAPARC might desire to give with respect to such proposed linguistic revision. ©

✦ Servant Living

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

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by Allen C. Tomlinson

As a Christian and pastor in the Reformed Protestant tradition, I do not believe we have studied and applied the Scriptures properly when we interpret the biblical text in a “surface” manner only.² For example, when people reject the doctrine of the Trinity because the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, I believe they are reading the Bible in a very superficial manner. If all the elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are found in the Bible, (and they are), then the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity even though it does not use the word “Trinity.” The Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles, in the New Testament documents, interpret the Old Testament in a doctrinal or theological manner, that is, “connecting the dots” of the various affirmations in the Word of God to arrive at “the big picture,” i.e., major conclusions. For example, the Lord Jesus Christ taught that if the Sadducees had “connected the dots” correctly, they would have known that God’s people rise

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=739&issue_id=144.

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

again physically, even though there may not have been a direct Old Testament statement to that effect in those specific terms (Matt. 22:29–32).³ Though the word “marijuana” does not occur in the Bible, and the people who lived during the biblical times may or may not have made use of this particular plant to achieve a “high” or even a “buzz,” I believe the Bible does speak very directly to the question, “Should a Christian use marijuana?”

Marijuana and Health Issues

This article is not concerned primarily with the possible physical health issues, or even with the more serious long-term mental issues that have been connected with using marijuana. Such matters should be a concern to the Christian who desires to live in a way that pleases the God of the Bible. Our physical bodies and our minds are wonderful gifts from God, of which we are stewards. It is a sin to be poor stewards of God’s gifts; it is to show ourselves to be horrible ingrates, and it runs against the command to do all to God’s glory, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do (1 Cor. 10:31). There is research that indicates physical and mental long-term health issues in the use of this drug.⁴ So if I did choose to come at this subject from the viewpoint of the Christian’s stewardship of his or her physical and mental health, I could build a very strong case for the Christian not using marijuana, as far as recreational use is concerned.

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

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

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

(THC). However, this article is concerned with recreational use of marijuana, not the doctor-prescribed use.

Marijuana and the Law of the Land

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

Marijuana and the Occult

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

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

drug. Such statements can be found online today.

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

It seems to me that the Holy Spirit’s use of this word for “sorcerer,” which emphasizes among other things a drug-induced “spirituality” or “connection to the supernatural,” should give a committed believer in Jesus Christ pause. It should create a concern to avoid a practice and a product historically and practically connected to the occult: Satan’s false religion which tries to imitate the one true religion of the gospel.⁵

⁵ As a pastor of nearly forty years, I have noted the relationship between occult experiences and the use of drugs that lessen natural inhibitions. The devil seems to find a mind that is “high” easier prey. Why give the devil an open door into one’s mind and life?

Marijuana and Drunkenness

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

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

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

So why is drunkenness always forbidden in God’s Word? Abraham’s nephew Lot sins by getting drunk, even though he is a “just,” that is, “justified” man. The Christian is not to live contrary to

God’s standard by “revelry and drunkenness” or by “lewdness and lust” (Rom. 13:13 NKJV). Instead, by way of contrast, he is to live in the light of the gospel (v. 12) by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 14). “Drunkenness” is a work of the flesh and, unless there is repentance by the grace of Jesus Christ, those who practice it “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Cor. 6:9–11).

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

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

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

Marijuana and Idolatry

Bringing together the sin involved in the

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

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

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

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

Marijuana and Sinning against Others

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

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

Marijuana and the Bible-Believing Christian

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

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

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

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Make Good Choices and Avoid Stupid Ones—Together!

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by Andrew H. Selle

Part 1: Defective Views of Guidance²

We who follow Christ want to *know* God's will and *do* it; we want both *guidance* and help to *act* on that guidance by making good decisions. We will roll these together with the word "choices."³ This article deals primarily with guidance, and specifically with three defective views. A subsequent article will develop a positive and biblical view of guidance and decision-making.

First an important observation: we who breathe the air of Western culture tend to read Scripture through the lens of the Enlightenment. Among other myopias, this predisposes us to *individualism* and casts into shadow the overwhelm-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=746&issue_id=145; https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=752&issue_id=146.

2 In order to crystalize the issues, these positions are described baldly, without any of the nuancing that their proponents might offer. It is important to the author to express appreciation for other believers with whom I disagree, yet from whom I have learned many lessons of faith and love. I hope my comments about the strengths often evident in those who hold other views will demonstrate that humility and teachability necessary for gaining wisdom! "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

3 The topic of decision-making presupposes a prior question, "How do we know God's will?" The ethical question ("What shall we do?") flows from the epistemological one ("How do we know?"). These are distinct disciplines, yet since they become intertwined in our experience, we combine them in these articles. Daniel M. Doriani poses four classes of questions: "What should I do?", "What should I be?", "Where should I go?", and "How can I see?" (*Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001], 9, 98). It is a lovely sentiment, and useful as long as we concede that ethical issues are considerably more complex than these four questions, especially if we change the singular "I" to the plural "you."

ingly *corporate*⁴ and *covenantal* emphasis of the biblical story line and biblical ethics. Nowhere is that bias more evident than with the topic of choices.⁵ A more biblical view is that corporate guidance, given by means of corporate wisdom, is the big circle and individual guidance a subset of it. Generally speaking, God chooses to give wisdom for decision-making to the *church together*, and in that context, to individuals. The people of God together are the ordinary locus of receiving wisdom from God and making choices that honor him.

In the extended metaphor of a cross-country bus trip, we will probe the subject of guidance,

4 The term “corporate” is used here in its general sense of “pertaining to a group” (Lat. *corporatus* “to form into a body”). Our concern is “Christians acting together,” broadly defined. It could be a church on any level (local, regional, or denominational), a parachurch organization or executive board, an extended family, a nuclear family, or a married couple. And, as a framework for the new humanity, there are useful applications outside the church. Paul’s use of the term “body” for the church is grounded in our federal union with Christ, whose literal body represented the church on the cross (Eph. 2:16). The Apostle draws out the rich implications for “body life” within the church (1 Cor. 12:12–31), yet we must not lose sight of the fact that his concern is first theological, and secondarily practical.

5 In a survey of the raft of Christian literature about guidance, it is rare to read anything at all about corporate guidance, other than a nod to the need for wise counsel as a means of gaining help in making one’s personal (individual) decisions. Yet it is a worthy topic dealt with by several authors. I recommend: Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God’s Will* (Chicago: Moody, 2009); Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Discovering God’s Will* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014); Garry Friesen, *Decision-Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980); Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002); J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *God’s Will: Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); James C. Petty, *Step by Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999); Dave Swavely, *Decisions, Decisions: How (and How Not) to Make Them* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003); Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, 2002). Two other works that at least attempt to address church-wide guidance, but badly falter because of a faulty doctrine of Scripture: Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1997); Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983).

and illustrate three sub-Christian views of guidance, with a view toward developing a biblical alternative.⁶ Let us, then, begin our cross-country journey—with the entire church together on a bus for the long ride. How do you⁷ get to your destination?

1. The Discovery View (“Figure It Out!”)

The Story: On the bus you have stacks of maps, primary and secondary drivers, and some intelligent riders. You also meet knowledgeable people in restaurants along the way who give advice about local shortcuts: “Don’t go that way! Take Route 18A over the hill to Westfield Center.” This was clearly no chance meeting, as you find yourself breezing along a nice road parallel to the clogged interstate before you turn up into the hills. You’ll need all the specialized knowledge and expert advice you can get. You must read the signs correctly in order to discover the *one correct route*—and avoid disastrous wrong turns. Occasionally you see small crosses along the road memorializing the poor souls who drove off a cliff. Who decides what roads to take? Sometimes the driver just chooses where to turn. Sometimes the bus tour’s administrative team huddles together and makes the calls. At other times, everyone on the bus takes a vote, and the majority wins (minority loses). Often it’s not even clear who should decide, or how to decide. At least you know where *not* to turn when you encounter a “Road Closed” sign. But those signs make people anxious: “Did we miss the correct turn hundreds of miles ago?” Things get especially difficult when you hit construction delays, and especially if you’re involved in an accident. That’s when arguments break out and relationships fray. You lose some passengers along the way; some get off the bus in Grand Rapids, some in Las Vegas. You hope your bus will get to its destination, but

6 Perhaps it is an allegory; let the grammarians choose.

7 In the bus stories, read all the “you” pronouns as plural.

you know that if it does, it will arrive late, and minus quite a few people.

This is the Discovery View, which may be the most common one among Evangelicals.⁸ God has one perfect plan, and he wants the church to discover it. You will find it if you read all the clues correctly—reading the right Bible verses at the right time, correctly interpreting the circumstances around you, feeling your inner promptings, encountering “open doors,” listening to others, experiencing answers to prayer, and seeing positive results after a decision is made. And, of course, feeling inner peace.

How, then, do we assess this Discovery View of guidance? We may affirm the following: first, we must appreciate the strong biblical convictions that motivate those who hold this position. They believe they ought to find, understand, and follow God’s will. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and they believe he will lead them step by step. He does. They pray, and God answers. They take steps of faith and obedience—“faith working by love”⁹—and often the Lord richly blesses them.

Second, we acknowledge that most proponents of the Discovery View stake their lives, explicitly or implicitly, on the biblical doctrine of God’s Providence. “God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things.”¹⁰ “Surely, then, we should seek to discover that plan and live according to it,” they might say. In such good soil of faith, good fruit will inevitably result, despite other errors in doctrine and life.

We must criticize the following: The foundational error of this approach is confusion about “the will of God.” No believer will deny the bibli-

cal requirement to obey God’s commands—his revealed, “preceptive will.” However, Discovery View proponents go beyond this and seek guidance about his perfect will for the future—his hidden “decretive will.”¹¹ Certainly, we may understand some aspects of God’s will of decree by looking in life’s rearview mirror, for nothing that has already happened was ever out of his control; he is Lord over every detail of history. Yet only the Lord truly understands the past, and certainly he alone knows the future. Bruce Waltke even raises a provocative question in the subtitle of his book *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?*¹² Ancient religions, and some modern ones, specialize in devising clever schemes to play the gods, coaxing them to reveal their secrets and manipulate them to our advantage. In a dangerous and chaotic world, we can understand craving after the certainty pagan oracles offered—and why the Lord severely warned Israel against their enticements.¹³ Yet Yahweh does not give to his covenant people secret knowledge; he gives them himself as the great Shepherd who leads them through every dark valley.

Herein lies the confusion for many believers: they operate on the mistaken assumption that our God expects us to wrest out of his mind the one “perfect will” for our lives, that one correct route along the journey. They seek unknown information that Scripture does not reveal or even promise to reveal. “The secret things belong to the LORD

11 Reformed theologians always make this important distinction. “God’s decretive will cannot be successfully opposed; what God has decreed will certainly take place. It is possible, however, for creatures to disobey God’s preceptive will—and they often do so.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 528–38. Although the preceptive will is usually described as obedience to God’s commands, I would add “believing God’s promises” given in his Word.

12 Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, 2002).

13 Leviticus 19:26, 31; Deuteronomy 18:10–12; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 8:19. Gideon’s fleece oracle (Judges 6,7) resonates with pagan practices and is a mark of his immaturity and unbelief, not faith. The account does not provide us an example to follow, but it certainly demonstrates God’s grace, patience, and determination to deliver his people from oppression, despite their unbelief—a theme developed in the prophets and fully in the New Testament.

8 So says James C. Petty, *Step by Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), who calls this the “traditional” view. But I wonder if the prayerless, functional deism of the Self-Sufficient View (no. 3 below) has nudged into first place. Views 1 and 2 (and the “wisdom view” of a future article) are similar to those Petty describes from an individual perspective, and I have recast them corporately for the church context.

9 Galatians 5:6, part of a crucial text for Pauline ethics.

10 WCF 5.1.

our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”¹⁴ God’s omniscience shatters our sinful pride; every Tower of Babel built to reach the heavens is doomed to failure. Rather, we must rest in the reality that the Lord is God—and humbly accept that we are not.¹⁵ If we want true guidance, we must begin with the doxology, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”¹⁶

As suggested by the Tower of Babel allusion above, the Discovery View does not bode well for life in the body of Christ. Disagreements are bound to develop over how to figure out all those divine “signs.” And if you miss that one perfect plan, the alternative is God’s “second best”—or third, fourth, fifth, sixth! The stakes become enormous even for relatively small decisions. It is no wonder, then, that Christians feel so threatened and fight so vigorously for their opinions. Intense church conflicts develop because God is on *everyone’s* side.¹⁷ “Since your opinion derails our church from its one perfect path, there is no good reason to listen to you. I’m right, and that settles it.” The quest for hidden knowledge leads us to demand an unrealistic level of perfection in decision-making, which, in turn, torpedoes our trust in one another and our fellowship together. We quickly forget our “in-Christ” mindset along with all the “one-another” relationship commands rooted in that fundamental identity. We deny our desperate need for every member of the body of Christ—*especially* those with whom we disagree. It has been said, “If both of us agree about everything

all the time, one of us is unnecessary.”¹⁸ Do we really believe that? We should, for Scripture assumes that God is at work in every member of the body, and therefore we expect to learn his ways from each other. That is the way of wisdom.

The next view we will consider includes elements of the Discovery View but takes them to a more extreme conclusion. It is the Immediate Direction View.

2. The Immediate Direction View (“Follow the Voice!”)

The Story: This is so very simple. Use your GPS all the way! There’s one driver, and perhaps a couple assistants. You just hope the driver is paying close attention to the voice coming out of that little box, because you want him to make all the correct turns. But sometimes the route seems so erratic you begin to wonder. You also notice a major problem developing: nearly everyone on the bus has their own cell phone with various mapping apps. Some passengers become vocal about it and continually tell the driver where to turn. Those who express their opinions don’t all agree, of course, so they push conflicting directions. The whole scenario becomes terribly irritating to the driver who shuts them out—and sometimes boots them out. The ride certainly feels more pleasant after they leave; but you miss your friends who got off. In the end, the only people left on the bus are those who agree with the driver or feel too intimidated to say anything. But at least there’s no more unsettling conflict—for now.

This is the Immediate Direction View. It is most often associated with charismatic circles,¹⁹

14 Deuteronomy 29:29; cf. Isaiah 46:9–11.

15 “Our activities and *plans*...will be no less our own for being His: only less burdensome..., and better made.” Derek Kidner, commenting on Proverbs 16:3, “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.” Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), 118.

16 Romans 11:33.

17 One will never hear believers in a conflict say, “I know this is dead wrong, but let’s do it anyway!” We do, however, label our opinions as right—as the biblically correct ones—and opposing views as incorrect, even sinful.

18 Source unknown. Interestingly, research in the area of decision-making errors identifies “groupthink” as a major culprit in disastrous choices. Consultants for business and government actually create structures to foster “constructive conflict.”

19 Not all who identify with the tag “charismatic” hold to this view. And, as stated previously, I have learned a great deal from my brothers and sisters in such churches. Please read my critique in that light.

but in fact, elements of it are common across a wide swath of biblically conservative churches. In its pure form, this view believes that God communicates immediately, directly, and verbally to the leaders, usually pastors. The rest of the church is expected to follow without question. Those who do raise questions often end up leaving the church and sometimes starting another one with its own prophetic leader. In the more generic version of this approach, one leader (or a very small group) makes all the decisions because he reputedly knows God's will for the church. Whether or not that church believes in continuing prophetic revelation, the leader behaves as if he does.

We may affirm the following: We must remain charitable by acknowledging the work of God among many who hold to this position. Behind it is a strong conviction that the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work in the church today. God has not abandoned his people, but is immediately present to shepherd and guide them. Doctrine is no mere abstraction, safely flying at thirty thousand feet, but comes right down to street level—our street, our trenches, our struggles. God speaks to the church and moves it to trust Christ and to serve him right where we are, concretely in our situation. They believe in the Lord Jesus who promised to be with us always, even to the end of the ages. He is forever “Immanuel,” God with us.

Second, we grant that many who hold this position have a high view of ordained church leadership and its special role, especially those in teaching positions. In a culture that has become toxic in its resistance to all authority, we must honor those who want to lead the church in Christ's name as his “under shepherds.” And on the congregational side, an attitude of faithful submission to godly leaders is not to be despised.²⁰ In the best cases, such a church uses its spiritual gifts effectively and unites together with common purpose and direction. They accomplish great things for the kingdom.

We must criticize the following: the matter of

20 1 Peter 5:1–7; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17.

continuing special revelation through prophecy has been thoroughly refuted by many since the Reformation, so little will be said about it here, other than to observe the unique foundational role of “the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”²¹ Foundations are laid only once. Our concern is certainly not to deny the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, or to dictate how he chooses to act,²² but to defend the doctrine of *Scripture as exclusively apostolic, special, and written revelation*. As such, it is our only final and sufficient authority for truth and life—a fact that all orthodox Christians affirm. Our fear is that any claim of an immediate “word from God” *functionally* eclipses Scripture, and the hard work of studying and expositing it, as the church's means to know God and receive his guidance.²³

A second problem with the Immediate Direction View shows up when we consider the church's identity as the *one people of God*, a doctrine that carries profound implications for church leadership. Even the apostles were not separated from or above the rest of the body. Paul himself asks for prayer, submits to other church leaders, and personally exemplifies the “humility of wisdom.” Paul and Peter are “fellow elders,” and James (our Lord's earthly half-brother!) calls himself a “servant.” Together they address the global church with the words, “the apostles and elders, your

21 Ephesians 2:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10–11; Revelation 21:14. One of the most compelling arguments for a closed canon is the biblical role of *written* revelation in establishing covenants, drawing on the ancient covenant treaty form that was available (in God's providence) to Moses and later biblical authors.

22 A dynamic view of God's providence acknowledges that God may work in extraordinary ways in certain times and places. We think, for example, of reports about Muslims in closed countries receiving guidance in dreams, hearing Scripture and trusting the Savior. Such accounts, if true, pose no threat to the doctrine biblical sufficiency. These are not experiences that the church expects, or demands, or needs for discerning wisdom and carrying out its mission. Yet if, in the Lord's wise providence, he chooses to give such experiences to some, that is his prerogative.

23 “Guidance is discerning God's moral and spiritual preferences as they apply to our life situations. It is not a detailed plan to be discovered or communicated by God in extra scriptural communications.” James C. Petty, *Step by Step: Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), 101.

brothers.”²⁴ Any church leader who functionally repudiates the equal status of every member, and the church’s corporate adoption by the Father,²⁵ will drive the bus into a quagmire.

Third, if a church locates the source of guidance narrowly with one leader, it misses the *normal process* of gaining corporate wisdom within the body. Every believer is taught by God, and therefore must be heard. The Philippians must hear the concerns of others (2:3–4) because every believer enjoys the same “fellowship” with Christ and has the “mind” of Christ. If I am not hearing them, I am not hearing God either. If a leader acts as though he is the sole agent of divine revelation, he denies the Spirit’s promise to build the church in Christ’s likeness “as each part does its work.”²⁶ We rob the church of the spiritual gifts given by her Lord.

Fourth, when a church places vast power in one person it *distributes authority too restrictively*. Any Christian body, regardless of its doctrine and polity, errs when its leadership becomes authoritarian and too proud to listen to the concerns of its members. Those with “haughty eyes” will “sow discord among brothers.”²⁷ The Reformation’s *sola Scriptura* heritage proclaims that “all church power is only ministerial and declarative,” not

24 Philippians 2:8–10; Ephesians 6:91–20; James 3:13, cf. Proverbs 11:2, 15:33; 1 Peter 5:1; James 1:1; Acts 15:23; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:10.

25 The church is God’s adopted family “in Christ.” The reality of corporate adoption has massive and practical implications for church leadership. For example, the day before a man’s ordination to the pastoral ministry, he is a “brother” to every other church member. The day after his ordination...he is still a brother to every other church member. That fundamental relationship never changes, and his need for the rest of the body never changes. In fact, all the New Testament “one another” commands apply to him in heightened and intensified ways, because leaders must be models for the entire flock in how they love, and listen, and learn, and fellowship with others.

26 Ephesians 4:16; James 1:17–19; 3:17. We hear that “wisdom from above,” “every good gift and every perfect gift, comes down from the Father of lights,” by listening to our sisters and brothers.

27 Proverbs 6:16–19. The “haughty eyes” of the troublemaker “manifest a denial of the LORD’s authority . . . and a disregard for human rights. . . . No vice stands in sharper opposition to wisdom than pride (Isa. 2:11–17), and no virtue stands closer to them than humility and modesty.” Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 346.

“magisterial and legislative.”²⁸

Inevitably, a defective view of unique biblical authority allows human pseudo-authority to usurp it, leading to *legalism*. Usually it is the kinder, gentler variety—not the damnable sort that the Apostle Paul cursed,²⁹ but a sanitized version we will call “applicatory legalism.”³⁰ It elevates human opinion to the level of God’s Law. It binds believers’ consciences not with the Word but with particular *applications* of the Word, thus undermining Christian liberty. And we note also that legalism can be self-originated in the flesh, not necessarily driven by authoritarian leaders.

In our quest for guidance, we ought never to tie up God’s people with the spiritual knots of legalism! We believe the Lord of the Church whose Word declares, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). The means of that wisdom, the fountainhead of that wisdom, will be the Word of God that stands forever. Anything less—or anything more—puts the bus on a bumpy road going in the wrong direction. We will now consider the “less” approach—the Self-Sufficient View.

3. The Self-Sufficient View (“Good Luck!”)

The Story: The bus takes off and follows the roads that look best because no one has any hard information, except the general compass

28 Authority is “ministerial,” meaning that church leaders serve Christ and his people, not themselves. It is “declarative” in that leaders are permitted to declare and apply only what God’s Word demands. Of course, we want to apply biblical principles wisely to particular people in their unique situations.

29 Galatians 1:8–9. This is the heresy of the Judaizers who required converts to become Jews as a prerequisite for becoming Christians. It was a spurious attempt to add meritorious human works to the finished work of Christ, in effect declaring that “Jesus’s blood and righteousness are not good enough; you need to improve on this provision in order to be saved.” The lesser forms of legalism move in the same direction, with negative, but much less severe, consequences.

30 This is my term. Daniel M. Doriani sees four types of legalism. Class-one legalists are the outright heretics. But “class-four legalists can preach sermons in which every sentence is true, while the whole is oppressive.” *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 280.

points. You're on your own, but everyone has read articles and heard lectures about bus travel, and you're feeling pretty confident. With some careful observations of what's around you, and with a little luck, the bus should get to your destination. Or perhaps a different destination. It all depends on who's driving and the latest book he's read. The young man currently behind the steering wheel often glances down to the volume on his lap, *Getting There: How to Successfully Drive a Bus*. Every so often you feel the vehicle drifting onto the rumble strip, and you wish the driver would just keep his eyes on the road. But no matter, it won't be long before someone else takes over. Each driver seems to follow his nose, or go in whatever direction seems to fit with the latest theories of travel. When everyone on the bus is getting along, it's an interesting ride, and lots of new passengers get on board at every stop. Others get off—mainly the ones who don't like the stops, the drivers, or the other people on the bus. And when people argue, the chaos becomes so bad that you might drive right off the highway into the ditch. When that happens, the trip is done.

The Self-Sufficient View usually involves no consistent plan at all, at least not one derived from Scripture. Decisions are based on the opinions of various experts, secular research, and sound management principles. No one asks God for guidance or, if they do, they do not expect it. The leaders do not need it anyway and are self-confident that they can lead the church and its members, achieving successful results based upon their own training, skills, and resources.³¹

31 That is the *optimistic* version of the “Good Luck!” method, which persists as long as everything is going well. The *pessimistic* form kicks in when the church faces failures, trials, or conflicts, exposing the reality that all their self-guided planning and human effort accomplished nothing. At that point, some people give up on the church, and sometimes on their faith. That version is fatalistic and unequivocally non-Christian. It is atheistic to its core, hopeless, and in the end plays well into individualism. With no God in the way, the only thing left is your own godlike desire to control, get your will done, and make others do it—or despair because you know you never will.

We may affirm the following: when we critique this approach, it is frankly more difficult to keep a charitable stance, although it helps if we admit that every believer and every church is tempted in this purely pragmatic and rationalistic direction. Consider the strength of the temptation. We live in a highly ordered world, and that order is observable and discoverable, especially (we are supposed to think) by experts using the scientific method. And let's face it, they really are very good at what they do. No one denies that God reveals himself through the general revelation of an exquisitely designed³² universe that operates with consistency. Wisdom grows as we understand how things work in God's world and gain practical skill to live in it.³³

A proper understanding of science has rich implications for our study. The irritating hubris of academia notwithstanding, we should raise no objections to impartial research into social processes, decision-making methods, organizational growth, and other fields, to help us discover best practices within our cultural context.³⁴ Christians, of all people, are equipped for this task. “We have categories to reframe every tiny bit of secular thinking so it functions as a comprehensible part of the God-centered world. We know what they are *really* looking at.”³⁵ Everything we see, and

32 Or just the impression of design, if one is trying to distance oneself from any notion of “Intelligent Design.”

33 In fact, the entire scientific enterprise was God's idea, as he commissioned our first parents to name, to understand, to categorize, to explore, to nurture. Wise people learn everything they can from creation, including knowledge of the Creator himself. Lazy people should learn from the ants (Prov. 6:6; 30:25). Isolated or divisive people should learn from the locusts (30:27). All people should learn from the galaxies (Ps. 8; 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20). The roots of science go deep; the prototypical “cultural mandate” to Adam and Eve now demands that God's people allow no area of human endeavor to escape Christ's lordship, as world history moves inexorably toward the New Creation.

34 For example, there is an extensive and provocative body of research about decision-making in business and political contexts, dealing with topics such as cognitive biases, decision-making errors, framing, stimulating constructive dialogue, collaborative negotiation, conflict resolution, best-practices for various goals, systems theory, etc.

35 David C. Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010), 257.

everything atheists see, must be radically recast into a Christian and biblical worldview. Only then do we understand reality accurately.

We must criticize this view, having affirmed what we may about the Self-Sufficient View, by grappling with its glaring defects. We know what we believe; it is all written down on the back pages of those dusty hymnals, right? But have these truths become mere abstractions—beliefs that barely rise to the level of that New Year’s resolution to get more exercise? At best, our Bible reading and prayer serves to give us greater inner peace, and perhaps even communal peace in family and church. But when it comes down to the practical stuff of *choices* that we fall back on pragmatic considerations of what will be most likely to “succeed”—decisions devised from “expert” opinions, straight up, with a few Bible verses sprinkled on top.

Yet the most severe criticism is this: if the Immediate Direction View errs by demanding what God has not promised, the Self-Sufficient View does worse, by failing to ask of God what he *has* promised. James’s condemnation is well deserved. “That person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”³⁶ This attitude betrays a prayerless, functional deism, that does not need God or expect much from him because we have everything we need in ourselves. In its extreme form, this approach truncates biblical scrutiny to narrow areas such as personal morality and the “end times”—but thinks that if we *really* want to understand *people* and their *choices*, we must employ the methods practiced by business executives, social psychologists, and perhaps mental health care professionals. Thus, we capitulate to a cadre of secular prophets and high priests and sanitize Word ministry out of the church right at the very point it is most needed. The church must ask itself some penetrating questions: Are we being

³⁶ James (1:7) coins a term *δίψυχος* (*dipsychos*), a “double-souled” man, the opposite of the faithful believer who displays “a wholehearted, consistent, and integral faith commitment to God.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 62.

intentional, expectational, faithful, and prayerful in seeking wisdom from God? Or will we by our unbelief be among those who “do not receive because (they) do not ask”?

Part 2: A Biblical View of Choices³⁷

In Part 1 we presented the case for considering decision-making from a corporate³⁸ rather than individual perspective, and then illustrated *three defective views of guidance*.³⁹ 1. The Discovery View (“Figure it out!”): God has one perfect plan and he wants the church to discover it. You can find it if you read all the clues correctly from the right Bible verses, advice from others, circumstances, “open and closed doors,” and inner promptings. 2. The Immediate Direction View (“Follow the Voice!”), which in its pure form expects God to communicate immediately, directly, and verbally to church leaders, and the church to obediently follow. And 3. The Self-Sufficient View (“Good luck!”), a purely pragmatic approach in which decisions are based on the opinions of various experts, secular research, and sound management principles. There is little need for divine guidance because successful results can be expected simply by utilizing the right training, skills, and resources. Now we will turn our attention to a *biblical approach*, The Wisdom View.

As was done in Part 1 with the defective views, we will continue the extended metaphor of a cross-country bus trip. Let us begin our journey—with the entire church together on a bus for the long ride. How do you get to your destination?

4. The Wisdom View (“Just Drive! But Listen!”)

The Story: Everyone on the bus has studied

³⁷ The word “choices” combines the epistemological issue (“How do we know?”) with the ethical (“What shall we do?”). This is intentional because both of them interact in decision-making.

³⁸ “Corporate,” broadly defined as people (especially believers) functioning together—the church on any level, Christian organizations, families, and marriages.

³⁹ All of these positions are stated baldly, without any nuancing. It is important to humbly recognize that some who lean toward these views are devout Christian brothers and sisters from whom we have much to learn.

the maps and internalized them, to a greater or lesser degree. The drivers have pored over them. Even more, they've studied geography with experts so that they understand the lay of the land. There are multiple ways to get to your destination, and you're free to choose any of them. When you hit traffic problems, or car trouble, or missed exits, you don't fret at all, and for one major reason: on board the bus sits the Director of the US Federal Highway Administration. The Director knows everything about all the roads and possesses immediate knowledge of what is happening on them. He mingles with everyone on the bus, teaching them during their travels, and spends much time with the driving crew. They get to know him, and they trust him. The drivers especially listen intently to whatever the Director says—and they also listen to other passengers who have learned from the Director. They often ask him for help on their journey, but oddly, he rarely tells the drivers exactly what roads to take. He does, however, point them to particular maps they've studied, reminds them of the general rules of driving, and helps them get oriented about their position. Often he encourages them, "You decide where to turn. You can do it." Sometimes you find yourself on roads that you never dreamed possible, and sometimes you experience mechanical problems, and sometimes it seems like you're lost; were it not for the Director sitting silently up front, you might think you were lost. You make many stops that you'd never planned, but in the end, you see that the route you took was the best one. Those who stayed on the bus realize that they actually ended up where they truly wanted to go, even though it looks rather different from their original plan. When you arrive at the destination, the Director proclaims, "Here we are! This is exactly where I wanted you to be."

This is the Wisdom View, the correct and biblical one. Others have ably written about in-

dividual guidance,⁴⁰ so we will consider the topic primarily from the standpoint of its *church-wide implications*. We already have touched on the "wisdom" alternative in Part I in the critiques of the sub-Christian views. We will now consider a model that can help us discern wisdom by looking for it in the right places. We also must confront the demonic counterpart to divine wisdom so that we prepare ourselves for spiritual warfare.

Three Perspectives:⁴¹ Asking the Right Questions

Paul's written prayers are instructive because they explicitly communicate to us the revealed will of God, his absolute standards that never pass away. We can think of this as the *normative perspective* that begins with the timeless truths, principles, commands, and promises of God's Word.⁴² Whatever Paul prays for, we also ought to pray for. Consider, for example, his prayer for the Philippian church.⁴³

And it is my prayer that your love may abound

40 Suggested readings are cited in Part I.

41 We will use the structure and vocabulary of John Frame, whose brilliantly simple triperspectivalism is easier to understand than to pronounce. Simply put, it means that God *speaks to people in situations*. Each of these elements is a perspective on the whole, interpreting the same data from three different angles—the normative, existential, and situational perspectives, which (respectively) capture God's lordship attributes of authority, control, and presence. Each perspective always includes the other two. This triadic structure is replete in all his works, e.g., John M. Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and Its Significance* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 24.

42 I still like the term "principles" even though some are uncomfortable with it, such as Harvie M. Conn: "One problematic reference is the term *principles*, usually linked with adjectives like *eternal*, *abiding*, *timeless*, or *normative* . . ." ("Normativity, Relevance, and Relativity," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 195). Certainly, we must not imagine "principles" as platonic abstractions independent of God, and we must avoid simplistic (and legalistic) applications of Scripture. Yet we must insist that the special revelation of Scripture is "objective" truth outside us, which God's people will understand "subjectively" and personally as the Holy Spirit illumines us inwardly (Eph. 1:18).

43 Philippians 1:9–11; cf. Romans 12:1–3; also, Ephesians 5:15–18 speaks of obeying the "the will of God" (revealed norms) by "making the most of every opportunity" (situation), requiring the church (people) not to be "foolish" but wise.

more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9–11)

“And it is my prayer . . .” Do not miss the obvious here: Paul prays. He asks God to give love and wisdom to the church, because unless he gives it, we will not receive it; we remain desperately needy and foolish without him. Praying for “abounding love” takes us right to the fountainhead of every good gift, the Lord’s sovereign choice to set his love upon his covenant people. Wisdom is gospel-oriented to its core. Paul continues and asks that their abounding love would come “with knowledge and all discernment.” This is literally “super-knowledge”⁴⁴ about God and the unseen and eternal matters of ultimate reality, along with all “discernment”⁴⁵ to grasp moral absolutes and judge between right and wrong. Biblical love is never mindless or contentless, but is informed by the entire breadth of the Word that “stands forever” and reveals the eternal God.

The next part of Paul’s prayer adds compelling new features. He asks that they would, literally, “test the things that differ,”⁴⁶ which begs the question, “Differ in what way?” Is he commanding them to recognize the chasm between absolute good and evil, according to the unchanging standard of God’s Word? I think not, because he has just said that and need not repeat it. The ESV captures the sense well with “approve what is

excellent.” We might say, “to choose that which is most important.”

And how will the Philippian church discern those “most important matters”? First, they must understand *who* they are—that church’s unique identity. This *existential perspective* recognizes that God spoke to that particular church in Philippi. Second, they must understand *where* they are—their unique time and place. This is the *situational perspective*; it views the reality that they must follow Christ in their particular *context*. Every church in every age must do the same, because we cannot obey God’s commands in a vacuum but only in the place in which he has providentially placed us.⁴⁷ The three perspectives help us sort out important questions to ask ourselves as we consider guidance and decision-making.

Consider the sample questions to be asked from each perspective in the following graphic and its explanation, along with a handful of biblical references presented as a sampling of the biblical data. Note again our corporate focus on the church.

The normative perspective highlights God’s *authority* and reveals his character and will. This perspective asks, “What does God say in Scripture that applies to this situation?” “What biblical principles are most germane to our decision?” “Which principles have the greatest importance, according to Scripture itself?” “What is the proper biblical weight to place on various principles?” “How can we keep a right sense of proportion between them?” (Ps. 119:105; Matt. 23:23; 2 Tim. 3:16–17)

The situational perspective highlights God’s providential *control* of the entire context in which

44 ἐπίγνωσις (*epignōsis*) has an intensified, experiential, and relational force. “Conversion to the Christian faith can be described almost technically as coming to a knowledge (*epignōsis*) of the truth.” Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 404.

45 αἰσθησις (*aisthēsis*) is about moral judgment; cf. the cognate in Hebrews 5:14 “senses” trained to “distinguish good from evil.”

46 εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα (*eis to dokimazein humas ta diapheronta*) “in order to test the things that differ.” The same word for “testing” is used in Romans 12:2, “by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The meaning in both texts is similar.

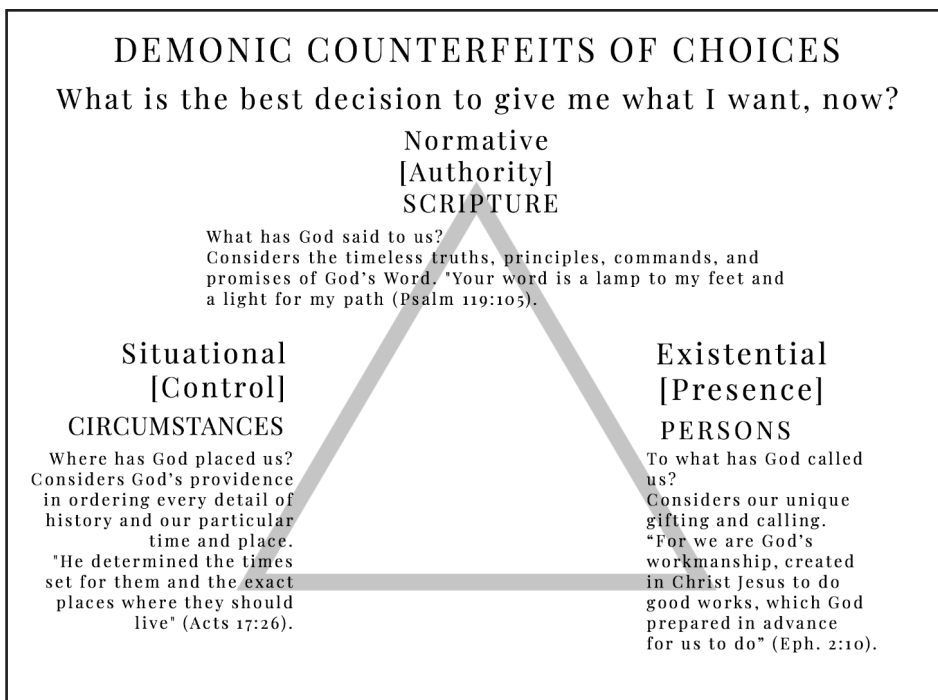
47 Time and place certainly include the church’s geographic location, culture, and decade, but foundationally the redemptive-historical epoch in which it exists. We live between Pentecost and Christ’s return, and in that regard are in the same place as New Testament church. The gap between the Old Testament theocracy and the worldwide New Testament church must inform our grasp and application of the entire Old Testament—the “Law,” “Prophets,” and “Writings.” An excellent popular work on this subject is the final book by Edmund P. Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007).

we live—our circumstances. He orders every detail of history, including our personal place and time and culture. He empowers the church to build itself up in love and to fulfill its mission in *our* world. This perspective asks,

“What are our opportunities and limitations right now?” “What are the best means of accomplishing God’s purposes for us in this situation?” “How can we demonstrate love for God and others, with wisdom and clear thinking, in this situation? (Acts 17:26; James 3:17)

The **existential perspective** highlights God’s *presence* in the church. He causes various needs in the church and provides the gifts in the body of Christ to meet them. This perspective asks, “How can we personally obey God’s commands and believe his promises, right here and right now?” “How do the resources God has given us match the opportunities around us?” “What convictions especially move us?” “What do we have faith to accomplish?” “What should we *believe* right now and how can we *love* right now?” “What is our decision-making process? Who should make this decision, and how?” (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:10; 4:7–12).

All the questions above, and the many more that we could ask, rarely have simple answers, but at least we are looking in the right places to find them. By asking appropriate questions from the three perspectives, we can receive useful answers to help us make wise choices.



Two Roads: Choices and Spiritual Warfare

We have seen that choices are triperspectival. They are also *binary*—good or evil. Guidance and decision-making demand that we grapple with the reality of spiritual warfare. This is very old news. In that pristine Garden of Eden, the devil impugns God’s goodness and twists his Word: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” He supplants God’s Word with lies: “You will not surely die.” He pushes a type of God-likeness built on rebellion and pride, rather than creaturely submission: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Our first parents listened to the arch-traitor and submitted to him, dragging the entire human race into bondage and death. It is no exaggeration to describe the entire Bible as an unfolding storyline of warfare—and God’s ultimate victory through the Lord Jesus Christ over sin, death, and the devil. We can rejoice that the story ends where it began—but infinitely better—in a new Eden forever purged of all evil and suffering, with God’s people united and resplendent in beauty, worshiping their Savior. “No longer will there be anything accursed, but

the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” Heaven and earth become one. The entire cosmos, with all who dwell in it, unite in worship, never again to face temptation and failure (Gen. 3; Rev. 21; 22).

We are not there yet. Throughout Scripture, and pervading the entire Christian life, every divine narrative has its demonic counterfeit—or more accurately a dizzying plethora of counterfeits exquisitely crafted to lure the church in every age from its “pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). When church leaders help members of the flock, we must pay attention to the issue, “Which ‘voice’ is this person listening to? The voice of the Good Shepherd or the voice of the thief who ‘comes only to steal and kill and destroy?’” (John 10:10). And, of course, we all know that we can sin just fine without the devil’s help; our sinful nature resonates with hell. Then, when many sinners get together and make “rules and regs” we are confronted with the “world”⁴⁸ of corrupted value structures that make it easy to submit to demonic lies and to scorn the truth. We battle the “world, the flesh, and the devil,” and we experience this warfare on every level.

Viewing sin from the three perspectives gives us insight into its destructive web. Consider, for instance, biblical teaching about idolatry: 1. Normative perspective: Idols are “nothing” in the sense that they are false pretenders, and there is only one God. Yet idols have demonic motivation behind them and press their corrupted norms (sinful values) into our reality.⁴⁹ 2. Existential perspective:

48 Of this usage of κόσμος (*kosmos*) by Paul, “The world is . . . in its unity and totality the domain of demonic powers,” and yet, “even in their activity of enmity against God and tyrannization of men, (they are) subject to God (2 Cor. 12:7).” Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 91–92. The world, the flesh, and the devil come together in Ephesians 2:1–2. We can view this evil triumvirate perspectively.

49 “We know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one’” (1 Cor. 8:4). And yet, “What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons” (10:20). Taken together these two texts present an accurate understanding of both the emptiness and dominating power of idols.

Within the biblical counseling movement, much has been written about idols of the heart, understanding idolatry from the standpoint of personal motivation and experience. Our inward desires “encamp” on the heart and take control over it. We “want something and do not get it,” leading to all manner of outward sins.⁵⁰ God’s blessings in this life are wonderful as gifts, but terrible as gods. 3. Situational perspective: Here we view idolatry in its organized and institutionalized forms. The “world” demands conformity to its godless values, rewarding those who conform and punishing those who do not. Therefore, we expect that the church will face persecution this side of our Lord’s return.⁵¹

The graphic below turns the spotlight on the decision-making process and the impact that sin has upon it. Note especially how sin turns the *plural of love* into the *singular of self-orientation*.

The normative perspective highlights the devil’s *usurped authority* and exposes his deceitful schemes. He is the source and driver of all evil, who demands worship as a counterfeit god. He organizes the demonic host to achieve that end.

This perspective asks, “What biblical principles is the devil attacking in this setting?” “How is the devil presenting partial ‘truth’ and twisting it for his own ends?” “How does this demonic message counterfeit biblical truth?” “Where is the devil creating blind spots so that we ignore important biblical teachings?” “What strongly held opinions are we elevating so high that we lose a biblical sense of proportion, and stop listening to others’ concerns?” “Which crucial principles must we fight for urgently, and which lesser ones may we release to God and wait patiently?” “How are we allowing our frustrated desires, even for good

50 “What causes wars and quarrels among you? Do they not come from your desires that encamp within you? You lust for something and do not get it. You murder and covet because you cannot have what you want” (James 4:1–2, author’s translation). And note the theme of demonic origin in 3:15, where such “wisdom” is “earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.”

51 “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

DEMONIC COUNTERFEITS OF CHOICES

What is the best decision to give me what I want, now?

Normative
[Authority]
FALSE CLAIMS

What deceitful words does the devil speak to us?
Considers the lies, demands, and false promises fabricated
by the enemy. "When he lies, he speaks out of his own
character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Situational
[Control]
CIRCUMSTANCES

How does the world
pressure us?
Considers social and
cultural support of the
lies and opposition to
the truth, in our immediate
setting.
"Do not be conformed to
this world" (Rom. 12:2).

Existential
[Presence]
PERSONS

What driving desires
rule us?
Considers our unique
array of inward
temptations.
"You desire and do
not have, so you
murder" (James 4:2).

things, to lead to sinful communication?" (John 8:44; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 10:20; Eph. 5:17; Eph. 6:10; James 3:15; 4:1–2; 1 John 3:8).

The **situational perspective** highlights the world under sin's control. Nothing in Scripture ever suggests that the Lord relinquishes his absolute sovereignty over creation, yet he exercises his rule without becoming the "author of sin."⁵² The world unites against God with Babel-like efficiency, organizing demonic lies into comprehensive worldviews, and building power structures that oppose Christian faith and life. Idolatry gains institutional support.

This perspective asks, "How does our world tempt us, and suffering discourage us?" "How do the corrupted values of our world undermine God's purposes for us in this situation?" "How do we squander opportunities and pretend false limitations?" "Where is the opposition to our calling and how can we move against it?" "How does a me-first attitude shatter church unity and torpedo good decision-making?" (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:15–16; James 3:16; 1 John 5:19)

The **existential perspective** highlights the inward *presence of sin* that rejects God and follows

the enemy. This perspective asks, "In what ways do our hearts resist faith and obedience in this situation?" "What false promises are we listening to, and why are they so enticing to us?" "What truths do we need to believe about our new identity in Christ? How can we think and live consistently with that identity?" "How do we allow our desires and fears to become idols?" "What inconvenient truths do we suppress?" "Are we actually listening to—and valuing—the biblical concerns of those who disagree with us? or do we pridefully believe we do not need them?"

"In what areas do we exhibit unbelief in God's promises?" (Rom. 6:6–14; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 2:3–4).

In conclusion, we readily admit to the difficulty of the decision-making task on a corporate level. The church daily faces overwhelming complexities in a chaotic and ever-changing environment. It also faces enormous pressure from sin, within and without. Yet that very pressure tells us that we may not succumb to the luxury of unbelief, which often leads to the functionally atheistic "Self-Sufficient View" of choices. Rather, we pray to our Lord who promises generous wisdom to the church that asks for it, in faith. Throughout the entire question-answer process suggested in this article, we pray expectantly for that heavenly wisdom which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).

James's character-oriented description of wisdom makes clear that in church decision-making, often *the process is more important than the product*. Perhaps this is overstated, for there are indeed wise or foolish decisions that carry positive or negative results. In many decisions, perhaps most of them, more than one "right" choice is available. (Think church budget matters, or even calling a pastor when more than one is available, etc.) But this is our point: the *means* of

52 "For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). See also WCF 3.1.

our choices matter to God, and they carry implications that transcend tangible results. If we care about life in the church family, we will pay as much attention to the ride on the bus as we do to our destination. Our task is not to discover the one perfect route, but to ride together by faith, in communion with Christ and one another. We believe that the Lord of the church will lead her by these means. On our journey together, the bus will take its twists and turns, and the roads ahead are known to God alone. Yet occasionally, we look out the rear window and see a straight line, a path that makes perfect sense and that no one could have imagined except a sovereign and loving Father. ©

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Servant Work

When It Is Time to Call a New Pastor

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by Jonathan T. Looney

At the start of the session meeting one month, your long-serving pastor (and close friend), Bob, asks if you would save five minutes at the end of the meeting for him to discuss something. The rest of the meeting proceeds normally and you are getting ready to close the meeting when you remember that Bob wanted to discuss something. Bob then announces that he has decided to retire. In a moment, your world is turned upside down: it feels like you are suddenly losing both your long-time pastor and also a long-time friend. Myriad emotions swirl through your mind. And, your thoughts may go in many different directions. (What do we tell the congregation? When do we tell them? How will this affect the congregation? What will this mean for our radio ministry?)

While processing your own emotions and thoughts, the one thing that you may not clearly realize at first is that this is the start of what is, realistically, eighteen to twenty-four months of very intense work. It is very much like the pastor has just shot off the starting gun of a long marathon. Have you ever watched the Olympic marathon and seen how the runners collapse just after the finish line? That may very well be you in eighteen to twenty-four months.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=727&issue_id=142.

Admittedly, I am somewhat exaggerating. Pastoral searches are emotionally tiring, rather than physically tiring. But we must not discount the importance or reality of emotional stress. And, furthermore, not all pastoral searches are equal. I've heard of long and exhausting pastoral searches. On the other hand, my church's recent pastoral search was on the easier side (And, I am happy to report that no one collapsed). But it is important that you have the right mindset at the start. It is better to overestimate the amount of work involved than to underestimate it and set unrealistic expectations for yourself and your church.

We had a conversation like the one I relayed above in one of our session meetings in late 2015. I didn't realize how much work was involved. I didn't even fully understand the process. What I soon discovered was that almost no one claims to be an expert at pastoral searches, simply because each of us do them so infrequently. (And, praise God for that!) I also found that there is no "standard" search process. Thankfully, we did one thing "right" through most of our search process: we sought advice from others. In the end, our search was successful, and a new pastor began his ministry in May 2017, about eighteen months after our previous pastor had announced his intention to retire.

Having had a successful search, other churches soon asked us for advice. Knowing how important advice was for us, I was happy to oblige. We did some things well that I think are critically important. We made some big mistakes that I would love to help other churches avoid. Hopefully, you will benefit from some of the things we learned.²

Caring for the Flock

As an elder, your primary job is to shepherd and care for the flock of Christ. Even the process of picking a new pastor is an element of shepherd-

2 I ended up organizing my thoughts into an unpublished pamphlet. Some of the material in this article comes from that, and I will provide a copy upon request. Like that pamphlet, this article is aimed primarily at the process of calling a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; however, much of the information can be easily adapted to other denominations.

ing the flock; however, I will cover that later. The first thing you must do is make sure you care for the flock's immediate needs.

One of the paradoxes of a pastoral transition is that this is a time when the congregation may (probably will) need more care than usual; but it is also a time when you are missing a full-time minister who would help provide that care. This means that the workload of the session can increase quite a bit. In addition to their normal needs, the congregation will be struggling to work through the loss of their pastor. This may be even more difficult if the loss was sudden (such as an unexpected death, or a quick transition to allow the pastor to pursue ministry elsewhere), or if the pastor left in the midst of conflict. The session will need to help the congregation work through this. In some cases, this may require lots of contact and much prayer, sweat, and tears. Regardless of the circumstances, *it is important that the elders are in regular contact with the congregation* and that they work through any problems that arise.

As a side note, the time to lay the groundwork for this is before your pastor leaves. You should have a good rapport with the congregation before the pastor leaves; otherwise, you may find that they are not receptive to your counsel once he is gone. Pastoral transitions bring the importance of ruling elders to the fore. Ruling elders are the stable figures who outlast pastors. And, they have a crucial role in shepherding the flock anytime, but particularly when there is no minister to lead the work.

You must also ensure that the congregation is fed spiritually. At a minimum, this means ensuring that the Word is faithfully preached every Sunday. If the pastor taught a Sunday School class, it may also be necessary to find someone to teach that. And, there may be other ministries that need to be maintained. But, we should be absolutely clear on one thing: the session's job is to ensure the flock is shepherded and fed. Merely filling preaching and teaching slots does not fulfill this mandate.

As Reformed Christians, we believe in the centrality of the preached Word in the life of the church. It is from God's Word that we receive

instruction for the Christian life. It is from God's Word that we receive comfort in time of trouble. It is from God's Word that we learn how we are to interact with each other, what a church is supposed to do, and what we are supposed to think about the events of life. In the hands of the Spirit, God's Word is the sword which pierces our soul, convicts us of our wrongdoing, and directs us to the right path. And, it is God's Word that teaches us about Jesus, the head of the church, its cornerstone, and the figure who unites us all. Your congregation needs this spiritual food all the time, but it especially needs it during pastoral transitions. And, again, the paradox of pastoral transitions is present: at the very time your congregation needs to hear God's Word preached skillfully, faithfully, and consistently, the man who provided that is no longer present to do so.

Some churches seek to fill this void through piecemeal efforts. This can certainly serve to communicate biblical truth to the congregation. But, does this inconsistency really serve to feed the people in the best possible way? I even visited one church recently that seemed to be filling the pulpit week by week. The minister who filled the pulpit had been asked to do so approximately eighteen hours earlier. His message certainly was biblical, but was this the spiritual meal the congregation needed? Without the minister learning more about the congregation, he might be hard-pressed to know the needs of the congregation. And, with only a single week to preach, he won't have the opportunity to present a series of biblical truths (or, even, a single complex truth) in an orderly way.

For these reasons (among others), *I think it is very valuable (perhaps, even critical) to have the exposition of the Word conducted by one or more regular, consistent, competent ministers*. This should be "consistent" in the sense that the same minister (or a small group of ministers) should do the bulk of the preaching. These ministers should be "competent" in handling God's word and understanding how to apply it to the lives of your flock. And, they should be "ministers": ideally, ordained ministers (retired ministers can do really

well in these roles) with a track record of biblical preaching.³

Interim pastors (or “stated supply”) can help greatly with caring for the flock. An excellent interim pastor will quickly be able to help with some of the shepherding needs (hospital visits, crises, and, perhaps, even some counseling) while also providing consistent spiritual food for the flock each Sunday (and that spiritual food will itself be informed more and more by his understanding of the needs of the congregation). An interim pastor can also be a great blessing to the ruling elders, since he can free up the ruling elders’ time to focus on other responsibilities within the church. In coordination with the ministerial advisor,⁴ an interim pastor can also assist with advice regarding the pastoral search.

During our recent pastoral transition, our church was blessed to go straight from our retiring pastor to an interim pastor, and then on to our new pastor, all without any gap. That meant that the people were being fed each week by a competent minister. It also meant there was great consistency in the preaching. I think it is not a coincidence that we had essentially no attrition during the transition. By contrast, I heard of another church that did have a gap between ministers and did suffer attrition.

I would suggest that you try to secure the services of a competent interim pastor as early as possible. If you need help finding one, ask for help. You can ask other ministers, your presbytery, or even the denomination. They should soon be able to provide the names of several competent interim

pastors. If you do choose to get an interim pastor, make sure you keep your presbytery informed. They may not need to take action, but they need to know what is happening in the pulpits of their churches.

Finally, *you need to pray for your congregation*. You need to pray for the church as a whole, as well as for the individuals within the church. As anyone who has been an elder for long knows, we are utterly incapable of impacting hearts or minds; rather, we are completely dependent on God to do that. So, where your church needs comfort, healing, strengthening, unifying, maturing, rebuking, growing, or anything else, you are dependent upon God to provide it. Take advantage of his invitation to lift your church before his throne of grace and rely on him to provide mercy and grace to help.

Finding the Right Man

During our search process, our ministerial advisor (Rev. Tom Trouwborst) compared calling a pastor to finding a wife.⁵ Although he only used the metaphor in a limited sense, I’ve come to realize it is useful more generally. Finding a pastor is a lot like the process for finding a wife.

One facet of dating is that there is no one standard way to do it. Likewise, there is no standard way to look for a new pastor. The exact process is informed by various considerations, such as tradition, congregational makeup and location, and the rules governing the process (found in the denomination’s standards, the church’s bylaws, and any relevant state laws). However, this acknowledgement of variety is not to say that all choices are equally good. I do think we can agree that there are some things that are better and some that are worse. But, at a minimum, because there is no standard way to look for a new pastor, sessions (and the search committees they oversee)

3 Yes, ruling elders can sometimes do a great job “preaching” or “exhorting,” depending on your view of the offices. But, my view is that during a time of pastoral transition, you should entrust your congregation to a man who has been trained to preach full time and has a track record of handling God’s Word well. Besides, your church’s ruling elders will be busy enough with other matters. Another possibility is to use a licentiate to fill the pulpit. I think that comes with some special considerations that a session should evaluate prior to employing a licentiate as stated supply.

4 A ministerial advisor is normally appointed by the presbytery at the request of the session of congregations without a pastor to provide guidance until a pastor is called (Form of Government 16.6, 17.2).

5 Indeed, this is probably not something that originated with Pastor Trouwborst. In fact, Chris Brauns also uses this metaphor in his book, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search: Biblical Principles and Practices to Guide Your Search* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2011). It is a helpful metaphor for some of the process, even if it fails to describe other parts of the process well.

will need to do a good job at defining the process among themselves first, and then with candidates whom they contact. Because finding a pastor is primarily a spiritual matter (rather than merely a matter of earthly employment), the session is ultimately responsible for the process. Many find it wise to use a search committee (in fact, some church's bylaws require this); however, the session again is ultimately responsible for the process. Throughout the process, the session should care for its flock, its former pastor, and the candidates with which it interacts, as appropriate for each. Let's briefly consider some of the facets of pastoral "dating" that the session and search committee will need to consider.

One of the first things the session should consider is the matter of *leaving and cleaving*. By the end of this process, the congregation should have "left" the previous pastor and been able to fully embrace the new pastor. I start with this simply because this may be a process that takes many months and runs in parallel with the rest of the search process.

Wayne Mack helpfully highlights several things that "leaving" means in the context of marriage. Let me paraphrase a few of his points and reformulate them to apply to the pastoral relationship:

- You establish a new relationship with the former pastor. (It is possible to maintain a relationship.) It can even involve you asking for, and receiving, advice. But it has a new character.
- You must be more concerned about your new pastor's ideas, opinions, and practices than those of your former pastor. This probably goes without saying, but the new pastor will not be the same as the old pastor. The church shouldn't needlessly discard the good ideas of the previous pastor, but they should care about the new pastor's ideas and judge them on their own merit, rather than by comparison to the previous pastor's ideas. This also has relevance in the search process, as the church should not be looking to replace the previous pastor with an exact copy, which

does not exist.

- You must eliminate any bad attitudes toward your former pastor, or you will be tied emotionally to them. Bad attitudes toward a former pastor can impact a congregation. If you harbor seriously bad attitudes, mere time and space will not heal the wounds, or, at least, not quickly heal them. The session must do its best to make sure the people and the pastor are reconciled prior to (or roughly concurrent with) his leaving, or they may find that these bad feelings continue to haunt the church for years to come—possibly, even interfering with the ability of the people to bond with their new pastor.
- You make the new pastor (together with the session) the primary source of pastoral counsel in your life.⁶

It is quite possible for a pastor to remain in constant contact with his former church, even worshiping with it every week; and for the congregation to "leave" him effectively. Likewise, it is possible for a pastor to move to the other side of the country and for the church to fail to "leave" him. However, just as Dr. Mack suggests that it "may make it more difficult to leave" your parents if you start your marriage living in too close of a physical proximity to them,⁷ it is likewise the generally accepted wisdom of the church that it is a good idea for pastors to be physically apart from their former congregation until the congregation has bonded to their new pastor. The session should discuss this with the departing pastor and develop a plan acceptable to all involved, with the goal of furthering the spiritual interests of all involved (including the departing pastor).

In addition to determining what work may be necessary to allow the congregation to leave its former pastor, it is also necessary for the search committee to *determine a "dating profile,"* which highlights any specific considerations that may im-

6 Adapted from Wayne A. Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), 2–3. The paraphrasing and adaptation to the pastoral context are my own.

7 *Ibid.*, 2.

pack the pastor you call. You could perhaps think of this like a personal ad: “Small, faithful church in upstate New York seeks a gifted preacher who . . .” You don’t necessarily need to use the ad; however, you should still use the information to focus your search and to think about what you will tell candidates.

It goes without saying that you will want a man skilled in handling the Word of God and able to preach. But, are there specific things that may impact the man you choose or that would impact whether a candidate might want to pastor your church? For example, if you are in a rural area, you will want a pastor who will enjoy living in a rural area. Or, perhaps, you live in an area which is generally distrustful of outsiders. Your candidates should, at least, be aware of that, as it may impact their ministry.

In developing your profile, you also need to consider whether there are any matters on which your congregation may require adherence to a doctrine narrower than that allowed by the OPC. It strikes me that in the recent past, homeschooling and views of creation have been the predominant issues on which congregations have developed strong views that may impact the choice of pastor.

Next, once you know the kind of candidate you are seeking, *you will need to find candidates*. Just as there are many ways of finding people to date, there are many ways of finding pastoral candidates. Personally, I think a good way of finding pastoral candidates is to seek recommendations from trusted advisors based on your profiles of your church and ideal candidate. These trusted advisors may come from various places: seminary professors with a good view of recent graduates; ministers who are well-connected to other ministers who may be looking to make a change; and, the denomination. The OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension keeps a list of both ministers and seminary graduates who are looking for calls within the denomination. In fact, part of their mission is to help congregations find pastors. Take advantage of their help. We asked for their advice. They provided several

names of promising candidates, and they were all right on the mark.

Once you have the names of candidates, *you can begin to “date” them*. You should probably first contact the candidates to let them know that you may be interested, to confirm their availability, and to request sample sermons. In addition to the sermons they provide, I would suggest finding their most recent sermons online and listening to one or more of those. I would suggest that an evaluation of the candidate’s preaching play an outside role in evaluation of candidates at this early stage.

The search committee, with the guidance of the session, should then interview the most promising candidates. Thanks to modern technology, it should be easy to have a “face-to-face” interview through a free video conferencing tool. If you decide to proceed further with a candidate, you should probably later supplement this with true in-person interviews; however, technology can help make early interviews possible at a lower cost. At this point, the committee should also check references. Ideally, you should have substantive conversations with their references, and they should be people who know the person well. At this point, the committee should rank its candidates into preference order.

Then, once you have determined your most preferred candidate, *it is time to for the candidate to “meet the parents.”* My brother recently brought a girl home for dinner to meet our parents. We all knew what that meant: this relationship was serious. Knowing my brother, I’m sure he was careful not to bring the girl home prematurely, and he wouldn’t later bring home another girl without first explaining why he was no longer dating the first girl. Likewise, I would suggest that you be very careful about bringing candidates to preach at your church. Once you bring a candidate to preach, I would suggest that you only proceed with that one candidate until you’ve made a decision. If you bring multiple candidates before the congregation at the same time, you risk dividing the congregation into factions united behind different candidates, rather than uniting them in

evaluating whether a single candidate is called to serve in your congregation.⁸ You can also combine in-person interviews with these preaching visits.

Next, your congregation comes to the all-important decision of *whether they want to “propose to” (call) this candidate*. It is important to handle this with care. The congregation should unite behind this candidate, but that may require some teaching on the right standards for choosing a pastor or on biblical unity. At the same time, the search committee must ensure the candidate himself has come to the place where he will be receptive to a call. This may require some additional work (additional visits, more phone calls, etc.).

At this point, you must also work out the terms of the call. I would suggest contacting the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension for their call guidelines. I would also suggest contacting the Committee on Ministerial Care to determine whether they have any relevant input. (As this relatively new committee serves, they may begin to develop material relevant to calling pastors.) You may also want to consult what other denominations have to say.⁹

Once you have done this, all that is left is to ask the presbytery to install (and, if necessary, ordain) the candidate. You should prepare your congregation for this process, including appropriate statements about the helpfulness and importance of the presbytery’s oversight.

Concluding Thoughts

When describing all that had to occur for a baby to be conceived, a doctor once said, “It’s a miracle anyone gets pregnant.” When I think

about all that must go right for a church to survive a pastoral transition and get the right man, I think it is also a miracle that any church survives this and also chooses the right person. But, isn’t that the point? We are utterly dependent upon God’s grace to find the right person. We are utterly dependent upon God’s grace to maintain unity in the church. And, we are utterly dependent upon Christ to shepherd *his* church. So, while we should work hard in this process, let’s remember to pray and trust God that he will do what he knows is best. He knows who should pastor the church, and he will provide the right man at the right time. ☺

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8 See also “Guidelines for Congregations to Follow in Discovering, Evaluating and Calling a Pastor,” Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, n.d., accessed December 1, 2018, <https://chmce.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Pastor-Search-Guidelines.pdf>.

9 I have found the information provided by the Presbyterian Church in America’s Retirements & Benefits to be quite helpful. In particular, the latest version of their call guidelines is found here: https://pcarbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Web_RBI_CallPkg.pdf (accessed December 1, 2018). Previous versions of this document have also contained a large amount of good advice (both biblical and practical).

Reflections about Ministerial Authority

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by T. David Gordon

This brief essay is entitled “Reflections” about ministerial authority, because that is what it is; nothing more and nothing less. It is not, for instance, a comprehensive study of the doctrine of ministerial authority (though some pertinent authorities are cited), nor is it a biblical theology of rule/authority (though some of that sneaks in also). “Reflections” also conveys something not conveyed by terms such as “research” or “study;” “reflections” includes one’s observations as well as what one has learned from books and from The Book. I was ordained as a ruling elder in 1982, and four years later was ordained as a minister, so I have been in and around church sessions, presbyteries, and general assemblies for a few decades, and my “reflections” are, of course, enlightened (or darkened?) by such experience.

In some sense, the idea of ministerial authority is almost an oxymoron, because we do not ordinarily think of “servants” as exercising authority. Paul most frequently refers to his office as that of “apostle” (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*, eighteen times), one who is sent or commissioned by someone else to perform some service on his behalf. His next most frequent term is some form of “servant” (διάκονος, *diakonos*, seven times and δοῦλος, *doulos*, five times); more frequently than “herald/preacher” (κῆρυξ, *kēryx*, two times) or “steward/manager” (οἰκονόμος, *oikonomos*, one time). Notably, Paul never referred to himself as “head,” although he employed the term (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) five times to refer to Christ. Therefore, in some senses, to discuss ministerial authority is to discuss its limits, to discuss how it can be that “servants” exercise rule or authority.

Ministerial Authority Is a Sub-Set of Ecclesiastical Authority

Any conversation about ministerial authority must understand itself as a sub-branch of ecclesiastical authority. Ministers are themselves “servants of Christ” (Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6; Titus 1:1), submissive to Christ’s purposes for them; they are, in their basic office, *under* authority, more so than exercisers of authority. They are Christ’s agents for caring for his flock; and have no authority beyond legitimate ecclesiastical authority. Note how our Presbyterian standards restrict the exercise of church authority, with one of them (Form of Government 3.3) referring to another (WCF 20:2) in so restricting church authority:

3. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God. “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship” (WCF 20.2).²

If “no church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority,” then surely no individual minister may do so. Ministers *administer* the ordinances of Christ (“only ministerial . . .”) and *declare* (“ . . . and declarative”) what the Holy Scriptures, as the “only infallible rule of faith and practice,” require or permit. They are not authorized to go beyond this. Interestingly, church judicatories ordinarily get this right, though some of their individual ministers get it wrong. An OPC session may deliberate whether parents must homeschool their children,

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=733&issue_id=143.

2 Form of Government 3.3, *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education, 2015), 4–5.

private-school their children, or public-school their children; and, ordinarily, it realizes that the Holy Scriptures have nothing to say about compulsory education at all (Robert Lewis Dabney opposed the practice when the Virginia legislature considered it), and so it rightly takes no position. Ministers of such churches, however, sometimes declare something about the matter from the pulpit, as though the most public and consequential office of the church was free to “declare” things which the church judicatories are *not* free to declare. Such ministers confuse the Christian pulpit with the so-called “bully pulpit” of public policy-makers, and abuse the declarative power given by Christ to the church and its ministers.

The Church’s Power to Enforce Is Spiritual, Not Temporal

In 1 Corinthians 5, the church is commanded to hand the impenitent individual over to Satan, not to the civil authority, even regarding a sin that, under the Mosaic laws, was a serious, possibly capital, crime (1 Cor. 5:1; Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30, 27:20). Following this apostolic example, the majority of the Presbyterian churches have refused to employ the civil authority’s power to enforce ecclesiastical laws. One implication of this doctrine of the spiritual nature of church power is this: *Persuasion* is always more consonant with the progress of God’s kingdom than *coercion*. The civil authorities employ coercive power by their very nature; if their citizens disobey their laws, they may fine them, imprison them, and even (in extreme cases) execute them. Ecclesiastical authorities refuse to employ any coercive power; they “declare” the will of God revealed in Holy Scripture, patiently instructing the flock, and equally patiently answering questions that are seriously proposed. Coerced “obedience” is not the same thing as heartfelt obedience; the latter of which only comes through patient instruction and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Church’s Declarative Power Is Not Inerrant

WCF 31.3 says: “All synods or councils, since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.” The church, then, has a responsibility to confess the faith in a manner which *recognizes* her own fallibility in so confessing. If even the highest courts of the church (general assembly) “may err; and many have erred,” then surely the individual ministers who jointly compose such assemblies “may err; and many have erred.” Even in the exercise of our proper office; to declare the Word of God, we should do so with entire awareness that our opinions *about* the Word of God are partial and fallible, and therefore not to be made “the rule of faith or practice.”

Church Power Is Both Joint and Several

The Scottish *Second Book of Discipline* in its very first page made a distinction which continues to appear in Presbyterian books of order and government: the distinction between joint power and several power.³ In the OPC, this distinction is articulated at Form of Government 3.2 (emphases added):

Those who join in exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction are the ministers of the Word or teaching elders, and other church governors, commonly called ruling elders. They alone must exercise this authority by delegation from Christ, since according to the New Testament these are the only permanent officers of the church with gifts for such rule. Ruling elders and teaching elders *join* in congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies, for

³ “This power is diverslie usit: For sumtyme it is severally exercisit, chiefly by the teachers, sumtyme conjunctly be mutuall consent of them that beir the office and charge, efter the forme of judgment. The former is commonly callit *potestas ordinis*, and the uther *potestas jurisdictionis*. These two kinds of power have both one authority, one ground, one finall cause, but are different in the manner and forme of execution, as is evident be the speaking of our Master in the 16 and 19 of Matthew.” (Chapter one, sections 7 and 8). From the edition published as an appendix in Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858).

those who share gifts for rule from Christ must exercise these gifts *jointly* not only in the fellowship of the saints in one place but also for the edification of all the saints in larger areas.⁴

The officers, in whose hand church power is effectively exercised, sometimes exercise that power “severed” from one another, acting as individuals; and sometimes they exercise power joined together in church courts, exercising authority over those under their jurisdiction. Thus, an individual minister teaches and preaches both privately and publicly, exercising the keys of the kingdom (calling people to faith and repentance) *severally*. His words are his. The officers of the church *assembled*, however, frame, modify, and approve the church’s confession, acting *jointly*. Acting jointly, the officers may determine that “lascivious . . . dancings” is sin (WLC 139); while acting severally, a given minister might very well counsel a member of his flock that his (or her) *particular* dancing is indeed lascivious, and should cease, while another member of the same session may declare that the dancing is not lascivious. Such counsel is private counsel; it is church power *severally* administered. If the individual does not heed the counsel, and a trial ensues, only at the end of the trial has the church acted *jointly* to determine the matter.

Misrule occasionally attends confusion about joint and several power. Some sessions have adopted (in practice if not in law) the practice of what they call “rule by consensus.” What such rule ordinarily turns out to be is brow-beating session members who are in the minority. The entire beauty of our form of government is rule by plurality; and the beauty inherent in plurality is that there is more wisdom (ordinarily?) in a group than in an individual. If individuals are pressured into conforming their opinions to the opinions of others, we sacrifice the most important aspect of our form of government. Sessions need not have unanimity; it is preferable that on occasion they do not have unanimity, because this indicates that

our form of plural government is still working, and that people recognize (and respect) the difference between joint and several power.

The Commend/Command Distinction

Sessions and ministers are routinely asked for their counsel on a number of matters; for some of these matters, there is no specific biblical information. This does not mean, however, that sessions and ministers may offer no counsel; they not only may offer counsel, they ought to offer counsel in such circumstances, as long as they indicate clearly that their counsel is informed by natural wisdom, and not from the Holy Scriptures. If parents ask a minister or session for advice regarding a child who is applying to college or university, such advice should be freely given, in accord with the wisdom and light the minister or other elders have. Should the child attend a Christian college or a secular university? To what degree does the amount of debt incurred influence the decision? These are valid, important questions, and ministers and elders should freely offer the best counsel they can provide, as long as they indicate that they are not declaring biblical truth. My elders and I called this the “commend/command distinction.” We attempted to distinguish obedience to divine laws—disclosed in Scripture—from consideration of human wisdom. We developed the habit of answering many requests for our counsel with words to this effect: “To my knowledge, Holy Scripture does not address this specific question. However, here are a few matters you should probably consider in the process of making your decision. . . .”

Ministers May Fail by Over-Exercising or Under-Exercising Their Authority (Timothy?)

According to the biblical witness, the human was made to be a ruled ruler; ruled by God, and exercising rule over the material order. Submissive to God’s rule, the human was entrusted with responsibility to govern other aspects of the created order. Our Reformed heritage ordinarily refers to

4 The Form of Government 3.3, 4.

this rule as the Cultural Mandate or the Creation Mandate.

The Fall constituted a revolt against God's order: Adam governed neither his wife nor the serpent; Eve yielded neither to God nor to Adam. From that time to the present, the fallen human swings—pendulum-like—from one extreme to the other, under-ruling where God assigned us legitimate responsibility, and over-ruling where he did not. We tend to abdicate our proper responsibilities, while taking upon ourselves responsibilities that belong to others. Consider David: “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. . . . But David remained at Jerusalem” (2 Sam. 11:1). David the giant-slayer had now become David the coward, David the fat cat. He neglected his first and primary duty as Israel's prince to defend her; but then he abused and transgressed his authority by sending Uriah to the frontlines to be killed and by taking Uriah's wife to himself. He *failed* to exercise the rule that kings *ought* to exercise, and he *exercised* rule he had no just authority to exercise.

Not surprisingly, ministers (and church courts) are not free from the human tendency to over-rule and under-rule. I've seen ministers abdicate to their sessions, without instruction, decisions regarding public worship, for instance. Yet the minister is the only member of the session ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacrament, and ordinarily the only member of the session with graduate level training in Bible. On such matters of the public administration of Word and Sacrament, the minister *under*-rules if he does not provide biblical instruction. On other matters (e.g., real estate), many ministers take an aggressive (even hostile?) approach to matters for which their seminary training makes them no more expert than other members of the session or congregation. On such matters, the minister *over*-rules by assuming responsibility to which he is not specially called.

Ministers are uniquely entrusted with the ministry of Word and Sacrament, for which they are (or ought to be) qualified, and therefore need

not defer to their fellow elders on such matters, but rather should instruct them. Ministers share with their other officers a common knowledge of their region, their city, or town, and ministers do not necessarily know more about these matters than their fellow elders. Ministers should “devote themselves” to apostolic doctrine, in pulpit and in lectern. Any competent, seminary-trained pastor can put together an adult education class in a fraction of the time that most other adults in the church—including many elders and deacons—could do the same. A minister who habitually surrenders pulpit or lectern to others, in order to attend to things that require no seminary education, is probably under-ruling in one area and over-ruling in another.

Ministers and the Flock

Most of the exercise of proper ministerial authority with the flock is feeding them with the true gospel of Christ. If Peter loved Christ, he would prove it by feeding Christ's lambs (John 21:15–17). There are many members of the body of Christ that can perform many acts of Christian service to other parts of the body; there is ordinarily only one part of the body of Christ who can serve the entire body, at the same time, every week, and that is the minister, who exercises his ministerial authority by declaring to otherwise utterly hopeless sinners that there is a competent Redeemer, who can and will save to the uttermost those who come to God through him. One of the lengthiest, profoundest paragraphs in the Form of Government is chapter 8, which appears in its entirety as a single paragraph, profoundly shaped by John 21, and part of which is this:

Christ's undershepherd in a local congregation of God's people . . . is called a pastor. It is his charge *to feed and tend the flock* as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to *pray for and with Christ's flock* as the mouth of the people unto God; *to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God,*

according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God; to administer the sacraments; to bless the people from God. (emphasis added)⁵

Under-ruling ministers neglect parts of this to do other things; over-ruling ministers do other things, neglecting parts of this in the process. ©

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Conflict Resolution in the Church

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by Alan D. Strange

We might properly think of conflict resolution in the church in two main ways—informal and formal resolution of difficulties. Informal resolution of conflict is what ordinarily does and should occur, needing no elder intervention, private parties resolving matters among themselves. Formal resolution is what occurs in church discipline, which itself has its ordinary and extraordinary expressions: the former occurs in the ongoing making of disciples through a use of the ordinary means of grace; the latter occurs when there’s been a breakdown of ordinary discipline and the church must resort to censure, such as rebuke, suspension, and excommunication.

Conflict arises due to our sin. In the garden before the Fall, there was neither conflict between our first parents nor between them and their maker. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, all of that dramatically changed. The once innocent pair now covered up, each seeking to hide from the other in newly-discovered shame, and both hiding from the God whom they had formerly adored and welcomed as he walked with them in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 1–3).

Now man in his sin is in rebellion against God and at war with each other. It’s hardly a surprise that if fallen man is in conflict with God, his maker and ruler, he would be in conflict with his fellow fallen man. We’ve witnessed this conflict through the ages both between persons and within the institutions of the family, the state, and even the church. Conflict has characterized our race since the Fall as Paul’s indictment in Roman 1–3 proves.

¹ https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=778&issue_id=150; https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=786&issue_id=151.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

Christ came to set to rights all that Adam and we, as his guilty and polluted offspring, have marred (Rom. 5:12–21). He kept the whole law for us, never at fault in any situation of conflict, perfectly patient, perfectly honest, and, in fact, perfectly righteous in all things. He lived for us, as we say. One can think of Christ as the one who truly embodied all of the virtues of the righteous man in the Old Testament, especially the Psalms (He is the righteous man of Psalm 1; the one who “speaks the truth in his heart” of Psalm 15, and so forth).

And he died for us, to pay the penalty for all of our rebellion against God and conflict with each other (Rom. 5:1–11) and to break the power of reigning sin in our lives so that we begin to live, though but a small beginning even in the godliest, according to all his commandments (Heidelberg Catechism, 114; Rom. 6). Those who trust in Christ alone can begin to move away from conflict as those in Christ and no longer in Adam. Because of remaining sin, however, we still have rebellion with respect to God and conflict with each other (Rom. 7).

Much of the hortatory material of Scripture deals with this, calling us as believers to die to all that separates us and to live to that which makes for our peace and unity. Our Lord (in passages like Matt. 18 and Luke 17), Paul (in passages like Rom. 12, Gal. 5–6, Eph. 4–6, Col. 3–4, etc.), and others exhort us to live at peace as believers, and to resolve any conflict that we have by repenting of our sin against one another and by forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32).

What Is Church Discipline?

This informal conflict resolution that is to be a regular part of the Christian life, because of the strength of remaining sin, needs supplementing with more formal conflict resolution; this is the concern of what we commonly refer to as church discipline. The rest of this essay will concern itself with the workings of church discipline, both as that is expressed in the ongoing exercise of the ordinary means of grace and in the more extraordinary censures of the church, when the ordinary means

prove insufficient to resolve conflicts among the saints in the church. The word “discipline” seems formidable to many, evoking for even some, perhaps, abusive connotations. But discipline is one of the three marks of the true church (along with the pure preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments), and is not a mark of God’s disfavor, but of his love for his people.

What is discipline? It comes from the Latin word *disciplina* which in turn comes from the word *discere*, meaning “to teach” (with its cognates/derivatives): It means to be a disciple, follower, pupil, student, etc. We use it today when we ask someone at a university, “What is your discipline?” It is that to which one gives oneself, as in “My discipline is history.” Thus, a disciple of Christ is one who is (as Matt. 28:18–20 indicates): baptized (initiated into the faith); catechized and further trained; taught to obey whatsoever things the Lord has commanded. In short, a disciple is one who gives himself to Christ, who trusts and obeys, who believes the gospel and walks in obedience to Christ. Discipline, then, is the act of such self-giving and believing obedience.

This definition and understanding highlights something of a popular misconception of discipline. We tend to hold a reductionist view of discipline and automatically equate discipline with censure or punishment (as in “I am being disciplined”). But censure occurs only when discipline in this fuller sense has been absent and/or has failed in its intended purposes. Censure comes when one fails to walk in the obedience that discipline entails. Think of disciplining our children. Such discipline involves the whole task of filial training, not merely corporal punishment, which occurs when there is a failure of obedience. It is necessary to have this fuller view of discipline, that it means being a faithful disciple, as we seek to examine discipline in the church.

How then is such discipline, in this fuller sense, to be carried out in the life of the church member? Discipline is ordinarily effectual and formative in the lives of those who pursue and seek it—who want lives characterized by trust and obedience. The ordinary public means of the forma-

tion of Christian character are the public means of grace: The reading, and especially the preaching, of the Word of God (Westminster Larger Catechism 155); the sacraments, the improving of our baptisms, and the realization of the fellowship and communion of God with his people; and prayer, especially for the spiritual growth of ourselves and others (note especially the prayers of Paul).

Coupled with this is faithfulness in the private duties of religion, each in his own closet (personal devotions), as well as Bible reading and prayer in our families (family devotions). Deuteronomy 6 well illustrates this—“as we walk along the way”—parents talking to their children about school, church, relationships, and what they learn in personal and family devotions, etc. (address this all on elders’ visitation). Such private and public discipline forms Christian character and largely involves learning to live with each other so as both to avoid and resolve conflict.

Discipline can, and does, however, also include censure from others when disobedience manifests itself (thus not merely self-imposed and internalized, which is the goal of all training/discipline). This, in terms of church members, can occur at two levels. First, informally—a friend challenging, encouraging, even rebuking (“Should you speak to your wife that way?”), obviously with all the care encouraged in Matthew 7 and Galatians 6. Remember—do not seek to play the Holy Spirit. Or, an elder or pastor speaking in this way. This is still informal but carries a little more weight. Elders are to seek to resolve such matters before bringing them to the consistory or session. Even the elders, as a whole, speaking to an offending party is informal, as long as they are not in judicial session.

Second, formally, church discipline may be enacted by a court of the church, the consistory or session, acting in a judicial capacity. This generally presumes that informal approaches have failed or that it is a public sin of such consequence as to require formal action. From this point forward the OPC Book of Discipline (BD) will be regularly referenced in addition to the URCNA Church Order (CO), the latter of which devotes Articles 51–66 to

Ecclesiastical Discipline. The OPC BD contains a fuller approach to church discipline than is found in the URCNA CO, and most other continental Reformed church orders have a fuller approach as well.

The judicatory (consistory or session) may issue lesser censures—admonitions and rebukes (these, as well as those that follow, are more fully described in BD 6; CO Article 55). Graver censure includes suspension in or deposition from office, and suspension of the privileges of church membership (CO Article 55). Finally, the gravest censure is excommunication, when someone remains persistent and impenitent in sin (CO Article 56).

Discipline throughout church history is itself an interesting study. It is, as noted above, one of the three marks of the true church, along with the pure preaching of the Word and a biblical administration of the sacraments. Church discipline is, as are the other two marks, a further incarnational reality of that church whose attributes are unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The Reformation added the three marks of the church to the four attributes which, while necessary, were no longer deemed sufficient properly to identify a true church.

Church discipline as a mark of the true church means that the church is to be faithful to her Lord: each member personally and all the members together and as a whole are to live in submission to the Spirit of Christ. The body as a whole implicates itself when it fails to exercise discipline and censure sin (Josh. 7; 1 Sam. 2–4; and 1 Cor. 5); the body as a whole vindicates itself when it exercises discipline and censures sin (Josh. 8; 2 Cor. 7). This is no easy task, though, as seen in Galatians 6 and 2 Corinthians 2:5 and following, and must be done with great humility and charity.

Discipline has often, in the history of the church, either been neglected or abused. John Calvin lamented its neglect in Geneva where open adulterers were coming to the Lord’s Table. For barring the table to libertines, among other things, he was sent into exile from 1538–41 in Strasbourg. The reluctance of the Genevan council to leave the question of admission to the table to

the consistory stemmed from medieval clerical abuse of excommunication/interdict, etc. Even as the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages claimed, ultimately in every sense, to be over the state (Caesoropapism claimed the opposite—the state over the church), so churches touched by the Reformation sometimes did the opposite and espoused Erastianism (a Protestant form of the state over the church).

Excommunication, as well as deposition from office, has been abused throughout the history of the church, used as a tool to get one's political enemies. We see such political abuse even in the early church (Athanasius, Chrysostom) but particularly in the Middle Ages with the rise and zenith of the papacy. The pretense of the church to exercise hegemony over the state made many reforming princes and governments gun-shy and tending toward Erastianism.

We can do either—neglect or abuse church discipline—in our churches today. Winking at sin (as may be done in many liberal and seeker-sensitive Protestant churches) is one way to neglect church discipline. Alternatively, we can go after those we regard as our enemies, in a political use of church discipline, which is a manifest abuse of discipline. Rather we need a humble, godly use of church discipline.

The basis of church discipline: God himself chastens us (Prov. 3; Heb. 12), so it is appropriate that such discipline should appear in the life of the church. He chastens us to enable us to die to sin and live to righteousness; to put off the old man and to put on the new man (Eph. 4:17 ff; Col. 3:5 ff.). Without chastening we go astray, even as do our children. Without chastening, sin is not checked in our hearts and lives, and we are treated not as sons but as illegitimate children (Heb. 12:8—it is the legitimate sons who are groomed by chastening to receive the inheritance; no chastening, no such grooming, and thus no inheritance). No son is then without chastening.

Even the Lord Jesus was not without discipline (Heb. 5:8): As Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “God had but one Son without sin but he

never had a son without chastisement.”⁶ This makes it unmistakably clear: God chastens us not because he hates us but so that we might be sanctified (Deut. 1 and 8). Thus, we are to be disciplined: by the Lord himself working in us; by trials and afflictions; by the self-examination that he requires at the table; by enabling us to put sin to death (“have salt in yourselves,” Mark 9); by others in our lives, in the “one-anothering” of the church, formally and informally, and by private counsel.

We are also disciplined by the governors appointed by God in the appropriate spheres: in the family—fifth commandment; in the state—Genesis 9; and in the church—the Matthew 16 and 18 grant of authority to the governors of the church. In each of these spheres, God has appointed governors to act on his behalf.

The nature and limit of church power in its discipline, as well as the purpose, is ministerial and declarative. Positively, that means that the power given to the church is to serve and to teach, like our Lord in John 13. Negatively, that means the power is not magisterial and legislative (as in hierarchical or some fundamentalist churches). Church power is, in other words, moral and suasive, not legal and coercive. As moral and suasive, it is concerned with sin and righteousness and seeks to persuade unto obedience; unlike the power of the state, which is legal and coercive—concerned with crime and has the power to punish such with the sword. Church power is spiritual (CO Article 51), meant to minister to and recover the erring soul.

The limits, or boundaries, of church power are also important to understand: All earthly power, as seen in the WLC exposition of the fifth commandment (WLC 123–133), derives from the fifth commandment, but is differently held and exercised according to the grant and ordinance of God. The family is given the power of the rod, and not the power of the keys or the power of the

6 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, sermon on Isaiah 42:18, “Joyful Transformations,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868).

sword. The state is given the power of the sword and not the power of the rod or the power of the keys. The church is given the power of the keys and not the power of the rod or the power of the sword.

In other words, the power of the family extends even to wisdom and discretion (certainly for minor children), and the power of the state extends even to the death penalty (but the state does not physically punish sin that is not crime: speaking hatefully, for example, may be a sin but is not a crime, although speaking hatefully, at least if it makes someone feel threatened, may be punishable as a crime in some places.). Church governors are analogous to parents, but have no power to compel with regards to discretion or wisdom as do parents: e.g., “no, you may not have ice cream; no, you may not purchase that car stereo.” Church governors are also analogous to civil rulers, but do not spank, jail, or otherwise physically punish. Rightly understood, the spiritual power that the church exercises is the most fearsome and awesome power there is, even more so than the death penalty, because it is a spiritual death penalty, though there is always the prayer for and hope of restoration in the exercise of even the gravest of church censures.

Classically, church discipline has a three-fold purpose: The glory of God—scandalous sin not addressed and repented of detracts from the glory of God, bringing dishonor upon his sacred and holy name (Gen. 39:9, Ps. 51—it is God against whom we sin, above all, and it is he who must be vindicated); the purity of the church—scandalous sin that is tolerated in the midst of the congregation has the effect of contaminating the whole body (Acts 5); and the reclamation of the offender—we hand over to Satan, even, so that the offending party may “learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1).

I think that a fourth reason is also significant, though often overlooked: justice for the offended party. If a seriously offended party is faced with a judicatory that is unwilling to press for repentance on the part of the offender, this opens up the offended party to bitterness and rancor. It is not love

for the victim on the part of the church to exhort him to “get over it.” Rather, we are the ones charged to carry out the vengeance of the Lord, as it were, in the sphere of the church (tempered with much mercy and grace, in the church setting especially), even as the state is in its sphere. We can properly counsel the offended that vengeance is the Lord’s only when we are thus willing to act to do our duty (Rom. 12:14–21). To fail to do so because of misguided sympathy for the offender is unloving and potentially quite destructive for the offended party (think of the innocent party in a divorce case).

Deal with Offenses Privately

One of the primary principles of church discipline is that offenses should be dealt with as privately as possible (CO Article 52). This is the dynamic that we see in Matthew 18:15–20 and Luke 17:3 and following: If your brother sins against you, go and seek to reclaim him. Let me urge a few considerations, though, even before the allegedly offended party goes to the offending party. Look to yourself (Matt. 7:1–5): What may be your part in this? Have you sinned against your brother (Matt. 5: 23–4)? Then, determine what the offense is: What commandment has the offender broken? How serious is this offense? Does it disrupt your fellowship and communion? Cannot love cover this sin (1 Pet. 4:8)? If it is a true offense that disrupts your fellowship and communion and thus must be addressed, then go in meekness and humility (the spirit urged in Gal. 6) and seek to regain your brother.

When dealing with Matthew 18, we are looking at an offense against you, not you seeking to play the Holy Spirit or otherwise set this person to rights (that is the job of the “spiritual” and of the governors of the church). One may, well before going, find it helpful to seek non-gossipy advice from your pastor or elders, who would be part of the solution. Resist the ever-present urge to gossip/slander/murmur/complain and be humbly ready to hear the answer of the alleged offender. Try your best to resolve the matter personally and do

not count one visit as having necessarily “done your duty.” This should be done if at all possible in person and not by mail, phone, etc. This should be done as personally as possible and as locally as possible. Any desire on your part to tell the church, the Supreme Court, the world about alleged personal, private offenses (and even ones that aren’t “tell it not in Gath” (2 Sam. 1:20)) needs to be repented of. Stay local (CO Article 53).

If the private is not successful, ask local witnesses to accompany you, local witnesses who are spiritually discerning. Why would you not ask elders? Certainly, the two or three witnesses spoken of in Matthew 18 are not a group of your friends to accompany you to beat up your enemy. What is the purpose of the witnesses? To give an unbiased, objective hearing of, and to be able to give testimony to, what is said by all parties, and to facilitate communication if necessary (and possible) between the parties. Even to intervene and seek resolution: perhaps one (or both) of the parties manifests an unreasonable, uncharitable spirit; the witnesses may urge forgiveness if it is not properly being offered or otherwise help along to reconciliation.

If the offender will not listen even at this point to the offended (together with the witnesses), tell it to the church. That is to say, bring it to the consistory or the session, the governors of the church, who represent the church (CO Article 54). The elders then advise and act.

Humility is needed on all sides in church discipline—in the offended and in the restoring parties. All are challenged in this process to walk humbly *coram Deo*. Matthew 7:1–5 teaches that the offended is to be quite aware of his or her own sin, and even of contribution to the offending party’s sin. We can properly speak of an “innocent party,” but even that party is not without sin. We tend to minimize our faults and to maximize those of others. We need true humility so that in the whole process we really listen to one another, which very easily is lost when feelings run high (Phil. 2:1–11).

Galatians 6:1–5 is particularly relevant to the

consistory or session as a restoring party. Those involved in restoring should be humble, profoundly aware of their own sin and need. In the process of protracted and perhaps difficult dealings this can be quite a challenge to the men on the consistory or session, who can easily become defensive and entrenched in a position, particularly against a party perceived to be willful or resistant. In the sinning/offending party, the end sought is repentance/humility.

The elements of biblical repentance (mirroring faith) are recognition and acknowledgement of the sin. Since God’s holy law has been violated, no small part of repentance involves hating the sin, in other words, having God’s perspective toward the sin. In addition to hating the sin, repentance includes turning from the sin, with an endeavor after new obedience.

True repentance does not mean that the party is no longer struggling with the sin (having gained “higher life” or a perfectionistic victory). This is perhaps the trickiest part: charity should prevail; turning from the sin does not mean never repeating it, but truly hating it and turning from it when it manifests itself. The party ought to be truly humbled and desire to walk in new obedience. We ought to restore when true brokenness is evident, not requiring victory altogether over the sin (CO Articles 57–58). Restoration is one of the greatest joys of ministry, and I have been privileged to witness several striking instances of it, in some cases after many years of rebellion on the part of excommunicated parties.

Judicial Discipline

There are several different ways in which matters may be brought before a judicatory. A person may come as his own accuser (BD 5.1). In such a case, the judicatory must ascertain what the offense is. This cannot be assumed but must be clearly established from the law of God. Is it serious? Perhaps consistorial/sessional or pastoral counsel will suffice. This step needs to be very carefully handled. If a real offense has been committed (not someone confessing to something that

is not sin, as someone once confessed to me having wine, not to excess, at a wedding reception) and its seriousness is clearly established, then the questions are: Is the party repentant and what shall the censure be?

Allegations of sin may be brought to the elders from the offended party or from witnesses. Those bringing the allegations must be able to testify to the inability to resolve matters under the first two steps of Matthew 18 already examined. Alternatively, the offense because of its very nature (that has a public character given its nature, e.g., adultery) must be brought before the consistory/session, even though it is known to a few, and the guilty party may seem repentant.

A charge may be brought to the elders (BD 3.1–3 details the steps in the institution of judicial process). Make sure that section 3 is satisfied (“Every charge of an offense must: (a) be in written form, (b) set forth the alleged offense, (c) set forth only one alleged offense, (d) set forth references to applicable portions of the Word of God, (e) set forth, where pertinent, references to applicable portions of the confessional standards, (f) set forth the serious character of the offense which would demonstrate the warrant for a trial.”), as is required in BD 3.7a., which describes the preliminary investigation that must occur for the judicial process to go forward.

There are several circumstances that may occasion the bringing of a charge and determining how it is handled: if the offense is public or against the consistory/session, the offending party is brought directly before the elders; it may be brought directly to the elders if the offense is known by them or if the offense is widely known and brought by other parties. A charge of an offense may also be brought by someone who has something against an elder or the pastor that is not personally resolvable (BD 3.1).

When matters are brought before the consistory/session, it must seek to assure itself that such matters ought to be before it; that the parties have done their utmost to resolve the matters privately first, remembering the admonitions of BD 3.4–5, which require offenses to be resolved as privately

and locally as possible. The BD and the URCNA CO (Articles 51–66), by the way, is the church’s application of the Scriptural/confessional principles governing church discipline (see BD 1 and 2), not an arbitrary set of rules that stand over against Scripture.

The consistory/session, once it has ascertained that a serious offense may have been committed, may invite the accused to come as his or her own accuser. If the accused declines, then judicial proceedings may be instituted in accordance with BD 3.3. The judicatory would then proceed to a preliminary investigation in accordance with 3.7b or 3.8. This is not at all perfunctory and in certain cases, doctrinal ones, for e.g., is perhaps the most important part of the judicial process. The judicatory would then proceed to trial if the preliminary investigation demonstrates that such is warranted. The rest of the proceedings that follow are set forth in BD 4, which details the actual trial of a judicial case.

If a trial is to be held, judicatories shall ordinarily sit with open doors, unless there is a manifest need for the doors to be closed (in the case of sensitive testimony and protecting the good names of witnesses). In the case of heresy, the doors must be open as all teaching is public. In any case, the doors should not be closed to protect the accused but to protect non-accused parties to the matter and possibly witnesses. Closing the doors for the sake of the accused looks like an “old-boys club” protecting one of its own. Conversely, closing the doors so that the proceedings of the judicatory will not be witnessed can look like railroading the accused and turns the judicatory into a “star-chamber” proceeding.

The judicatory may deny the accused the privileges of office or membership until the case is concluded. This is generally done in the case of scandalous and/or notorious sin, either for office or general membership or both. And it may also be done in the case of a charge of heresy for the teaching officer when it would be thought injurious for him to continue teaching.

Trials may be conducted *in absentia* when the accused refuses or fails to show up for his trial.

The first no-show calls for a second summons; at the second no-show, the trial may proceed. This is arguably inferior to the PCA's procedure: a no-show brings forth a summary judgment on the charge of contumacy, which must be dealt with before the presenting charge can be considered. The elders may wish thus to charge a no-show, requiring them to deal with obstinate rebelliousness before proceeding to deal with the substance of the presenting offense.

The clerk should take roll at the beginning of every session. A person must be present at each session to vote on the specifications and charges though he may otherwise deliberate, ask questions, and propose motions (BD 4.C.2.b). The clerk should keep a careful record of the trial (but a transcript is not required).

The accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty—as a biblical principle; concomitant with that is the notion that the prosecution bears the burden of proof. We are not told whether or not that means “beyond reasonable doubt” or a “preponderance of the evidence.” The accused can sit in judgment on no part of his case, including the preliminary hearing (if he is a member of the judicatory). The accused is entitled to counsel, as long as such is a member in good and regular standing of the OPC (for those tried there). The accused may raise objections as noted in BD 4.B.2:

The accused may object to the competency of any witness and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any testimony or evidence produced in support of the charge and specifications. The trial judicatory shall decide on all such objections after allowing the accused to be heard in support thereof.

Several matters arise with respect to the witnesses in a trial. Initially in the preliminary investigation the competency of a witness is to be determined. Is the witness of sufficient mental capacity to testify? Is he properly an “eye-witness”? The credibility of a witness is determined by one who, during the trial, stands up under cross-examination. Depositions may be taken by commis-

sions and witnesses when summoned are bound to appear (before the proper body). Pursuant to BD 4:B.4, the accused may request that witnesses not testify in the presence of other witnesses.

The rules for evidence are as follows: it must be factual, not mere opinion (if not expert, do we have such?) or conclusions. Evidence can be direct—eyewitness, letter, etc. Evidence may be circumstantial—matters surrounding the alleged offense (“I drove by and saw him leaving her house at 9:30 on the date in question”). Specifications may be established by the testimony of more than one witness or duly authenticated documentary evidence. We sometimes feel stymied in this regard, being certain that a person has committed a deed but lacking sufficient direct or circumstantial evidence. We must remember that it is our duty to adhere to this standard and not to seek to bring to light what only Judgment Day may. It is unsurprising to find the world in its fear seeking for ultimate justice now. We should not fall prey to this in the church.

An examiner is to be appointed by the judicatory. He conducts the exam on behalf of the body, though other members always retain the right to take part in the examination as they see fitting. “Prosecution” witnesses are first examined by the judicatory. Then such are cross-examined by the accused and/or his counsel. The judicatory may then conduct a re-direct examination, and the accused may follow with a re-cross examination. The subject matters of the re-directs and re-crosses are restricted to that already in evidence. Leading questions are permitted only under cross-examination (only when the witness is presumed to be “hostile” and not friendly). “Defense” witnesses are first examined by the accused, may be crossed, with the defense given the last examination on re-direct. In the OPC BD the defense always gets the last go at witnesses.

If new evidence is presented against the accused, he must be given a reasonable time to examine and prepare his defense. Exculpatory evidence produced by the accused must be examined by the judicatory, and it must take action accordingly.

Trial proceedings are as follows. The first meeting of the trial is *pro forma*, involving, first, a formal reading of the charges and specifications; then, a fixing of the time, date, and place for the second meeting. The accused is given citations to call witnesses.

The “second meeting” of the trial is the way to which all the rest of the trial is referred. The accused may at the beginning of the second meeting interpose objections dealing with everything done up to this point, including matters germane to the preliminary investigation. The trial judicatory may dismiss the charge(s) or amend them (in a non-substantive way). If the trial judicatory determines to proceed to trial, the accused shall plead. If he pleads “guilty,” the trial judicatory proceeds to censure. If he pleads “not guilty,” the trial judicatory proceeds to trial. The accused may also, after the presentation of the “prosecution’s” case, move for dismissal of the case.

At the conclusion of the trial, the accused makes final arguments (if the examiner has a summation, the accused follows). Then the trial judicatory (not the accused or his counsel) deliberates on each specification and charge. If “guilty,” the trial judicatory proceeds to the censure phase. Censure is first proposed and then pronounced after the expiration of time for filing an appeal. Censures may be of the following sort: admonition, rebuke, suspension (definite or indefinite), and excommunication (censures are described in greater detail in BD 6 and CO Articles 55–56).

The appeal process (in a judicial case) allows ten days to file notice of appeal after proposal of censure; thirty days to perfect an appeal (the appeal process is described in BD 7; CO Article 31 provides simply the broad right of appeal). Only the accused (or a reversed judicatory) can appeal a judicial verdict. Appeal may be on the censure as well as on the verdict. The records of the case must be sent up to the appellate judicatory by the clerk of the judicatory of original jurisdiction. The appellate judicatory (excluding the members of the judicatory from which appeal is taken) may reverse, modify, or uphold judgment of the lower judicatory.

Administrative Discipline

There is, in addition to judicial discipline, administrative discipline. Judicial discipline involves charges brought against individuals for sin, not against judicatories (whose members could be charged, though this would provide remarkable challenges), and only for sin serious enough to warrant trial.

Administrative discipline involves complaints brought against judicatories for errors or delinquencies (detailed in BD 9; CO Article 31 establishes the broad right of appeal). Note that such errors or delinquencies must be of constitutional magnitude and may not be properly filed for allegations of lack of wisdom or poor judgment (there are other ways of dealing with that). Rather, complaints address doctrinal errors or delinquencies committed by a judicatory regarding the Scriptures and standards, and also polity errors or delinquencies which are violations of the Book of Church Order. Complaints may not be brought in judicial cases. All that is objectionable in a judicial case must be stated as specifications of error in the judicial appeal (BD 7.2).

Here are some circumstances under which actions subject to a complaint might occur: A session/consistory or presbytery/classis makes a decision (error) or fails to make a decision or take a necessary timely action (delinquency) which is alleged to violate the Scriptures or the constitution of the church (the doctrinal standards or the church order), and such alleged error of delinquency can in no other way be remedied.

The complaint must be processed as soon as possible, but within three months (unless some extraordinary circumstances exist). It is the burden of the complaint to set before the judicatory as clearly as possible the alleged errors or delinquencies. The appeal of a complaint from the body complained against shall be entered at the earliest possible time, with reasons appended, and becomes the vehicle for taking the complaint to a higher judicatory, which shall consider the substance of the original complaint above all else.

Grievances Against a Pastor

Grievances against a pastor should be brought, first of all, to him and/or the elders. If private, concerns should be brought to him alone, and the parties should attempt to work through them. If with specific reference to his office (preaching, counseling, etc.), the concerns should be brought to him and then to the elders. The elders should engage in judgment (CO Articles 61–62). They should be prepared to hear the grievance and advise the pastor. The pastor should listen carefully, and the parishioner(s) should carefully heed the elders' words.

Here is another difference between the OPC and URC church orders. Not only are the rules concerning discipline more detailed within the Presbyterian (and many other continental) church orders, but also original jurisdiction with respect to a charge against a minister vests in the presbytery in all the Presbyterian church orders. In the URC, a charge against the minister would be handled at the local level rather than the classical level (though there would be consultation more broadly) as set forth in CO Article 61:

When a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions of the Consistory, he shall be suspended from his office by his own Consistory with the concurring advice of the Consistories of two neighboring churches. Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot continue in office, he shall be deposed by his Consistory with the concurring advice of classis.

What constitutes serious sin with respect to the office-bearer is set forth in CO Article 62.

For the Presbyterian, if two or more witnesses have a concern with the pastor, then, while the session should think about a charge if the pastor denies the allegation or admits it and refuses to repent, the charge itself would be heard and tried in the presbytery. Nevertheless, a charge coming to the presbytery against a pastor should ordinari-

ly come after the session has drafted or endorsed it, as the judgment of the local elders is always of great importance. Rulers ought to be humble and members submissive throughout the process. Here it may be noted that elders ought themselves to engage with some regularity in the time-honored practice of mutual censure (CO Article 63). Consistories (and councils) practice mutual censure variably, but it is an accountability mechanism that permits office-bearers to make sure (in a roundtable fashion), at some designated intervals, that all are at peace with each other or are committed to doing what needs to be done to achieve restored relations. Elders especially benefit from unity in their work, and mutual censure is an opportunity to address concerns that may impede such unity and allow office-bearers to go forward in mutual respect and affection.

It is proper for a pastor to hear criticism and not to respond immediately. All appearance of defensiveness should be avoided, and forgiveness sought wherever possible. Elders should use discretion in visits or other occasions and direct that private offenses be dealt with accordingly and refer alleged public offenses to the pastor and session.

Finally, Psalm 133 furnishes us with an excellent conclusion to this essay, speaking of the goodness and beauty of brotherly unity:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

The unity of which the psalm speaks is the end of all church discipline that seeks to promote the purity, peace, and unity of the church.

Reconciliation and resolution of conflict, in other words, lead to the beautiful unity celebrated by Psalm 133 and for which we long more and more in all of our worshiping assemblies. May God grant us such unity, with him and with each

other as members of his mystical body, here and hereafter, until that perfect day when we enjoy unity in a world brought to its eschatological goal in which heaven and earth are one and God is all and in all. ©

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Servant History

The Synod of Dort: Keeping Venom from the Lips

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by **R. Scott Clark**

Few of our Reformed confessional documents are as valuable and yet as neglected as the Canons of Dort. Today most who know about them think of them as the so-called and quite misleading “Five Points of Calvinism” or TULIP. Indeed, it is anachronistic and reductionist to call them the “Five Points of Calvinism” because Calvin had been dead fifty-four years when the Synod of Dort convened in the Netherlands. It is reductionist because the Canons were never intended to be a complete statement of the Reformed faith. They were the product of ecclesiastical deliberation on the attempt by some within the Reformed church in the Netherlands fundamentally to revise our doctrines of God, man, salvation, the church, and sacraments. Further, what the churches were defending was the Word of God as confessed by the churches, not the formulations of a single pastor, however significant and influential.

Background

Outwardly there was little about young Jacob Arminius (c.1560–1609) that would have signaled his dissatisfaction with the Protestant Reformation. Born in 1560, in Utrecht, he grew up in the

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=772&issue_id=149.

Reformed church. His family was martyred by the Spanish when Arminius was away at school and he was supported financially by members of the Reformed church. He was a student in the famous university of Leiden. From there he studied in Geneva under Theodore Beza (1519–1605).

Given that he learned his theology from stoutly Reformed theologians in Leiden and Geneva, it is not easy to explain why Arminius became, if we may, an Arminian. One theory is that he reacted to Beza's theology, but there is little evidence of this. Arminius's student disputation shows no evidence of any theological movement. Further, the theory rests on a dated, untenable caricature of Beza's theology. If Arminius did react to Beza's supralapsarianism,² Beza was unaware of it. He wrote a letter of commendation for Arminius.³ Another theory is that Arminius's shift may be traced to his adoption of Ramist logic and pedagogy, but this theory fails to explain too many exceptions. Caspar Olevianus (1536–87), one of Beza's friends and students, and a formative orthodox Reformed covenant theologian and editor of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), was a Ramist as were William Perkins (1558–1602) and William Ames (1576–1633), whose Reformed orthodoxy is also beyond question.

Arminius did, however, use Geneva as home base from which he made study trips to Basel, Zürich, and Padua to study with scholars from a variety of backgrounds. It is possible that these trips combined with some of his contacts in Leiden, e.g., Caspar Koolhaas (1536–1615), may have helped to facilitate his desire to revise Reformed theology. The latter was a Reformed minister in Leiden who was later disciplined by the Reformed

churches for refusing to subscribe to the Belgic Confession. Whether he was influenced by Romanist theologians during his tour of Italy has been disputed, but there is some evidence for it in the texts that he assigned when he began teaching in the theology faculty in Leiden and in his writings. One possible explanation for his theological movement is to be found in his desire to explain the problem of evil, which was rooted in his grief over the massacre of his family and his consequent struggle with the problem of evil and divine sovereignty.⁴ In this period, perhaps during his visit to Padua, he came into contact with the work of Luis de Molina (1535–1600). As a consequence, he seems to have not only rejected both supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism but also to have adopted the doctrine of middle knowledge (*media scientia*) as part of his theodicy.⁵

As Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), who was Arminius's student in Leiden, Francis Turretin (1623–87), and J. H. Heidegger (1633–1698) concluded, the doctrine of middle knowledge, that God sovereignly arranges the circumstances but does not decree the choices of contingent creatures, makes God contingent upon humans and is incompatible with a Christian doctrine of God.

After his studies, he finally returned to Amsterdam to be examined by classis (presbytery) in 1587. He sustained his examination and was called to a pastorate there and, in 1590, married into an influential family.⁶ One reason to think that Arminius's theology shifted significantly during his study trips from Geneva is that almost immediately upon taking up his pastoral duties in Amsterdam he became embroiled in controversy over his ser-

2 “Supralapsarianism (also called antelapsarianism, pre-lapsarian or prelapsarian) is the view that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically *preceded* the decree of the fall while infralapsarianism (also called postlapsarianism and sublapsarianism) asserts that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically *succeeded* the decree of the fall.” Herman Bavinck.

3 The faculty in Basel was quite impressed with him and wanted to award him a doctorate. Johannes Jacobus Grynaeus wrote him a glowing letter of recommendation. See W. Robert Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2019), 196–97.

4 Herman Selderhuis observed this connection in an interview broadcast May 9, 2019. <https://wscal.edu/resource-center/the-canons-of-dort> (accessed July 6, 2019).

5 Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 19–21; Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 191–95; Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45, 66–69.

6 Contra Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Death by Love* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 170, which bizarrely claims that Arminius married Calvin's daughter. On Arminius's marriage see Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 201–2.

mon series in Romans. On Romans chapter 7, he concluded that Paul could not have been speaking about himself as a Christian.⁷ He argued that Paul had adopted a *persona* of a man under the law.⁸

On Romans 9, he postured as a defender of justification *sola gratia, sola fide* but set up a system in which God elects on the basis of foreseen faith (*fides praevisa*).⁹ These sermons provoked a strong reaction in the church led by the father of Reformed missions, Petrus Plancius (1522–1622), but Arminius was not disciplined by his consistory or classis most likely because of protection by influential supporters.

Less well known, Arminius rejected the Protestant doctrine of justification *sola fide* by making faith, rather than Christ’s alien righteousness, the thing imputed.¹⁰ Part of his motive for this revision was his concern that the Protestant doctrine of justification made believers careless about their sanctification.¹¹

The Crisis

Despite the controversy attached to Arminius’ teaching, in 1603 he was called from the pastorate to a position in the theology faculty at Leiden. His appointment was controversial and the governors of the university twice commissioned Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) to investigate Arminius’s views. He suspected Arminius of heterodoxy, but he was never able to prove it to the satisfaction of the governors or the Erasmian civil authorities.

In his career at Leiden University, Arminius accumulated a following among students, who became pastors and spread his teaching in the church. He died in 1609, and his supporters sought to replace him with an even more controversial theologian, Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622),

who had studied in Heidelberg, Herborn, and Geneva among other places. He was suspected, however, of harboring Socinian sympathies. Gomarus was so upset by the appointment that he left the university. Ultimately, however, Vorstius never took up his position there.¹²

Into this boiling cauldron of controversy, mutual suspicion, and recrimination came the five points of the Remonstrants, crystallizing the issues.¹³ For all the doubt surrounding what Arminius had been teaching, it became clear what the Arminians were teaching. The first article confessed that God elects on the basis of foreseen faith, obedience, and perseverance.¹⁴ They revised the doctrine of the atonement by arguing that Jesus did not die as the substitute for his elect to accomplish their redemption. Rather, they confessed that Jesus died “for all men and every man” so as to make redemption possible for those who meet the conditions. Their third and fourth points must be read together since what the Remonstrants gave with the third they took away with the fourth, in which they confessed the resistibility of grace. The Synod of Dort would reply to these points by combining the third and fourth heads of doctrine. The fifth point of the Remonstrants was, to put it plainly, disingenuous. After already implying the possibility of falling from a state of grace, which they suggested explicitly under the fifth point, they further coyly claimed that they had not yet made up their minds.¹⁵ Their rejection of the Reformed doctrine of perseverance, of course, laid waste to the Protestant doctrine of assurance and

7 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 1.510–11

8 James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, The London Edition, 3 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2.491.

9 Arminius, *Works*, 3.485–88.

10 Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 168.

11 *Ibid.*, 182–83.

12 In May 1619 the Synod published a sentence against Vorstius declaring him to be a Socinian.

13 See Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.545–49.

14 Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 101. He comments that, in Remonstrant theology God does not elect persons as much as conditions. “Saving the Reformation,” Office Hours podcast, Westminster Seminary California (website), March 4, 2019, <https://wscal.edu/resource-center/saving-the-reformation>.

15 Compare the fifth point of the Remonstrants with the doctrine of apostasy confessed in “A Joint Federal Vision Profession (2007),” in which the authors use the same sort of language on the same issue. This document has recently been deleted from its original site. See “A Joint Federal Vision Profession (2007),” R. Scott Clark (blog), accessed July 6, 2019, <https://rscottclark.org/a-joint-federal-vision-profession-2007/>.

pushed the Reformed churches back toward the very Franciscan covenant theology against which Luther had rebelled in the early sixteenth century: “To those who do what lies within them, God denies not grace.”¹⁶

The Crisis Intensifies

Because the followers of Arminius have been (mostly) ecclesiastically separated from the Reformed churches for centuries, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the Arminian crisis occurred originally *within* the doors of the Reformed church. Despite the grave reservations about his theology and teaching expressed by Plancius and other ministers in his classis, and by his colleagues Gomarus and Lucas Trelcatius Jr. (1573–1607), Arminius was and remained a minister in good standing in the Reformed church in the Netherlands. The fact that he conducted his ministry and died within the church intensified the problem, because, in the absence of any unequivocal ecclesiastical pronouncement, that fact made it possible for his apologists to say that “he is a minister in good standing.” Thus, the Remonstrants defended their right to teach their revisions of Reformed theology within the bounds of the church. They actively campaigned also, with help from sympathetic civil magistrates, to revise the Belgic Confession (1561), the church order, and the relationship between church and state (toward Erastianism), so that those sympathetic magistrates might not only defend them but advance their theology, piety, and practice within the Reformed church. Remember, too, that while this theological-political contest was occurring, the Netherlands was at war with Spain and that destructive Thirty-Years War (1618–1648) was approaching. The tensions inherent in the

16 See Heiko Oberman, “Facientibus Quod in Se Est Deus Non Denegat Gratiam: Robert Holcot O.P. And the Beginnings of Luther’s Theology” in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Stephen Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 119–41; idem, Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 135–39; idem, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 103–04.

Peace of Augsburg (1555) were about to be resolved one way or another.

The orthodox responded to the Articles of the Remonstrance at a ten-day conference at The Hague from March 10–20, 1611. Six representatives from each side, the Remonstrant and the Reformed, presented their case. The formal goal was to see if there was a way to reconcile the two sides. It became clear through the *Collatio*¹⁷ (Latin for comparison) that the differences were fundamental and irreconcilable. That much became clear in the text of the Contra Remonstrance, much of which was later incorporated in the Canons adopted by the Synod of Dort.¹⁸

One of the most intriguing and perhaps surprising points of the Contra Remonstrance is their confession that “children of the covenant” are to be reckoned as “God’s elect children” and “children of the covenant so long as they do not manifest the contrary” and thus, “believing parents, when their children die in infancy, have no reason to doubt the salvation of these their children.”¹⁹ We know this doctrine from Canons 1.17. Contrary to the Remonstrant caricature,²⁰ most of the Reformed were not and never have been supralapsarian.²¹ Believing parents are to rest on the promises of God in Christ made to them in the covenant of grace and signified and sealed in baptism.

Synod Approaches

The Remonstrants adopted a victim identity. In their narrative, Arminius was just a godly Reformed pastor who was unjustly singled out for his preaching and teaching, and they were unjustly

17 The *Collatio Hagiensis* (1611) was the conference held at the Hague between the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants.

18 See P. Y. DeJong, ed. *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 209–13.

19 De Jong, *Crisis*, 211. See also R. Scott Clark, “Baptism and the Benefits of Christ: The Double Mode of Communion in the Covenant of Grace,” *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal* 2 (2006): 3–19.

20 See the “Conclusion” (Latin, *Conclusio*) of synod, which restates the orthodox case against the Remonstrants (Schaff, *Creeks*, 3.576, 3.596).

21 Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 190–91.

persecuted along with him. In fact, concern over Arminius's teaching arose almost immediately, but the final resolution took nearly thirty years.

Further, concern about what Arminius and his followers were teaching was widespread across Europe and in the British Isles. It was perceived immediately as a fundamental attack on basic Augustinian theology and the material doctrines of the Protestant Reformation (salvation *sola gratia, sola fide*). In Herborn, Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) wrote against the Arminians. Pierre DuMoulin (1568–1658) wrote *The Anatomy of Arminianism* (1618), still perhaps the greatest critique of Arminianism. For some years before Arminius, Peter Baro (1534–1599) had been teaching something like what Arminius would teach in Amsterdam and Leiden. Archbishop Whitgift (c. 1530–1604) responded in 1595 with the Lambeth Articles reaffirming the Augustinian view of sin, grace, and election. After Synod, William Ames (1576–1633) would publish his *Animadversions* against the Remonstrants in 1629.

As the theological controversy heated up in the Netherlands, across Europe, and in the British Isles, the polarization between the Arminians and Calvinists threatened to break out into open warfare. Prince Maurits (Maurice of Orange, 1567–1625) and Jan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619), the *de facto* prime minister of the United Provinces, were estranged. The latter supported the Arminians, and Maurits sided with the orthodox. England, which had become deeply involved in the Netherlands, sided with Maurits against Spain. After the lines of disagreement had become clear, in light of the conference at The Hague (1611), pressure mounted on Maurits to support the orthodox against the Remonstrants, to bring the matter to a resolution despite his misgivings about what that would mean for national unity (such as it was) against the Spanish. The Remonstrants had favored a synod but only to revise the church order in order to give the (typically latitudinarian) magistrates more control over the church and to revise the Belgic Confession to allow the Remonstrant view of conditional election.

There was some popular support for the

orthodox in the Netherlands. When the Remonstrants gained control of churches, they forbid the Reformed to leave in order to start new, confessional congregations. This heavy-handed approach backfired. There was popular support in the churches for the confessional doctrine of salvation, for the contra-Remonstrant position as articulated in The Hague in 1611. In 1617 riots by the contra-Remonstrants broke out. Four provinces urged the States General to call a national synod to resolve the crisis.

The Province of Holland, dominated politically by Oldenbarnevelt and supporters of the Remonstrants, resisted the call for a synod. They sensed that things might go against them. Now the survival of the United Provinces was at stake. Oldenbarnevelt even sought to persuade members of the army to take an oath of allegiance to Holland against the United Provinces. His troops gave way, however, and in August, he, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), and others were arrested. The Remonstrant leader Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557–1644) fled the country. Oldenbarnevelt was condemned for high treason and was beheaded at The Hague on May 14, 1619, after synod. His son retaliated by attempting to assassinate Prince Maurits, whose father had been murdered in 1584. A synod was called for November 13, 1618.

The Reformed knew that the controversy with the Remonstrants represented more than a parochial theological dispute. They believed that the Remonstrants were leading the nation backward toward the heresy of Pelagianism and thence to Socinianism. Not only had they supported Vortsius's appointment to Leiden University, but the Remonstrant leader Simon Episcopius (1583–1644) was also suspected of being sympathetic to Socinianism. In recent decades, both John Platt and Sarah Mortimer have seen connections between Episcopius and Socinianism.²²

22 John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 218, 231; Sarah Mortimer follows Platt in *Reason and the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26.

The Resolution

The Synod of Dort did finally convene in the armory in Dordrecht on November 13, 1618, and concluded their work in May 29, 1619. Though the Remonstrants were defeated at synod they did not disappear. Uytenbogaert, Episcopius, and others convened a Remonstrant Synod in Antwerp in October 1619, attended by forty Arminian ministers. They were protected by Archduke Albert who benefited from the ongoing controversy. Episcopius and Grotius moved to France, others to Denmark. Other Remonstrants held clandestine meetings across the Netherlands.²³ The Princeton church historian Samuel Miller (1769–1850) noted in 1841 that the Remonstrants were re-admitted to pulpits after Maurits’s death in 1625. It was not long thereafter that rationalism began to spread through the Reformed church in the Netherlands.²⁴

Finally, one aspect of the Canons that has not received much attention is its formal judgment against the Remonstrants and their theology. Synod used the word *heretic* of the Remonstrants, beginning in the preface, where synod complained about the “impious violence of heretics.”²⁵ Synod equated the Remonstrants with the “proud heresies of Pelagius” (Canons of Dort 3/4.10; hereafter, CD),²⁶ and urged authorities to “check all heresies and errors, unquiet and turbulent spirits.”²⁷

Given synod’s affirmation of the judgment of the ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) against Pelagianism (CD 3/4.10), we should see the implicit condemnation of the Remonstrant error as heresy when synod says that their doctrine of conditional election “savors of the teaching of Pe-

lagius” (Rejection of Errors, 1.4; hereafter, RE).²⁸ In RE 2.3 synod denounced the Remonstrants for “recalling from hell the errors of Pelagius” for their doctrine that Christ made salvation possible for those who do their part.²⁹ In RE 2.6 synod complained bitterly that the Remonstrants, by using the distinction between “meriting” and “appropriating,” tried to “give to the people to drink the venom of Pelagianism.”³⁰ Synod called Remonstrant theology Pelagian in 3/4.2, 7, 9 and in RE 4.9 and in RE 5.2 “manifest Pelagianism” (RE 5.2).³¹

Observations

Four centuries after Synod, in North America, Dort might seem remote, but it should not. The confessional Reformed churches may not be facing Spanish persecution, but we are a distinct minority in an overwhelmingly Arminian evangelical culture. The assumptions that fueled the Remonstrant movement live on. We may not have Remonstrants within Reformed churches today, but we do have Federal Visionists, who openly affirm the Remonstrant denial of the perseverance of the saints. There are those in our midst who would turn the covenant of grace into a covenant of works and who seek to revise the doctrine of the atonement. The setting changes but the issues remain. Thus, the Preface, the Canons, the Rejections of Errors, the Conclusion, and the Sentence of the Synod of Dort all continue to instruct us as we seek to feed our flocks and keep the venom of Remonstrant theology and piety from their lips. ☺

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23 Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477–1806*, Oxford History of Early Modern Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 464.

24 Samuel Miller, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, trans. and ed. Thomas Scott, (repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1993), 46–47.

25 “et hæreticorum impietate” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.550).

26 Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.566.

27 “omnes hæreses et errores, spiritus inquietos et turbulentos compescant” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 5.579).

28 “Pelagium enim sapiunt” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.557).

29 “Pelagianum errorem ab inferis revocant” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.563).

30 “populo perniciosum Pelagianismi venenum conantur propinare” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.564).

31 “manifestum Pelagianismum” (Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3.574).

Beza on the Trinity

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by David C. Noe

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

A letter to the most illustrious Prince Nicholas Radzvilas,² the supreme Marszałek³ of the great Duchy of Lithuania.

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

why my reply is so brief even though this is a quite serious and urgent matter.

I have read, and not without absolute terror, some comments which Gregorius Pauli,⁴ Casanonus, and several others who have been enchanted by Biandrata and Gentile⁵ wrote in different treatises. They are converting⁶ the three persons or ὑποστάσεις (*hypostaseis*) into three numerically distinct⁷ οὐσίαις (*ousias*) or essences. In their writings I have found so many things that are both opaque and even contradictory that not even at present do I have full clarity as to their doctrinal positions and arguments.

But your letters, although they were written far more lucidly, nevertheless—if I may speak frankly with your Excellency—do not fully make up for my simple mindedness.⁸ This is especially the case in your explanation of that third conciliatory statement which, if I understand it correctly, I think is hardly at all different from the position of either Gentile or Pauli.

And so, because there is not yet much agreement between us concerning the substance of these issues, and far less even with respect to the arguments of our opponents, we can't help but be legitimately afraid that we could seem to be working in vain over these much disputed topics.⁹ Or that we are not adequately precise in attacking our opponents' position. This circumstance could inflame these already unfortunate debates rather than extinguish them. And furthermore, even the debate itself shows, with so many written documents flying back and forth, that the controversy is increasing rather than diminishing, while each man does not allow what he has just written to be adequately grasped.

4 d. 1591.

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

6 *transformantes*.

7 *numero*.

8 *ruditati*.

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

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=787&issue_id=151.

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

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

Therefore, before I publish a fitting answer to the individual arguments, I demand¹⁰ this from you, your Excellency, in the name of Christ: you must compel¹¹ those who do not agree with this proposition—Father, Son, Holy Spirit¹² are one and the same God—to do as follows. They must write out, point by point, clearly and distinctly, their own entire dogma both on the essence and on the hypostases,¹³ in definite and clear theses. Then they must provide their own positions as derived both from the Word of God and from the writings of the Greek and Latin fathers. Finally, if you have no objection, they must supply refutations of our arguments, which they know full well.

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

Yet in the meantime, so that some people do not conclude that we have delayed our response because we have retreated from our position or because of duplicity, we assert openly before your Excellency, most illustrious Prince, that by God's grace we persist in the true and orthodox position. Not only that, we have also been greatly strengthened in our position by reading their falsehoods. We hold that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three truly distinct persons, and nevertheless one and the same God according to essence. For what could be more inappropriate, no, what could be more irreligious than to multiply in number the

10 *flagitamus*, a very strong word.

11 *adigas*.

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

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

most simple¹⁴ infinity? And so we must recoil from the blindness of the Jews, who removed the distinction between persons, and likewise abhor Sabellius's insolence. He recognizes the persons but only distinguishes between them verbally, not in fact. The Arians' blasphemy is also reprehensible. Some of them regard Christ as of a different substance, others as of like substance.¹⁵ The Macedonians are similarly detestable for attacking the deity of the Holy Spirit.

But we think that all these, however loathsome they are, have nevertheless said things less absurd than the Severians¹⁶ once did and those with whom we are now dealing. For they retain the fundamental point that God is one as his essence is one, since the Word of God alone declares the real distinction of the essence into three persons without any division. But they have refused to reason soundly from that foundation. Thus it is no wonder that they have not held onto the distinction of persons. But what in the end will they leave intact in the foundation of religion if the divine essence has been torn apart into three gods?

Nevertheless, they would readily persuade us that they avoid a multiplicity of gods if they would only say that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, i.e., in one divine nature or essence. But even if, for example, Peter, John, and James should be described as one in *species*, they are not for that reason constituted as three men. So what value is there in retreating from their position? Why have they not instead freely and sincerely maintained what directly follows from their dogma, namely that yes, there is one deity but three gods? And that they are not equal to one another, because to exist from a separate origin¹⁷ is greater than to possess one's own existence from another's

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

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

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

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

existence,¹⁸ or to be God transiently?¹⁹

Certainly they must hold that God is either one in number or many. If one, then why are they fighting so fiercely? But if many—and evidently they believe that the Son’s essence has been propagated from the Father’s essence so that there are in number two essences—how will they so boldly dare to deny that they posit numerically multiple gods? Therefore, if we believe them, then those ancient idolaters²⁰ should not have been charged with merely worshiping multiple gods, but with worshiping multiple gods in three persons, and indeed false gods. This multiplication of the divine essence into two gods (for we have also heard that some of them erase the Holy Spirit) or into three gods, how is this consistent with their other dogma, that whatever things are predicated in the Scriptures of the one and only God must not be understood of the Son or Holy Spirit? For if the Father is the one and only God, it follows that the Son either is not God, or that he is God by another *genus* of deity than the Father. That is the Arians’ error. If when Abel was born Adam was the one and only man, his son Abel either was not man or was endowed with another human nature than his father’s, and thereby differed from him in *species*.

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

called the Father the one and only God, and Jesus Christ the one and only Lord.²² And we will, God helping us, explain this more fully on some other occasion.

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

“All the same,” our opponents reply, “you do not say ‘one thing’ but ‘one God.’”²³ Quite the contrary! We do not simply say “one” but “one God.” This is plainly with reference to the one and same essence, in all which these three²⁴ so subsist that they are neither divided, nor at all conjoined or *synousioi*.²⁵ Instead, they are really

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

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

20 I.e., the Trinitarian orthodox.

21 αὐτόθεος (*autotheos*).

22 1 Corinthians 8:4.

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

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

25 συνοῦσιοι (*synousioi*), i.e., unity of substance that does not admit distinction.

distinct in their own incommunicable properties such that any one of the three according to hypostasis is different than the other two. And nevertheless, because the one subsists in the entire and same essence, therefore he is the one and same God as the other two.

The understanding of the Council of Nicea was no different when it wrote “God from God,” even though the phrase is somewhat vague. This was done not in order to establish two Gods or to derive any kind of deity from deity. Rather, it was simply to establish against Arius the identity of essence in two persons. Thus John writes that “the Word which was God was with God in the beginning.”²⁶ So he makes plain not that there are two numerical essences but two persons subsisting in the one and same essence. Hilary forcibly emphasizes the same sense in his well-known statement “One from One, Whole from Whole, Perfect from Perfect,” though he is the one author these men approve.²⁷ But Hilary’s purpose is not only to deny the existence of a twofold deity, but also to deny the existence of two gods numerically. Because obviously the Son is other than the Father, and therefore second in order (but not in degree of Godhead)²⁸ with respect to the fact that he is begotten. And yet because the Son wholly subsists in the one and same essence, he is one and same as the Father with respect to the fact that he is God.

But as for the reason why the same relationship does not obtain among created species, Your Excellency should also consider the following. Created species, like a person, although they cannot be divided as to form, nevertheless because they are constituted of quantitative individuated elements (as I would express it), they are in fact divided according to their quantitative extension.²⁹

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

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

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

29 *secundum quantitatem*.

Consequently, let us use the following as an example: although Peter, John, and James are one in terms of both their universal and specific³⁰ form, they are not, however, one individual but are referred to as three. There can really be no doubt that they are not only distinguished by their incommunicable properties but also divided by their quantitative extension. Similarly, we not only say that Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael are three distinct hypostases of one angelic nature. We also hold that they are three spirits. Even though they are not limited by corporeal extension, still, bound by the peculiar quality of their substance they are truly separated one from another. But in the divine essence that is most simple in every respect, and most infinite in act,³¹ there can be no place for either division or composition, but for distinction only. This is something that neither flesh nor blood has revealed to us but the Son himself. Moreover, the same logic that applies to a subject’s nature also holds with respect to those things that are predicated of that nature absolutely. And so likewise, the individual Persons are the one and same eternal, immeasurable, infinite, and omnipotent God.

And so, when we read in the work of that man who is both in substance and name “Gentile,”³² i.e., in his pamphlet against Athanasius, that there are multiple “eternals and omnipotents,” we realized that what the Apostle had foretold had been fulfilled in him. I mean that men of this type were given over to a reprobate mind, to a mind devoid of all reason and judgment.³³ Now we must take a different position on those properties that are predicated by relation, and that one in particular which they describe as *ὑφισταμένην ιδιότητα* (*hyphistamenēn idiotēta*).³⁴ Because, as Tertullian

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

31 *actu infinitissima*.

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

33 Romans 1:28.

34 Underlying quality of individuation.

correctly explains in his work *Against Praxeas*, the nature of the relations³⁵ is that they can be neither the same nor can one differ from another.

Finally, how can they be so outrageous as to ascribe to us what they call a “quaternity”? For they dream that we posit that God exists in himself (and this is a topic that Hilary discusses at length yet without clarity in book 4 of his work) by some unknown kind of separate οὐσία (*ousia*) anterior to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, they claim, we hold that there is a kind of fourth “shared” God³⁶ to whom those three persons are adjoined, leaving four gods as the result. Or, at the least, that we hold that those three persons like parts of a whole constitute that one “shared” being.

But the basic experience common to the created order teaches us just how stupid their invention is. For those things that are called universals do not exist in themselves but only the hypostases that subsist in them exist. Unless perhaps these men count human nature apart from its own individuated properties as a singular entity.³⁷ Applying this concept to individuated properties results in an increase in the number of such singular entities.³⁸

And so these men should know that when we speak of the divine essence we conceive in the mind not of some shared or conglomerate God, but that in which those individual persons subsist distinctly—as we said before—by their own unique properties, in the whole and same being. By the term “Trinity” we understand not one shared God separately, but three persons subsist-

ing in one essence. This is because, as Gregory Nazianzus has correctly written, we cannot in the mind conceive the one essence apart from the three persons, nor the three persons apart from that whole same and singular essence. It also follows from this, as my father of blessed memory John Calvin, the true defender of this truth, properly wrote, that the prayer “Holy Trinity, One God” smacks of barbarism. For if the expression is not softened by a skillful interpretation, it seems to suggest either that there is something that subsists outside the three persons or aggregates the three persons themselves, guiding the invocation toward some universal (though this universal is not per se beyond the persons, but those three³⁹ subsist in it).

I do not doubt that those who first spoke this way⁴⁰ meant something different. But they who have adopted this position, as Your Excellency writes, are causing great harm to a very good man and openly revealing their own irreverence. From our perspective, these men demand that we fight not with arguments that they call merely human but from the Word of God. As though it were some kind of philosophical invention to hold that there are truly three persons, while of these same persons there is in number only one essence! But while I wait for a more full response from your Excellency, I shall at the same time do the following, in order to explain more precisely the particular relevant passages of God’s Word. I shall set against these men whatever the Scriptures state in defense of the one God, and against a multiplicity of gods. And because we, though we are commanded to adore one God, nevertheless worship the Son and the Holy Spirit no differently than we do the Father, therefore we believe and confess that the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father are individually the one God who alone must be worshiped, though from the Father, as from a foundation, the distinctions of the persons derives.

Moses in his song bears witness that Jehovah

35 *relativorum*, scilicet, in the godhead.

36 *communis Deus*.

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

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

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

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

alone was Israel’s guide.⁴¹ But Paul plainly calls him Christ.⁴² And so they must acknowledge that there are not two gods but that the one in number, who alone was called the guide, is Jehovah, even though one is the person of the Father, the other that of the great Angel himself.⁴³ Yet I will say more about these matters on a later occasion when what I am asking for from your Excellency becomes available. As it is, I direct my attention to your Majesty. I plead with you, Most Noble Prince, that you compel those men to acknowledge openly the blasphemy that they have for some time now entertained: that there are numerically many gods.

They must, I say, admit along with us either that there is one and the same God or that many gods are derived from one. Furthermore, they must acknowledge that they are becoming detestable to this one true God and all his saints. Come on, let them own up to their own doctrine openly, the teaching they have swallowed from Philoponus, Severus, Damian, and other monsters of unhappy memory.⁴⁴ And if they can, they must prove it with arguments, or from the Scriptures, or from the consensus of the Fathers and the ancient church. We in our turn accept the same constraint. And if we cannot make their blasphemy as obvious as the sun at noon, then, Most Noble Prince, we do not at all object to being considered and treated as false prophets.

They praise Hilary alone more than all others, not of course because no one is more confusing or vague than he!⁴⁵ Still, we do not by this statement intend any insult to him. But why do they not acknowledge without argument that Augustine is the best and most learned writer? Obviously it is because they consider him a sophist, and so

41 Deuteronomy 32.

42 1 Corinthians 10.

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

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

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

they toss around the phrase “some Augustinian God” as a joke. And yet even that phrase, Most Noble Prince, is so offensive to the minds of all godly people (and rightly so) that I am not in the least surprised that all such godly people who now live flee from these men no less than from the devil himself. For who could persuade a man of good judgment that Augustine taught anything different on the subject of the Trinity than the churches of Africa? And could believe that these churches held a position that was any different than what the Catholic consensus maintained? I do indeed acknowledge that the Fathers have their warts (who could deny that?); but they are the kind of blemishes that still reveal a solid foundation. When this has been removed, what will we conclude their faith was, and what will we think of their church?

And so, most Illustrious Prince, we⁴⁶ neither can nor ought to pretend before your Highness that anybody who has granted men like this access can be excused. This is especially so when we have verified time and time again by written public statements what kind of man Biandrata is, as well as the nature of Gentile’s notorious and perjurious pollution. Likewise, although this particular topic is weighty and especially difficult, it nevertheless belongs to that class of subjects into which inquiry is no more appropriate, after all the countless struggles waged against heretics, than is doubt whether divinity and eternal life exist at all! Consequently, I now mourn with heartfelt grief not only that this brilliant work of the Lord is so miserably hampered, but also that the whole kingdom of Poland is torn asunder by such woe-ful dissensions. And I weep over it with endless tears. Still, we are compelled both to acknowledge and adore the righteous judgment of God, who punishes with deserved blindness the curiosity and pride of men who had least reason for it (I say this without rancor).

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

We approve, moreover, and commend to you quite precisely the holy edicts of Hezekiah, Josiah, Asa, and several other righteous kings of Judah. These constitute a pious and sound plan for your Royal Majesty to root out blasphemies, in keeping with both your sovereign authority and, at the same time, sound judgment. But be careful that some men do not craftily use this as a pretext to condemn true religion. Similarly, be sure to distinguish, as is appropriate, those who have been ensnared by such men and drawn into error from the actual authors and defenders of blasphemy.

We exhort, moreover, the individual Christian brothers among you and especially orthodox pastors of churches to resist stoutly the discord and sedition that flow from reckless zeal. So, remembering that the sword⁴⁷ has been granted to the Magistrate, not to them, they must fight with inexhaustible effort—by the Spirit from God’s mouth,⁴⁸ by faith, patience, and prayers—against those who would overthrow their souls.

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

Finally, we beseech the Polish aristocracy, known for its great bravery, and especially your exalted highness, most illustrious Prince, which I hear surpasses the whole realm of Poland in piety and moral worth, we beseech you both by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our one God, to protect yourself and your country against these destroyers,⁴⁹ and to do so with much more zeal and resolve than you do against the Turks and the Moscow threat.⁵⁰ If you should do so, then I predict that the kingdom of Poland will enjoy the very best and greatest blessings with all success. But if not—and may God for his goodness prevent this from happening—then I, with the most

heart-wrenching sorrow, foresee this outcome: our heavenly Father will use the same disasters he once employed to avenge the terrifying blasphemies of first Arius, then Nestorius, Eutychus, and others like them, to catch these men who sin in a way not that different. Relying on God’s grace, I freely devote not only my effort but also my life to disentangle us from these threatening evils.

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

Written at Geneva, March 19, 1565.

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

Theses or Axioms on the Trinity of Persons and their Unity of Essence as Derived from Theodore Beza’s Lectures⁵¹

Thesis I True knowledge⁵² concerning God is the principal aspect of truly calling upon God. This is because we cannot worship what we do not know.

Thesis II We must seek our conception⁵³ of God from his Word, because in it, and nowhere else, does he fully disclose himself to us for our salvation, and he does so such that the one who gains knowledge⁵⁴ of God outside his Word gains no knowledge for his salvation.⁵⁵

Thesis III Because God has not only fully

51 From *Tractationes Theologicae Bezae, Volumen I* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1570), 651.

52 *de Deo scientia*.

53 *dei cognitio*.

54 *sapit*.

55 Beza here both recognizes the existence of natural theology and limits its efficacy.

47 Cf. Rom. 13:1

48 I.e., Scripture.

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

50 *Tartaris ac Moscovitis*.

disclosed himself to the world in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles in the most true fashion,⁵⁶ but even, most of all and especially, in their very suitable words and phrases, we must devote our effort not only to confining ourselves within the boundaries of Scripture (as regards the main point), but also observe the customary formulas of Scripture down to the finest little bit.⁵⁷

Thesis IV Nevertheless, the stubbornness of heretics made it necessary sometimes to fashion terminology in order to avoid their petty objections. But the Holy Fathers of the church did not do this carelessly. Instead, they used the greatest reverence so that the meaning of the Scriptures was not in any way whatsoever diminished, nor was any innovation introduced into God's Word.

Thesis V This was why, long ago, the Greek terms οὐσία (*ousia*) and ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) were adopted against Sabellius Afer, who confused the persons with the essence, and against Samosatenus of Antioch,⁵⁸ who destroyed the Son's divine nature. Nevertheless, the author of the letter to Hebrews in chapter 1 employed the second of these terms. Nearly the whole controversy regarding these topics depends upon the explanation of these two terms.

Thesis VI Therefore, we must understand that when the Fathers are discussing the divine mysteries, they have borrowed these terms from natural

phenomena.⁵⁹ This is not because they thought that subjects so distinct could properly be explained using the same terms. Instead, they did this so that, in some way, they might by a kind of comparison of things unequal set before our eyes divine realities. And with these as their weapons they resolutely silenced those who were transforming theology into mere philosophical wrangling.

Thesis VII Therefore, we will state what οὐσία (*ousia*) and ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) mean when it comes to natural phenomena,⁶⁰ at least as much as the present argument will require, and then explain in what respect the same terms are applied to the divine mysteries.

Thesis VIII There are some designations of a type of universal and indeterminate meaning. These by similar reasoning⁶¹ are attributed to a whole host of predicates in which we note there is something shared. This element is in fact present in the very many different subjects concerning which, by similar reasoning, it is predicated. But still, it does not subsist outside of those subjects, just as likewise those subjects do not subsist except in that common shared element. When, for example, I say "person," I do not conceive of anything that is properly subsisting *per se*, but I note in my mind a certain shared nature apart from any particular demarcation. By a similar reasoning Peter, Paul, Timothy, and other individual subjects like these subsist. Therefore, "person"

56 *verissime.*

57 *mordicus.*

58 Also known as Paul of Samosata, c. AD 200–275, who was Bishop of Antioch 260–68.

59 *a rebus naturalibus.*

60 *in rebus naturalibus.*

61 *pari ratione.*

is a term that indicates οὐσία (*ousia*), a concept expressed by the designation “person.”

Thesis IX Furthermore, because this conceptualizing afterward descends from that aforementioned universal to the individual and particular instances through which those subjects are distinguished—I mean those in which that common notion was previously conceived and which subsist fully delineated⁶² by those properties—therefore, designations have also been found that are adapted to expressing these distinctions. Thus we say Peter, Paul, and Timothy, which are expressed as names of these ὑπόστασις (*hypostaseis*) or ὑφιστάμενοι (*hyphistamenoι*), i.e., names of subjects defined by their own properties and subsisting in their own, shared οὐσία (*ousia*).

Thesis X The word “God” denotes an essence infinite, eternal, supporting itself by its own power, omnipotent, creating and conserving all the things that it has made, and thus an essence in which all perfection dwells. When I say the word “God,” I understand that essence indeterminately, which by a shared reason is predicated of its own hypostases that subsist in it.

Thesis XI The subjects designated by these titles—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—are hypostases. That is, they are distinct in their properties, and subsisting from eternity in that common and eternal essence, because they are distinguished by their own properties. For the Father is unbegotten, begetting the Son. The

Son is begotten from the Father. The Holy Spirit is neither begetting nor begotten, but from the Father and the Son proceeding.

Thesis XII I am not concerned about a more subtle distinguishing characteristic between proceeding and begetting. And certainly those who have wrangled back and forth about this have ignorantly twisted the Scriptural passages that have no bearing on the issue. For the fact that the Holy Spirit is someplace said to proceed from the Father and the Son refers to his manifestation and gifts. Let it be adequate that he is the Spirit, and common to the Father and the Son, and on that basis has reference to each.

Thesis XIII Because created substances have a finite essence, they necessarily therefore are finite, and consequently are distinguished not only by their individual properties, but their hypostases also have been truly separated. Therefore, Peter, Paul, and Timothy, although by a shared reasoning are called men, nevertheless in reality they are not one man but three men, even with respect to their very humanity. For because fathers cannot communicate their own complete essence with their sons, but it is only some portion which possesses the nature of the seed⁶³ that takes its origin from their fathers, the sons’ essence is derived from this. And so the sons do not possess that same singular humanity which belongs to their fathers but only a similar one that has flowed forth from it. Consequently, the particular humanity, inasmuch as

62 *circumscrip̄te*.

63 *seminis rationem*.

it is finite, cannot exist in diverse subjects. And so, I claim, in all respects there are three: Peter, Paul, Timothy, not one.

Thesis XIV But the consideration is quite different when it comes to things divine. For because divine essence is infinite, most simple, and eternal, therefore the three hypostases subsisting in it—although they are truly three in number—because these individual hypostases are distinguished by their own incommunicable properties, they are nevertheless not three gods nor are they said to be three gods in the same way that there are three men. This is because the Son is not begotten from the Father nor does the Holy Spirit proceed from Father and Son by some “cutting off”⁶⁴ of a portion, i.e., by division,⁶⁵ as when anything is divided into three pieces. Nor is this by some effluence,⁶⁶ that is, by ἀπόρροια (*aporroia*),⁶⁷ such as the procreation of children from the father’s seed. Nor is it by extension, i.e., περιβολή (*peribolē*), which we see in the propagation that takes place in grafting of vines. But instead, in the divine this happens by an indescribable communication of the whole essence from eternity, in which no point of beginning, middle, or end can be stated.⁶⁸

64 *resectione*.

65 Beza employs a Greek expression, κατὰ μερισμὸν (*kata merismon*), which he then glosses in Latin.

66 Here Beza reverses this practice, giving first the Latin *fluxu* then a Greek gloss.

67 The ancients (e.g., Thales, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius) explained the effects of a magnet, the “Hercules Stone” which attracts iron, by its ἀπόρροια (*aporroiāi*), “things that flow out from it” or *effluvia*.

68 *dari*, i.e., cannot be stated or supplied because it does not exist.

Thesis XV Therefore, there is one and precisely the same essence of begetting, of begotten, and of proceeding, although it is not the case that the Father who begets is the Son that is begotten or the Spirit who proceeds. Nor that the Son is the Father who begets or the Spirit who proceeds. Nor is the Spirit the Father who begets nor the Son who is begotten. Nor is God himself thrice-named,⁶⁹ since the properties of persons are not imaginary accidents that can be present or absent, either actually or conceptually. But they truly reside in persons and distinguish them from others. And God is not a kind of accumulation⁷⁰ either, and this for two reasons. First, because these three persons are so distinguished as not to be separated. And second, because in any given person there is not some part of God’s essence but the whole essence, and this is unable to be separated into parts⁷¹ because it is infinite.

Thesis XVI The statement I made concerning the unity and identity of essence is also by necessity understood concerning the common attributes of that essence; for example that God is one, thus also that the one is infinite, eternal, omnipotent, etc.

Thesis XVII ὁμοούσια (*homousia*) or ὁμοούσια (*homoousia*) when it comes to natural phenomena are termed “individua.” These are combined in the same essence or species, such as man with man, beast with beast, source with source. And so this term was adopted for divine phenomena

69 *trinomius*, a very rare word.

70 *aggregativus*; this could be translated “aggregated.”

71 *insecabilis*.

in order to refute the Arians, who claimed that the Son was from the Father—not begotten from the Father’s substance but made *ex nihilo*. Consequently, they claim, the Son is God by participating in his power, not by nature. Therefore, against such men it was decided that the Son is ὁμούσιον (*homousion*) or ὁμοούσιον (*homoousion*) with the Father. They did not, however, intend by this term merely that the essence of the Father and of the Son is similar, as is the case in natural phenomena (this is how two essences numerically would be taken, and thus there would be numerically two gods, which is anathema). Instead, they wished to describe two realities: first, that the Son is not different from the Father in essence, not because he was made *ex nihilo*, but as he was begotten from the Father himself, and so from eternity. This distinction they marked by another term, coeternal.⁷² Second, that he is from the Father insofar as he is the Son, such that he is one with the Father insofar as he is God. That is to say, that the Son’s essence is not somehow a derivative⁷³ essence which took its origin from another principal. The heretics called this notion *ex traduce*, and today some men advance this idea under the term *essentiation*.⁷⁴ But we assert that the actual, complete essence—by which the Father is God—is the Son by begetting, as the essence has been shared with him by the Father.

72 συναιδίου (*synaidiou*).

73 *secundariam*.

74 Apparently Gentile, according to René Hoven: *Lexique de La Prose Latine de La Renaissance* (Brill, 1994), 127.

As a result, Father and Son—insofar as they subsist in one and the same essence, or are of one and the same essence numerically, with respect to essence—are the one and same God, although, nevertheless the Father is not the Son.

Thesis XVIII Therefore, those who called the Son ὁμοιούσιον (*homoiousion*) deservedly stand condemned. By this they mean of like essence, in order to establish two essences numerically. Likewise, the other Arians deserve condemnation who said that the Son is ἕτερούσιον (*heterousion*), meaning of a different essence. And in order to avoid the deceit of those who fashioned the term ὁμοιούσιον (*homoiousion*) from ὁμοούσιον (*homoousion*) by inserting a single letter,⁷⁵ the Fathers began by the figure crasis⁷⁶ to say ὁμούσιος (*homousios*) while retaining the same meaning.

Thesis XIX Therefore when we say that the Son is of one essence with the Father, we distinguish the persons but not the essence. And this form of expression must be used for the common attributes of essence rather than for essence itself. We speak with greatest precision when we say that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in essence, or that there is one essence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thesis XX The ancients used these formulas not to convey the notion of a plurality of essences but to show that there was identity of essence in the relations of the persons,

75 I.e., the iota.

76 A phonetic phenomenon to avoid repetition of vowel sounds. Cf. H. W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar*, §62ff.

against those who said that Christ was made *ex nihilo* and in fact made in time. For statements of the Arians like the following lead to that understanding: “there was a time when he was not”⁷⁷ and, “he was created from things that were not.”⁷⁸ In other words, that he was established from things that did not exist. Therefore the Fathers added to the Creed⁷⁹ the phrase “true God from true God” to show that God from whom God exists, i.e., the Father, and God who is from God, i.e., the Son, are by reason of essence one God.

Thesis XXI There is some ambiguity⁸⁰ between εἶναι (*einai*) and ὑφιστάναι (*hyphistanai*), i.e., being and subsisting, and likewise between οὐσία (*ousia*) and ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*), i.e., substance and essence. For this reason, when these terms are interchanged great errors necessarily follow, since the resolution of this controversy depends upon distinguishing between them. The writings of the ancient authors, and especially the works of Hilary and Jerome, make this very clear. Therefore, the Latin Fathers adopted the term “person” for ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*), and the Greek Fathers likewise found this acceptable. ©

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77 ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν (*ēn ote ouk ēn*).

78 ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐκτίσθη (*ex ouk ontōn ektisthē*).

79 I.e., Nicea.

80 Homonymia.

✦ Servant Technology

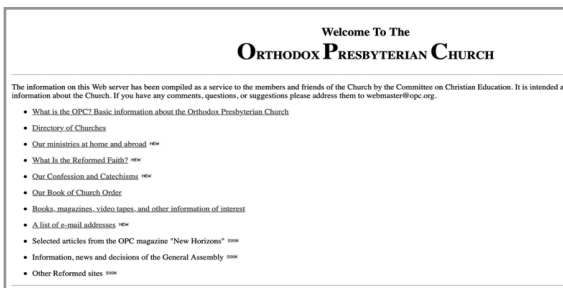
OPC.org 3.0: Going Mobile

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2019⁸¹

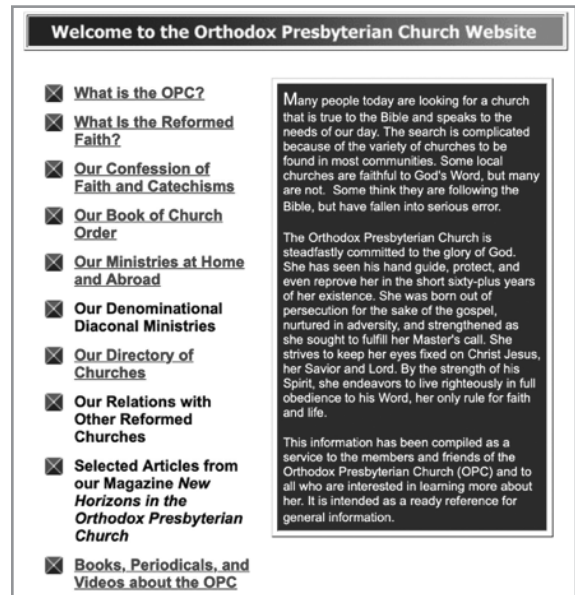
by Gregory E. Reynolds

Soon you will see another new face for OPC.org. Once again the Committee on Christian Education's (CCE) Subcommittee on Internet Ministries (SIM) has managed the redesign of OPC.org with the indispensable help of web designer Chris Tobias and a very competent technical engineer.

In 1995 the OPC initiated its first website (1.0). The minutes of the March 14–15, 1995, meeting of the CCE record the passing of the following motion, "The CCE encourage connectivity by the members of the Committee by December 31, 1995." According to whois.com, the domain OPC.org was registered on September 20, 1995. Sometime that fall the website was launched. It was remarkably simple, as were most websites of the day, consisting of our name with a series of hyperlinks. The example below is roughly a year after the initial launch.



By 1998 the graphics were slightly improved with an expanded and highlighted introduction. The number of hyperlinks remained the same.



By 2003 a sidebar was added for the hyperlinks, which had been expanded to seventeen. A logo was also designed and added as a banner on the top left.



In 2005 the CCE realized that a more professional design was needed to insure a contemporary web presence, with greater access to the expanding content of the website (2.0). This was a major project. To achieve this goal, web designer Chris Tobias, webmaster Stephen Pribble, technical expert the late Barry Traver, and programmer Jonathan Barlow, were engaged to create a website, meeting the sophisticated standards of the day. While this was during the early days of the introduction of mobile and social media (known

81 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=791&issue_id=151.

as web 2.0), those did not become a pervasive presence until later. The new website (2.0) was launched November 1, 2005.



In 2014 the same team updated the website with a more visual aesthetic, making the feature article much more prominent.



Now in 2019 we have redesigned our website to accommodate the pervasive use of mobile media devices (3.0). Our focus has always been on the dissemination of gospel truth throughout the world. Our content rich site has not changed its purpose. As I wrote in 2005:

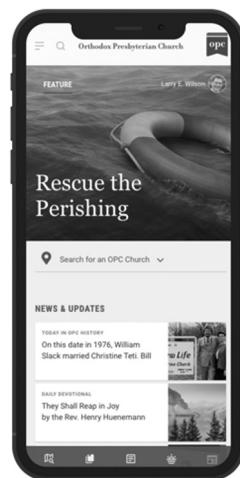
The original mission of OPC.org, as stated in a report to the 1998 General Assembly, has not changed: “The Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall, through its Committee on Christian Education, maintain an official presence on the World Wide Web through its website known as OPC.org, in order to: 1) Provide public information concerning the description, beliefs, structure, ministries, and publications of the OPC; 2) Promote the cause of Christ within the OPC; 3) Provide Reformed theological

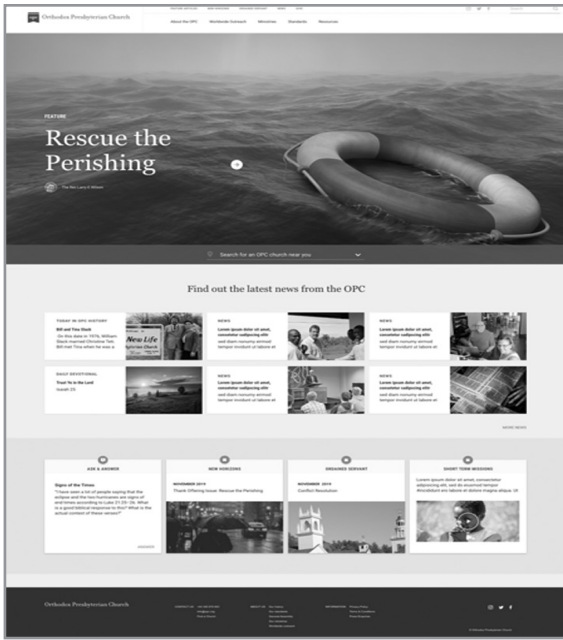
material for consideration by other Reformed churches around the world; 4) Evangelize and teach the gospel to the world.

I have been part of this project since the 2005 redesign with some trepidation. I think my colleagues on the CCE share this concern as we seek together to be good stewards of the gospel and how it is communicated. This means that we are neither utopian nor dystopian about electronic communication, thus we embrace its benefits and seek to avoid its liabilities.

Such a stance requires a prudential engagement with the electronic environment. And with this new design I would reiterate a stern warning. The internet, along with the entire electronic environment, is rearranging the entire structure of Western civilization as did the automobile a century ago. Electronic media subtly alter our presuppositions, priorities, and relationships to God, his world, his church, and other people in ways that have the potential to undermine the Christian life. Among other things this means that face-to-face relationships may be compromised. As a member of the committee that fields Q&A questions, I have observed a number of people seeking advice that, consciously or unconsciously, does an end run around the leaders of the local church. So, while affirming and enjoying the benefits of the electronic media, we must be vigilant stewards. Among the great benefits of our website is the number of people from other countries, even Saudi Arabia and Iran, hundreds from around the world, who have visited, and in some cases interacted with, OPC.org. May the Lord continue to bless our imperfect efforts.

Here is what you can expect to see soon:





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✦ Servant Humor

Rome’s Biggest Convert

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
November 2019¹

by Eutyclus II

*Eutyclus II continues the tradition of Eutyclus I, Ed Clowney’s pen name in the initial issues of Christianity Today (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutyclus (and His Pin)*: “Eutyclus was summoned to his post as a symbol of Christians nodding, if not on the windowsill, at least in the back pew.” Like his namesake, Eutyclus II aims at “deflating ecclesiastical pretense, sham and present-day religiosity.” This *nom de plume* will remain a cover for this ecclesiastical sleuth—to maintain his anonymity, and thus his freedom to poke fun.*

Several recently published books have sought to explain the popularity of the road to Rome that some Evangelicals have walked over the past few decades. Among the best are Darryl Hart’s *Still Protesting*² and Ken Stewart’s *In Search of Ancient Roots*.³ As helpful as these two studies are in analyzing the attraction of Rome to discontented Evangelicals, both of them seem to have overlooked the real headline event of confessional mobility, indeed the Silver Tuna of Evangelical conversion stories. Begun in 2012 but completed and dedicated just last July, the Crystal Cathedral

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=780&issue_id=150.

2 D. G. Hart, *Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018).

3 Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017).

in Garden Grove, California is now the Christ Cathedral of the Roman Catholic Church, after an aging church demographic and a mishandled succession plan rendered Robert Schuller's showpiece bankrupt. (Language purists will happily observe that this conversion finally renders it a genuine cathedral, because it is now the seat of the bishop of the diocese of Orange County, California, of the Roman Catholic Church.)

Designed by the renowned architect Philip Johnson and completed in 1981, the Crystal Cathedral was dubbed the "largest glass building in the world." I visited it once, over thirty years ago. The hot and dry Santa Ana winds were putting on an impressive show that January morning, so powerful that they blew off one of the 10,600 silver-tinted panes of glass, which fell one hundred feet to the ground and shattered. Security wisely closed down the campus immediately for safety reasons, but not before dozens of postmodern pilgrims, your reporter among them, scurried to collect souvenir shards, the icons for the New Reformation.

The building's scale, of course, is breathtaking. It has no flying buttresses, but plenty of room for flying angels in the lavish theatrical productions that were staged. Ninety-foot high doors open the worship experience to the bright California sunshine, evoking memories of the church's earlier life in drive-in format ("worship as you are . . . in the family car!"). This feature particularly facilitated the conversion process as it allowed for the fluid substitution of idols, when a half-ton steel crucifix replaced an eighty-by-fifty-five-foot American flag.

I realized the true genius of Schuller's designs during an *Hour of Power* recording, when it became plainly evident that the cavernous interior really served as a gigantic television studio. The building actually did not seat that many: 2,500 is modest by Evangelical megachurch standards. Willow Creek accommodates 7,500 and Lakeview Church (nee The Summit of the Houston Rockets), can pack in over 16,000. To his credit, Schuller never replaced its pews with theater seating.

But how, one might ask, could Evangelical

kitsch be recycled into Catholic worship? Anyone who doubts that Catholics have become comfortable with American pop culture would do well to read Thomas Day's 1990 book, *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste*.⁴ While it took seven years to fully complete the transformation into a Roman Catholic cathedral, the theological transition may not have been that arduous. A life-size statue of Father Fulton Sheen, the Roman Catholic pioneer of the electronic church, had already adorned the building grounds. Before retirement in 2006, Schuller would often boast of his numerous audiences with Pope John Paul II. And one would search in vain for anything vaguely Protestant in the church's mission statement. As church historian Dennis Voskuil aptly described the Pelagian logic of Schuller's "theology of self-esteem," confession of sin in the worship of the church "would be like a physician's prescribing whiskey for an alcoholic."⁵ (Yes, the church was a congregation of the Reformed Church in America, but that was an affiliation that Schuller actively advertised only after the Jonestown massacre of 1978.) Who knows? Perhaps the Roman Catholic affiliation will render the teaching of the cathedral *more* Augustinian.

When Robert Schuller purchased ten acres in Garden Grove in 1955, he claimed it would be the key to ministry in the twenty-first century. Instead, the remarkable odyssey of the Crystal Cathedral is a testimony to how dated the gospel of church growth is that Schuller so aggressively touted and how non-sustainable are the empires of American Evangelicalism.

Even more importantly, it should remind us of what truly constitutes gospel success. Edwards E. Elliott (1914–1979) was an OPC minister who labored for many years in the shadow of Schuller's conglomerate that eventually expanded to forty

4 Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad, 1990).

5 Dennis Voskuil, *Mountains into Goldmines: Robert Schuller and the Gospel of Success* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 103.

acres of prime southern California real estate. Elliott arrived in Garden Grove a year after Schuller, and twenty-three years later he died tragically in a plane crash (returning home from General Assembly), a year before the grand opening of the Crystal Cathedral. The last of many articles he wrote in the *Presbyterian Guardian*, entitled “Success—True and False,” reflected on Schuller’s ministry at the height of its popularity.

God is the “author and evaluator of genuine ecclesiastical success,” Elliott insisted. It cannot be reduced to “the erection of larger buildings, to house the latest crop of admirers.” Rather, success in the church

is to be measured by a divinely given reed (Rev 11:1). “Rise, measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.” It is not counting, so much as measuring. There were many out in the court who could have been counted, but they were only temple-treaders, and not worth measuring. Heresies, said Paul, actually are necessary, that they which are approved may be made manifest. The draining off of those who are merely temple-treaders is an important function. What is left is measured for eternity.”⁶ ©

Eutychus II, the son of Eutychus I, serves as a comedian in Troas.

6 Edwards E. Elliott, “Success—True and False” *Presbyterian Guardian* 47 (Sept. 1978): 7.

✦ Servant Reading Book Reviews

When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search

by *Chris Brauns*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2019¹

by **Jonathan T. Looney**

When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search, by
Chris Brauns. Chicago: Moody, 2011, 193 pages,
\$11.99, paper.

When searching for a new pastor, churches are looking for many things. Some churches might be looking for a great CEO, a competent and organized administrator, or perhaps a dynamic leader who can inspire the people through his personality. There's nothing inherently wrong with those qualities in a minister, but are they really the most important thing?

In this short, accessible book, Chris Brauns sets forth the case for what he considers to be the most important quality that churches should seek in a pastor: solid expository preaching. And, he exhorts search committees to seek their direction from God's Word. Given the context of the modern evangelical church to which Brauns is

speaking, his words are important and (at least, from my perspective) most welcome.

Brauns separates his book into three parts. In the first part, he exhorts pastoral search committees to do their work in a God-centered way. He exhorts the committees to pray. He exhorts them to make the time to do their work well. He exhorts them to be Bible-centered, seeking the qualifications of their minister from Scripture such as 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9 and seeking a minister who will preach the Word. And he exhorts them to seek congregational unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than through human means.

Brauns cautions against “premises or actions that would inadvertently teach your congregation that church is a democracy in which you are seeking to discern the will of the people and to deliver accordingly” (47). This is an important lesson that even Reformed and Presbyterian churches need from time to time. And, yet, Brauns is speaking to the broader evangelical church. I am inclined to agree with him, but wonder whether his important statement will be received well by others less inclined to agree with him.

Brauns's brief paragraph on the role of the church vote is also important (46–7). Here, he clarifies exactly what churches are being asked to do when they vote to receive a minister: “recognize together the call of God on a particular pastor” and “agree corporately and pledge corporately their commitment to support and submit to their new God-given leader.” Again, these are important things a church should understand when it is preparing to call a pastor.

In Part 2, Brauns spends time explaining what qualities churches should seek when calling a pastor. He covers a variety of issues while explaining what a biblical shepherd should be, but devotes most of this section to an extended explanation of expository preaching, why it is important to hire a skilled expository preacher, and how a search committee can (and should) judge a pastor's preaching.

His definitions and explanations are accessible, and a search committee would do well to evaluate a candidate's preaching as thoroughly

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=728&issue_id=142.

as he suggests. Given the book's targeting of the broader evangelical church, this is an important message, and I hope many churches will heed his call to seek faithful and high-quality preaching.

In Part 3, Brauns covers some suggested techniques for interviewing and a number of suggested lines of inquiry for interviews. Having recently been involved in a pastoral search, much of this resonated with me, either as questions that were useful to ask, or questions that we should have asked.

The book ends with ten "Frequently Asked Questions," which contained some real gems. I think this section could easily be relabeled "Miscellaneous Advice," as the author seems to delve into some matters that may not have fit easily into the rest of the book. But, some of these were quite helpful, and I wholeheartedly encourage churches to read these.

This book contains some other good nuggets, such as the important suggestion that search committees quiz pastoral candidates about Internet pornography (71–2), an acknowledgement that the process will include subjectivity and has the potential to be divisive (29), and a plea that search committees not "justify a lack of follow-through by telling one another that [they] are all very busy" (66).

As for criticisms of this book, there are a few cases where the exegesis of biblical texts didn't live up to the high standards Brauns set for himself. In one case, he says that Acts 17:12 shows that "[e]ffective leadership took place in Berea" (35). That may be true, but it seems something is missing from the line of argument to connect that conclusion to the biblical text. In another case, he explains 1 Timothy 5:17–18 as saying that people should provide for their pastors because pastors are there to serve the people. He goes on to explain, "Supporting your pastor is really about taking care of yourself. Take care of your pastor. It is in your interest to do so" (179–80). While I agree with these statements, and I think there is support in Scripture for them, I am not sure that 1 Timothy 5:17–18 (standing on its own) says exactly

that. Given the context of a book which is trying to urge the importance of high-quality biblical preaching on those who may not be accustomed to that, it is disappointing to see these minor slips. Nonetheless, I understand the pressure of writing under deadlines, and I can easily forgive a few weak explanations in what is otherwise a good book.

Because this is a review for a Reformed and Presbyterian audience, it is worth mentioning how this book might be useful in that context. My opinion is that most Orthodox Presbyterian Church search committees will instinctively understand most of the content of Part 2 (on the importance of exegetical preaching and how to evaluate it) even without reading the book. However, there are some important pearls of wisdom in the rest of the book that will be quite helpful to search committees. In particular, Part 3 will be quite helpful to those new to interviewing pastoral candidates.

I appreciate Brauns's contribution to the dialogue about pastoral searches. I hope many in the evangelical church will heed his exhortation to seek faithful biblical preaching. ©

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Reader, Come Home

by Maryanne Wolf

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2019¹

by Stephen A. Migotsky

Reader, Come Home, by Maryanne Wolf. New York: HarperCollins, 2018, 260 pages, \$24.99.

In two dystopian novels, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley² and *1984* by George Orwell,³ people don't read books. In *1984*, books are censored and banned by a totalitarian government in order to control what people think. In *Brave New World* books are available, but no one wants to read them, because they are all too happy in a world of groupthink. More recent books, such as *iGen*, *Proust and the Squid*, *The Shallows*, and *The Digital Divide*,⁴ have suggested a third reason people might not read books. It's not that books are banned as in *1984*, or people are too happy without books to want to read them as in *Brave New World*; now the suggestion is that most people don't have the ability to read the way people used to read. Now people have brains that are disabled and can no longer read big, important books in a deep, thoughtful way.

That is a stunning fact. The result in study after study is that the hours that we spend looking at a screen change how our brains work. There is a difference even when one reads the text of a novel

on a Kindle instead of on a printed page (77). What inspired Professor Wolf to begin to research and write this book was her experience after writing *Proust and the Squid*, which was published in 2007. She describes her experience as a Rip Van Winkle one. For seven years she did research for *Proust and the Squid*. When she woke up from that book, "our entire literacy-based culture had begun its transformation into a very different, digitally based culture. I was gobsmacked" (6).

The book is written as nine letters to the reader from someone who, in her own words, "became consumed with how the circuitry of the reading brain would be altered by the unique characteristics of the digital medium, particularly the young" (7).

Letter One describes her Rip Van Winkle experience in depth as someone who used to read deeply and has researched the brain's activity while reading. Letter Two is an overview of current knowledge of the reading brain. Letter Three describes "the essential processes that compose deep reading—from the reader's empathic and inferential abilities to critical analysis and insight itself" (11). These first three chapters give the foundation for Letter Four, which argues that "how and what we now read" in digital media changes our ability to do "critical analysis of complex realities" (11–12, emphasis hers). This is a crucial chapter.

In the Letters Five to Eight, Professor Wolf writes of her concerns for the loss of reading's role in the development of "intellectual, social-emotional, and ethical" traits in children (12). She has a novel solution to the print vs. digital reading dilemma. She proposes and hopes that readers can be taught to read print and digital media as if they were two different languages and readers would become bilingual and able to switch between the two media with each having its own "language" without losing any of the benefits of either "language" (12). She calls this her hope for a "biliterate" reading brain (12). This hope is merely a hope.

In her last chapter, Letter Nine, she asks us to question ourselves whether we have "the three

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=729&issue_id=142.

2 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Modern Library, 1946).

3 George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

4 Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria, 2017); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010); Mark Bauerlein, ed., *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2011).

lives of the good reader” akin to Aristotle’s three lives of a good community—“the life of knowledge and productivity, the life of entertainment and . . . leisure, and finally the life of contemplation” (13). The life of contemplation is “daily threatened in our culture” (13).

She notes that Professors of English know firsthand the condition of their students’ reading and writing skills. Their most frequent observations are two. First, students are becoming increasingly impatient with the difficulty and time it takes to understand long and complex sentences, and they don’t like to respond deeply and thoughtfully to a book (92). This reality is so common that students have an abbreviation for their experience with some books—TL; DR (Too long; didn’t read) (92). A second observation is that student writing is deteriorating (92).

Consider giving yourself this test that she gave herself. Professor Wolf picked a big, dense book that was a favorite novel that she had read when she was younger. The test was to reread it now. She believed that her reading style had not changed in the intervening years, because she thought that only the time she had available to read was changed (98–99). She happily chose one of her favorite books and began to read it, and she “experienced the literary equivalent of a punch to the cortex. I could not read it” (99). Without her knowing it, her brain had changed. She could not read it!

If she—a professor, a researcher, a smart person—lost the ability to read a favorite book, because her brain changed, then what has been happening slowly to the rest of us who also read digital media, perhaps, even more than she did? Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). When your brain is unable to read deeply and meditate deeply on the Holy Scriptures, how is a pastor or any Christian going to be transformed and be able to test and fathom the deep things of God? Even a man who creates much of the digital media worries about the

damage that is done by them. “Google CEO Eric Schmidt cautioned, ‘I worry that the level of interruption, the sort of overwhelming rapidity of information . . . is in fact altering cognition. It is affecting deeper thinking’” (123–24). The deep reading brain is in danger. This book explains how your brain responds to what you read and how you read.

The good news for Professor Wolf, and for us, is that she overcame her reading disability by forcing herself to read her test book in twenty-minute intervals, and she regained her deep reading ability after two weeks of concentrated training (101). ©

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The Soul in Paraphrase

edited by Leland Ryken

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* January 2019⁵

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

The Soul in Paraphrase: A Treasury of Classic Devotional Poems, by Leland Ryken, ed. Wheaton: Crossway, 2018, 262 pages, \$35.00.

As a collector of anthologies of poetry, I recognize this slim volume as unique. Harold Bloom’s *Anthology of American Religious Verse*⁶

5 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=730&issue_id=142.

6 Harold Bloom, ed., *Anthology of American Religious Verse* (New York: The Library of America, 2006).

is loaded with excellent choices but lacks the brilliant commentary of his *The Best Poems of the English Language*.¹ He also covers religions other than Christianity. *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*² covers a narrower terrain, but also lacks commentary. James Trott's *A Sacrifice of Praise*³ is a more contemporary anthology covering a wide range of Christian poetry from Caedmon to the mid-twentieth century. His tome (804 pages) contains commentary with biographical sketches of the poets, like Bloom's *Best Poems*. Ryken's anthology, on the other hand, is a study in conciseness rooted in a keenly developed taste for the best sacred poetry. Leland Ryken brings all his poetic experience as a master teacher to bear on this selection. His poetic sensibilities have enabled him to make impeccable choices.

The title is from George Herbert's poem "Prayer" (88). In a mere 262 pages, ninety-one poems comprise this superb anthology; one third of the poems (by three of fifty poets) are by Ryken's favorites. His *The Devotional Poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Milton*⁴ is a prelude to the present book. His work on these three poets in the former volume is largely reworked here. In *The Soul in Paraphrase*, Ryken uses all of the poems of the three, adding two to Herbert and three to Milton. It is not merely personal preference that lead Ryken to favor these three, but rather the high quality of their devotional poetry. Their stature among English poets is without equal, as this selection demonstrates. Harold Bloom agrees regarding Donne and Herbert, "There are only a few extraordinary devotional poets in the language, including Donne, and the Victorians Gerard Manley Hopkins and Christina Rossetti. By any standard, George Herbert is the devotional

1 Harold Bloom, ed., *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

2 Lord David Cecil, *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

3 James Trott, *A Sacrifice of Praise: An Anthology of Christian Poetry in English from Caedmon to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2006).

4 Leland Ryken, *The Devotional Poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Milton* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).

poet proper in English."⁵

Each poem, from Caedmon (seventh century) to Emily Brontë, is adorned with "notes on selected words" and a brief, but sagacious, commentary. Biographical notes on each poet, along with Scripture and person indexes are collected at the end of the book.

This is truly a treasury, housed in a beautifully bound hard cover edition. Gold-tooled cloth with a dust cover is rare in Christian publishing. Bound in signature with a red cloth book mark makes this a distinctive contribution to devotional poetry and will thus edify a generation of Christian readers. ©

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Keep Up Your Biblical Hebrew and Greek in Two Minutes a Day

compiled and edited by
Jonathan G. Kline

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2019⁶

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Keep Up Your Biblical Hebrew in Two Minutes a Day: 365 Selections for Easy Review, vol. 1, compiled and edited by Jonathan G. Kline. Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2017, xiv + 370 pages, \$39.95.

Back in the sixties, I remember reading with interest the book *Europe on \$5.00 a Day*. So,

5 Bloom, *Best Poems*, 183.

6 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=731&issue_id=142.

Jonathan Kline's fine little volumes (there are two each for Hebrew and Greek, and one for Aramaic, which I am not reviewing) allure the busy and often overwhelmed pastor to keep fresh in his use of the biblical languages. I always reminded parents who inquired about how to do devotions with their little children to keep the lessons short and sweet. Kline has done a masterful job of doing just this for original language studies.

Each volume covers three hundred sixty-five one-page selections beginning January 1. The eight-page introduction to each volume is a very useful and important aid to getting the most out of these books. For example, Kline provides suggestions for brief (ten seconds to one minute), medium (two to five minutes), and longer (ten to twenty minute) study periods, depending on the time available to the pastor on a given day. Finally, there is a complete index of Scripture references.

Each one-page selection begins with a verse in an English version of the author's choice. Kline uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Bible (NIV), Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB only for the New Testament), Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and Modern Language Bible (MLB). Three Greek or Hebrew words are embedded in parentheses in the English translation; one is a new vocabulary word, and the other two are for review. The transliteration and meaning of each new word appear next, shaded in gray. Each of the review words has a reference to the day when that word was first used. Next to this is the frequency of the Greek or Hebrew word found in Westcott-Hort edition of the Greek New Testament or Michigan-Claremont-Westminster Electronic Hebrew Bible, followed by an "x." To assist beginning students, just below the frequency number there is a reference to the new word in Strong's concordance, beginning with an "S." Finally, the Greek or Hebrew text of the daily verse is given with the daily words highlighted in bold and "then divided into phrases or clauses, with the corresponding English phrases or clauses next to

them" (vii).

At first the lack of declensions of nouns and conjugations of verbs seemed like a flaw, but then I realized that the absence of those technical grammatical features encourages simple growth in reading the original texts. Kline addresses this at the outset: "This book complements such grammatical study by enabling you to build a robust vocabulary base and by encouraging you to work with the biblical text and review morphology and syntax in a largely inductive manner" (vii). These volumes deliver what they are advertised to do and should be a serious encouragement to pastors and students seeking to build a reading knowledge of the Bible in its original languages for devotional and exegetical work. I highly recommend this unique series. ☺

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Why Can't We Be Friends? Avoidance Is Not Purity

by *Aimee Byrd*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2019¹

by **John W. Mahaffy**

Why Can't We Be Friends? Avoidance Is Not Purity, by Aimee Byrd. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018, x + 248 pages, \$14.99, paper.

How does the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, living *in* the world but *not of* it, maintain her

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=736&issue_id=143.

faithfulness to her Lord and her distinctiveness from the world? Among other things, she emphasizes sexual purity as she lives in the hypersexualized culture of North America.

Ironically, as Aimee Byrd argues, the church can be more influenced by the culture than she realizes:

Unfortunately, as eager as the conservative church is to speak out against the sexual revolution and gender identity theories, she often appears just as reductive as the culture surrounding her when it comes to representing our communion with God in our communion with one another. But Scripture tells us over and over again that Christian men and women are more than friends—we are brothers and sisters in Christ. (14)

In a well-intentioned effort to avoid sin, Christians too frequently fall into a default position of treating members of the opposite sex as an occasion for temptation. That flattens who we are—images of God, redeemed in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the subtitle notes, “avoidance is not purity.” Byrd is critical of an unthinking application of the so-called “Billy Graham (or, more recently, Mike Pence) rule” as the standard for handling relationships between men and women.

It is not only the humanistic culture that defines people in terms of their sexuality. In a strange reaction some Christians do something similar:

A major language shift has taken place, and our thinking is changing with it. Evangelicals in the purity culture have moved from discussing sexual behavior as a fruit and outworking of being made in the image of God and of Christian holiness, to focusing on sexual purity commitments as the core of our identity. (64)

One reason I bought this book was to see for myself whether pre-publication fears aired on social media were correct: that this book would destroy barriers and open the door to immoral behavior. Those concerns are unjustified. Byrd re-

peatedly warns against temptation and emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries appropriate to our situations. She upholds the biblical positions that men are called to the office of elder and that husbands are to exercise leadership in marriage. And she is correct in reminding us that in both cases, it is servant leadership.

Although a factor in my purchase was to read for myself rather than depend on secondhand reports, I was blessed with more than I expected. Byrd does not simply decry a sub-Christian manner of treating one another. She describes the way that the Bible treats believers as family, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and traces how that worked out in the early church. She emphasizes scriptural teaching on purity: “If purity is preeminently about our communion with God, then we can pursue holiness in others and ourselves while abhorring sin” (69).

We are not just brothers and sisters, we, Christian men and women alike, are that because we are the Father’s adopted sons in Christ. Byrd makes helpful use of David B. Garner’s *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (2017). She takes us to the heart of what purity means:

Because we are adopted sons in the Son, and our hope lies in full glorification and Christ-likeness, we are called to purify ourselves. What does that mean? We cannot do this without Christ, who is our purity. But what does that mean? It means that we don’t purify ourselves through abstinence. We purify ourselves by fixing our hope on Jesus Christ, “for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36). (71)

Byrd has a refreshing emphasis on the importance of public worship and the official ministry of the Word. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions. One won’t agree with every point she makes, but the book could well be used to help groups in the church develop their understanding of who they are in Christ. That theological growth is important for us, helping us to relate to one

another in biblical ways. It also helps the church image to the world something of what redemption involves. Byrd's burden is for the Lord and his church:

Friendship points to our truest friend and advocate, Jesus Christ. And he cannot be cheapened. Furthermore, friendship points to the mission of our triune God: eternal communion with his people. Is your church a picture of this? (232) ©

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The Tech-Wise Family

by *Andy Crouch*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2019¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place, by Andy Crouch. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017, 224 pages, \$14.99.

Crouch begins: “Tech-wise parenting isn’t simply intended to eliminate technology but to put better things in its place. . . . I’ve discovered a world out there that is better than anything

technology can offer—as close as our front lawn” (11). This is a book about putting technology in its place. As such it offers some excellent, humbly expressed, advice that all parents and adults would be wise to consider. I am always concerned about the theoretical basis of books on technology. When I first began studying and writing on this subject, most Christians were concerned only about media content; they hadn’t considered the ways in which electronics are an environment and not simply tools. Crouch has read several of the right books to undergird his analysis and suggestions.²

In the preface, Crouch gives five descriptions of what it means to put technology in its proper place. The sum of his concerns reminded me of Matthew Crawford’s *The World Beyond Your Head*; and *Shop Class as Soulcraft*.³ Crouch is concerned with the reality of embodied existence, involving activities that require mental skill and personal presence (29). It is these real life employments that should be promoted and enhanced by technology. This also reminded me of Edith Schaeffer’s *Hidden Art*⁴ in which she encourages artistic expression in ordinary, everyday life. L’Abri exemplified this in my experience there in 1971–72.

Crouch is very realistic about the peer pressure that young people are subjected to when it comes to using electronic devices (26). At the end of each chapter, he has the “Crouch Family Reality Check” in which he humbly relates his own successes and failures. After the introduction he gives “Ten Tech-wise Commitments” (41–42), which he elaborates on in the remainder of the

2 Albert Borgman, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015); John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).

3 Matthew Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015); *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

4 Edith Schaeffer, *Hidden Art* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1971).

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=737&issue_id=143.

book. Reshaping patterns of living must be rooted in changes of our inner lives. He uses Sabbath-keeping as an example (35–36).

The first three chapters present “The Three Key Decisions of a Tech-Wise Family.” They are: “Choosing Character,” “Shaping Space,” and “Structuring Time.” Crouch is essentially pleading for RL (real life) to take precedence over VR (virtual reality) in developing the virtues of wisdom and courage (53). Christian character is developed in the context of families, natural and spiritual. Technology is good when it helps us to achieve these noble ends. But it also poses the greatest threat to the development of character ever conceived (62–63).

Proper ordering of space means that our homes and churches must be suited to the development of wise and courageous people. Here Crouch has lots of practical suggestions, such as having technology free zones (79–80).

Ordering time wisely means maintaining a work-life balance, which technology tends to remove by making life all work. He recommends the Sabbath and worship with God’s people as a positive commands of God (92–93, 98–101). Using the “off” button on devices assists us in the wise use of time throughout the week.

The chapter on “Learning and Working” is Crouch’s best. He focuses on human life as embodied existence expressing ideas and concerns similar to Matthew Crawford, to whom I referred above. Language itself is embedded in the body, the tongue, as the etymology of the word suggests (124–25). Crouch pays attention to the important research of cognitive science⁵ which reinforces the mind-body interaction (125). The use of pen and paper helps memory and creativity in ways that keyboards and screens do not. Electronic devices are “dangerously easy” (126–27). Activities that demand skill, that are difficult and thus

5 Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper, *The Myth of the Paperless Office* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003). Maryanne Wolf’s most recent book is well worth reading, *Reader, Come Home* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018). Stephen Migotsky reviews it on page 84.

rewarding, must be emphasized at an early age. “Computer literacy” is a myth because it does not take great skill as does learning to read—actual literacy (130–35). Neil Postman made this plea in *The End of Education* in 1995.⁶ Crouch ends this chapter by recognizing that we are swimming upstream. Few educators have heeded Postman’s advice. Perhaps the plethora of research and writing that points out some of the deleterious effects of the digital will seep into our culture and its institutions.

The remainder of the book deals helpfully with boredom and its antidote: real life activities such as conversation and singing. Crouch’s chapter on “Why Singing Matters” comes close to a healthy criticism of much contemporary worship music (which sounds to me like an oxymoron) as he laments the “disappearance of shared singing” (185). Missing in his analysis is the fact that the entertainment mode of the “worship band” and microphones is by its very nature the performance of a few. Here Neil Postman’s chapter in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, “Shuffle off to Bethlehem”⁷ would be helpful in showing how TV worship programming mutes the presence of God. A corollary to Postman’s critique would be that many contemporary worship services unconsciously replicate TV. For all of Crouch’s excellent material on the Sabbath, corporate singing, and worship, the absence of discussion for the need of sound biblical preaching is troubling.

Yet, my quarrels with this book in no way undermine its great value as a practical guide to electronic navigation, especially in family life.

The Barna visuals, while supportive of some of what Crouch is seeking to deal with, are sometimes difficult to understand and always distracting. Perhaps a hardcover book without a dust cover and dressed in snappy orange and red accessories is meant to communicate PRACTICAL. In this it succeeds.

6 Neil Postman, *The End of Education* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

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

Crouch could have described the way that the electronic is a total environment and one that alters social space. Mid-twentieth-century sociologist Erving Goffman observed that access to information defines social relations. Thus, altering the means of access to information changes these relations and the institutions of a culture.⁸

A final concern is Crouch's use of the word "leisure." His problem is really with amusement or meaningless rest (87, 94). So, his point is a good one, but he inadvertently gives leisure a bad name. Leland Ryken presents a positive view of leisure in his article "Leisure as a Christian Calling."⁹ Leisure is etymologically rooted in the idea of being freed from obligations in order to cultivate one's life. Our word "school" means to set free. This is the idea behind a liberal education. Ryken broadens the idea by defining what leisure is in its highest reaches: "Leisure is the growing time for the human spirit. Leisure provides the occasion for learning and freedom, for growth and expression, for rest and restoration, for rediscovering life in its entirety."¹⁰ That raises the bar high, and I think we resonate with that.

That said, with these few reservations, I highly recommend this book. It is a wonderfully accessible encouragement and guide to developing technological wisdom in the Christian family. ☺

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8 Cf. Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: Allen, 1983). Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959).

9 Leland Ryken, "Leisure as a Christian Calling," *Ordained Servant Online* (November 2018), http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=714&issue_id=140.

10 Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), 35.

The Marrow of Modern Divinity: A Simplified Version of Edward Fisher's Seventeenth-Century Classic

edited and revised by Andy Wilson

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2019¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

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

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

Editor Andy Wilson explains his reason for publishing the book:

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

The 1978 Reiner edition of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* is 370 pages. So, Wilson has almost cut half of the original. But unlike most

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=741&issue_id=144.

abridgments the essential content is not marred, especially since the editor is wholly sympathetic with the original.

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

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

In place of the single appendix in the original by John Brown of Haddington, Wilson provides six appendices, the first and last of which are a "Glossary of Names Cited by Fisher and Boston" and "How the Reformed Confessions Distinguish between Law and Gospel." Appendix 2 articulates the gist of the *The Marrow*, while setting the work in the context of the theological controversy of Thomas Boston's day: "A Righteousness Apart from the Law That Is Not Against the Law: The Story and Message of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*." This appeared originally in *Ordained Servant*.¹¹ The other three appendices are sermons preached by Pastor Wilson, germane to the main themes of *The Marrow*. These should be of considerable help to preachers in bringing the power of the gospel home to their congregations through the biblical themes enunciated in *The Marrow*.

A few pithy examples of the content of *The*

Marrow will suffice. Regarding the Sinai covenant Boston notes:

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

Wilson comments in a footnote:

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

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

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

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

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¹¹ Andy Wilson, "A Righteousness Apart from the Law That Is Not Against the Law: The Story and Message of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*," *Ordained Servant* 24 (2015): 63–67.

On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books

by Karen Swallow Prior

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
March 2019¹

by Stephen C. Magee

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

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

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

Human beings are created in the image of the God who has spoken to us through a collection of inspired writings in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. People can build character together when they enjoy shared metaphors with an attitude of respect for the way that an author has chosen to communicate. How much more when those who read and serve together agree on

a confessional heritage affirming the primacy of the Bible as "the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him" (WSC Q. 2).

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

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

The twelve virtues and recommended readings are grouped into three categories: the cardinal virtues, the theological virtues, and the heavenly virtues. Here is the fare:

Part One – The Cardinal Virtues

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

Part Two – The Theological Virtues

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

Part Three – The Heavenly Virtues

8. Chastity: *Ethan Frome*, Edith Wharton
9. Diligence: *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan
10. Patience: *Persuasion*, Jane Austen
11. Kindness: "Tenth of December," George Saunders
12. Humility: "Revelation" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Flannery O'Connor

Prior, a professor of English at Liberty University, provides us with chapters introducing each of the selected works, commenting not only on the

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=743&issue_id=144.

meaning of the particular highlighted virtue, but also on the literary features that make each text worthy of our time. At the end of her volume, Prior has included discussion questions for each chapter.

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

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

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

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Reading Matthew as the Climactic Fulfillment of the Hebrew Story

by *Martin C. Spadaro*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2019¹

by **David VanDrunen**

Reading Matthew as the Climactic Fulfillment of the Hebrew Story, by Martin C. Spadaro. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015, 299 pages, \$34.00, paper.

Scholars commonly call Matthew the most Jewish and pro-law Gospel in the canon. Matthew was composed, they say, for a predominantly Jewish community of Christians who continued to observe the Mosaic law. Many scholars see serious tension between Matthew and the Apostle Paul on this issue: Matthew was pro-law and Paul anti-law. A few have argued that Matthew wrote explicitly to counter Pauline influence in the early church. While more conservative interpreters obviously refuse to set one biblical writer against another, many of them adopt a milder version of the same perspective. They typically interpret Matthew as if Jesus is simply refuting the Pharisees' misinterpretation of the Mosaic law and showing his followers how to obey it according to its true intentions.

While such approaches can be (and, I believe, ought to be) challenged on several fronts, Martin Spadaro has opened a new front, presenting an innovative and stimulating study that claims Matthew does something much more drastic and grander than these approaches contemplate. Spadaro, a Presbyterian minister in Australia, argues that Matthew wrote to advance and complete the Old Testament story as a whole. In short, Matthew

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=751&issue_id=145.

presents Jesus as coming to terminate the Mosaic covenant and thus to decommission Israel's temple and priesthood, and in their place to establish the prophesied New Covenant. This gospel thus serves as a prophetic indictment, documenting the grounds that justified this judgment and describing the work of Christ that brought about this radical development in redemptive history.

Although not a comprehensive study of Matthew, Spadaro works his way through the main points of its storyline to establish his case. Matthew 1–4, he argues, presents Jesus as the “heir apparent,” the true Israel and well-qualified Messiah. These chapters also describe the opposition that arose against Jesus from the beginning (39). Then, in Matthew 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives his “mission statement” (88). He is not just critiquing contemporary applications of the law, nor is he laying the ground for a law-observant Christianity. While it also indicates the character of the new-covenant community, the sermon chiefly presents Jesus as the fulfiller (not abolisher) of the law and prophets (Matt. 5:17) in terms of settling accounts with Israel and foreclosing on their unpaid debt.

Spadaro next considers John the Baptist's important role in the Gospel. Although Jesus proclaimed “good news” for those who followed him, John proclaimed a wrathful Messiah and the “bad news” he also brought. God sent John before Christ to purify the nation for his arrival, and to reject him was to reject the whole of the law and the prophets.

Spadaro next considers Matthew 8–12. Here, he explains, Jesus carries out a mission of compassion, mercy, and amnesty to various sections of the Hebrew community. Nevertheless, the response was appalling, and Jesus's ministry was largely rejected, making the community vulnerable to judgment. The parables that follow, in Matthew 13 and later in the Gospel, serve as “instruments of indictment” (146–47). Matthew capitalizes on the indictment of Isaiah 6:9–10 far more than the other Gospels do, and he considers God's charge in Isaiah to be “unfinished business.” Given that “the severest images of future punishment

found in the Christian Bible are attached to these Matthean parables” (184), Spadaro believes these texts contribute greatly to his broader case.

The book then makes the case that the concept of Jesus as Messiah, in Matthew, has to do with his priesthood as well as his kingship. Here, Spadaro considers a number of texts throughout the Gospel that highlight the failure of Israel's priests under the law and present Jesus as a new and better priest who could meet the people's needs. This discussion leads Spadaro to his final main topic, the concluding events in Jerusalem in Matthew 21–28. He argues that Matthew presents the story of Jesus's passion as judicial action against the Levitical priesthood, which effects “the termination of the Mosaic administration” (236) as well as providing salvation for those believing in Jesus.

In my judgment, Spadaro's study is well worth reading for those preaching or teaching the Gospel of Matthew, or for those who simply love this first book of the New Testament. Spadaro's volume has limitations, to be sure. It is not a commentary and should not be viewed as a substitute for use of commentaries and journal articles that provide detailed studies of particular texts. It also makes many claims that are arguable and that cut against prevailing views of Matthew. No reader will come away convinced by all of Spadaro's suggestions. And it's good for readers to keep in mind that this book is an argument for the importance of a particular theme in Matthew, and thus does not give as much attention to other themes that are also undoubtedly important in this Gospel (as Spadaro himself would acknowledge). Preaching or teaching Matthew emphasizing only the theme Spadaro's book emphasizes would be imbalanced.

But this book is very helpful for several reasons. For one, it helps to explain something that every attentive reader of Matthew notices: there is a lot of divine wrath and judgment in this Gospel. Spadaro makes a plausible case that this pervasive theme of judgment is not tangential to the main message of Matthew, but something quite central to its message.

Furthermore, this book helps readers to ap-

precipitate that Matthew's vision was big, not small. Matthew was not writing to a small community of Jewish Christians or trying to carve out a place for Torah-keeping within early Christianity, as many scholars portray it. Rather, Matthew wrote with the whole of the Old Testament in mind, with a view to God's purposes in and faithfulness to the Old Testament covenants, and in defense of Jesus as the effective Messianic priest of a New Covenant community. To whatever extent one might (inevitably) disagree with some of Spadaro's particular claims, his reading of Matthew from this big-picture perspective is very helpful.

Finally, Spadaro's work provides a healthy antidote to the many works that present Matthew's Jesus as sort of tidying up some mistaken uses of the Mosaic law so that Christians can be better Torah-keepers than the Pharisees. Spadaro brings out something that is true of Matthew as well as of Paul and other New Testament writers: although holy, righteous, and good, the Mosaic law was ultimately a ministry of condemnation that brought the Old Covenant people under just condemnation. While it remains essential to affirm the deep continuity of God's redemptive work throughout the various administrations of the covenant of grace, it is also crucial to recognize that with Jesus's earthly ministry the Old Covenant has become obsolete (Heb. 8:13), and the people of God now enjoy many things that are wonderfully new. This idea is not just present in Matthew; it is prevalent in Matthew. ©

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The Spiritual Life

by *Campegius Vitringa Sr.*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
April 2019¹

by **Gerald P. Malkus**

The Spiritual Life, by Campegius Vitringa Sr., translated and edited by Charles K. Telfer. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018, xli + 226 pages, \$20.00, paper.

Charles Telfer of Westminster Seminary California introduces to the reader, in a very reader-friendly translation, one of the many volumes written by Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722). Vitringa, who was born and labored in Friesland, in the North of the Netherlands, became grounded in the original biblical languages as a young student, and this work reflects the very valuable combination of biblical exposition, solid doctrine, and the practical application of a pastor's heart. This volume comes to us from an obvious desire of a humble servant of Christ to build up the disciples of Jesus and to strengthen the church. An introductory essay, "The Life and Work of Campegius Vitringa Sr. (1659–1722)" (xxiii–xli), provides a very helpful and interesting summary of Vitringa's life and labors. Telfer provides an extensive bibliography. The foreword by Richard Muller gives an excellent defense of Reformed orthodoxy and summary of the value of Vitringa's work.

The Spiritual Life begins with four general chapters outlining the nature of the spiritual life, its origin, its causes, and how it is produced in the believer. I must acknowledge that having grown up in a thoroughly Presbyterian home, being early grounded in the vocabulary of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, I found it a bit difficult, though in the end helpful, to read some

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=747&issue_id=145.

different categories in Vitranga. Chapter 4, “The Way Spiritual Life is Produced in Man,” employs the notions of *generation* and *regeneration*. It took me a couple of readings to understand. (I will admit that was more my problem than his categories.)

In the second section, his outline of the three parts of the spiritual life uses the summary of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:24: self-denial, cross-bearing, and following Jesus. I found his accurate exposition of the virtue of self-denial to be both convicting and heavy: “renouncing all the vices of the corrupt nature of every sort . . . renounce anything delightful to the flesh” (44). I understand the validity of the teaching, but I found too little of the comfort of grace in these sections.

Section three, “The Challenges of the Spiritual Life,” frequently employs the metaphor of the stages of ordinary human life from infancy to adulthood, and from adulthood to maturity. Obviously limited in exact parallel, nevertheless he does show how it is that God carries his people through the difficult stages of life into full spiritual life.

Especially helpful was a discussion of eight general occasions for sin and vice to come into the life of the believer. He then quickly makes the transition to those wonderful gifts that God has granted to the believer to “progress in the race, to confirm and promote his spiritual standing, and to bring his sanctification to completion in the fear of God” (113).

Using *our* language a bit more freely, he identifies seven “means of promoting sanctification” (113), including prayer and the Word of God, but adding singing, worship, fellowship, self-examination, and the chastening hand of God. I found the sections on singing and worship especially helpful and perhaps worthy of an independent publication to hand out to our congregations as a concise expression of a better attitude toward these benefits.

In the final section, “The Goals of the Spiritual Life,” I became a bit confused, because the first chapter of the section (ch. 16, “Spiritual Death”) is a vivid description of the estate of sin

and misery. I don’t think that is one of my “goals” as a disciple. Nevertheless, the succeeding chapter outlines six concise characteristics of the Christian life.

The Spiritual Life ends with chapter 18, “Eternal Life.” If it is anything like what Vitranga describes, the culmination of our life in Christ is going to be very nice. I only wish that the author would include more of what we refer to as the *already, but not yet* of what we now possess in Christ.

Altogether I found this treatise on the spiritual life to be clear, challenging, and helpful in terms of giving an outline for study or discussion of the Christian life. ☺

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John G. Paton: Missionary to the Cannibals of the South Seas

by Paul Schlehlein

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2019¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

John G. Paton: Missionary to the Cannibals of the South Seas, by Paul Schlehlein. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017, xix + 186 pages, \$11.00, paper.

The “King of the Cannibals,” John Gibson Paton, was born in Scotland on May 24, 1824. His autobiography was first published in 1889, edited by his brother James, eighteen years before John’s death on January 28, 1907. The most complete edition was published with a third part covering the years 1895–1907. My copy was published in 1907 by Fleming H. Revell, totaling 869 pages. I first read this autobiography in the Banner of Truth edition, based on the 1907 three-part edition, which they still publish.² The first-hand account of Paton’s pioneering work among the cannibals of the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu in the South Seas) is riveting. I felt that I was accompanying the author on this frightening and grand adventure that brought countless lost souls to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can replace his detailed and unique account. But in our age of shortened attention spans a much briefer treatment is welcomed. And it is briefer with a difference: half the book deals with lessons from Paton’s life and work.³ Also many

personal aspects of Paton’s life, not present in Paton’s autobiography, are brought into Schlehlein’s account based on the newly republished letters of Paton’s second wife, Margaret Whitecross Paton (55–64).⁴

The book is usefully divided into two equal parts: “Paton’s Life” and “Lessons from Paton’s Life.”

The seventy-five-page account of Paton’s life outlines the best of the Scottish Covenanter tradition of zeal for spreading the gospel through the whole counsel of God. Paton had an uncanny sense of the urgency of his mission to the perishing (12). This is especially poignant given the fact that the field to which he was called, the New Hebrides in the South Seas (present day Vanuatu), was inhabited by cannibals, who had claimed the life of missionary John Williams two decades earlier (19). When warned of this danger, Paton famously replied, “I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms” (19). A year after arriving on the island of Tanna, his nineteen-year-old wife and newly born son died of malaria (27). From this point on, the story is one of God’s sustaining grace and strength enabling Paton to endure countless trials. But along the way Schlehlein writes frankly of Paton’s frailties, including discouragement that led him to wish that he had died with his first wife (38). Such realism is more inclined to encourage real trust in God than are the rose-colored success stories often required by missionaries for fundraising. When the struggles are covered up, rookie missionaries are ill prepared to meet those challenges and often leave the field in discouragement. It was decades before Paton saw real fruit, but by his life’s end he was blessed to see thousands come to Christ (74).

Part two, “Lessons from Paton’s Life,” is comprised of six chapters. “Paton’s Godly Home” looks

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=748&issue_id=145.

2 *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (1907; repr. as *The Autobiography of the Pioneer Missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu)*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965, 2016).

3 See Gregory E. Reynolds, “Seven Lessons for Missionaries from the Ministry of John Paton,” *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011):

20–24.

4 Margaret Whitecross Paton, *Letters and Sketches: The New Hebrides* (1894; repr. as *Letters from the South Seas*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003).

at the strong spiritual influence of his parents. Daily Bible-based devotions were lived out in the simple piety of his parents.

“Paton’s Clear Calling” impresses the importance of the clarity of a call to mission work: “the impetus to world missions is complex not simple. Correct motives in missions are vital, as they will lead to greater endurance and less discouragement” (90). The clarity of the call is a call to the clarity of the message that warns men of the coming judgment, of the realities of hell, and of the magnificent mercy of God in the crucified and risen Christ as the only means of escape (92–93). Such a calling must not be taken lightly.

“Paton’s Undaunted Courage” makes clear that only those with a high degree of trust in the Lord venture upon dangerous mission fields (104). Schlehlein’s discussion of cannibalism as revenge, rather than normal diet, is illuminating (108–10).

In “Paton’s Pensive Risk” Schlehlein helpfully discusses the nature of thoughtful risk, offering an alternative to what he calls “Camp Caution” and “Camp Courage” (120). Paton refused to give in to either extreme. Schlehlein sums this up nicely, “Faith is the root of pensive risk, presumption is the root of thoughtless chance” (124).

“Paton’s Gospel Strategies” enumerates the methods of the early church, which focused on the power of preaching and the Holy Spirit’s work in the hearts of sinners. There were four paths to reach this goal: language study, church planting, financial aid, and social reform (136). Paton was skilled at learning a language that had no written documentation. He worked feverishly at translating the Bible into the native language from what he learned. As a student of Nevius’s three-self principles (self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, 143), he found that establishing strong indigenous leadership was a constant challenge, but a goal from which he never wavered (143).

“Paton’s Relentless Evangelism” movingly documents Paton’s passion to spread the good news. “Paton’s belief in a sovereign God, coupled with his resolve to win the natives to Christ no matter the cost, no matter the sacrifice, no matter

the loss, and no matter the penalty, is in the end what brought the whole island to faith” (164). There is no more inspiring example of faithful mission work than Paton’s life and work. This little book is a wonderful introduction to it.

This book should serve as an instructive motivation for genuine missions, coming as it does out of our Reformed tradition. Schlehlein’s first goal for his book is “to infuse in the reader the kind of unflappable courage and indefatigable moxie for which Paton was known” (xvi). For freshman missionaries, it would make a good companion volume to John L. Nevius’s *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*,⁵ a book it appears Paton certainly read (65, 143). It would also make an excellent text for an adult class on missions. It goes to the heart of the matter and the heart of the reader. ©

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5 John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Manchester, NH: Monadnock, 2003).

The Missionary Fellowship of William Carey

by Michael A. G. Haykin

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2019¹

by Charles M. Wingard

The Missionary Fellowship of William Carey, by Michael A.G. Haykin. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2018, 161 pages, \$16.00.

Michael A. G. Haykin gives a concise and inspirational account of the life and work of William Carey, English missionary to India and often called “The Father of Modern Missions.” Reformed theology was the solid foundation of Carey’s ministry. Haykin explains:

In his theology, Carey married a deep-seated conviction regarding God’s sovereignty in salvation to an equally profound belief that in converting sinners God uses means. . . . Without understanding Carey’s consistent delight in Calvinism throughout his life, we cannot understand the man, his motivation, or eventually the shape of his mission. (43–44)

One example of Carey’s firm grasp of the doctrines of grace appears when he writes that one “may well expect to see fire and water agree, as persons with sinful hearts and desires cordially approve of the character of God” (47). Nothing but the sovereign and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit can surmount man’s hostility to God.

This deep, Calvinistic theology did not come from his parents. Born in 1761 to a modest family, Carey’s father served as parish clerk and village schoolmaster in Paulerspury in the county of Northhamptonshire. A child of the Church of England, he grew up with the liturgical rhythms

of Psalter readings and Scripture lessons that shape Anglican worship. Although the congregation lacked evangelical piety, Carey recalled that the church “tended to furnish my mind with a general Scripture knowledge” (14).

The young Carey was curious about the world beyond Britain’s borders. An uncle’s stories of serving in Canada during the French and Indian Wars piqued Carey’s interest in foreign lands—an interest that only grew as he read of the exploits of British naval captain and explorer James Cook.

At sixteen, Carey worked as a shoemaker’s apprentice, and his friendship with a co-worker (a member of the Congregational church) led to his conversion. This experience left him with an emerging appreciation for the spiritual vitality of England’s religious dissenters. He would soon leave the Church of England and become a founding member of a Congregational church that would later become the Baptist church at Hackleton. His study of the Scriptures and his conversations with John Sutcliff and Andrew Fuller, members of the Northhamptonshire Baptist Association, resulted in his acceptance of the doctrine of believer’s baptism. Carey approached John Ryland of Northampton for baptism, and was immersed by his son, John Ryland Jr. in 1783.

Fuller, Sutcliff, and the younger Ryland forged deep and lasting friendships. Through these men, Carey was introduced to the books of towering figures of the Christian faith, and especially those of Jonathan Edwards, whose sermons he took with him to India (48).

The importance of these lifelong friendships is the major theme of Haykin’s book. Their influence upon like-minded believers in the Baptist Missionary Society made Carey’s mission to India possible. Without this network’s support, and the gathering of the necessary resources, the undertaking would not have succeeded.

Carey’s friends supported him through intense debates over the right use of means in doing the Lord’s work, and especially the sending of missionaries, evangelism, and fervent prayer. When properly understood, the doctrines of grace never enervate but motivate God’s church to missions.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=755&issue_id=146.

In *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792), Carey pointed to the example of the eighteenth-century Moravian Brethren. Small in number, by 1760 they sent more than two hundred missionaries to gospel-neglected (such as the West Indies, Georgia, and Surinam) and remote (such as Greenland and Lapland) places in the world. In the Moravians, Carey found a fierce commitment to the right use of means in global missions (66–68).

One additional close friend must be mentioned: Samuel Pearce (1766–1799). His correspondence with Carey during Carey’s early years in India became an invaluable source of much-needed encouragement. Corresponding by letter required great patience; mail could take six months or more to reach its destination (94). Not without reason did Carey prize the friendship of Pearce, a man whose character won widespread admiration. Of him, William Jay wrote: “When I have endeavored to form an image of our Lord as a preacher, Pearce has oftener presented himself to my mind than any other I have been acquainted with. . . . What a savour does communion with such a man leave upon the spirit” (82).

In lesser detail, the author describes Carey’s friendship with William Ward and Joshua Marshman at the famed Serampore Mission.

Carey said of himself, “I am a plodder, it is true. I have no genius, but I can plod” (3). And so he did. He overcame obstacles of procrastinating Christians who errantly applied the doctrines of grace and undercut missionary resolve. He persevered in the midst of painful family trials. He stayed the course through many years of preaching and Bible translation in dangerous outposts of the Lord’s kingdom. We need plodders today. Plodders who, persuaded of the Lord’s will and their duty, persevere in their gospel work.

But as critical as plodding is, it takes more than individual initiative to undertake ambitious works like Carey’s missionary voyage to India. Supportive friends and networks are absolutely necessary.

I hope this fine book finds its way into many

ministers’ libraries. Missions fueled by doctrine, committed to the right use of means, and undergirded by deep friendships and broader networks of relationships are as essential now as in Carey’s day. ☺

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Susie: The Life and Legacy of Susannah Spurgeon

by Ray Rhodes Jr.

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2019¹

by Pamela A. Malkus

Susie: The Life and Legacy of Susannah Spurgeon, by Ray Rhodes Jr. Chicago: Moody, 2018, 262 pages, \$19.99.

The life of Susannah Spurgeon could have as easily been subtitled by the verse “When I am weak, then I am strong.” For that matter, Charles Spurgeon’s life and legacy could have been summarized by the same verse. Much of this couple’s lives were marked with incapacitating pain and

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=756&issue_id=146.

physical, even emotional, weakness, which did not paralyze their determination or halt their assurance of the Lord's provision to enable them to serve the needs of the church at home and around the world.

Ray Rhodes Jr.'s recent biography of Susie Spurgeon is proclaimed by the Spurgeons' great-great-granddaughter as the most detailed and historically accurate account of the beloved wife of Charles Hadden Spurgeon written to date. Rhodes's thorough research from Susannah's own writings and those of family and friends, who knew her well, unlocks new information that provides a clear picture of her love for her husband, and her amazing work for the local and global church, both before and after Charles's death.

Early in the book a vignette from the time of their engagement reveals the Spurgeons' mutual submission to the Lord and their calling as a ministry couple (61). It sounds a warning to those contemplating Christian marriage and ministry to respond to the admonition of wise elders (in this case Susie's mother) about the peculiar struggles they would experience and the importance of their particular calling.

A year into their marriage they welcomed twin boys into their home, which were to be their only children. More than two chapters (chs. 9 and 10) are devoted to devotions in the Spurgeon household. Charles Spurgeon's friend and student, William Williams, made these observations:

At 6 PM the entire household gathered in the study for worship. The portion read was accompanied with exposition . . . Then how full of tender pleading, serene confidence in God, and of world embracing sympathy were his prayers! When bowed before God in family prayer, he appeared a grander man even than when holding thousands spellbound by his oratory. (93)

Charles had been concerned for London's poor orphans since he first moved to the city in 1854. He witnessed homeless, impoverished children lining the streets and alleys around town in threadbare clothing and looking emaciated.

Even though the Spurgeons had only the twins, Susie and Charles would nevertheless help to care for hundreds of children through two orphanages started under Charles's ministry.

Another ministry they began was the Pastors' College. It began with one student and was initially funded by the Spurgeons' own household budget. Susie supported Charles's passion and training for poor pastors. When bedridden for years, Susie, before and after Charles's death, administered support for these poor pastors in their rural ministries by frequent gifts of theology books to augment their understanding of the Scriptures. An entire chapter in the book is given to the description of this twenty-year ministry by Susie. It describes her extraordinary dedication to this difficult work even for a healthy person, which Mrs. Spurgeon was not. Most were very thankful to receive this ministry; although there were some detractors as well, she bore it most kindly. This singular obsession, following care for her own family, shows that her goal was to educate pastors to better feed their congregations, effecting the spiritual health of all of England.

Susie described life without Charles as "bearable" after seven years of widowhood. She wasn't paralyzed by her sadness. She engaged her time and efforts with the pastors' book fund and auxiliary ministries, which included compiling a four-volume autobiography of C. H. Spurgeon.

This book gives insight into Susannah Spurgeon's motivations and concerns, particularly her love for her husband and boys and for the church local and worldwide. This work is not filled with tedious repetition given in some other biographies, but includes new information and succinct descriptions that will satisfy the busy twenty-first-century reader. ©

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40 Favorite Hymns on the Christian Life: A Closer Look at Their Spiritual and Poetic Meaning

by Leland Ryken

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2019¹

by Timothy P. Shafer

40 Favorite Hymns on the Christian Life: A Closer Look at Their Spiritual and Poetic Meaning, by Leland Ryken. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019, 156 pages, \$15.99.

What a pleasure it is to read through the most recent book of prodigious author Leland Ryken (professor emeritus of English at Wheaton College). In *40 Favorite Hymns*, Ryken takes the reader on a literary and theological tour of the poetry of some of the most cherished hymns of the Christian faith. Ryken, of course, is well regarded for his literary analyses of some of the most well-known Christian literature, including *Paradise Lost*, C. S. Lewis's Narnia series, and the Bible itself.

Ryken has, in this current volume, turned his considerable literary analytical skills specifically to hymnic poetry, consciously omitting references to the musical settings of the poems. In the introduction of the volume, he describes his rationale for this musical omission as threefold: 1) until the late nineteenth century the format of hymnals was that of a small book containing only words; 2) every hymn is a poem first, and; 3) there are gains that can be had by reading the poems in linear

fashion, as a poem, as opposed to the strophic design in which they are found in modern hymnals (11–12).

One of the interesting advantages of linear reading that Ryken points out is that the gaze of the reader continues to move forward (as opposed to returning to the top of the page, as in a modern hymnal), making clear the sequential progression of thought and feeling found in the poetry. Another is the ability to slow down and take in the words at one's own pace, rather than being pushed forward by the pace of the musical setting. Yet a third advantage that he explores is that of shifting the spotlight of beauty from the musical setting to the text itself, which beauty is often overshadowed by the musical elements during sung renderings (12).

With the above, Ryken makes a strong case to consider the texts of our hymns separately from the music. Approaching our hymns in this manner will no doubt deepen and enrich the worshiper's experience of corporate sung praise on a given Lord's Day when the text is once again partnered with its given tune. Doing this work in advance of corporate worship could easily be considered an element of bringing a "sacrifice of praise" as commanded by the author of Hebrews in 13:15, or a part of "singing with understanding" that the Apostle Paul exhorts in 1 Corinthians 14:15. While Ryken's book serves as an aide to our corporate worship for only forty specific hymns, it is nevertheless a model for us to follow for hymns not contained in the volume. Ryken is in effect teaching us how to understand the texts we sing, and as such is making a wonderfully edifying contribution to our faith in practice. Each local congregation would do well to consider using the book for a Sunday school term as a resource to encourage and teach individuals and/or families to study their sung praise in advance of each Lord's Day service.

Ryken himself describes the format of every entry in his anthology as consisting of three elements—a hymnic poem, an explication of the poem, and a passage from the Bible that ties into the hymn and its explication. He further states

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=760&issue_id=147.

that the Bible passages are intended to contribute to the reader's use of the book for devotional purposes (12).

Within these three categories, Ryken offers the reader an amazing variety of information and insight. The first category, the poetic text of the hymn itself, is self-consciously printed in a linear format so that readers might experience what Ryken speaks of when he describes the advantages of reading the text as poetry.

In the second category—explication of the poem—the reader can find all manner of information related to the hymn. As appropriate for each poem, Ryken covers such diverse topics as the historical circumstances surrounding its origins, its influence after having been written, history of its use, personal circumstances of the author that inspired the creation of the poem, the form of the poem, poetic/literary devices contained in the poem, the genre of the poem, biblical references within the poem, the principal imagery of the poem, and much more. Each entry averages two to three pages, but Ryken's writing is vigorous, not wasting words, making for rich content as he proceeds.

Without giving away too much of the surprising information found in the volume, some examples of the above diversity of content include: the use of “Holy, Holy, Holy” in nearly every English hymnbook; Charles Wesley's composition of “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” to celebrate the anniversary of his own conversion; the astounding number “ten million” as the number of times “Amazing Grace” is estimated to be sung publicly each year; the nearly fifty biblical references to be found in “The Church's One Foundation”; the rhetorical techniques found in “How Firm a Foundation”; the gang membership of the author of “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”; the Trinitarian structure of the prayer of petition in “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”; the literary archetypes that govern the composition of “Like a River Glorious”; the reason “Rock of Ages” was written on a playing card; the nature imagery that binds “How Great Thou Art,” “O Worship the King,” “Fairest Lord Jesus,” and “A Shelter in the

Time of Storm”; the role of “Abide with Me” in the Rugby League Challenge Cup in England; and the rich metaphors of iron mines and bitter buds ripening in “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.”

Ryken frequently describes the specific ways in which each poem demonstrates beauty by being both unified and diverse—recalling Jonathan Edwards's definition of beauty and excellence as that of “consent of being to being.”² With this emphasis, Ryken points a way forward for the hymn writers of our generation and beyond: far from the insipid and vain repetition found in so much modern worship music and lyrics, Ryken extols the layered beauty to be found in the time-tested poems of our most familiar and beloved hymns, all in the context of biblical beauty.

Equally, if not more importantly, is Ryken's provision of numerous biblical allusions to which he points for each and every hymn text. Far from being “the imaginations and devices of men,” Ryken demonstrates that the poems of these authors are steeped in biblical language, imagery, genre, and theology. Meditating on the biblical sources and references provided by Ryken in this volume is solid preparation for letting “the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16) both privately and in communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ each and every Lord's Day.

Ryken's volume will no doubt prove to be a blessing to individual believers as well as Christ's church in the months and years to come before Christ's return, should he tarry. I encourage my fellow laborers in Christ's church to avail themselves and their congregations of this wonderful new resource. ☺

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2 Jonathan Edwards, “The Mind,” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 22–34.

The Hymnal: A Reading History

by Christopher N. Phillips

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2019¹

by Timothy P. Shafer

The Hymnal: A Reading History, by Christopher N. Phillips. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018, 272 pages, \$39.95.

When one considers a hymnal, it is likely that what most commonly comes to mind is the large, hardbound musical aid to worship. For many, hymnals are the repository of some of their most treasured devotional material (both musically and poetically), and for the regular church-goer, hymnals are often associated with some of the most spiritual and emotional moments of public worship. But as author Christopher N. Phillips, an associate professor of English at Lafayette College, demonstrates, hymnals have a vastly and surprisingly wider scope of meaning than most realize.

Phillips's book, *The Hymnal: A Reading History*, is an excellent historical compilation of the role of the hymnal in culture, education, economics, gift-giving, the home, courtship, literature, denominational distinction, personal devotion, and of course, church life. In addition to the interest piqued by many of these lesser-considered, but important, facets of the role of the hymnal in daily life, Phillips's writing style is warm, engagingly personal, and eminently readable, adding greatly to the enjoyment of discovering the hidden history and impact of the genre. He weaves tales—some documented, some surmised from scant evidence—with skill, engaging the reader empathetically in the personal joys and sorrows of individuals from earlier generations. His ability to

engage the reader's imagination in this manner is a great feature of his writing of what is, in essence, a history book.

Phillips's ecumenical approach to the topic is also admirable. While much of his discussions naturally center on the Protestant hymnbook, he also gives considerable attention to Catholic, Jewish, and Mormon use of hymnals. Of note is his poignant inclusion of the impact a hymnal had on a particular slave as she decoded the text that provided for her a “click of comprehension” (106). He describes her joy when she understood from the page the words of a Watts hymn: “When I can read my title clear to mansions in the skies, I bid farewell to every fear and wipe my weeping eyes” (106). She at once comprehended her assurance of salvation as it was linked to the written word and rejoiced in her ability to understand it.

Phillips devotes an entire chapter (ch. 6) to the use of the hymnal as a literacy tool for teaching the young. In a description of a common practice of early reading pedagogy in the American colonies, he outlines the joyless practice of the “ABC method” of learning to read, where the students would recite the letters from a word divided into syllables, and afterward speak the sound of each syllable, eventually joining the syllables together to form and recognize the word. He juxtaposes the description of this tedious process with Watts's stated goal of “using the pleasures of rhyme and image to motivate children to not only read, but memorize his texts” (107). Watts also encouraged parents to turn the duty of children (that of learning to read) into a reward by offering them their own personal copies of the books of verse.

Many more aspects of the hymnal are discussed throughout the volume, including descriptions of various practices of learning new tunes before printed tunes and musical literacy were widely available. These included the “giving out” of a hymn by the preacher and the “lining out” of the hymn by a lay leader (called a precentor) (68). Also, of particular interest are Phillips's carefully researched descriptions of the evolution of common features of our modern hymnals, including various approaches to layout, bindings, and

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=761&issue_id=147.

subject and first line indexes (ch. 5).

Having myself just spent the previous decade on the joint Psalter Hymnal Committee for the OPC-URC publication of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, I learned two important things from Phillips' book. The first is that the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (2018), which is currently enjoying its first days of use in Reformed circles, is apparently the first major American Presbyterian hymnbook to include a separate psalm section since the 1843 production of *Psalms and Hymns Adapted to Social, Private, and Public Worship in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (49). For the re-emergence of sung psalms in combination with hymns in corporate Reformed worship, I give thanks to God, for I consider both to be biblical. Secondly, Phillips's work is a humbling example of just how much there is to learn about the history of the worship of our Triune God by the communion of saints over the centuries. It is a thoroughly engrossing and highly informative volume, free from large doses of musical and poetic technical jargon, making it a great pleasure to read for anyone with even a cursory interest in hymns. I highly commend it. ☺

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Last Call for Liberty

by Os Guinness

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by William Edgar

Last Call for Liberty: How America's Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018, 336 pages, \$27.00.

For most of his career Os Guinness, who is British, has been a keen observer of the United States. He is convinced that no other country stands at the crossroads as does America. His first major study of the United States was *The American Hour*, published in 1993. It was a sweeping, detailed, historical look at the second half of the twentieth century. These succeeding decades illustrate a gradual loss of the genial vision of the Founding Fathers. Then, the hard-hitting question, can the country sustain the freedom of speech established by the Framers? More recently Guinness has written *A Free People's Suicide* (2012), in which the warnings become more pressing. Then, convinced of the need to be more constructive, he wrote *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (2014), followed by *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (2016). While each of these contains significant variations, the theme that unites them is something like this: freedom of speech, the respect for those with deep differences, the need for civil discourse, cannot be sustained without the other two great qualities, virtue and faith.

In this (final?) iteration, he repeats this call, and appeals to the notion of covenant as alone able to support this trilogy of merits. But the book carries a greater sense of urgency than the previ-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=762&issue_id=147.

ous volumes, which is to say quite a lot. Guinness argues that the real and present danger is not from without but from within. Simply put, we Americans need to choose between the values proclaimed by two revolutions, the American and the French. We are rapidly forgetting the original, covenantal idea of freedom of 1776, and trading it in for the French revolutionary idea of 1789. According to the former, true freedom can only be undergirded where there is character, and character is only possible where there is religious faith.

Guinness structures the book with a series of questions, each of which call for a conversation. Among others, he asks how much Americans know about our history, how is freedom defined, how can the world be made safe for diversity, which institutions will carry the weight of the crucial qualities, and the like. As are all his works, this one is learned and original. In my opinion, Guinness has moved ahead from his former style, where names and quotes come at us like water from a fire hydrant, to a more flowing narrative, building an edifice that is logical and cogent.

Guinness writes as a Christian. Readers of this journal might have wished for more resolute appeals to biblical orthodoxy, though. In the chapter titled “Where Do You Ground Your Faith in Human Freedom?” he contrasts, as he has done in previous works, three families of faith, the Eastern, the secularist, and the Judeo-Christian, or, as he calls it, the Abrahamic. After brilliantly critiquing the first two, he then writes a section in defense of what he considers the most important biblical doctrine for our times, the image of God. The chapter stresses the freedom we have to receive or reject God, which, although right in itself, could have benefitted from some warnings against Arminianism, which in the end does not promote freedom, but (paradoxically) hinders it. That said, the book is “prophetic” and needs to be read by all who seriously desire freedom. ©

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The War Outside My Window

edited by Janet Elizabeth Croon

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2019¹

by **Wallace B. King**

The War Outside My Window: The Civil War Diary of LeRoy Wiley Gresham, 1860–1865, edited by Janet Elizabeth Croon. El Dorado Hill, CA: Savas Beatie, 2018, xxxviii + 442 pages, \$34.95.

Last year saw the publication of this most unusual book that should appeal to many students of the American Civil War and of Southern Presbyterianism, but also to those who have an interest in the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is largely comprised of a diary written by LeRoy Wiley Gresham, beginning in 1860 when he was only twelve years old, and continuing up to a few days before his death at the age of seventeen in 1865. Included in the collection of the U.S. Library of Congress, after being donated by the family in the 1980s, the diary has been edited by Janet Elizabeth Croon, who has provided copious notes that help the reader to keep track of the many persons mentioned and events recounted in the diary. Croon’s footnotes assist the reader in making sense of diary entries that are often filled with inaccuracies stemming from the proverbial fog of war. In addition, the publisher has provided a helpful introduction, a medical foreword and afterword, and LeRoy’s obituary.

The Greshams were a prominent slave-owning family living in Macon, Georgia. LeRoy, no doubt being raised to one day assume the duties of a proper Southern gentleman, is an older

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=763&issue_id=147.

brother of Mary “Minnie” Gresham, mother of J. Gresham Machen. At the age of eight, LeRoy’s left leg is crushed when a chimney collapses on him. Shortly thereafter, he is apparently diagnosed as having pulmonary tuberculosis, which evolves into spinal tuberculosis, or Pott’s Disease. The events chronicled in the book begin in June 1860 with LeRoy and his father, John Gresham, a ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church in Macon, traveling to Philadelphia to seek medical help. LeRoy’s entry of Genesis 31:49 on the first page of his diary as he is about to begin his trip north elicits a footnote from editor Croon that “the Gresham family was very religious.” Indeed.

LeRoy is a voracious reader of just about anything he can get his hands on: history, the classics, theology, forgettable novels, and newspapers. Books are his window on the world. LeRoy’s own writing develops in sophistication and insight as he grows older, though from the beginning to the end he writes in a fairly matter-of-fact manner about the daily minutia he chronicles, an amusing mix of the mundane and trivial with matters of lasting national significance. One senses the increasing excitement in the diary entries as the expected outbreak of hostilities between North and South draws closer and LeRoy’s optimism concerning the success of the Southern cause in the early years of the war, which finally turns to grudging acceptance that the secessionist project is doomed to failure.

LeRoy regularly writes about what is happening at the church: pastor visits, who is ill on a given Sunday and must stay home, sermon texts, pulpit swaps following meetings of presbytery, and so on. Sadly, from the very beginning of the diary LeRoy is already unable to attend public worship due to his fragile health. In October of 1864, Minnie is received into communicant membership during the morning worship service, and the pastor and elders come to the Gresham home following evening worship to receive Leroy as well. There is no Lord’s Supper given to him, however, as everyone was “too busy” to remember to bring the elements. Just two months before his death, Leroy writes that he hopes that one day he

will be able to “go to church long enough to have [the] privilege” of receiving communion. Prayer meetings increase in frequency as the war turns increasingly against the Confederacy, with special services and days of fasting also noted. When the Northern army occupies Macon, LeRoy expresses regret that he had not “kept Sunday right” because he spent too much time watching the troops march past the Gresham home.

As the war drags on, Leroy becomes increasingly skeptical of the overly optimistic official pronouncements, and he does not hold back in his criticisms of various politicians and generals. His growing realization that the war is not going well roughly corresponds to despair over his inevitable physical deterioration. A warning to the gentle reader: Leroy is usually rather explicit when describing his symptoms. But it is his growing sense of hopelessness in his condition that makes for increasingly difficult reading. And none is more heart-rending than the letter from Leroy’s mother to her sister shortly after Leroy’s death. Her grief is simply overwhelming as she recounts Leroy’s final moments, his quoting of Scripture, expression of confidence in his Savior, and exhortation of his older brother Thomas to “give himself to Christ.”

This book is by no means a “feel good” read, but I can recommend it without reservation; fascinating in so many ways on multiple levels, it is the most engrossing book I’ve read in quite some time. ☺

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

by Randy Jaeggli

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Meredith M. Kline

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

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

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

In Jaeggli's chapter on *hebel* (הֶבֶל), tradition-

ally translated as "vanity," he transliterates the term until concluding that in Ecclesiastes it usually should be translated as "frustration," but a few times as "transitory" or "emptiness."

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

There are some inadequate discussions of texts in this volume. Jaeggli does not really deal with the tension in 8:12–14 on retribution. He assumes that there is retribution in an afterlife, without indicating how that is derived from Ecclesiastes, which focuses on the lack of divine retribution under the sun. He also confuses modern promises with biblical vows in a discussion of 5:4–6. A biblical vow was not a modern-day promise; biblical vows were based on a response to what God would do, not on how God might respond to what was done. Jaeggli's chapter on the limits of wisdom is strange because it does not include discussion of the major passage on the topic, 8:16–17. It also exhibits some confusion. Negative aspects of wisdom include "no guarantee that a wise person's endeavors will always be successful" (9:11). This,

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=768&issue_id=148.

however, is less a negative aspect of wisdom itself, than a reality of sovereign providence shared by people, whether they demonstrate wisdom or folly. On 1:17, wisdom is limited, since it eludes the quester. The goal, however, of attaining comprehension, not wisdom itself, is wind-chasing. Total comprehension is an unwise expectation of wisdom (the point of 8:16–17, the highlighted passage of Qohelet’s words on wisdom).

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

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God’s Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653

by *Chad Van Dixhoorn*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2019¹

by **Charles M. Wingard**

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

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

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

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=769&issue_id=148.

Westminster Standards at Westminster Theological Seminary, guides readers through the assembly's debates, theological examinations, journals, minutes, and formal documents.

The author arranges his work in three sections.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examinations were comprehensive, and included questions about his doctrine, knowledge of the biblical languages and Latin (the language in which theological texts were written and debated),

range of theological reading, motivations for ministry, and practical theology. The Directory for Worship added examinations in biblical knowledge and church history (83–84).

With regard to practical theology, the candidate was expected to demonstrate that he knew how to visit the sick, catechize, and appeal to consciences. For whatever reason, the statement of views on visitation of the sick and catechizing were not required in The Directory for Worship (55, 83).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision- Making at the End of Life

by *Bill Davis*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by **Gordon H. Cook Jr.**

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

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

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

Dr. Davis, a professor of philosophy at Cov-

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

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

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

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

Thus, I am reluctant to say anything that might be construed as negative about an excellent book that is well worth your attention. But just as Davis notes how the PCA Report on *Heroic Measures* is now dated, so also his own work is quickly

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=770&issue_id=148.

becoming the same. While all of us should have an advanced directive, which addresses our desires at the end of our lives, persons who are approaching the end of their lives should also fill out a POLST.² POLST forms are medical orders signed by a physician that deal with end-of-life treatments. Because it is signed by a physician, the POLST form has far greater authority in medical circles than an advanced directive. It is also more broadly accepted by other states and nations, though not completely so. For me, the most important advantage of a POLST form is that you (or your loved one) are having these important conversations with a medical professional, ideally your family physician, a person who knows you well and knows how to translate your desires into the language of healthcare professionals in a way that will gain their attention and compliance. Most people approaching the end of their life should have both an advanced directive and a POLST form (or your state's equivalent). The POLST will focus sharply on the end-of-life treatments that you want or don't want under various circumstances. The advanced directive can, and often does, include a broader range of desires, including how you would like your body interred after death, funeral planning, and similar concerns not addressed by a POLST.

Another minor concern is Davis's handling

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

of the subject of hospice, something he mentions only a couple of times. Recognizing that hospice availability varies considerably from location to location, it is still an important and underused benefit for those approaching the end of their lives. Hospice is not primarily about a facility for the provision of terminal care. It is rather a Medicare benefit to which you or your loved one are most likely entitled. This benefit can help you financially, as well as medically, in the final six months of your life. Hospice ideally involves a well-established team of medical professionals (doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, and volunteers) who are all focused on keeping you comfortable and helping you to live as full and satisfying a life as is possible right up to the moment that God calls you home. They also support your family or care providers to make their efforts more successful. Sometimes this does involve an inpatient stay at a hospital or hospice facility to address certain symptoms. But more often, hospice supports patients so that they can die peacefully in their own homes. There were several illustrations offered by Davis, particularly involving financial issues, that could have been resolved far more favorably by at least considering how dying at home on hospice provides a more affordable and comfortable end of life. It can assist you or your loved one in glorifying God right up to the final breath.

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

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Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort

by *W. Robert Godfrey*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2019¹

by **John R. Muether**

Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort, by W. Robert Godfrey. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2019, xiv, 265 pages, \$19.00.

A half-century ago it was widely accepted among church historians that the spirit of the Reformation was antithetical to that of the century that followed. Often described as “Calvin vs. the Calvinists,” this school of thought contended, in the words of one historian, that the “spontaneity, freshness, and joyfulness” of the Reformation was usurped by the “legalism, moralism, and rationalism” of the Protestant scholastics.² If the Westminster Assembly at mid-seventeenth century was the epitome of this alien spirit, the turning point took place in 1618–1619 at the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands. Thankfully, that school of interpretation has been refuted by recent scholarship committed to a closer reading of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts.

In this book Dr. Robert Godfrey, recently retired as president and professor of church history at Westminster Seminary California, revisits the Synod of Dort, which was the subject of his 1974 doctoral dissertation at Stanford University. Two

words stand out in the title of this book. First, Godfrey is not content with merely crediting Dort with maintaining the spirit of the Reformation; more than that, Dort “saved” the Reformation in several respects. It served the recovery of Augustinianism by exposing a subtle version of semi-Pelagianism, it clarified the “solus” of the Reformation, and it prepared the church for its faithful witness when the Enlightenment emerged by century’s end.

Secondly, the title notes that the chief product of the synod, the Canons of Dort (though cast in the polemical form of articles to affirm and errors to reject) is preeminently a work of *pastoral* theology. This is a feature that is sometimes lost even among its defenders. Godfrey’s book is for teachers, because the Canons especially were composed for teachers in the church. Every head of doctrine includes instruction on how the doctrines of grace must be carefully and diligently preached and taught.

Part one sets the stage by describing the crisis in the Dutch Reformed Church that prompted the call of the synod. Godfrey surveys the rise of Jacob Arminius (1559–1609), who studied at Leiden, Geneva (under Beza), and Basel before pastoring in Amsterdam and then teaching at Leiden from 1603 until his death. Though controversy followed his teaching, the debates in the church were heightened after his death. In 1610, forty-two ministers appealed for tolerance of his teachings in the form of a five-point Remonstrance. By decade’s end an international Reformed synod gathered to respond, as Reformed voices throughout Europe joined ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. The synod’s response to the Remonstrance, the Canons of Dort, contain what we have come to call the “five points of Calvinism,” though Godfrey suggests that they are better described as “five answers to the five errors of Arminianism” (13).³

In part two Godfrey offers a new translation of the Canons, followed, in part three, with his

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=777&issue_id=149.

2 Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 30. Not surprisingly, mainline Presbyterians celebrated the Confession of 1967 as the church’s liberation from the legalism of the Westminster Standards.

3 The concept of “five points” comes from Dort, but the acronym “TULIP” does not emerge until the early twentieth century.

analysis and exposition of its five heads of doctrine. He illustrates how the synod refuted Remonstrant errors by constant and explicit quotations of Scripture. On the delicate matter of the extent of Christ's atonement, the synod reached a consensus of acknowledging its universal sufficiency and its particular efficacy (115). The doctrine of perseverance was premised on the simple teaching on the faithfulness of God (155). Godfrey notes that, rightly taught, perseverance has encouraged humility and godliness in the churches of the Reformed tradition (163).

Godfrey underscores the pastoral dimension of the Canons in his summary of the synod's work:

The synod . . . addresses ministers and teachers in the Reformed churches to deal with these matters carefully and piously. These doctrines are taught by God in the Scriptures for "the glory of the divine name, the holiness of life, and the consolation of troubled souls." The church must be faithful in teaching them just as God has. Teachers and preachers must speak as the Scriptures do and must avoid phrases (sometimes called "harsh phrases") or expressions that can be misunderstood or abused either by the faithful or by those who reject Reformed teaching. (177)

There are five appendices to the book. The first (and by far the longest) offers a "new look" at Jacob Arminius. Godfrey surveys how biographers through the centuries have lauded the Dutch theologian's example of "nobility, moderation, and heroism" in an age that had become narrowminded and polemic. Looking especially at the influential 1971 work by Carl Bangs (which is consistent with the Calvin vs. the Calvinists approach of this era),⁴ Godfrey assembles evidence to paint a different and less complimentary portrait of the patron saint of the Remonstrants.

In addition, there are briefer appendices with helpful guidance for understanding the form and structure of the Canon's heads of doctrine. Here,

for example, Godfrey explains that because the synod intended each head of doctrine to be read on its own, there is some built-in redundancy, and so some arguments recur under different heads. Not to be overlooked is appendix five, a translation of the "Doctrinal Statement by the Synod of Dort on the Sabbath." The synod did work beyond the Remonstrance debate, and while this statement is brief and preliminary, it challenges the popular notion that the Dutch Reformed and English Puritans were divided on the practice of Sabbath-keeping.

Godfrey's book reminds us that the doctrines of Dort "are not peripheral or obscure" (165), contrary to the impression left by their absence from many contemporary pulpits. When predestination is preached with modesty and prudence, it shapes us in our gratitude and humility before God, far from leading us to despair or presumption. If the Synod of Dort "saved" the Reformation by clarifying the Bible's teaching on grace against the errors of its day, a study of its "theology, piety, and strategy" (175) would no doubt benefit the church today as well. A careful study of Godfrey's book would certainly help toward that end. *Saving the Reformation* might be especially fitting for book discussions in church sessions. ©

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⁴ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

Pastoral Theology: The Man of God, His Preaching and Teaching Labors, vol. 2

by *Albert N. Martin*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2019¹

by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Pastoral Theology: The Man of God, His Preaching and Teaching Labors, vol. 2, Albert N. Martin. Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2019, xiii + 651 pages, \$47.00.

This the second volume of three in what will likely become one of the most extensive pastoral theologies in the history of the church. The primary strength of this volume is that it collects some of the best Reformed and biblical material on preaching available. Martin teaches pastors how to preach Christ-centered, Spirit-filled sermons to the edification of the church and to the conversion of others. This book is useful, practical, and interesting, and it has the advantage both of condensing some of the best Reformed preaching manuals into a single volume and of introducing readers to some of the best books on preaching.

Martin's treatment of preaching is thoroughgoing and engaging. The first section, on the content and form of preaching, includes seven axioms about preaching. The second section primarily addresses different kinds of exegetical preaching. The final section of this volume treats the act of preaching itself. Most of the first section deals with issues such as form, structure, the application, and illustration of sermons, along with

other key issues. Drawing from a plethora of biblical and historical examples, Martin couples these things with over fifty years of pastoral experience and sanctified common sense.

Martin's counsel on different kinds of exegetical preaching is particularly noteworthy. Rather than arguing simply for consecutive expository sermon series—which he favors—he uses the best of past examples to show that topical, textual, and consecutive sermons can all be expository. From this, Martin concludes that the Spirit has blessed preachers in the past through various kinds of preaching rather than in spite of it.

He also gives balanced directions regarding manuscript versus extemporaneous preaching, arguing that achieving the goals of preaching are more important than a specific method of delivery. However, preachers should recognize the clear differences between the written and the spoken word and that simply reading a manuscript to a congregation may not achieve the goals of preaching (603–14).

One final feature that stands out in this book is that Martin includes a range of issues concerning how people hear sermons, such as the effects of good airflow, comfortable chairs, and an appropriate pulpit. While some may regard such counsel as unspiritual, Martin rightly seeks to minister to people as creatures with body and soul. Beyond the items mentioned here, the scope of the author's instruction on homiletics is fairly full and includes virtually every major topic that a preacher will need.

The only major drawback in this work is that the author does not develop the place of the doctrine of the Trinity in preaching as thoroughly as some other recent authors have done. While his treatment of preaching Christ is superb and his material on the Holy Spirit is outstanding, he does not synthesize the doctrine of the Trinity into preaching distinctly. In this regard, recent authors like Sinclair Ferguson, Joel Beeke, and John Piper usefully supplement this material.²

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=775&issue_id=149.

2 See Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers: Reflecting a Biblical Vision of What Every Minister Is Called to Be*

Volume 2 of Martin's *Pastoral Theology* is an excellent summary of some of the best Reformed instruction on preaching. It is an excellent place for new students to cut their teeth on homiletics, and it is an ideal review that will stir the hearts of even the most seasoned preachers. ©

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Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 2: Faith in the Triune God by Peter Van Mastricht

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2019¹

by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 2: Faith in the Triune God, by Peter Van Mastricht, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Michael Spangler. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019, xxx + 660 pages, \$50.00.

There has been a recent upsurge of interest in classic Reformed theology. Due to the fact that much of this material is buried in Latin texts, this translation of Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical*

(Banner of Truth, 2017); Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=788&issue_id=151.

Theology (originally published 1698–99) has a vital role to play in mediating historical Reformed thought to a modern English-speaking audience. This second volume (of seven total projected) focuses on the doctrine of God. Mastricht provides a model of mature Reformed thought on the divine essence and the Trinity, guiding us toward heart-searching application in each chapter.

This volume constitutes a rich feast of meditations on the glory of God. Pages 1–42 simultaneously complete Mastricht's *Prolegomena* and transition to his theology proper under the topic of saving faith. Pages 43–496 explore God's names and attributes. The last ninety-five pages focus on God's Trinity. Following his intellectual predecessor, William Ames (1576–1633), Mastricht taught about the nature of saving faith as a bridge between prolegomena and theology proper. This was an important move because it reminds his readers that theology is the doctrine of living to God through Christ. Saving faith is vital for the true knowledge of the true God and Christ must be the object of that faith.

The section on the divine attributes is the largest part of this volume by far. Contra the opinions of some modern authors, placing the divine attributes prior to the Trinity and devoting more space to the attributes than the Trinity is not evidence that Reformed orthodox authors, like Mastricht, marginalized the Trinity. Instead of viewing the Trinity as an appendix to the doctrine of God, it is more proper to view the Trinity as the climax of Mastricht's doctrine of God. He also interlaces the Trinity into his treatment of the divine names and attributes, frequently showing how God's self-revelation culminates in Christ. He follows the standard threefold division regarding the doctrine of God: whether God exists (foundation), what kind of God he is (names and attributes), and who he is (Trinity). Mastricht on the divine attributes leads readers into fruitful and engaging reflection and meditation upon what kind of God we worship. His division of the Trinity into four chapters, covering who God is in general as Triune, and then each divine person in turn, leads us to the height of our knowledge of God. God has

revealed himself as Triune in order to reveal his majesty in the gospel and to lead us to know and worship him. Put together, Mastricht drives us to and through saving faith in Christ to rejoice in the glory of God in the Spirit.

In addition to the general usefulness of this volume, several features stand out. Readers of volume 1 of this translated set of Mastricht will find his fourfold division familiar. Each chapter includes an exposition of a text of Scripture (exegesis), followed by a dogmatic (systematic) summary of each doctrine treated from Scripture as a whole, leading into a refutation of opposing views (elenctic theology), and concluding with application aimed at the reader's heart. These features continue to make the *Theoretical-Practical Theology* a well-rounded theological textbook, which is what attracted Jonathan Edwards and many others to it in the past.

Throughout the volume, Mastricht treats the systematic doubt of René Descartes (1596–1650), asking whether this method is proper in theology. This is important historically, in part because Cartesian philosophy became one of the primary dividing points with the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, and partly because it illustrates the ongoing relationship between theology and philosophy in historic Reformed orthodoxy.

Mastricht also provides readers with an extensive defense of divine simplicity, which teaches that God is his attributes and that he has neither parts nor passions. His treatment of this topic pervades almost every chapter on the divine attributes and spills into his treatment of the Trinity. This doctrine is hotly contested today and Mastricht provides readers with a thorough classic treatment of the subject.

In my endorsement to this multi-volume set, I stated that Mastricht had the precision of Francis Turretin and the devotion of Wilhelmus à Brakel. While this is true, the present volume illustrates ways in which we should qualify this statement. Mastricht has the precision of Turretin, but not the clarity of Turretin. He often assumes and uses, rather than defines and explains, key

theological ideas and connections. This is true, for example, in his passing glance at the controversy surrounding Calvin's teaching on the aseity of the Son. Contrary to the Western tradition, Calvin taught that eternal generation referred to the Son's person and not to his essence. Yet Mastricht neither hinted at the complexity of this debate, nor adequately developed Calvin's viewpoint (561), which most other Reformed authors did. Mastricht adopted the common Reformed approach to this subject in defending Calvin's orthodoxy while rejecting his position on eternal generation. While Calvin argued that eternal generation referred to the Son's personhood and not to his essence, Mastricht taught that the Father was the fountain of the deity and that he "communicated" the whole divine essence, including aseity, to the Son and to the Spirit (e.g., 2:530, 533–534, 546, 556). This is a complex debate that the uninitiated would not likely be aware of by reading Mastricht alone.

In addition, Mastricht shares the devotion of Brakel, but not his depth of devotion. The practical elements of doctrine in his system are edifying, but he largely expected his readers to develop them further. Readers will not find searching application to the extent that they will find it in Brakel. However, for readers who know something about Reformed orthodoxy more broadly, Mastricht will often push them beyond what they have learned elsewhere. This is especially evident in his extensive treatment of the economy of the divine persons in three separate chapters at the close of the volume. Reading Mastricht is like reading the conclusion rather than the introduction to classic Reformed dogmatics. This is not so much a weakness in his work as it is something that readers should be aware of as they read him.

This translation of Mastricht's doctrine of God should prove to be fruitful, both for church officers and for others who are interested in delving into classic Reformed texts. Much of his material assumes a broader knowledge of the theology that was common in his context. Readers who are unfamiliar with this context will still find here a rich feast for the soul, while those who are familiar with it will often stretch beyond what they have

read on these subjects elsewhere. This work confirms the fact that this is one of the best Reformed systems of doctrine ever written. Serious students of Reformed thought cannot afford to ignore it. ©

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Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship

by *Scott Aniol*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2019¹

by **Timothy P. Shafer**

Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship, by Scott Aniol. BMH Books, Winoona Lake, IN, 2009, 281 pages, \$17.99, paper.

W*orship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship*, by Dr. Scott Aniol, was first published in 2009. It is one of many books tackling the controversial subject of musical style as it relates to worship; and perhaps, because of the plethora of available books on the topic, *Worship in Song* has become somewhat lost in the crowd. But it deserves to be read. There are many excellent insights in the book, with some of the most important being those that concern the wise and biblical assessment of aesthetics in worship. It is eminently readable and characterized by its clarity of expression to laymen in not only theo-

logical, but also the poetical and musical issues necessary for the evaluation of song in corporate worship.

There are a couple of reasons for this clarity in Aniol's writing. The first is that he is a master communicator. Aniol is associate professor and chair of the Department of Worship Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a prolific author, editor-in-chief of *Artistic Theologian*, and the founder of religiousaffectionsministries.org, a website on religion, aesthetics, and culture. But more importantly, he is uniquely trained as both a theologian and a musician. With advanced degrees in both theology and music, he has expertise in these two principal disciplines that come together in the church's songbook to pierce the hearts of God's people, helping the Word to dwell richly in the believer.

Worship in Song divides into three large sections. The first, "Laying the Foundation," comprises five chapters. These chapters include the establishment of biblical principles by which his assertions and conclusions are made, the definition of biblical worship and its influence, convincing proposals for the importance of sanctification and the affections, the distinction between passions and the affections, and a brief musicological/philosophical tour of the musical characteristics of worship from the early church and its Jewish influences through postmodernism.

The second section, entitled "What Does the Music Mean?" consists of four chapters dealing with musical expression and its relationship to the emotions, definitions of beauty and glory, the sanctification of emotions, and making musical choices. In this reviewer's opinion, this section contains the meat of what the book has to offer pastors and sessions who may be responsible for choosing what is sung in corporate worship and/or substituting tunes for various hymn texts.

In the third section, "Music in Assembled Worship," Aniol highlights the need for our worship music to be oriented toward four different categories: God, doctrine, the affections, and the congregation. Also, in this section, there are chapters on making sacred musical choices, the

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=789&issue_id=151.

“styles” of biblical worship, and preparation for and participation in the worship service. The book closes with a helpful set of practical appendices.

Far from a dogmatic or legalistic approach toward making musical choices, Aniol instead encourages a wisdom approach based on biblical and aesthetic knowledge. He does this from the perspective of evaluating musical meaning and connecting it to the emotional tenor of the text to which it is attached. According to Aniol (and others, whom he cites), the emotional tone of the text is related not only to the propositional content of the text, but is steered and amplified by the various art forms that are acting upon it in a given hymn. These arts forms (i.e., poetry and music) magnify the propositional content of the text in a variety of ways. For instance, Aniol posits that the affect of the hymn begins with the poem—from the poet’s choice of specific words and poetic devices, to the poetic meter in which the words are set. He gives many interesting examples of these devices. Beginning with vocabulary, he describes how synonyms, while carrying essentially the same truth content, may carry radically different connotations. He gives as examples: *homeless individual/bum*; *boy/fellow*; *unkind individual/jerk*. Aniol states that for each of these pairs, “The terms mean the same thing propositionally, but they have different connotations. When we evaluate poetry, we cannot stop with looking only at the propositional content. We must also look at how the lyrics express that content” (82). He demonstrates this by comparing two love poems that express the same propositional content but in very different affective manners because of the vocabulary choice.

He continues this exploration by introducing the notion of how the various stress patterns of different poetic meters carry specific emotive content by virtue of how they relate to the motion of human beings when we have specific feelings (sad feelings are manifested with downward, slow motion, often smooth and soft, for example). By using familiar poetry for the examples, he clearly demonstrates how the same propositional content, expressed with different vocabulary and stress pat-

terns, can evoke an entirely different feeling about that truth content. For example, the syllabic stress pattern of a limerick introduces a rhythmic feel that is similar to skipping (long-short-long, along with strong-weak-strong); the natural correlation of this stress pattern to skipping evokes in humans a response that is inherently happy since skipping is an activity of joy. He also elaborates on the use of various phonetic intensifiers in poetry (such as the “fl__” sound communicating motion as in “flutter,” or “flee”) and their use in communicating emotion in the art (85). All of this technical material is explained and exemplified in highly readable and understandable language.

After the evaluation of some of the poetic aspects of a hymn, Aniol presents general samples (not exhaustive) of combinations of musical elements (pitch, rhythm, tempo, mode, texture, volume, etc.) and corresponding affective suggestions. Without specific musical examples, it is, of course, difficult to create a comprehensive and accurate list of such combinations, but the listing is helpful to gain an idea of the goal. Questions about the emotional tone of specific works should be directed on a case by case basis to a trained musician—one who is skilled in the art of interpreting musical scores. Nevertheless, Aniol gets the reader thinking in the right direction regarding the ability of sound to communicate intrinsically.

Anticipating the likely objections of postmoderns who would argue for an individualistic and hence relativistic approach to interpreting meaning, Aniol goes to lengths to distinguish between learned (or associative) meaning and what he calls “intrinsic” meaning. He thus makes a compelling argument for universals in emotional communication, while also allowing for individual differences because of personal associations.

Also compelling is Aniol’s chapter on beauty and glory. Here, he makes strong biblical cases for absolute and objective beauty (found in the being of our Triune God) and the Christian believer’s responsibility for seeking that beauty. He follows this with a chapter on sanctifying the emotions and another containing considerations for choosing worship music. At the end of each chapter in

the book, there are a series of thought-provoking questions for discussion for use in small-group or Sunday school format.

Aniol concludes with a strong chapter entitled, “Making Sacred Musical Choices,” in which he contrasts secular affects with those in the sacred realm, and what questions one should be asking to determine what is appropriate for congregational worship. Here, he makes many logical points directly from Scripture that are thought-provoking and that should lead to careful consideration of our choices. This is no small task given the aligned and seemingly irresistible commercial forces that are attempting to co-opt the Lord’s service on Sunday mornings. The Lord has mandated the use of these art forms in our worship of him, and this requires a knowledgeable and wise use of the forms. Scott Aniol makes an invaluable contribution to our acquisition of both.

©

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✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

Roger Williams: Peacemaking, Soul Liberty, and the Public Good

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2019¹

by Diane L. Olinger

God, War, and Providence, by James A. Warren. New York: Scribner, 2018. xiii + 287 pages, \$30.00.

Many have lauded Rhode Island founder Roger Williams as an early proponent of religious liberty. This book adds a new layer to what we know of Williams, focusing on his role as a peacemaker and as a tireless servant of the public good. *God, War, and Providence* is intended for a general audience (xiii), although its scholarly documentation and thorough bibliography will make it useful to academics as well.

Williams arrived in the New World in 1631, a Cambridge-trained dissenting minister in the Church of England, and was welcomed by New England worthies like John Winthrop and William Bradford. In addition to his reputation as a godly minister, Williams brought with him a strong grounding in English jurisprudence and political philosophy, having clerked for Sir Edward Coke, whose ideas would influence the framers of the

American Constitution (40).²

Williams soon came into conflict with the Puritan establishment of Massachusetts. The first issue was separation. Williams pushed for full separation from the Church of England, rejecting a prestigious position in the Boston church soon after his arrival on the grounds that the church had not fully separated (41). This had political implications, as well as theological; a separated church crossed the line between acceptable religious dissension and political subversion.

The second issue, the one most associated with Williams, was the role of the civil government in religious matters. In striking contrast to his fellow Englishmen, Williams believed that the civil government had no legitimate role in enforcing compliance with the First Table of the Law, those commandments dealing with man's relationship to God (52). Thus, Williams objected to the magistrate punishing religious dissension and heresy.

The third issue, the main concern of this book, was the Puritans' treatment of the Native American tribes.³ Williams described colonization as "a sin of unjust usurpation upon others' possessions" (49). To have a legitimate claim to land, settlers needed to deal with its rightful owners—the Indians, not the King of England.⁴ Williams rejected the idea that the King as a Christian ruler had a right to claim for Christ the lands of the New World. Williams saw the modern nation state as a civil, not a religious, entity; the King, therefore, was committing blasphemy when he claimed to act in Christ's name (50). Williams also rejected the application of the legal doctrine *vacuum domicilium* to Indian lands. Pursuant to this doctrine,

2 Coke's influence is detailed by John M. Barry in *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

3 In this article I will use both the terms "Native Americans" and "Indians," in addition to particular tribal names.

4 This scruple would not prevent Williams from later returning to England in the 1640s to obtain a Parliamentary patent for Rhode Island. After the English civil war and the restoration of the monarchy, Charles II granted Rhode Island a royal charter in 1663, bestowing upon its citizens a degree of religious freedom that was unheard of at the time.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=735&issue_id=143.

Indian lands were considered to be unoccupied, since their homes were not fixed nor their lands fenced. Unoccupied lands may be taken. Williams, who spent considerable time trading with the Indians even before his banishment, knew that the Indian sachems were particular about land boundaries and assigned certain lands for planting, hunting, and villages. Ignoring this because it didn't fit English preconceptions was sinful.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts by the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to rein in Williams and his destabilizing ideas, the General Court banished Williams from Massachusetts in 1635. After a fourteen-week winter trek across the New England wilderness, Williams befriended Canonicus and Miantonomi, the sachem-chiefs of the Narragansett tribal confederation, and was deeded land by them, on which he established Providence at the head of Narragansett Bay as a refuge for those “distressed of conscience.” As more settlers arrived, Providence became the capital of the colony of Rhode Island. From its start, Rhode Island had a “uniquely symbiotic relationship” with its Narragansett neighbors (248).

The focus of *God, War, and Providence* is what happened next with respect to the relationship between and among the Puritans, Williams, and the Narragansetts.

From the Pilgrims' first arrival in Plymouth in 1620 until 1650, the Puritans' relationship with the Native Americans, though not without incident, was marked by “mutual accommodation, peace, and growing prosperity for Indian and Puritan alike” (4). For the Puritans, one of the most important tasks of their Holy Commonwealth was bringing Christ and his blessings to the Indians (36). “In the Puritan mind, Christ's blessings were inextricably tied to the adoption of the institutions, ideas, and patterns of life associated with English civilization. Thus, conversion required that the Indian not only jettison his religion, but his political allegiance and his entire mode of subsistence, and take up the manners and mores of the English” (36). But, the Puritans saw few Indian conversions, and in reality invested little effort in evangelizing them (129–30). As the English population in

the New World expanded, they began to see this heathen Indian population as a security threat and as an obstacle to their growth and prosperity.

Like his fellow Puritans, Williams believed that the Indians were in spiritual darkness and needed to be converted to Christianity. But Williams, who immersed himself in Indian culture, was known for treating them as humans worthy of dignity and respect; he shared his Christian faith with them but trusted that God would open their hearts to that message in his time.⁵ Williams rejected state-sponsored missions that were inherently coercive, producing false conversions. In *A Key into the Language of America*, which was published in London in 1643, Williams shared the fruits of his study of the language, culture, and daily life of the Narragansetts (130). The book's tone is hopeful, reflecting the author's optimism for English-Indian relations and his view that “if the Narragansetts have much to learn from the English, so, too, do the English have much to learn from the Indians” (133).

During the Pequot Wars (1636–38) and King Philip's War (1675–76), Roger Williams was called upon “time and again . . . to mediate disputes between Puritans and Indians” (87). Williams did so, not only to protect the English, but also because he feared for the lives of the Narragansetts, whose sachems were his close allies and personal friends. In addition, he feared that a war between the Puritans and the Narragansetts might destroy Providence or lead to a Puritan army occupying Narragansett country, including Rhode Island (87).

Indian raids on English villages were put down brutally, with disproportionate force. For instance, after a Pequot raid that resulted in nine deaths and three captures, the Puritans retaliated by burning a village of four hundred Pequots to the ground (90).

5 In *A Key into the Language of America*, Williams wrote that he had told the biblical creation story to Narragansetts “many hundredths of times, [and] great numbers of them have heard [it] with great delight and great convictions” Warren, *God, War, and Providence*, 132, citing *Key* (1643; repr. of 5th ed., 1936, Bedford, MA; Applewood, n.d.), 131). Though Williams reported that the Indians exhibited “a profound curiosity and respect for matters of the spirit (132), there is little evidence that his exchanges with them resulted in many Christian conversions.

The Puritans justified their actions by referencing Old Testament passages in which Israel was instructed to kill their enemies, even the women and children (91). Williams denounced such reasoning, maintaining that the Massachusetts Bay Colony was not a covenant people akin to Israel, and that no nation could claim such spiritual power in politics after the coming of Christ.⁶ The Narragansetts tried to stay out of these conflicts between the Puritans and other tribes,⁷ though they were eventually drawn into King Philip's War by a preemptive strike against them by the Puritans (248). The outcome of the war was the "complete eradication of Indian political power and cultural autonomy throughout the region" (3).

In sorting through the reasons for these conflicts, Warren digs into a wealth of historical treatments of the colonial period. Warren acknowledges that some of this is guess work. When Warren enters into the realm of conjecture, he alerts the reader, "Now, let the reader beware" (79). Gaping holes in the evidence and problems sorting out exact chronology make it difficult to uncover the intentions of the participants in the conflicts between the colonists and the native tribes. The Indians didn't leave records, so we are left with the Puritans' recorded recollections of these events. Warren, like most modern historians, takes a skeptical view of their justifications of their behavior or their characterization of tribal behavior. For instance, the Puritans faulted the Pequots for not complying with treaty provisions, but, upon examination, those provisions appear unconscionable by English legal standards, let alone those of the Pequots.⁸ Warren suggests that, by making such draconian demands, the Massachusetts' leaders were simply setting up justification for land grabs. Even readers who disagree with Warren's take on

the historical record should appreciate his intellectual honesty as he deals with these disputed matters.

Harvard historian Perry Miller's 1953 work *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* established that Williams's views on religious liberty and the separation of church and state were firmly grounded in his Christianity.⁹ Warren extends this thesis to Williams's relationship with the Native Americans of the region, concluding that here too Williams's actions should be seen as driven by his Christian beliefs.

And, Roger Williams took his Christian beliefs very seriously. The only difference between a prominent Puritan clergyman like John Cotton and Roger Williams was that Williams "took these doctrines of Calvinism with such utter consistency that rather than settle for rough approximations to the kingdom of God on earth, he demanded the real thing or nothing at all."¹⁰ In other words, the Puritans' views of the church, the state, and society were not pure enough for Roger Williams. It's understandable that the Puritan establishment looked on his ideas disapprovingly and as a threat to good order in the church and the community. Indeed, Rhode Island, for which Williams served as governor as well as a spiritual leader, was a hotbed of religious schismatics and libertarians, if not libertines.

But Williams's religious eccentricity is intriguing. His view of the spirituality of the church—and non-spirituality of the state—stands in sharp contrast to the Puritans' conflating of the roles of church and state in an effort to transform their world. Convinced of the righteousness of their cause, the Puritans demanded conformity, banished those who disagreed, justified land encroachment and brutal suppression of Indian uprisings, and forced Indian "conversions." In contrast, Williams tolerated proponents of views with which

6 Miller, *Roger Williams*, 54.

7 However, the Narragansetts sometimes provided intelligence and manpower to the English pursuant to treaty commitments.

8 As retribution for the mistaken killing of an Englishman who had captured some Pequots, Massachusetts demanded the surrender of the killers but also the payment of a sum of wampum and other goods equal to about half the total property taxes levied on the whole colony in a year (81).

9 Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953). See also, Edmund Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967).

10 Miller, *Roger Williams*, 28.

he disagreed, even making a home for them and working to secure their peace, and patiently sought to befriend the Narragansetts as he trusted God to bring about their salvation in his time. Perhaps paradoxically, because Williams abjured any use of the state as a means to enforce Christian beliefs,¹¹ he was peculiarly fit to be “a tireless servant of the public good—with public being expansively defined to include the Indians” (254).

But, is a focus on the public good, like Williams’s, the same as advocacy of public religion? In a lecture delivered at Covenant College on March 3, 1998, OPC historian Charles G. Dennison described a 1991 ceremony in which the stated clerk of the PCUSA presented a Delaware Indian chief with a sacred health-guardian doll.¹² Many years before, the doll had been given to a Christian missionary by a Native American convert as an idol that conflicted with his new faith. The ceremony was part of the mainline church and U.S. government’s effort to support “Native American communities trying to reclaim their cultural heritage and religious identity.”¹³ Dennison criticized the actions of the PCUSA as those that dignified “outright paganism by commending in the

11 It’s important to remember that Roger Williams did not object to the civil magistrate enforcing the Second Table of the Law, commandments five through ten, dealing primarily with man’s relationship to man. In other words, Williams would not have raised an objection to morals legislation (no public drunkenness, no adultery). Instead, his concern was “soul liberty.” The magistrate should not use his power to control what people thought or believed. To describe him in twenty-first-century terms, Williams would have more in common with Antonin Scalia than with the Libertarian Party. See *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003) (Scalia dissenting, warns that if the court is willing to strike down anti-sodomy laws, then other legislation based on the moral disapprobation of the majority would soon fall, as well). See also the platform of the Libertarian Party, emphasizing personal freedom and opposing most morals legislation (e.g., the party opposes laws either for or against abortion), <https://www.lp.org/platform/>.

12 Charles G. Dennison, “J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis in the Reformed World,” in *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2002), 41.

13 Dennison, 42 (citing “Department of History Repatriates Delaware Doll,” *Presbyterian Heritage: The Newsletter of the Department of History*, Presbyterian Church (USA) 4:3 (Fall, 1991): 3.

name of public religion the outrageous religious beliefs, which a courageous convert abandoned at great cost.”¹⁴ How would Roger Williams have reacted to such a ceremony? He certainly had a greater respect for the Indians’ culture, and even their spirituality, than did the Puritans of his day. But, the key for him was “soul liberty” (125). If the early convert gave up the doll willingly, and not as a result of coercion or inducement, then it seems that Williams would have applauded the convert’s act of Christian faithfulness and would have recognized the PCUSA’s return of the doll, insofar as it was intended to have religious significance, as demeaning to Native Americans, as well as unbiblical.

In writing this review, I hope I have not made Roger Williams into either a proto-Orthodox Presbyterian or a modern-day civil libertarian. In fact, he was neither. He dreaded what he saw as emergent Presbyterianism among the Puritans. And, Williams and Rhode Island ultimately “treated the Indians only marginally better than the Puritan colonies” (248). But despite this, Williams’s story has implications for Christians living in a pluralistic society. Warren’s *God, War, and Providence* is a well-researched account of this important chapter in American history. ©

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14 Dennison, 43.

Recovering the Spirituality of the Church

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by Glen J. Clary

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

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church is of particular interest to Orthodox Presbyterians because it has fundamentally shaped our history and identity. In the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the 1920s and '30s, both sides had lost sight of the church's spiritual mission in pursuit of a social utopia. Machen repudiated the church's efforts to improve society (whether those efforts conformed to the ideals of modernism or fundamentalism) and called for a return to the true spiritual mission of the church.² The doctrine of the spirituality of the church is critical for a proper understanding the church's nature, province, and mission, but how exactly is that doctrine to be defined? What is its theological basis? And historically, how have American Presbyterians understood it and used (or abused!) it?

Strange explains that the doctrine of the spirituality of the church

has to do with the question of the province of the church and the nature and limits of its power—specifically, the contention that since the church is a spiritual institution, a kingdom “not of this world,” its concern and focus

should be spiritual and not civil or political.
(xix)

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

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

1. The Holy Spirit constitutes the true church—that invisible body of believers gathered across the ages and found in a variety of particular visible churches.
2. The church is a spiritual kingdom, whose power is moral and suasive—as opposed to the state, a physical kingdom whose power is legal and coercive. The state itself is not atheistic, however, and though separate from the church, and not over the church, should provide the atmosphere in which the church can thrive (Sabbath observance, Christian teaching in schools, etc.).
3. The church, over against the Roman Catholic Church or any other ritualist churches, exercises power in a fashion that is ministerial and declarative as opposed to power that is magisterial and legislative.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=742&issue_id=144.

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

4. Thus the spirituality of the church, in this sense, means that the church is the Spirit-composed communion of saints, who dwell in a variety of particular churches across the earth, who are called to a specific task, the gathering and perfecting of the saints. It is to that task and not mere ritualism ecclesiastically or politics civilly that this true church is called (173–74).

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

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

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

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

respect due to man as man. (80)

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

The obsession — which Hodge shared in common with many other Presbyterians including Thornwell — “to maintain the bond of union between North and South at almost any price” unfortunately shaped and guided the actions of the American Presbyterian Church far more than it should have. In one of the most insightful sections of the book, Strange identifies the underlying cause of this quest to maintain the nation’s union “at almost any price.”

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

This commitment to the American experiment, though cast in spiritual terms was a political commitment, and abolitionism in particular threatened the continuation of the holy “errand into the wilderness” that Hodge and others saw the American nation to be. Hence, even if slavery was undesirable, as Hodge thought it was, and thus he advocated gradual emancipation, slavery was not horrible enough to warrant its abolition, certainly not at the price of the dissolution of the nation. Thus for Hodge, Thornwell, and most Presbyterians, Old and New School, the survival of the nation transcended all other concerns and was itself conceived as not merely a political

conviction but rose to the level of a spiritual truism since the continued existence of the nation was the precondition of the continued existence and thriving of the American Presbyterian Church, at least as Hodge and company assumed at the time. All the parties to this were so enmeshed in their political commitments to the U.S. Constitution and the American nation that such was sacrosanct and beyond dispute. For Hodge and his fellows, nothing rose to the moral level of supporting the survival of the nation. The continuation of the Union became paramount to every other consideration.

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

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

of world-wide blessing” (338).

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

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

3:3). Christ's resurrection power at work in the church in this age consists in the fellowship of his sufferings and conformity to his death (Phil. 3:10).³

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

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The Unpardonable Sin?

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism, by Jemar Tisby. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019, 253 pages, \$21.99.

Details from Presbyterian church history about race relations in the United States are not pretty. Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, for instance, saw members and officers leave when Mariano Di Gangi, predecessor to James Montgomery Boice, preached about racial prejudice, opened the church and session to African Americans, and served on the mayor's commission on civil rights. At the time, Tenth Church was still part of the Presbyterian Church USA and did not join the Presbyterian Church in America until 1982; but that denomination had hurdles of its own to overcome. Sean Michael Lucas's history of the PCA's founding, *For a Continuing Church* (2015), includes stories of Southern Presbyterian conservatives who defended racial segregation on biblical grounds and sought ways to guard the church from important figures regarded as having erroneous understandings of racial equality.

The OPC herself debated the merits of civil rights during the 1960s in the pages of *The Presbyterian Guardian* that showed opposition to political reforms designed to end segregation. A black pastor in the church, Herbert Oliver, wrote an article about the positive contribution the Christian church had made to social reforms in the past and that supporting Civil Rights for African-Americans was another instance when Christians could be instruments of social change. Letters to the editor indicated that Oliver had failed to persuade some Orthodox Presbyterians. E. J. Young, for instance,

³ Lane G. Tipton, "Machen on the True Christian Religion" (unpublished paper, 24 November 2018).

⁴ https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=754&issue_id=146.

wrote a letter to the editors in which he objected to both a view of egalitarianism that was clearly unbiblical and an understanding of the church's role in society that failed to highlight the ministry of the gospel. If these instances seem inconsequential, perhaps J. Gresham Machen's 1913 letter to his mother, strongly objecting to the integration of Princeton Seminary, will show how much ideas of white supremacy afflicted conservative Presbyterians who contemporary Orthodox Presbyterians esteem. If a black man were to take up residence in Alexander Hall, Machen wrote, he would consider moving out, which would have been "a great sacrifice to me."

Jemar Tisby's book, *The Color of Compromise*, purports to narrate the story of white American Protestantism's "complicity in racism," as the book's subtitle puts it. Indeed, the subtitle also indicates that this will be "the truth," an assertion that suggests most of the book's intended audience do not know about the church's history of either supporting or turning a blind eye to instances of institutional forms of racism. And yet, stories like those of Mariano Di Gangi at Tenth Presbyterian, or the PCA, or Herbert Oliver and Machen do not surface in Tisby's survey of American church history. What Tisby does cover is chiefly political developments in the United States that demonstrate the nation's and white leaders' assumptions about racial hierarchy. From the arrival of African slaves in colonial America, defenses of slavery in the new nation that produced the sectional conflict that led to civil war, the institution of Jim Crow after the Civil War, additional mechanisms of segregation in twentieth-century America, and opposition to the Civil Rights movement, to the Religious Right's indifference or hostility to African-Americans, Tisby's book guides readers through the racial portion of American political and social history. The narrative concludes with the emergence of Black Lives Matter and the 2016 presidential election. He quotes one scholar who opined that the election of Donald Trump was "the single most harmful event" during the last thirty years of racial reconciliation (189).

As Tisby plows through well-trod ground of

American history, his examples of the church's actual complicity in racism—aside from standing by in a segregated society—are harder to come by. In some cases, the instances of racism are personal where individual blacks experienced assaults or opposition from local Christians (unidentified) or when Christian colleges either barred African-Americans from enrollment or prohibited them from living on campus. Even so, for all of Tisby's insistence that the track record of church complicity in racism is long and extensive, his evidence is anecdotal. He fails to explore the institutional mechanisms of specific communions, their policies on church membership and ordination, or arguments in defense of segregation. Not even the Southern Baptist Convention's determination to break with northern Baptists in 1845 over slavery receives any more notice than a paragraph.

This makes all the odder Tisby's decision to single out Billy Graham for examples of complicity with racism. To be sure, the most famous Evangelical of all time had a checkered history. Graham's ties to presidents (especially Richard Nixon) showed that he was not as politically astute as he could have been. At the same time, Graham regularly receives credit for integrating his revivals well before other leaders of Evangelicalism. Mark A. Noll writes, for instance, that Graham showed "how attractive a nonracist form of affective southern evangelicalism could be."⁵ That does not mean that Graham was guiltless or confronted moral dilemmas that prevented him from taking a consistent stand against segregation. Tisby points to Graham's church membership at W. A. Criswell's First Baptist Church in Dallas; Criswell was an outspoken opponent of desegregation. Additional evidence of Graham's compromise was his association with Nixon, who appealed to Evangelicals with a "racially loaded stance on law-and-order politics" (156). Overall, Graham displayed a commitment to preaching and an "assiduous" avoidance of any "countercultural stances that would have alienated his largely white audience and his

5 Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 157.

supporters” (135).

That assessment of Graham is indicative of Tisby’s standard for evaluating American Christians and their churches. Early in the book, he argues that the question is not simply one of excluding blacks from membership in churches (church history) or implementing poll taxes to prevent blacks from voting (political history); it is a question of inaction. “The refusal to act in the midst of injustice,” Tisby asserts, “is itself an act of injustice.” “Indifference to oppression perpetuates oppression” (15). This becomes the standard by which Tisby (and many other activists) lump together figures who belong to white supremacist organizations with ordinary white suburban Americans who only follow the campaigns and policies of the Democratic and Republican parties. Ignorance or passivity qualify as racism because they perpetuate an unjust system.

One problem with this approach to the church’s complicity with racism is that the actual instances of ecclesiastical rejections of past failings come across in Tisby’s book as too little, too late. In his last chapter of historical narrative (before a section of recommendations) the author recognizes that both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church in America have passed resolutions that acknowledge each communion’s racist past and that call for reconciliation with African-Americans in the church and society. These attempts at repentance and repudiations of racial prejudice give Tisby room to write that “[p]lenty of white evangelicals have promoted reconciliation and have attempted to address the racism that has defined large portions of the American church” (190). That seems like a balanced assessment of recent developments. But Tisby follows with a collection of new instances of racism. It now looks “different.” Today’s instances of racism include saying “all lives matter” to someone who says, “black lives matter,” supporting a president “whose racism has been on display for decades,” telling black Christians they are “divisive” when they mention topics related to race, and talking about personal relations instead of systemic racism (191). Tisby should be complimented for such

candor—that racism is a fluid category that can be applied to a wide variety of words and actions. But he does not seem to be as candid about the fact that such a fluid definition hardly establishes categories for reconciliation and repentance.

Indeed, the fluidity of categories hovers over Tisby’s book and accounts for apparent contradictions in his narrative and judgments. For instance, he argues that the Civil War was chiefly the result of slavery (not preserving the Union), and that Confederate soldiers “were willing to risk their lives to protect” the evil institution (72). What Tisby fails to allow, by this logic, is that the 360,000 Union soldiers who died (almost 100,000 more than the South) were willing to give up their lives to abolish slavery. That sacrifice of life might complicate charges of deep and abiding white supremacy. A similar error of judgment clouds Tisby’s recommendation that the United States make Juneteenth a national holiday. June nineteenth is a day that signifies for some the significance of the 1865 emancipation of the last remaining slaves in Texas but also points back to the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1, 1863), which made such freedom possible. Tisby writes that such a holiday would “commemorate one of the most important historical events in U.S. history.” Abraham Lincoln’s proclamation “opened the way for further legislation designed to grant black people their civil and human rights” (207). That is one perspective on the importance of legislation. Yet, Tisby also argues that “racism never fully goes away.” It always changes and adapts. So, “you cannot erase four hundred years of race-based oppression by passing a few laws.” Those lines follow Tisby’s discussion of the Civil Rights Act (1964). This invites the question: if the legislation for which Martin Luther King Jr. labored could not erase the legacy of racism, why should the nation commemorate legislation that ended slavery and opened the way for civil rights for African-Americans?

In the end, Tisby puts between two covers the substance of arguments that pervade some of the perspectives from Reformed and Evangelical Protestants who comment on systemic injustice and racism on Twitter, the blogosphere, and in

podcasts. For those wanting a portal into those arguments and outlooks, *The Color of Compromise* is a valuable resource. At the same time, his recommendations for “effective remedies”—awareness of racism and interaction across racial lines, reparations, learning from the black church, creating a seminary for future black pastors, field trips to important historical sites—look overwhelmingly ineffective. If laws to end slavery and Jim Crow only create new conditions for racism to adapt and persist, why should readers of Tisby’s book think any redress of racial injustice could ever be satisfactory? ©

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Ecclesiastes: Musings of an Unfaithful Solomon?

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by **Meredith M. Kline**

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

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

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

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=767&issue_id=148.

in the epilogue (12:9–14).

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

Even Reformed interpreters vary on whether they understand Qohelet as cynical or realistic about the success of labor, resigned or thankful in enjoying life's benefits, and fearful or reverent in relating to God, as well as whether or not they think Qohelet believes in an afterlife with a divine judgment, or whether an editor (if one is posited) differs or agrees with Qohelet. Belcher argues that Qohelet represents Solomon when he was unfaithful to his covenant Lord, and Ecclesiastes contains his negative ideas during that period. Thus, in Ecclesiastes Solomon denies the existence of an afterlife with a final judgment, so death means earthly labor is ultimately useless and wisdom is frustratingly limited; any joy should be accepted with resignation; a dreaded, unpredictable deity should be related to cautiously; and an editor corrects Solomon by appending an admonition to obey God.

Translations

Thus, Belcher chooses to translate *hebel* (הֶבֶל) as “senseless” rather than “transient,” or “enigmatic,” or “futile,” or “vanity.” He also translates *we'et umishpat* (וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט) in 8:5–6 as “proper time and right action” rather than “judgment time.” Belcher's interpretative perspective is also evident in how he understands the use of “fear

God” in Ecclesiastes. When the orthodox ending of the book uses the phrase (12:13), it refers to the traditional OT wisdom view found in Proverbs, but when Qohelet uses the same phrase and emphatic syntax in 5:6 [Hebrew v.7], it refers to dread of a deistic despot rather than to reverential awe of God. In 3:9–14 one fears God because of the immense distance between humans and an inscrutable deity.

Interpretations

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

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

and delight in common blessing, based on the already inauguration of Christ's heavenly kingdom, which guarantees the existence of righteous and wise humans.

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

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

On 2:24–26, where Qohelet first introduces the concept of enjoyment in cultural endeavors, Belcher perceives a resigned acceptance of random, unpredictable benefit that one cannot

integrate with a Christian perspective of laboring with success to the glory of God. Rather, we should understand these verses to indicate that God gives the burden (or “business”) to all sinful humans of leaving the fruit of their efforts to others at death, yet gives some the wisdom to appropriately appreciate any divine benefits they enjoy.

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

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

Structures

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

But the last word is not the final word when

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

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

Preaching

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

Do Qohelet’s statements that labor is vanity or useless indicate a view that is to be avoided in favor of work being purposeful and God glorifying? Or does Qohelet’s perspective refer to the common curse where death means that the cultural man-

date of producing ever-living members of a human family is undermined, so that even though through God’s common blessing work can produce relative success, nevertheless, it does not eventuate in the glorification of the human race but in the earthly death of every human?

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

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

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

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

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

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

in order to arrive at an appropriate expository sermon. ©

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Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters, by D. G. Hart

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by **Richard M. Gamble**

Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters, by D. G. Hart. *Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage*, 2018, xiii + 207 pages, \$18.00.

Scores of local churches and evangelical colleges face the challenge of Roman Catholicism today in ways for which they may not be prepared. Catholic theology, liturgy, aesthetics, and in some parishes a tight-knit community prove attractive to more members of our congregations than we might expect, especially our young people.

In the case of college students, their conversion to Rome typically starts with friendship. As a courtesy, they accompany a roommate or classmate to Mass, usually with the promise of a return visit to their own Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Methodist church. Surprised in some cases by a kind of earnest Catholicism they didn't know existed, they become curious. They start reading. They get into disorienting debates over justification, sanctification, the sacraments, tradition, and beauty. They might find the Roman Church's pro-life activism and emphasis on marriage and the family compelling. They might sense the alienation of modernity, resent the damage done by divorce to their childhoods, feel awash in a culture of radical individualism and global capitalism, have grown tired of megachurch innovations, seek certainty and authority in a whirl of competing truth claims, and long to be connected to the grand narrative of Western civilization. All of this the Catholic Church seems to provide in abundance, especially in those parishes where these

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=767&issue_id=148.

emphases set the tone, however rare such parishes may be. Ultimately, seekers buy into the plausibilities offered by Rome, while their circle of Catholic friends and mentors—often converts themselves—pressure them to convert. Despite Pope Francis’s liberalism, alarms over heresy, and pedophilia in parish after parish, Protestant converts believe they are coming home. Some even enter the priesthood or convent.

Are Protestants just being cranky and obscurantist if they resist these conversions? Is the Reformers’ dissent from Rome five hundred years ago still relevant? Is the Catholic Church the same institution that Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli denounced and from which they were severed in the sixteenth century? If so, then the old Protestant cause is one still worth fighting for. Here we stand. We can do no other.

These are the kinds of questions Darryl Hart tackles in *Still Protesting*—a two-word title that states a thesis. Hart, a professor of history at Hillsdale College and a ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, has good friends and colleague who are devout Catholics and has witnessed Rome’s attraction for students, including those in the OPC. Much of this book grows out of personal experience. It is not abstract. He has seen the heartbreak that families, pastors, elders, and congregants have endured. For many of us, this is a pressing concern, and he addresses it with his wide knowledge of the Reformation, especially historic Calvinism, a sympathy for converts, and a fair-minded assessment of what Catholicism teaches and practices. Caricature has no place in a sober response to Rome.

At its core, the Protestant Reformation still matters since “salvation, worship, and the institutional church still matter” (xiii). To prove this thesis, Hart divides his task into two parts: the first five chapters are meant to refresh our memories about the Reformation; the second five chapters refute Rome’s claims about the consequences of Protestantism. Hart concludes with reflections on sainthood, contrasting Catholicism with the testimony of the Bible. On the eve of John Henry Newman’s scheduled beatification in October

2019, this chapter is an especially timely reminder of just what it means for all believers to be saints. Above all, Hart’s hope is “to make the objections to Rome not political or cultural but religious and theological” (14).

To that end, Hart goes right back to Luther and other early Reformers. Much of Hart’s overview will be familiar ground to students of history and hopefully to officers in the OPC. These chapters lay out the context for understanding the debate that still divides Rome from Protestantism, especially from confessional churches that know who they are and what they believe. Hart rightly emphasizes the recovery of sola scriptura, the purity of the gospel (justification by faith alone), the dubious claims of papal authority, and the priesthood of all believers.

One of the most powerful narratives being promoted today is that Protestantism is the source of everything we hate about modernity. Protestants themselves bear much of the responsibility for promulgating this story, at least a certain brand of progressive Christianity does. It was common at one time, especially in America, for cultural Protestants to boast that the Reformers were to be thanked for the manifold blessings of individualism, the market economy, civil and religious liberty, and the absolute sovereignty of private judgment. These Protestants celebrated American civilization and gradually secularized the Reformation into an achievement for political, social, economic, and broadly cultural ends. It was a happy story of how the arc of history led to themselves and their own moment in time. They abandoned theological precision and fidelity to confessions of faith in the name of advancing American greatness and the nation’s mission to the world.

Once people began to doubt the virtues of modernity, however, it was easy to blame Protestants for the very things that they had been boasting about as their contribution to civilization. A number of recent Catholic historians and apologists have accepted the Protestant Whiggish version of history as true, and have set out to deconstruct it, offering Catholicism as the antidote to the poisons of modernity. The truth, as always, is more com-

plicated. Rather than investigating what modernity did to Protestantism and Catholicism alike, they blame modernism on Protestantism. What gets missed in these pronouncements from the bench is the fact that Protestantism itself underwent a revolution, beginning at least in the nineteenth century, that ultimately turned it into another religion altogether, having little to do with the Reformation. Hart highlights J. Gresham Machen's compelling argument in *Christianity and Liberalism* that modernity in the shape of theological liberalism had created nothing less than a new religion disconnected from the Bible and everything for which the Reformers stood. This new religion has a different God, a different Christ, a different soteriology, and a different eschatology.

Hart argues that Rome has been a theological and ecclesiological innovator for centuries, culminating, for the time being at least, with Vatican II's liberalization of the church. The history of Catholicism is not a seamless, organic story of remarkable continuity and harmony topped off with a happy ending. Indeed, the history of the Council of Trent alone shows a church deeply divided against itself and wrapped up with political intrigue. "History is not reassuring or comfortable," Hart warns. "If anything, history makes claims to certainty and authority look profoundly contested" (111). That note of skepticism ought to chasten American Protestants as well. Admirably, Hart shows what Roman Catholicism did to apostolic Christianity rather than providing an ark for its preservation. The division between the Reformers and their adversaries in Rome cannot be reduced to an unfortunate misunderstanding. To do so does an injustice to all who have contended for the faith and trivializes what is at stake.

What is to be done? Firm in their adherence to Scripture and true to their convictions, congregations need to remain grounded in the hope of the gospel. Parents need to catechize their children, cultivate lifelong habits of faithful church attendance, and show by their own lives that the local church is the center of their ongoing spiritual formation. Elders and deacons need to care for each member, including and perhaps especially

the children under their charge. They need to build relationships with young people, making the church a home and hospital, a place that nurtures their faith and affections. Pastors need to be willing to bear the burden of repeated, time-consuming conversations with young people, showing love and patience as they raise the same questions again and again. Pastors and elders need to be well versed in the history and doctrines of the Reformation, and know more than a little about the Council of Trent and about claims concerning the Virgin Mary and the intercession of saints. They need to teach the biblical and confessional doctrines of human depravity, election, grace and nature, the atonement, good works, and perseverance. Our Reformed churches also need to understand the beauty and simplicity of their own worship in Word and sacrament. As the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.6) eloquently says of the sacraments, "though fewer in number [than Rome's], and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory . . . [the gospel] is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles."

Still Protesting is a helpful and timely resource to equip the church of Jesus Christ to defend the faith. The stakes are ultimate and the significance eternal.

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A Way Out and a Way To: Intertextuality and the Exodus Motif

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by Meredith M. Kline

Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif, by Bryan D. Estelle. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018, xiv + 392 pages, \$40.00, paper.

The alliterative title of this book is ambiguous. In *Echoes of Exodus* the word “exodus” refers primarily to the deliverance of God’s people from bondage in Egypt plus their journey towards the Promised Land, and only secondarily to the second book of the Pentateuch. The journey from the Nile to the Jordan is treated as a complex literary configuration whose components reoccur throughout Scripture, resulting in repeated evocations of the whole pattern in a manner that helps readers appreciate the unity of the Bible. Academics can profit from this massive project because myriad footnotes document the many monographs that the extensive research is based on; pastors can benefit from the helpful introduction to the topic of intertextuality (or inner-biblical exegesis) along with the discussion of a wealth of biblical materials; and congregational members will increase their knowledge of Scripture because the book is very readable with translations of biblical texts included, while Hebrew and Greek are presented only in transliteration in parentheses. (Typos and word duplications exist in the book, but most interrupting are some omissions that obscure the sense of a sentence.) One of Estelle’s goals is to increase the reader’s “allusion competence.” Academics and pastors can attempt to accomplish

this by striving for a rabbinic-like immersion in biblical languages and texts, while with lay readers they can strive for an intimate familiarity with the Bible in translation. Because the book’s primary intended audience is the academic guild, one of Estelle’s goals is to demonstrate the fruitfulness of typology. Since readers of *Ordained Servant* already employ this method, they can, thus, profit from the many thematic correlations presented in the book, which reinforce responsible use of the method. *Echoes of Exodus* also occasionally mentions issues of concern within *Ordained Servant* circles, but illumination of the issues requires pursuit of materials relegated to footnotes.

Bryan Estelle, professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary in California, is an accomplished mountain climber. In *Echoes of Exodus* he follows themes associated with the exodus motif throughout the biblical landscape, aware of the underlying covenantal and redemptive geological structure, as he reports on expeditions that include ascents of various versions of God’s holy mountain.

After an introduction that maps the territory the book will cover, the author lays out a methodological base camp from which his ascent will commence by clarifying definitions associated with intertextuality. This is important because current scholarly practice of the method is often imprecise, and its results limited or misleading. (Estelle includes an appendix with a more technical discussion of how contemporary secular literary theory influences practitioners of biblical intertextuality.) Then the author begins with creation in Genesis and explores the trails of the exodus motif in ten chapters, traversing in the Old Testament the books of Genesis, Exodus, the Psalms, Isaiah, and later prophets, then progressing in the New Testament through the synoptic Gospels, Paul’s writings, and 1 Peter, while culminating in Revelation. A conclusion discusses implications of the exodus motif for biblical theology. The book also contains a bibliography along with author, subject, and Scripture indexes.

The last thirty years have produced mountains of scholarship on intertextuality. Estelle’s

2 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=781&issue_id=150.

book reflects an impressive scholarly effort of traversing an immense range of academic hills, including N. T. Wright's formidable Everest of written/published works, in order to map the exodus motif as part of the terrain of Scripture. While previous works primarily concentrated on limited portions of biblical literature, Estelle attempts the daunting task of following the trails of exodus themes through the whole Bible. The author interacts with previous monographs that described local peaks of the scriptural range while he graphs the biblical trajectories of deliverances through ordeal waters from Egypt, Satan, and sin; of wanderings through the wildernesses of Sinai and the world; and of ascents up the Horeb, Jerusalem, and Zion mountains. Estelle's contribution is to indicate the direction changes taken by the exodus motif mountain ranges as one proceeds over the topography of the biblical landscape.

Since there are textual allusions to the creation in the Pentateuchal accounts of the deliverance of Abraham's descendants from Egypt and their journey to the Jordan, those events can be pictured as a re-creation. So, Estelle appropriately begins his investigation of the biblical text by covering aspects of the creation account which will be echoed in subsequent chapters, such as the deep waters the Spirit constructs into a divine temple, the Edenic mountain where Adam enjoys the divine presence, and the projected Sabbath goal of the Adamic covenantal tasks.

Estelle then defines the exodus motif as comprising four major themes: a cosmological battle, the worship of the divine presence at the cosmic mountain, the wilderness wanderings, and the Promised Land. Each theme contains a number of topics and subsequent chapters reveal how biblical authors select particular topics from the exodus motif for their own purposes.

The author next turns to selected Psalms that highlight the divine warrior who conquered his people's enemies, depicted as chaotic waters. But the Psalms also comment on the contemporary state of the covenant community by comparing them to the disobedient wilderness-wandering generation. The chapters on the prophets (plus

Ezra-Nehemiah) reflect exilic realities with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel projecting a new exodus from Babylon with intimations of a coming new kingdom associated with a messianic king, a new way through the desert, and a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of his descendants being a blessing to the nations.

Chapters on the synoptic Gospels take the exodus motif in an eschatological direction, treat Jesus as the new exodus, and focus on the identity of true Israel. The Pauline materials utilize exodus themes to warn church members about disobedience (1 Cor. 10) and to exhort them to journey with the Spirit who makes believers adopted siblings of Christ, heirs entitled to the world to come (Gal. 4–6, Rom. 8). Since the exodus motif is pervasive in Paul, new topics such as sonship, adoption, inheritance, suffering, and light are introduced into the discussion. The church as a new royal priesthood in 1 Peter reflects how Israel should have functioned, while Revelation echoes themes like the divine warrior defeating the adversarial dragon in order to deliver the Lord's suffering pilgrims.

Echoes of Exodus is replete with examples of biblical allusions and typology. Estelle's practice of inner-biblical exegesis recognizes links between texts, evokes a larger context from texts alluded to, and reminds readers of a whole complex motif. When 1 Peter and the Apocalypse collocate "kingdom" and "priests," thus alluding to Exodus 19:6, Estelle notes the correlation and elaborates the significance of the textual echo for the history of redemption: an attribute of Israel is applied to the church (302). Even though textual variants in the wording of the allusion are discussed, this is a small-scale project. While typology may be a natural extension of noticing literary links between texts, identifying the connections between persons or situations is a larger-scale process involving more subjectivity on the interpreter's part. Though one of Estelle's goals is to revive typological exegesis, humans are inveterate pattern-seekers, so interpreters have slipped into allegory in the past; therefore, he also includes a section on typology in the chapter about the intertextual method and

provides examples of types throughout the book. What might make Moses a new Adam? Mountaineer Estelle is attracted to the facts that Adam, Moses, and Christ are ascenders and descenders of the mountains of God: Eden, Sinai, and Zion (101)!

Estelle's exodus motif project, however, is humongous in scale. His definition of the exodus motif is a complex, hierarchical configuration of motif, themes, and topics. If the exodus motif is correlated with the Genesis 1–2 account, which describes the “week” of divine activity that is a pattern for the totality of history from creation to consummation, any biblical text might allude to the motif; the context of any echo could become all of Scripture and history; the project approaches the scope of a whole biblical theology. Estelle's organization of tracing the exodus motif sequentially through the Bible was naturally suggested by the numerous volumes previously published on the exodus motif, even if defined in various ways. This approach does demonstrate how concepts associated with the exodus evolved during the progress of redemptive revelation. Estelle's covenant theology is implicit in providing explanations for the varying biblical uses of particular topics. Since the biblical books are means of God administering his covenant community, changes in the nature and state of the covenant community, such as Israelite kings defying their covenant suzerain or the covenant community changing from a theocracy to a church, clearly reveal the significance of the changing functions of the exodus motif in the Bible.

The complexity of the exodus motif, however, means only some of its topics occur in any biblical text and discussion of one topic may be scattered over several of Estelle's chapters, so a unified understanding of a topic may not result. Some topics, like the Feast of Booths, one of the means God designed for Israel to remember the exodus, are mentioned early on in Estelle's account but not picked up subsequently. Initially, the Passover is not mentioned as a topic under his first theme, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt in terms of a cosmological battle, but subsequently in the

discussion of 1 Peter it is employed as a relevant aspect of the exodus motif. For a pastoral audience, an alternative volume, perhaps, could be produced that delineated the themes and topics but then traced them individually through Scripture.

How should the exodus motif be defined? What themes and topics should it include? This is important since the motif is a large-scale feature of the biblical narrative. Previous investigators have proposed a variety of reverberations of this complex motif. That poses a challenge when one attempts to synthesize the results of previous scholarship or to creatively reconfigure the motif. Properly patterning the richly complex biblical models of salvation and tracking their modulations through Scripture is a monumental challenge. Estelle provides lots of data to stimulate refined mappings of the biblical topography.

Comparison with the creation narrative and prophetic portrayal of a new exodus as a return to the promised land, a type of God's day-seven rest, indicates it is appropriate to extend the exodus journey from Egypt to Canaan. Since that decision involves including a wealth of material from the Pentateuch, disagreements about what to include in the motif are inevitable. For example, why is the topic of God's presence associated only with the Sinai episode? God was also present for Israel while combating the gods of Egypt and protecting the Israelites who were covered by the blood of the sacrificial lambs; plus he was present in the cloudy and fiery pillar at the Red Sea crossing; he guided Israel through the wilderness; and he dwelt in the tabernacle. Why, in the discussion of Estelle's third theme, the wilderness wanderings, are the pre-Sinai and post-Sinai wilderness episodes not distinguished? Despite the grumbling of Israel on the trip to Sinai, the Lord's provision of water and food as blessings establishes an Edenic environment for the mountain experience. In contrast, the wilderness wanderings between Sinai and the Promised Land are a cemetery-curse for a rebellious people afraid to engage in holy warfare. Also, should the Sinai wilderness wanderings, even if transformed by Isaiah's variation on them

as a way through the desert, serve as the paradigm for use of “The Way” in Acts as a designation for the early Christian community as a sect within Judaism? Better is to understand “The Way” as a reference to Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life; he is the one pictured by the symbol of divinity traversing the way through the split carcasses at the ratification of the covenant of grace with Abraham or the one who passes through the flaming-sword crucifixion on the way back to the garden-mountain of God and the presence of the Father. If attaining the Promised Land, Estelle’s fourth theme, is part of the exodus motif, why is the second water crossing ordeal at the Jordan not included in the motif? Or, similarly, if the land of Canaan is part of the motif, why is the second dragon combat, the conquest, not a component of the motif?

In Estelle’s second theme, the worship of God at a cosmic mountain (Sinai), the topic of making a covenant is submerged, even though it surfaces when discussing the book of Exodus as a genre model for the gospels. Covenants are ratified at Sinai with the generation that came out of Egypt and in the steppes of Moab at the banks of the Jordan with the second generation, as recorded in Deuteronomy. Including covenant ratification in the exodus motif would, of course, involve a totally different kind of book. The covenant topic, however, would be a crucial element for Estelle’s secondary interest in elucidating the current controversy over forensic and participationist versions of justification. While his suggestion that the dragon-combat topic should be considered as a forensic component in the justification discussion is helpful, the topic would have to be appropriately included in an analysis of the covenant of redemption in order to resolve the current impasse.

While participating in the *Echoes of Exodus* mountaineering expedition is an arduous endeavor, the experience should support the conviction of readers of *Ordained Servant* that properly practiced typology is helpful for redemptive-historical preaching, should encourage them that the complexity of the biblical narrative and covenant history, nevertheless, strengthens belief in the

unity of the Bible, and should stimulate them to continue to pursue ways of making the gospel message clear. ©

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A Remarkable Season of Change

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

How the Internet Happened: From Netscape to the iPhone, by Brian McCullough. New York: Liveright, 2018, 372 pages, \$28.95.

The technological change over the past three decades is nothing short of phenomenal, in fact, it is a phenomenon like no other. Over the years of lecturing on this topic many people have asserted that this change is no different from other historical changes initiated by inventions such as

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=782&issue_id=150.

the printing press and the telephone. However, Canadian scholar Arthur Boers observes that modern technological change is unique in five ways.² 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.³ Wendell Berry contends that the Bible is an “outdoor book.”⁴ 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: *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape*.⁵

How the Internet Happened is a fascinating narrative that carefully documents the dramatic change in the American social structure and economy generated by computing as it is con-

2 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).

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

4 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>.

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

nected with the Internet. No technology in history has had such a sudden and pervasive impact on culture. The book acquaints us with the actual history that is the backdrop to the dramatic TV series “Halt and Catch Fire.” While this history is largely descriptive, its detailed coverage of the Internet’s development and effects is of considerable assistance in the formation of a critical assessment.

McCullough begins by stating that

The Internet is *the* reason that computers actually became useful for the average person. . . . that is what this book is about: how the web and the Internet allowed computers to infiltrate our everyday lives. . . . It is about how we allowed these technologies into our lives, and how these technologies changed us.” (3)

There are many interesting factual surprises throughout the narrative, like learning that the “i” in Apple products is not the tribute to the individual that I always thought it was, but rather refers to the Internet, since prior to the iMac, Apple was a losing player on the Internet. But the “innovative and beautifully crafted computers” (208–9) designed by Jonathan Ives were part of the Steve Jobs’s overhaul of Apple that saved the company at the turn of the century.

The linking of computers took place in the highly technical world of the U.S. government and academic research in 1969. The earliest computers were built at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1951. The ARPANET linked four academic nodes together to become the grandfather of the present Internetwork. By 1990, the World Wide Web democratized the Internet by providing the graphic user interface (GUI) and connecting households. Computers were enabled to search sites through the first search engine, Gopher (3–4). In 1995 Netscape, a simpler means of navigating the Net, “was the big bang that started the Internet Era” (8). Prior to Netscape the search engine Mosaic transformed “the Internet into a workable web . . . instead of an intimidating domain of nerds” (16). Between the launches of Mosaic and its morphing into Netscape, the number of websites expanded from hundreds to

tens of thousands (14). McCullough reminds us of the vastness of the change that has taken place since then, commenting: “Today, the phone in your pocket is more powerful than every computer involved in the moon landing” (8).

Along the way, McCullough goes into great detail to describe the various inventors and investors who made the modern Internet a reality. Coding geniuses were cranking out new web products on Netscape in a single day and finding “hundreds and thousands of users the next” (31). One of the main themes of the history is the millions of dollars that were suddenly being made by web companies. Beginning in 1995, the dot-com era ushered in a host of overnight millionaires the like of which Wall Street had never seen (35). The competitive drama became intense, as seen in the opening sentence of chapter 2 (“Bill Gates ‘Gets’ the Internet”), which asserts, “Netscape was right to fear Microsoft” (38). Microsoft’s software and operating system (Windows 95) connected to the web through Internet Explorer proved an unbeatable combination. The goal was to make the web as mainstream as TV. The information superhighway was becoming a reality. The web by contrast with TV allowed users to consume, but also create content. Now, because Microsoft bundled Internet Explorer with every Windows machine, Netscape was outmaneuvered and soon to become extinct (38–51). Demonstrating how ruthless the competition could be, Microsoft threatened legal action when Compaq replaced Internet Explorer with Navigator on some of its models (52).

McCullough continues his narrative with a history of the development of early online services such as America Online (AOL). The discovery that people wanted to interact with each other, especially in sharing special interests, proved revolutionary, as chat rooms and electronic mail became popular (55). The advent of actual pictures on AOL in the nineties reminds us of how rapidly electronic communication developed. Meanwhile, millions were paying monthly fees for Internet access.

In chapter 4, McCullough explores big media’s discovery and use of the web. The main

challenge was how to make money by providing online content (75). Print media like *Wired* and *Rolling Stone*, embraced the web as the means to technological utopia (75–6). Advertising, a centuries old business model, has proven to be largely the way online content is paid for (79). This in turn brings another major theme of Internet history to the fore: attention. Much of the web and its software are designed to capture and keep our attention (81). Chapter 6 explores the development of e-commerce. Physical reality kicks in. Jeff Bezos started with books. His idea was to become a profitable intermediary through the computer network between buyers and sellers of goods (95). Amazon soon became one of the largest companies in the world.

Chapter 5 deals with the importance of search engines. What we take for granted was not obvious or easy to invent. Google has become a verb due to its dominating search power. It opens up the world to us, but not in a neutral way, as we shall see. Notice that the ads that come with most applications can only be eliminated for a fee; it’s almost all about commerce. But what is remarkable about the ethos of this new reality is the combination of what McCullough observes: “Silicon Valley has always been equal parts egghead libertarianism and acid-tinged hippie romanticism” (108). Access to the proper means of liberation will set us all free as the *Whole Earth Catalog* promised to my generation of the counterculture. The Internet search engine simply enhanced this possibility exponentially (122). The irony is that even what appears to be free content contradicts the basic tenet of the romantic because free web services “make their money by whoring out our personal information to marketers and advertisers” (130). I have warned people for decades that one of the hidden dangers of social networks is that they make people surreptitiously participate in the largest focus group in history.

Fred Turner, author of *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, summed up the philosophy of Stewart Brand, the editor of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, who

“suggested that computers might become the new LSD, a new small technology that could be used to open minds and reform society.” Indeed, Steve Jobs came up with the name “Apple Computing” from living in an acid-infused community at an Oregon apple orchid.¹

The aspiration of Silicon Valley gurus is to change the world according to their vision of the way the world ought to be. Absent of a biblical anthropology and worldview, this is a dangerous project indeed.

Chapter 11 covers the development and dominance of Google. Recognizing the importance of relevance in web search was revolutionary in terms of the power of finding what one is looking for. The gathering and appropriate ordering of search results was key. This discovery at Stanford University was named Google after the word “googol” which means 1 followed by 100 zeros (189). As hard drive capacities grew so did search ability.

McCullough explores the dot-com era and the bubble that burst in the early part of this century. The gold rush frenzy of new dot-com company IPOs caused investment in companies that made no profit. The word “Internet” had achieved an almost magical power of attraction, often blinding investors to their lack of profit. Chapters 8 and 9 tell the sad story with a happy ending: many wild speculative investments failed, but the Internet forged ahead (180). In 1999, *Time* named Amazon’s Jeff Bezos its Person of the Year (157). But to realize the profits that *were* actually made, consider this: through the 1990s AOL’s stock appreciated 80,000%, and that’s not a typo (167–9).

“Mix, Rip, and Burn” (chapter 12) demonstrates the fruition of Apple’s aspiration to make its computers digital hubs (209). Digitizing music through iTunes and the mobile iPod proved to be the doorway to success (210–11). “Jobs was convinced that ease of use and customer choice were

the key to competing with the lure of the free” (213). Linking iTunes and iPods to Windows put Apple on the path to becoming the most profitable company in the world (214).

Every other chapter throughout this book deals with the commercial aspect of the Internet. Chapter 13 covers the inception of virtual banking vehicles like PayPal. Meanwhile when Google was searching for greater profitability, it discovered the importance of getting companies to pay for search result priority (229–32). Suddenly search results became not a consequence of users’ search priorities but rather of paying advertisers.

Then there’s Web 2.0 (2004). Now the more personal and democratizing dimension of the web’s potential came to the fore with web-logs (blogs), Wikipedia, YouTube, and the social networks. Now the idea of participation dominated. Creation of web content became pervasive on the Internet (255). “Web 2.0 was about people expressing themselves—actually being themselves, actually living—online.” The boundary between online and real life was blurred and broken (258–59).

Enter the social network (chapter 15) and its biggest player, Mark Zuckerberg.² He was already used to stealing content and violating privacy during the nascent development of his social network ideas and skills at Harvard. One of his inventions for Harvard students, Facemash, was shut down because he had stolen student profile pictures from Harvard’s internal network. Zuckerberg was placed on probation then (267), and now, years later, he seems to be under the scrutiny of Congress. In the early days of Facebook, observing the server logs and discovering user behavior enabled Zuckerberg and others to call what they observed “the trance” (281). To put it crudely, cultivating addiction is the best way to increase profits. McCullough observes that the genius of Zuckerberg’s discovery is that “finding out what is happening with your friends and family is a core human desire, right smack in the middle of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” (283).

1 Jon Askonas, “How Tech Utopia Fostered Tyranny,” *The New Atlantis*, no. 57 (Winter 2019): 6–7; quoting Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

2 See my review of the film *The Social Network*, “Dis-integrated?: The Social Network,” *Ordained Servant* (2010): 62–66, https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=222.

The “Facebook trance” led to the proliferation of content, including feeds like News Feed (288), which included a certain degree of biased curation.

Chapters 16–17 conclude the body of the book with an exploration of the rise of mobile media, especially the iPhone. The PalmPilot was the first mobile device to be used widely. Then the Blackberry moved into first place with the slogan “Always on. Always connected” (299). I can still remember my adult children doing business on vacation with their Blackberries. Of course, there were more limited early mobile devices like pagers and MP3 players, but the Blackberry was the first true “heroin of mobile computing” (300). I say first because the smartphone outpaced them all.

The history of the iPhone’s development within Apple is fascinating, and I’ll leave that topic to interested readers. The combination of Jonathan Ives’s stunningly elegant design, the enormous computing power, and connection to the App Store and iTunes, of what is far more than a mere phone, make the iPhone a large component of the culture-changing influence of electronic media. “Rather than arrive too soon, the smartphone+social media represented a moment when two world-changing technologies arrived at just the right moment” (320).

McCullough’s conclusion, “Outro,” sounds a warning about the lofty utopianism that has fueled much of the Internet’s development. J. C. R. Licklider, an early developer of the ARPANET, wrote a philosophically foundational paper titled “Man-Computer Symbiosis” in which he asserts: “Preliminary analyses indicate that the symbiotic partnership will perform intellectual operations more effectively than man alone can perform them” (322). After summing up what the Internet Era has astonishingly accomplished, McCullough asks: “But are we better off? Are we truly thinking as no human brain has ever thought, just as Licklider supposed? That’s the open-ended question as the Internet Era continues” (323). This question reminds me of the first electronic message sent by telegraph, “What hath God wrought!” I have proposed turning it into a question, “What hath God

wrought?” We need to be like people of David’s troops, “men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32). “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). This comprehensive history can aid the technology navigator in wise stewardship of the new environment in which we find ourselves. I highly recommend this book. ©

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Memory and Hope: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and the Challenge of Exile

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by John N. Somerville, Jr.

Between Two Millstones, Book 1: Sketches of Exile, 1974–1978, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, translated by Peter Constantine. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018, xv + 451 pages, \$35.

For those whose formative years have come since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the singular menace of the Soviet empire is perhaps little more than a vague prologue to our current geopolitical circumstances. But for others, those who came of age at the height of the Cold War, who remember the deep worry created by Soviet communism, that nation's aspirations to worldwide domination, and the prospect of nuclear annihilation, that era certainly continues to inform their view of the world.

Such individuals were also inevitably and keenly interested in the fate of those Russian citizens living under the brutal weight of the Soviet system and were captivated by accounts of resistance within that population. Among those dissidents, one who achieved international celebrity, even as he suffered intense persecution in his homeland, was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He had first come to the attention of the world in 1962 when his novel about the Soviet prison labor camps, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, was published in a leading Russian literary journal. In the following years, he engaged in a long struggle to get other works published and found himself increasingly at odds with Soviet authori-

ties. He suffered continual harassment and an attempted assassination at the hands of the KGB, and in 1974, four years after being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, was deported from the Soviet Union.

Between Two Millstones, Book 1 is Solzhenitsyn's account of life in the first four years after his expulsion and is, in a sense, a sequel to his earlier memoir, *The Oak and the Calf*. The new volume, the first English translation of the book, will be followed at a later date by a further installment covering the years from 1978 to 1994, or up until his return to Russia.

For those who were aware of Solzhenitsyn's plight during the late 1960s and early 1970s, his every publication, his conflict with state authorities, and his being awarded the Nobel Prize were cause for great interest. The circumstances of his life after 1974, however, tended to receive less attention. In fact, apart from the publication of new books and his 1978 Harvard graduation speech, Solzhenitsyn kept a fairly low profile. For those curious about his first years in the West, as Solzhenitsyn negotiated the challenges of living in a different world, this volume goes a long way to filling out the story.

His deepest yearnings were, it seems, to acquire the time and quiet to pursue his research and writing, and to find a place—a home—for his family and himself. He remarks early in the book that, delivered from the constraints he endured in the Soviet Union, “I was free to discuss whatever I liked” (8). Many pages later, however, he reflects on the Harvard address, saying that “I naively believed that I had found myself in a society where one can say what one thinks, without having to flatter that society” (287). But it is not just this one episode that troubles Solzhenitsyn: the book contains, in fact, a long series of incidents where Solzhenitsyn laments the failures of words—in pirated or poorly translated editions of his books, but most often as a result of his own miscalculations, misunderstandings, and hotheadedness in making public statements. It is hard at the end of his narrative not to recall his words to reporters on arriving in Germany after his expulsion: “I said enough in

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=784&issue_id=150.

the Soviet Union. I will be silent for now” (3).

True, Solzhenitsyn finds periods during which he can, without interruption, gather information for his *Red Wheel* cycle of novels about the Russian Revolution. He also notes with pleasure those moments in Switzerland and later at his new home in Vermont when he found the opportunity to write. Much of his time, however, is spent on the necessary, but tiresome business of dealing with visitors, invitations, speeches, interviews, and thousands of letters. He must deal also with the exasperating details related to the ownership, translation, and publication of his books, concerns that inevitably draw Solzhenitsyn into seemingly endless legal battles. These, he writes after many such episodes, are “a profanation of the soul, an ulceration. As the world has entered a legal era,” he continues, “gradually replacing man’s conscience with law, the spiritual level of the world has sunk” (202).

If Solzhenitsyn encounters a sort of “noise” in the law, he finds something no less disturbing in the Western press, which becomes a constant nemesis to the liberated novelist. Indeed, he shouts at a group of reporters soon after his arrival in the West, “You are worse than the KGB!” Solzhenitsyn adds immediately, “My relations with the press grew worse and worse” (13). Perhaps as telling as any moment in his dealings with the press occurs in relation to his Harvard speech, during which he singles out journalists for criticism, and after which he laments their misreading of his message. In their many attacks on Solzhenitsyn in the days after the address, he complains that “they had *completely* missed everything important” while “invent[ing] things that simply did not exist in my speech” (286).

The cause of Solzhenitsyn’s greatest distress, however, of which the legal system and the press are symptoms, is the West’s moral decline and cowardice before the communist menace. He voices these thoughts most famously in the Harvard graduation address, where, among other things, he complains that in the West “the notion of *freedom* has been diverted to unbridled passion” and “a sense of responsibility before God and society has

fallen away” (285). The West, he adds, adrift in its “excesses and carelessness” (50), has its origins in “irreligious humanism,” and has, with the rest of humanity, no hope or “way left but—upward” (286).

Despite such unhappiness with the world he finds in freedom, Solzhenitsyn also conveys some sense of promise. In its simplest form, this occurs in reports of his travels through Europe, Canada, and the United States, all previously inaccessible to him. These passages, at the least, provide some of the more interesting and amusing episodes in the book, including the Nobel laureate’s story about receiving a speeding ticket during a trip from California to Vermont and his blunt descriptions of the ugliness of cities such as Montreal and New York. More significant, though, are the places where Solzhenitsyn seeks and then finds a home, a location where he and his family can settle during their life in exile. Solzhenitsyn describes their first stop in Zurich, his later search in Canada and Alaska, then finding a comfortable spot in rural Vermont. There, aided by the tireless labors of his wife, Solzhenitsyn can focus on his writing and other projects, and together they can raise their sons. Though he rarely mentions them, one short section of the book describes the boys coming to his writing cottage for instruction in mathematics, to swim in the pond, and to pray with their father. In this place Solzhenitsyn can find some of the quiet he craves, a refuge with his family from the ruined world, East and West, that he knows so well.

Since the fourth of the book’s five chapters—although it also recounts the turmoil associated with his Harvard speech—pays particular attention to Solzhenitsyn’s domestic retreat in Vermont, it is jarring to read the last chapter, a long response to a book that attacked Solzhenitsyn. He devotes page after page to the book’s accusations and to his defense against those charges. The seeming purpose of the chapter—or to the chapter’s placement in the narrative—is that it underscores the truth that for Solzhenitsyn, although he has found his refuge, the world with which he has engaged has not finished with him.

Here, as elsewhere in the book, Solzhenitsyn shapes his narrative with the care of a novelist. And it is in this unhappy closing chapter that he embeds his single most moving passage, a message addressed to his childhood friend Kirill, one with whom the young Solzhenitsyn shared a passionate love for literature, but who as an adult betrayed the writer by contributing his own lies to the book attacking Solzhenitsyn. “Kirill! . . . Kirochka!” Solzhenitsyn writes, “What have you done? How could you have gone over to *them*?” (327). The plaintive tone of heartbreak that saturates Solzhenitsyn’s words in this brief section eloquently expresses the spirit of sadness that is never far from the surface in the book.

Despite this strain of unspoken sorrow and the ceaseless battles that Solzhenitsyn fights, even in the relative freedom of the West, *Between Two Millstones* testifies above all to the author’s immense courage and resilience, invaluable reserves gathered to some degree from his Russian Orthodox faith. We can now look forward to the second volume, to observing Solzhenitsyn, having obtained some degree of quiet and a place of his own, as he negotiates his final years in exile. ©

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2. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.
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