# Ordained Servant

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A Journal for Church Officers

United Church of Christ North Hampton, North Hampton, New Hampshire / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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OrdainedServant

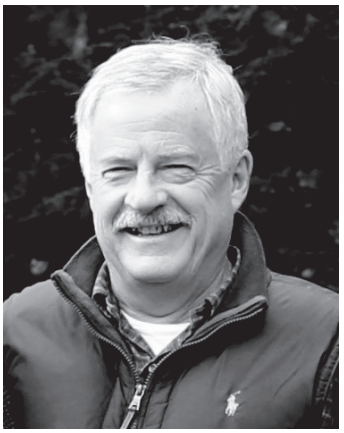
A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

# CONTENTS

## ServantReading

REVIEW ARTICLES

# From the Editor



This is the seventeenth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant*, as we completed our thirty-first year of publication in 2022.

It has been very encouraging to me and the Committee on Christian Education that writers have not been difficult to find. The range of gifts, and interests, and areas of expertise is remarkable for such a small church.

The cover picture is of the United Church of Christ North Hampton in North Hampton, New Hampshire. My uncle, Ralph Vincent Gould, was a lay preacher there for several years in the mid-twentieth century, prior to the church joining the liberal United Church of Christ in 1962. My uncle was a Gideon and was part of the influence that eventually brought me to saving faith in 1971. His theology was simple, but the gospel was clear. In 1738, a wooden structure (erected in 1734) at the top of North Hill, called North Hill Parish, was owned by the town and served as the meeting place for the local congregation. The congregation was Puritan during those years. It was not until 1819 that the state passed the Toleration Act. This separated the church from being controlled by the town and opened the way for other denominations to exist, all churches maintaining their own buildings and ministries. The present building was built in 1838.

Once again, I would like to thank Committee on Christian Education General Secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange (Chairman of the Subcommittee on Resources for the Churches), and the Subcommittee on Serial Publications—Darryl Hart (chairman), Stephen Tracey, David VanDrunen, 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: Ayrian Yasar, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, and the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal. Finally, I want to thank Paul Meyer for his meticulous editorial work on the final document, and Judith Dinsmore for her excellent final proofing and formatting of this printed volume.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Pastor Emeritus
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Servant

# Thoughts

# *Editorials*

## Grace in Winter: Reflections on *Ordained Servant* at Thirty

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* January 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

I guess it was inevitable that I should become an editor later in life. I was the editor of my high school yearbook for the class of 1967. I enjoyed the collaborative effort. We won the University of New Hampshire high school yearbook award that year. I was somewhat oblivious to the honor as I was headed for a career in architecture, never dreaming that I would end up an editor for sixteen years. There is another irony. I feared public speaking, so my assistant editor, who loved the limelight and was a gifted speaker, happily took that responsibility—then I became a minister, speaking in public for over four decades two to three times a week. God's ways are indeed mysterious.

Samuel Johnson defined the lexicographer as a "harmless drudge." He might have defined the editor in a similar fashion, since editor and lexicographer are both word-gatherers, but as I begin my seventeenth year as editor of *Ordained Servant*, I should like to own the "harmless" attribute and eschew the "drudge." There is, to be sure, drudgery in editing—late submissions, improper formatting, missing citations, etc., but for me, above all, assisting in edifying my fellow church officers brings a joy that easily supersedes the small drudgery.

I am reminded of the classical trio of transcendental realities: the good, the true, and the beautiful. They embody a summary of what I have tried to accomplish in *Ordained Servant* over the years. The *good* represents the ethics of the Christian life rooted in the Trinity—a life well lived. The *true* represents all that our God has revealed in his Word about who he is, how he has redeemed us, and how we are to live before him and with our fellow man. The *beautiful* is seen in the way the good and the true present themselves in literature, poetry, art, and in all creative human endeavors as well crafted.

I have sought to broaden the exposure of officers to the culture in which we are embedded to witness the gospel. The original intent of *OS*'s first editor was the laudable goal of revitalizing the offices of elder and deacon. Given the presence of much material on these offices in the *OS* archives, I have sought to expand the material available to ministers without neglecting the elders. Although, since ministers and elders form sessions, I always have the two offices in view. There are over twenty articles in the *OS* archives under the topics "Elders" and "Deacons," besides many more that pertain to those offices such as "Visitation" and "Tithing." Deacons also now have regular denominational summits. Elders are about to receive special attention through a series of podcasts. Serving all three offices remains my goal as editor.

Since our high standard for the ministerial office requires a liberal arts degree, I have sought to help ministers see how that broad exposure to culture relates to the ministry of the Word and their pastoral duties. This has, at times, included reviewing books on important topics written by those outside the Christian faith. I have sought to promote the value of poetry and literature for preachers as an aid to their craft as wordsmiths, but also for the edification and pleasure of all Chris-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=939.

tians served by our officers. It has been gratifying to have a number of men and women say how much they enjoy the poetry, some of whom were enjoying poetry for the first time. We must ever be in the business of expanding our understanding of our task in the complex world in which we minister.

* * *

As I look to the future of my editing task, I realize that an editor is a complex creature, whose perceptions and sensibilities are varied, and thus in my case different in some ways from others who have edited the OPC's two periodicals. I will continue to attempt to understand what officers in the church need, what might help them fulfill their callings better. I will also continue to unabashedly introduce new ideas and interests of my own, which I hope will expand the interests of officers intent on ministering to their congregations. This is what editors do. And while I am always seeking to respond to the needs of officers, this personal trajectory is something that editors cannot deny or avoid. That other editors could do better or at least differently I do not deny.

I intend to continue to follow our original mission statement by helping to encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am always committed to working within the boundaries of our confessional commitment. I have taken a vow to do so.

I want to cover issues that threaten the unity and faith of the church. These issues come from within the church and from outside. They often come from our culture and infect the church. In their worst form, these beliefs and practices come in the guise of true spirituality within the church. An example would be the idea of many American Christians that formal membership or a membership roll book are unspiritual, when in fact the biblical case for these is overwhelming. This is the spirit of radical individualism in the guise of true spirituality. How easily cultural assumptions can be mistaken for Christian principles and ideals.

As mentioned above, *OS* will be developing a podcast, initially focused on elders. We are planning a series of interviews on topics specifically related to the various tasks of elders.

I will continue to foster close contact with the Committee on Ministerial Care to stay in touch with ministerial concerns. As my generation of ministers retires from fulltime pastoral ministry, issues such as retirement, financial planning, ministerial transition, etc., will become more of a concern.

I am always open to new ideas and unsolicited articles and reviews. And I am deeply grateful to all who make *OS* possible.

Why did I title this article "Grace in Winter"? It is the title of Faith Cook's book that puts several of Samuel Rutherford's (1600–1661) choice and eloquent letters into verse.[2] Rutherford said, "Grace grows best in winter." This little book meant a great deal to me during a difficult time in my ministry in 1989 and after. Each church officer encounters suffering and difficulty in the lives of those to whom he ministers and also experiences this himself in his own life and ministry. In a sense, all of life in a fallen world is in the season of winter, in desperate need of the light and warmth of the gospel. It is my constant hope that, in a small way, *Ordained Servant* helps to alleviate the wintry conditions with which we all deal from day to day and provides a path forward through the snow. ©

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

2 Faith Cook, *Grace in Winter: Rutherford in Verse* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989).

# Reflections on the Ministry of Francis Schaeffer

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

After becoming a Christian in 1971 out of the counterculture of the 1960s, I lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and returned home to New Hampshire on weekends to attend my mother's Baptist church.[2] She had become a Christian just before I left for college. Still wrestling with the questions of my generation, I found little understanding for my concerns in the church until one day a perceptive member gave me a book titled *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* by Francis Schaeffer. Here was a Christian who understood my world and spoke my language. I rapidly devoured everything Schaeffer had written up to that point, as well as Edith Schaeffer's *The L'Abri Story*. These books equipped me to speak with the others in my cooperative living situation—a Kierkegaardian existentialist, a Vietnam vet who considered himself a warlock, a high-strung cellist, an argumentative law student, a sensitive poet, and two feminist lesbians—about my newfound faith. The exclusive claims of the gospel were offensive to most, but several became Christians, recognizing the wonder, beauty, and liberating power of Jesus Christ. In August 1971, I went to L'Abri Fellowship in Huemoz, Switzerland. For someone with no theological or philosophical training, this was truly a high-altitude experience.

The day after I arrived, I was treated to a taped lecture given by Os Guinness on "Christian Truth and Verification," in which I learned of the demise of Logical Positivism and the influence on Schaeffer's thinking of a theologian named Van Til. Heady stuff for a hippie. I ended up becoming the assistant host, helping Bruce Nichols greet and settle newcomers, and living in the main chalet, *Les Mélèzes*, where the Schaeffers lived on the second floor. Young Franky lived with his new wife, Genie, on the lower ground floor (see my review of his 2007 memoir *Crazy for God*).[3] I took Os Guinness's place. And while he was away getting married in the UK, I was able to use some of his books in the bookcase next to my bed. This was a dream come true, although I had no idea who Guinness was. But I knew that living in Schaeffer's chalet would give me many opportunities to ask questions.

Apart from the breathtaking beauty of the setting, at an elevation of three thousand feet in the Swiss Alps, overlooking the Dent du Midi and the Mont Blanc Massif, three refreshing realities were present. They stood in stark contrast to my experience in the fundamentalist churches I had known briefly in America as well as my communal experience as a hippie. First, L'Abri was a genuine community where true Christian faith was practiced—where people worked, studied, and discussed together. Second, earnest engagement of the mind was fostered, but never in a merely academic way. There was no one like Schaeffer in our day. He filled a niche. Third, along with intellectual nurture, the Schaeffers encouraged a true appreciation for, and involvement in, creativity and the arts, which was part of my background. Edith's *Hidden Art* helped rescue my mother from the culturally suffocating influence of her fundamentalist church. It was easy to think of L'Abri as a kind of Mecca. But as my English friend Tony Morton later reminded me, "You don't have to go to L'Abri to enter the kingdom of God." L'Abri wasn't for everyone, nor was it without its faults, although it was not easy for me to see this at the time.

Living so close to the Schaeffers, I saw their imperfections—which they were usually happy to admit themselves. After leaving in early 1972,

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=955.

2 This essay is based on excerpts from Gregory E. Reynolds, "Your Father's L'Abri: Reflections on the Ministry of Francis Schaeffer," *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 35–40.

3 Gregory E. Reynolds, "Too Frank by Half: What Went Wrong with Frank Schaeffer," *Ordained Servant* (October 2008).

I discovered more—the dangers of celebrity and hero-worship (probably more a problem for Schaeffer's followers than for him). And, more important in my own future thinking and ministry, I discovered the superficiality of some historical and philosophical aspects of Schaeffer's published work. Anyone stimulated by Schaeffer's thought who then dug deeper into a given discipline soon realized this. I was shocked to observe—as I helped expand the Schaeffer bedroom by cutting through the partition into Franky's old bedroom—that the great thinker had no study and seemed to read only magazines, besides his Bible (although the stairway was lined with full bookcases). He placed a large blotter at the end of his bed, and that was his study. I realized that in order to communicate with my generation, he had worked hard to understand the basic thought-forms of the postwar twentieth-century West, especially as they were manifested in popular culture, along with developing a commensurate vocabulary. Not big on primary source material, he never claimed to be a scholar but painted in broad strokes to try to give us the big picture.

L'Abri lived up to its name for me—it was a true shelter that fortified me in the truth of historic Christianity: its intellectual heritage and its practical piety. It exhibited the reality of living before God by faith and seeking to worship and serve him as a whole person in a community of God's people. Schaeffer's evangelistic engagement of modern culture taught me to empathize with the predicament of modern man. This was an authentic element in Schaeffer's thinking, despite weaknesses in his scholarship and apologetic theory.

During my trip home from Switzerland I had occasion to meet the painter Francis Bacon in a pub in Soho. Bacon's *Head IV* appeared on the cover of Hans Rookmaaker's (a close friend and colleague of Schaeffer's) *Modern Art and the Death of Culture* (1970). Reinterpreting Velasquez's portrait of the pope, Bacon distorts the once dignified head and face, which is depicted being sucked upward through the top of a translucent box in which the man is sitting—his humanity is disintegrating. The futility, horror, and despair portrayed in the painting were verified in my conversation with Bacon. Hopelessness was written all over Bacon's melancholy face. My explanation of the gospel elicited only scorn. But Schaeffer had prepared me for this encounter.

Schaeffer had a private meeting with Timothy Leary in the fall of 1971. Leary, for those who do not remember, was a Harvard professor of psychology who resigned, dropped out of the academy, advocated the therapeutic use of psychedelic drugs, and became a counterculture guru. He was in Switzerland evading drug charges. Nichols and I were privy to his visit with Schaeffer because we lived in Schaeffer's chalet (October 2, 1971, according to my journal entry). At dinner, Leary was very self-absorbed and not a little blown out from all of the LSD he had taken. He proved to be very obnoxious company. But Schaeffer had been compassionate enough to spend an afternoon in conversation with him about the gospel, telling no one of his encounter with this famous man.

At the beginning of this editorial I referred to Schaeffer's "ministry." This was intended as a reminder that the value of Schaeffer should be assessed in terms of his entire evangelistic endeavor. This is not to minimize the theoretical weaknesses of his approach, but only to say that apologetics proper was not the centerpiece of his ministry. His bold attempt to step outside the box of his fundamentalism and demonstrate true compassion for sinners, by working to understand their world, in the context of a true Christian community formed in grace and truth, was a visible—if imperfect—reality.

While studying under Gordon H. Clark at Covenant College in the 1970s, I began to recognize some theoretical weaknesses in Schaeffer's apologetics. It would take Cornelius Van Til to clarify this discovery as he acquainted me with a more profound analysis of man's fallen condition.

As noted above, the first time I encountered Van Til's thought was at L'Abri in the summer of 1971. The context was a heady discussion of A. J. Ayer's logical positivism, showing that this form of truth verification was self-refuting. The leader mentioned Van Til as an important influence on

Schaeffer's thinking. A booklist I was later given, titled "A Selective List of Christian Books to Start Your Library With," recommended Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*. At the time, I was unaware of the theoretical differences between Schaeffer and Van Til. When I studied at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1976 to 1979, I was privileged to meet informally with Van Til on several occasions.

"Would-be autonomous man" was a favorite Van Til description of the sinner. It was his penetration to the anthropological center of the apologetic enterprise that finally clarified the problem with Schaeffer's apologetic. While Schaeffer often distinguished between the use of reason, as creatures made in God's image, from rationalism, which asserts the sufficiency of reason without revelation, he also exhibited some rationalistic tendencies. As Westminster Seminary apologetics professor William Edgar points out:

> There is an underlying rationalism in much of Schaeffer's thinking. His view of truth is abstract, in that it is not strictly equated with God, but is a more general idea of which God is only the "final screen." Furthermore, Schaeffer often spoke of Christianity conforming to "reality," or "what is," without clearly distinguishing between the Creator and the creature.[4]

For Van Til, the sinner must be challenged at the heart of his problem—his audacious quest for autonomy. According to Van Til (following Paul in Romans 1), the sinner's quest involves the continual suppression of the truth that he is a creature of God, living in God's world. Schaeffer, on the other hand, was more of an evidentialist of ideas, seeking to show the inconsistencies of the sinner on his own terms.[5] However, Schaeffer echoed many of Van Til's fundamental insights, and sometimes the differences between the two warriors have been exaggerated.[6] I heard Schaeffer confront sinners in their rebellion, and there is plenty in his writings that does the same, even using the term "autonomy" frequently.

The evangelical penchant is to seek to win the world on its own terms. The Pauline approach, as Van Til would insist, was to challenge the sinner on God's terms. Thus, the profundity of Van Til's theoretical analysis of the unbeliever cannot be overstated. But comparing him to Schaeffer is something of an "apples and oranges" enterprise (as I will explain in my review of Follis)[7] and may leave Schaeffer without the appreciation he is due in our circles. By the end of his life, Schaeffer was certainly the darling of evangelicalism, although the most important things he taught us may have been largely forgotten.

As a philosophical apologist, Van Til never saw his role to be that of a cultural critic. Schaeffer, however, was able to connect with the baby boom generation precisely because he was a cultural critic with a heart for evangelism. In the end, his apparent identification of secularism, instead of man's would-be autonomy, as the final enemy of the gospel, amplified this theoretical weakness in terms of a cultural transformationist agenda. Perhaps this is one of the dangers of cultural criticism. As Follis points out, Schaeffer is neither presuppositionalist nor evidentialist, but rather a "verificationist," seeking to convince the unbeliever that his core beliefs (presuppositions), are inconsistent with reality, unlike the true presuppositions of Christianity.[8] William Dennison's critique of Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* [9] seems to place Keller in a similar mold. The vertical focus of the gospel takes a back seat to the horizontal concern.

The Reformed church awaits a cultural critic and evangelist of Schaeffer's stature, sensibilities, and energy who is consistently Van Tilian in his

4 William Edgar, "Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer Compared," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (spring 1995): 72–3.

5 Bryan A. Follis, *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 111.

6 Edgar, "Two Christian Warriors."

7 Gregory Edwards Reynolds "Francis A. Schaeffer: A Unique Evangelist," *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 151–56.

8 Follis, *Truth with Love*, 99–122.

9 William D. Dennison, "The Reason for God," *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 146–51.

approach. Until then, cultural engagement will be aligned with relevance and transformation in the place of radical engagement with the message that turns the world upside down. Whatever else might be said about the differences between Van Til and Schaeffer, they had one very important passion in common: to see sinners won to King Jesus. I will be forever grateful for the shelter provided by L'Abri as it pointed me to the only final shelter found under the wings of the Almighty, whose Son covers our sins and has inherited glory for us. This was your father's L'Abri. ©

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# Encouragement for Leaders from 1 Samuel 30:1–31

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

When I was attending the Bible Institute of New England in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, in 1972, I was asked to preach at the annual meeting of the board of directors. I was scared blue since I had almost no experience in preaching and had always feared public speaking before becoming a Christian. So, I prayerfully decided to help myself by preaching on encouragement from 1 Samuel 30:1–31.[2]

Discouragement is one of the great plagues of Christians and especially church officers. Life is full of discouragements, but officers in the church are acquainted with trouble, grief, and care more than most. Often in our congregation, perhaps in yours, officers feel a bit of "battle fatigue."

During his exile, David was rejected by the Philistine army as they marched on Israel. David had been given charge of the Philistine city of Ziklag where he lived (near the western border of the tribe of Simeon). Originally, he had left to fight with the Philistine army but had to turn back, only to find his home, Ziklag, destroyed, and the women and children kidnapped by the arch enemies of Israel, the Amalekites. "David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. . . . David was greatly distressed . . ." (vv. 4, 6). There was certainly reason to be very discouraged. But

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=969.

2 This article is based not only on the original sermon preached to the board of directors of the Bible Institute of New England but also on a revised sermon preached at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church in Manchester, New Hampshire, on May 14, 2010.

how did David respond?

## I. Our Heavenly Father Orders Our Lives to Teach Us to Seek Encouragement in Him

First notice how the Lord kept David from great folly. Loyalty to the Philistine chief Achish, who gave David temporary refuge from King Saul, made him willing to attack his own people. He also left his home in Ziklag unguarded. Then the Lord allowed the plunder of Ziklag in order to draw David to trust him in the worst of circumstances. The lesson was learned: "David strengthened [KJV, "encouraged"] himself in the LORD his God" (v.6). He did not first seek a human solution. That came second, because the Lord uses secondary means ("second causes," WCF 3.1, 5.2) to achieve his sovereign purposes.

As a type of Jesus Christ, the Messianic King, David is in royal training. Here he seeks direct guidance from the Lord through the high priest Abiathar as to what to do. This lies at the heart of Messianic obedience. "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:7–8). "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34).

In the midst of trial and discouragement we grow in Christlikeness: "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:28–29).

This same Son, the Lord and king of his church, wants his officers to find strength in him. Paul is a great example of this regarding his thorn in the flesh, which is unidentified so that we may identify our own thorn. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

## II. Our Loving Covenant Lord Is Himself the Ground, Source, and Reason for All Our Encouragement

David went to the source of encouragement by exercising faith. The first thing he did was to seek the Lord in prayer. In our frenzied lives we take too little time for this. While not all depression and discouragement are due to a lack of faith, we should wonder how much is. Look at Nehemiah under attack for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. "For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, 'Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.' But now, O God, strengthen my hands" (Neh. 6:9). "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6–7). He did not seek from men what he could only receive from God. Sometimes we unwisely seek wisdom first from human counselors.

Here is a lesson for officers in dealing with criticism. In verse 6 the people blamed David for what had happened and wanted to stone him. Since he had left Ziklag unprotected, there was some truth to their criticism. But in their great "distress" the people looked in the wrong place for a solution. David did not. Faith is only as good as its object. So, David trusted in the "LORD his God" (v. 6). Note well this name of God. The unique covenantal name Yahweh ("LORD") coupled with the general name for the sovereign-creator God is the exclusive source of encouragement and strength in trouble. Why is it exclusive? Because the Lord of the covenant of grace has established a unique relationship with his chosen people through the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, the God-man. So, because the Lord has favored us, we may be utterly confident as we trust him amid trouble. David's God and ours is not a distant sovereign, but an intimate friend. David was as confident as Job that this God was *his* God. "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). The Lord wants us to love him above all as David says elsewhere, "The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words" (Ps. 119:57). And Jeremiah in

the midst of his heart-rending lament over Israel's idolatry, "'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him'" (Lam. 3:24).

Look at the ultimate goal of our trials—the New Jerusalem:

> Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. . . . its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Rev. 21:3–4; 22–23)

This reality, known only by faith, alone can penetrate the sadness and darkness of a fallen world.

### III. Our Lord Encourages Us to Make Us Fruitful

David's example is a call for us to encourage others in the Lord as they face various trials and troubles. We must be an example to others of how we face discouragement. This is Christ's work through us by the power of his Spirit. Paul understood that his afflictions were part of a learning process to teach him to encourage others.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:3–4)

Facing trials in this way also helps us in waging spiritual warfare, as Paul knew. "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor 10:3–4). The Puritan Thomas Brooks counsels us to "answer all temptations with this short saying 'the Lord is my portion.'" The enemy in 1 Samuel 30 is the Amalekites. Amalek was the sworn enemy of the Lord: "The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:16). This reminds us of the Lord's declaration of war on the serpent in Eden (Gen. 3:15). The Satanic forces of history may only be defeated by the warrior Lord.

How central to encouragement is Scripture, the Word of God. Judas and Silas, "who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words" (Acts 15:32). "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:31). David, of course, lived in a period of redemptive history different from ours. He sought direct guidance from the Lord through the high priest (v. 8) and was an author of Scripture. Now Scripture is complete. The Ziklag story is now part of Scripture and thus useful for encouragement, as Paul told the Roman church: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The preached Word is central to the church's encouragement.

The Word refers to Jesus as "the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). "Consolation" is the same Greek word for the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete, the Encourager (*paraklēsin*, παράκλησιν). We must give people Jesus and the hope of his Gospel, "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ" (Col. 2:2). The Gospel and the Christ of Scripture are our greatest encouragement.

Obedience must accompany encouragement. As pointed out above, David coupled the encouragement of the Lord with his commitment to sanctification: "The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words" (Ps. 119:57). "[W]e exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12).

This passage also calls us to encourage our fellow officers, ministers, elders, and deacons in the Lord. One of the beauties of biblical Presbyterianism is the plurality of leadership. Ministers of the Word do not minister alone but with a session of ruling elders. Deacons meet as a diaconate and regularly with the session. As those who bear the burdens of the congregation as well as the frustration and quandaries of their own ministries, officers are especially subject to discouragement.

Shoulder to shoulder in ministry it is easy to forget that we need mutual encouragement. To the Roman church Paul said, "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom. 1:12).

David encouraged the exhausted two hundred men (vv. 10, 21–23), like the parable of the laborers in Matthew 20:1–16, a parable of the kingdom of heaven, reminding us of Christ's unmerited favor. Barnabas (lit. "son of encouragement") was an encourager (*uios paraklēseōs*, Υἱὸς Παρακλήσεως, Acts 4:36; 9:27) who encouraged Paul. No one can encourage everyone, but everyone can encourage someone. Resolve to "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). ©

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# An Honest Appreciation of Francis Schaeffer

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**by Paul R. Maffin**

The ministry of Francis Schaeffer and of L'Abri played a pivotal role in my coming to saving faith in 1971. I journeyed to India as a hippie in 1970, seeking to satisfy my spiritual hunger. Once on the ground in India, I quickly soured on Hinduism, realizing that the Hindu belief in karma was the driving philosophy behind the evils of the caste system. Even today, fifty years after my travels in India, the caste system is "outlawed, but still omnipresent," in the words of one observer. While there, I spent substantial time with two Christian couples—one expatriate, the other Indian national—both of whom had a significant role in guiding me in the direction of the Christian faith. One of the couples, older medical missionaries from my hometown, gave me a copy of Schaeffer's book *The God Who Is There*.[2]

Turning from Hinduism but still fascinated by Eastern religions, I immersed myself in Zen Buddhist thought and practice, spending months in an ashram (spiritual retreat center) in Bodh Gaya, India, the place where Gautama Buddha received his insights into the nature of the universe. Zen is a rigorous form of Buddhism, a sort of fast track to enlightenment. Through intensive meditation and other spiritual practices, Zen is supposed to catapult the devotee into the state of consciousness in which he/she "sees" in an intuitive flash that the perceived world is really an illusion and that his/her nature is the same as the nature of Buddha. Once that insight is obtained, the devotee is supposedly released from the endless cycle of death and rebirth. This particular ashram had a unique rhythm of daily life. In addition to the intense, extended seasons of meditation, there were periods for rest and times set aside for work to benefit the community, such as working in the fields that supplied our food and grinding grain by hand for meals.

Like many of my generation, I was confident that there must be a way to align the teachings of Jesus with that of renowned teachers from the East, particularly Gautama Buddha. Having been raised in a fairly liberal mainline church (PCUSA and American Baptist), I had been exposed to enough of Jesus to know that I could not just jettison him. Like many of my peers, I clung to every saying of Jesus that seemed to have any flavor of the East, e.g.,

> And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20–21 KJV)

In my travels I had purchased a copy of *The Gospel according to Thomas*,[3] a collection of extra-canonical sayings of Jesus. In addition to reading foundational Buddhist texts, I was also reading the New Testament and working my way through *The God Who Is There*.

Through a number of circumstances, I became gradually disillusioned with Eastern religions. Although I can point to several factors, I can identify the major turning point in my spiri-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=956.

2 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1968).

3 A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel According to Thomas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959).

tual odyssey. One day during a conversation with Zengo, the Zen monk leading our group, I asked what he thought of Jesus Christ. He gave the fairly standard answer from an Eastern religion's perspective, "I think that he was a highly enlightened man." Either that day or the next, I opened my Bible, and my eyes lighted on John 14:6, where Jesus is recorded as saying, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This verse brought me up short. Here was Jesus, a man regarded as highly enlightened by most Hindus and Buddhists, claiming to be the only path to God. Perhaps it was the time for me to seek to learn more about this man Jesus.

It was then that I decided to leave India and go to L'Abri. I hoped to discover in that remarkable setting whether the Christian faith was true to reality and whether it proved genuine as lived out in community. Encouraged by the missionaries who gave me *The God Who Is There*, I flew from Mumbai to London, where I had my head freshly shaved. I was going to L'Abri on my own terms, still confident that there must be some way to harmonize Christianity with the world's other great religions. I arrived at the doorstep of Chalet les Mélèzes (home of Francis and Edith Schaeffer in Huemoz, Switzerland) totally unannounced, sporting my "Gandhi glasses," green pajama suit from Nepal, and a huge, red backpack. Despite my outlandish appearance, I was welcomed warmly, settled in Chalet les Sapins with Udo and Debbie (Schaeffer) Middelmann, and soon after met with Os Guinness, the proctor for my studies.

The early days of the L'Abri ministry began when the Schaeffer daughters brought fellow university students home to discuss issues related to faith and culture with their parents. By the time of my arrival in April of 1971, L'Abri encompassed several chalets overseen by workers. I was one of about one hundred students. Some were Christians seeking a deeper understanding of the intersection of faith and culture, while others, like me, were seeking to know if the Christian faith was true. It was a stimulating atmosphere, with long, serious conversations around the table during meals, weekly lectures and discussions, and Sunday worship. The rhythm of life at L'Abri seemed quite similar to my experience at the ashram in India. The weekday routine involved both study, discussion, personal time, and work to benefit the community; my main assignment was working in the large community gardens.

My first study assignment was listening to tapes of Francis Schaeffer's lectures in the Book of Romans. Having grown up in a fairly liberal Protestant church, I had never heard the Bible handled with such care and proclaimed with such intense passion. I began to hear many of the now famous Schaefferisms, such as "true truth," a phrase that resonated with me, coming from an Eastern worldview in which there is no such thing as objective truth. In his preface to *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, James Packer gave an apt description of Francis Schaeffer that squares with my experience of his teaching and preaching style:

> [W]hat he said was arresting, however he might look or sound while saying it. It had firmness, arguing vision; gentleness, arguing strength; simple clarity, arguing mental mastery; and compassion, arguing an honest and good heart. There was no guile in it, no party narrowness, no manipulation, only the passionate persuasiveness of the prophet who hurries in to share with others what he himself sees.[4]

A pivotal factor while I was on the way to faith was the rare gift that Francis Schaeffer exercised in his analysis of worldviews. What I learned from him about analyzing worldviews has served me well throughout my life as a Christian. Like many then and today, I took a smorgasbord approach to religion, picking the parts that I liked of each religion and ignoring the remainder. Through Schaeffer's approach, I was led to see that worldviews have an internal coherence. One cannot take a piece of a worldview and leave the other unwanted bits behind. I began to see that the Eastern and

4 J. I. Packer, "Foreword," in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Good News, 1990), xi.

Christian worldviews are radically different on numerous key issues. The nature of the being of God, the "mannishness of man" (another Schaefferism), the basic problem of humanity, the necessary solution to that problem, the view of history (linear or cyclical), and the central purpose of life are just a sampling of the many key issues.

Through the weekly lectures and discussions, I began to see the beating heart behind the unique community that characterized the ministry of L'Abri. Repulsed by a cold, sterile orthodoxy, Schaeffer had a deep spiritual crisis in 1951. Emerging from that crisis, he was determined to pursue a Christian faith that remained totally orthodox in belief while simultaneously demonstrating the reality of Christian love in Christian community before a watching world. L'Abri had become this kind of community by the time I arrived in 1971. This combination of truth and love was powerfully attractive to me as an unbeliever. I was able to stay at L'Abri as a student for three months, then, after coming to saving faith, to remain another four months as a helper. I am thankful for that extra time in this unique community, which prepared me for a lifetime of ministry.

My experience of Frances Schaeffer is not that found in the number of hagiographies that have been written, which portray the man as a nearly superhuman saint and towering intellect, nor was my experience one that is found in writings that have savaged the man (most notably the books written by his son Franky). Some of the people closest to him have given us a more balanced view of Schaeffer. For example, in an interview with Jane Stewart Smith shortly before her death, she speaks glowingly about Schaeffer's role in her conversion and his deep concern for the people who came to L'Abri. When asked to comment on Schaeffer's quick temper, Jane freely shared a couple of occasions on which she witnessed flare-ups of that temper.[5] Because the editor of this journal and I lived and worked in such close proximity to Schaeffer at L'Abri, we experienced him "warts and all," as the expression goes.

Os Guinness spoke of his love for Fran and Edith and his continued appreciation of Schaeffer's legacy in a short interview with Justin Taylor (The Gospel Coalition) on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Schaeffer's death. In this interview, Guinness honestly conveyed what he perceived as Schaeffer's weaknesses. He went on to verbalize what, more importantly, he perceived as Fran's great strengths:

> I often say simply that I have never met anyone with such a passion for God, combined with a passion for people, combined with a passion for truth. That is an extremely rare combination, and Schaeffer embodied it. It is also why so many of his scholarly critics completely miss the heart of who he was . . .[6]

Douglas Groothuis recalls an occasion when Schaeffer was asked to define his apologetic methodology: "After a talk, Schaeffer was once asked about apologetics. 'Dr. Schaeffer: Are you a presuppositionalist or an evidentialist?' He replied, 'Neither. I am an evangelist.'"[7] Although critics might see that as an evasive answer, I believe that it was an honest expression of what motivated the man. Os Guinness agrees that it was Fran's evangelistic heart that was his greatest strength. Guinness writes, "If you watched him one to one, within a minute or two you could see his eyes—I don't think he was aware of it—you could see his eyes welling up with tears. He had incredible empathy and compassion for the people he was talking to."[8] As I recall my interactions with Schaeffer, this description accords well with the kindness and

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kdf8isieGU4&ab_channel=FrancisSchaefferStudies.org

6 Justin Taylor, "An Interview with Os Guinness on the 25th Anniversary of Francis Schaeffer's Death," The Gospel Coalition, accessed January 17, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/interview-with-os-guinness-on-25th/.

7 Douglas Groothius, "Francis Schaeffer: Pastor, Evangelist, Apologist, Prophet," Christian Research Institute, accessed January 17, 2022, https://www.equip.org/article/francis-schaeffer-pastor-evangelist-apologist-prophet/.

8 Tim Stafford, "Os Guinness: Welcome to the 'Grand Age of Apologetics,'" *Christianity Today*, accessed January 17, 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/july-web-only/os-guinness-interview-welcome-grand-age-apologetics.html.

grace he showed toward me. I am convinced that as Schaeffer looked at me and all the other weirdos who came to L'Abri, he had full confidence that God was able to save each one, including me, and remake us into the image of his Son.

During my stay at L'Abri, I realized that Schaeffer's combined passion for God, people, and the truth, while perhaps modeled best by him and Edith, was worked into the DNA of L'Abri as a whole. As an unbeliever, I remember lengthy conversations with the Schaeffers' daughter, Debbie, who shared so much of her mom and dad's intensity in one-on-one interactions. I never felt dismissed or disrespected, even though I was steeped in Eastern ideologies. During my time at L'Abri, my life was also deeply impacted by an older woman from New Zealand, Sheila Bird, affectionately called Birdie by the L'Abri community. She was a trained Christian counselor who helped me to understand many of my motivations from a biblical perspective, both before and after I came to faith in Christ.

One other aspect of L'Abri, which flowed directly from the personal convictions of the Schaeffers, was the importance of prayer in the life of the community. From the earliest years of the ministry, prayer played a central role in the life and direction of L'Abri. I learned that Mondays were set apart each week as a day of prayer. Workers would sign up for time slots during the day; they would pray for every aspect of the ministry. The Schaeffers had decided early in the life of L'Abri that they would not publicize their financial needs but would rather bring them to the Lord in prayer. In many of the Schaeffers' books there are multiple testimonies to how the Lord provided for the financial needs of the work. The workers prayed for God to bring the students of his choosing to L'Abri and then for God to do his transforming work in those who came. I am certain that I was the beneficiary of numerous prayers offered to God on my behalf. Witnessing this commitment to prayer gave me a strong sense of the need to undergird any ministry done in God's name with concerted prayer.

In 1971, when I arrived at the doorstep of L'Abri, I realized that the ministry of Francis and Edith Schaeffer was absolutely unique, which is why people traveled from all around the world to participate in that community. I could not have crafted a ministry more suited to my quest for "true truth." With all the imperfections inherent in any human endeavor, the community lived out the claims of the Christian faith in a breathtaking way. God used this remarkable ministry to bring me to see the uniqueness of his Son and his superiority to all fallible human teachers and religious leaders. My time at L'Abri prepared me for a lifetime of Gospel ministry, as essential a foundation as my years in seminary. I am forever grateful for the life and ministry of Fran and Edith Schaeffer. Ⓢ

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# Meredith G. Kline's Family Life

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**by Meredith M. Kline[2]**

Interest in my father, Meredith G. Kline, focuses on his academic and ecclesiastical involvement along with his biblical-theological writings. His linguistic skill[3] and artistic sensibilities strengthened his exegesis, while his global-systems thinking enabled him to perceive and elucidate both the theological forest and the exegetical trees. What role, however, did life outside seminary or church play in his academic career? The multitasking involved in juggling his family life and academic responsibilities helps us appreciate what he was able to accomplish.

Not much is known about Meredith's family life growing up. His father, born Harry Klein in 1895, possibly in Austria, had emigrated from Latvia with his family and settled in Boston, Massachusetts, by the 1900 census. Harry grew up in a Jewish household where his father supposedly spent the day immersed in Torah, so at a young age Harry was helping to support the family by selling newspapers on streetcars. When he dropped out of school at age fifteen, Harry abandoned Jewish culture and changed the spelling of the family name from Klein to Kline.[4] He spent much of his working life either painting Navy ships during wars or painting Boston-area mansions and Fenway Park seats and concession stands while working with a couple of his brothers in a relative's business. When my brothers and I were growing up, the only members of Harry's family that our family interacted with were Harry's brother Ben's family; we would visit them in Dorchester, Massachusetts, near Meredith's parents, to watch Friday-night fights.

Somehow, Harry ended up working as a machinist in the Coplay, Pennsylvania, area, where he married Lydia Moyer in 1918. Their son Meredith was born on 15 December 1922, three years after his sister Gladys. Lydia had been born in 1900 and was a member at Trinity Reformed Church in Coplay. According to church records, Harry became a member months before Meredith was born. But most of his life he rarely attended church services, perhaps hearing Meredith preach once at Central Congregational Church in Dorchester. However, when he and Lydia lived in the housing for the elderly that his grandson Sterling designed for the Whitinsville (Massachusetts) Christian Reformed Church, he would attend services with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) folk. At Harry's funeral, Robert Eckhardt, who served on the pastoral staff there and had been a Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) classmate of Meredith, comforted his fellow Orthodox Presbyterian Church pastor, saying he had perceived a spark of faith in Meredith's father.

By 1930, Harry, Lydia, Gladys, and Meredith were living in Dorchester. Lydia took the children to nearby Central Congregational Church, which had an evangelical pastor, the Rev. Norman King. Even though church activities included putting on plays, which Lydia and Meredith participated in, by the time Meredith graduated from Boston Latin School he was nicknamed "Rev." The spiritual life that bloomed while growing up under Pastor King's ministry directed his career path. Before commencing classes at Harvard, Meredith determined his life would be better spent as a minister than as a dentist, so he withdrew and enrolled at Gordon College to study theology, on the advice of a woman missionary associated with Central Congregational Church. Pastor King mentored

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1004.

2 In consultation with my brothers and our wives: Miriam Kline, Sterling and Karen Kline, and Calvin and Sharen Kline.

3 Cyrus Gordon told me when I started studies with him in 1972 that up to that point in time Kline was the best linguist he had taught.

4 Interestingly, we wonder what genetically is at play in the family. Consider Harry's son (Meredith G. Kline), grandson (Meredith M. Kline), and great-grandson (Jonathan Kline)—each has written a doctoral dissertation dealing with the Old Testament text, and each has taught biblical Hebrew and other Semitic languages at seminaries and divinity schools.

Meredith, passing on an emphasis on evangelism and church revival, encouraging his preaching,[5] and working to find him a Congregational pastorate in the Boston area as Meredith approached graduation from Westminster; while a Westminster student, although each of his two older sons were born in June, Meredith waited until Christmas vacation time when he could return to Dorchester in order to have them baptized by Pastor King.

Meredith seems to have had good relations with his family. His sister Gladys supported our family throughout her life. She came to Philadelphia to help Meredith and Grace when newborns arrived. Her home in Canton, Massachusetts, was the place where Meredith M., Sterling, and Calvin enjoyed playing with their cousins during family vacations with Meredith's parents. Gladys apparently was not aware of Kline's career, though, since she seemed surprised to learn at his funeral how respected he was by his academic and ecclesiastical colleagues and friends.[6]

Meredith was closest to his mother. When away from home, he communicated frequently with her by letter, whether from Camp Waldron in New Hampshire where he was a summer counselor during his college days or from wherever he was pastoring or teaching; unfortunately, almost none of those letters have survived. His mother showed keen interest in his career and was familiar with seminary happenings from Meredith's letters and her personal visits to Philadelphia to help the family from the time Meredith was a student at Westminster until he began teaching at Gordon Divinity School.[7] One significant event in their relationship was the time Meredith differed with his mother about his future plans. A couple months before he graduated from Gordon College and just after Gladys had been married, Meredith was planning to be married soon and depart for Dallas Theological Seminary, where he had been accepted. The sudden prospect of being an empty-nester and having Meredith located in far-off Texas was too much for Lydia; apparently, she weepingly pleaded with him to change his mind. The next day he agreed to comply with her wishes, and they were reconciled; he then went to Burton Goddard for advice and was directed to Westminster!

The most significant factor for Kline's own family life was the mental health of Grace, his wife. According to Grace's sister Joan, a classmate of Kline at Gordon College who introduced him and Grace while they were counselors at summer camps for boys and girls near Meredith, New Hampshire, their family had been dysfunctional. Grace's father, Arthur Lambourne, was a kind-hearted Six-Principle-Baptist pastor, but her mother, May, apparently suffered from undiagnosed emotional problems (her mother had hated her) that made family life miserable. She traumatized Grace at a young age by quoting a poem to her about a little girl who was either very good or horridly bad. Grace considered that occasion the origin of her paranoid schizophrenia (Grace thought of herself as a double personality, as reflected in her going by the name Grace in most contexts but going by Muriel, her first name, in medical institutions or when signing her paintings).[8]

Grace's father was dispensational, believing Israel and the church were on separate tracks in God's redemptive program. Our father told us that Grace's emotional issues and the fractured relationship between our family and her family were theologically rooted. Perhaps Meredith had

5 Meredith first preached at Central Congregational Church in November 1941 when he was eighteen and preached there occasionally through 1954.

6 Gladys died two months after Meredith. We were surprised to learn from her children at her funeral that she had never informed them of their Jewish roots.

7 Lydia and Harry's visits to the family in Philadelphia also enabled them to maintain their lifelong relationships with their Coplay friends.

8 Mair Walters (wife of Gordon Divinity School homiletics professor Gwyn Walters), who had practiced medicine in Wales and helped Grace over the years, said she was a "sweet" schizophrenic. Thus, many people were not aware of Grace's emotional issues. She shared Meredith's interest in evangelism and missions, constantly prayed for family, friends, and missionaries, and would donate the proceeds of sales of her artwork to missions. After Meredith died, she bought large-print hymn sheets for residents of her assisted living to use when church groups came for services, and she visited church and resident-acquaintances during their stays at the next-door nursing home.

applied to Dallas Theological Seminary under the influence of Rev. Lambourne, who apparently arranged for Meredith to preach often during the last half of 1943 at a Six-Principle-Baptist chapel in Maple Roots, Rhode Island. And perhaps because Grace had fled her family a few months before her wedding and because Meredith changed his plans last minute to study at a Reformed seminary, none of Grace's family, who lived ten miles away in Cambridge, Massachusetts, attended her wedding; memory of that fact at anniversaries in later years, Meredith felt, would bring on Grace's bouts of depression.[9]

The seriousness of Grace's condition did not manifest itself until Kline started teaching full-time at WTS in the fall of 1950, soon after the youngest of their three sons was born. The family had moved from Kline's OPC pastorate in Ringoes, New Jersey, to a rental near WTS, but, possibly to save money, in February 1951 he planned to move the family to seminary-campus lodgings while he attempted to construct a house that he had designed for property purchased next to E. J. Young. The stress of contemplating such a move with three young boys apparently triggered Grace's inherited dysfunction, and she spent over six months in a CRC mental facility in Wyckoff, New Jersey. Initially, with the help of Glenside, Pennsylvania, and Ringoes OPC friends, along with family, Kline maintained his WTS schedule and house-constructing activities, but he temporarily discontinued his PhD studies; Lillian Young started taking care of seven-month-old Calvin while, eventually, Meredith M. and Sterling were sent to Kline's parents in Boston. Grace experienced additional lengthy hospital stays in the next several years; despite continual medical monitoring and various medications, she was susceptible to breakdowns of varying length during the rest of her life. One fall, a church pastoral search committee decision so upset her that she was unable to cope with life for months; when Kline managed to get her to Escondido, California, so he could teach during the spring semester at Westminster Seminary California, instead of renting an apartment as usual, they lived with their son Meredith's family so someone could be with her while Kline taught his classes at the seminary.

Dealing with Grace's fragile condition resulted in Kline placing constraints on the family, primarily out of fear of how he could manage if something unexpected happened to the boys, thus adding cares to the uncertainty of Grace's potential negative reaction to such events. The boys' extracurricular school activities were limited, they were not driven to libraries for research-report resources, and later, for financial reasons, they were not permitted to get driver's licenses until late college years or beyond.

In addition to limitations on the activities of his three sons related to concerns about Grace, Kline's ideas also affected what the boys did. While they were growing up, he had traditional views of the Sabbath. Kline did not work on his academic, even biblical, projects on Sunday. When healthy, family members regularly attended morning and evening services at the Glenside or Hatboro OPC churches, the boys attended Sunday School and Machen League, afternoons involved naps or reading or taking walks, and the family might socialize with church friends. Meredith M. and Sterling did not attend their high school graduations, which occurred on Sunday. Based on Kline's views of church and state relations, the boys, along with their many Jewish classmates, did not participate in reciting the Lord's Prayer during the school's joint morning opening-exercises.[10] Kline's strong Reformed convictions meant his boys did not affiliate with the high school Bible club.[11]

Kline's desire to protect Grace contributed

9 Over the years we had little contact with Grace's family.

10 Kline spoke to Christian groups about supporting the attempt by parents of the boys' classmates to take their case to the Supreme Court to have the Abington (Pennsylvania) School System stop the mandatory Bible reading and Lord's-Prayer-recitation practice.

11 The boys already had Wednesday catechism classes, which like Sunday School involved homework. During high school, Meredith M. had no interaction with classmate George W. Murray, president of the Bible club, who later became president of Columbia International University.

to his tendency to micromanage and do things himself. In academic life his desire to control an Old Testament department and curriculum was a significant factor in his switch from Westminster to Gordon Divinity School in 1965.[12] In family life he performed all sorts of activities related to building or maintaining the family's houses and managing their yards, yet he never trained his boys to do carpentry or paint or shingle or mow the lawn, etc.; he had to do those activities himself so they would be done the way he thought they should.[13] Even in later life, Kline's need to be in control led to trying, even if with good intentions and involving generosity, to make decisions for his grown sons.

Grace's emotional instability might be a reason Kline never traveled outside the United States, except to briefly lecture in Canada; an additional factor might have been potential uncertainties associated with the fact that she was a British citizen (having been born in London before her parents moved to Rhode Island)—she did not become an American citizen until her seventies, probably for reasons related to Social Security. Grace's condition was considered a major factor in the family not going to Basel for a possible sabbatical around 1957, though finances also played a role in Kline not fulfilling invitations to England or Switzerland for later sabbaticals.

Kline constantly had to include Grace's requirements into calculations for daily living. She never learned to drive, so he had to transport her for family shopping or evening art classes and seminary wives' events as well as medical appointments. Providing taxi service for family members was considered noteworthy in his date books, along with writing projects or seminary meetings. He also supported Grace by accompanying her for walks in the woods on the Gordon College property, by canoeing in nearby Chebacco Lake, or by visiting the beaches and scenic locations of Boston's North Shore as well as its art galleries.

Art was Grace's therapy throughout her life. She had studied fashion design at Massachusetts College of Art, so she made her own clothes and hats and also knitted rugs. Her main concentration, however, was oil and watercolor painting. Meredith's artistic talent, developed during high school days as evident in artwork done for Central Congregational Church and Boston Latin School publications, enabled him during college days to join Grace in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts classes and later in life to join her as an exhibiting member of the Beverly (Massachusetts) Guild of Artists. They also enjoyed frequent visits to art galleries in the Boston area. After Meredith died, the family was pleased with how Grace managed on her own in an assisted-living facility, spending many days, when healthy enough and despite limited eyesight, in drawing and painting or even assisting other residents with artwork. Grace as artist was the background to the punning dedication of Kline's book *Images of the Spirit*—to "the grace of murielangelo." Also, her painting of the mountains of New Hampshire graced the cover of Meredith's last book, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*.

Kline was interested in architecture. He designed the family house in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, and additions to two residences in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. While engaging church or seminary acquaintances to do the bulk of the construction and utility work for his houses, Kline would help dig foundations, do carpentry, paint, lay linoleum, and shingle. He also served on faculty committees for the construction of new library buildings at Westminster in Philadelphia and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton.

Kline's artistic gifts were exhibited in his academic work, since they enabled him to perceive aesthetic techniques in Hebrew poetic pericopes, symmetry patterns and genre forms in whole biblical books, and structures of covenant theology. He and Edmund Clowney were known as skilled practitioners of biblical theology, and both were artists constantly thinking in terms of the relationships of

12 Conwell Theological Seminary and Gordon Divinity School merged in 1969 to become Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

13 He never attempted to work on cars, though, relying totally, while teaching at WTS, on Charles Danberry, a Ringoes OPC elder and lifelong friend who had a Chevrolet franchise and operated a garage.

parts to wholes. In Kline's case, he even sketched colleagues or designed houses during long Saturday WTS faculty meetings!

Kline liked classical music, which was usually on the radio at home, and he enjoyed going to local concerts. While in high school he had played violin in a Boston-area youth symphony; he continued to play violin during his Westminster years, and the night he died he was talking with grandson Jonathan about a young violinist he had heard.

Kline passed on his interests to his sons. He dedicated his last book to them. Son Meredith continued his dad's interest in ancient Near Eastern languages, the artistry of biblical texts, and covenant theology, especially in relation to Ecclesiastes. Sterling inherited an ability to visualize conceptual systems, which resulted in him being a prominent architect in the construction of pharmaceutical manufacturing plants, designing two churches, and volunteering as consultant for projects of the OPC's Boardwalk Chapel in Wildwood, New Jersey. Calvin inherited the ability to perceive the structures of musical compositions, which enabled him to conduct musical groups, be a church organist, and play many instruments. In later life he has also been a lay preacher.

Kline was athletic and enjoyed participating in and watching sports on television. While attending Westminster he taught swimming for over a year and was a lifeguard at a local YMCA. In 1957 he was the speaker at the OPC New England Presbytery's Deerwander Bible Conference in Maine, but the next year and many of the next forty years, along with teaching the staff class, he was the waterfront director! As a student at Westminster, he played football, and even as a faculty member he would play for the graduate student team. He enjoyed playing softball with church folk at picnics or weekly summer games on the Westminster campus; he and his three sons constituted half a team. He enjoyed playing tennis with other pastors and friends at Wildwood, New Jersey, when the family vacationed at the OPC Boardwalk Chapel. After moving to Massachusetts, for many years he would try to run a mile most days. Having grown up in Boston, he was always a fan of its sports teams, and he enjoyed watching the baseball world series or, sometimes with Robert Knudsen, football bowl games on New Year's Day.

Kline liked the outdoors. Though he grew up in Dorchester, a part of urban Boston, he loved the lakes and woods of New England. College summers were spent as counselor at a camp in New Hampshire canoeing on a lake and climbing mountains (even leading campers up Mount Washington at night, partly on the cog-railway tracks to avoid animals). When the family lived in Pennsylvania and traveled to Boston to visit family, Kline always cheered when we crossed the border into Massachusetts. He would often take his family and parents to the mountains of New Hampshire for a day trip or a week's vacation. Later in life he was thrilled to have a house in evergreen woods overlooking a pond. He enjoyed the common grace of a beautiful natural environment provided by the Creator he loved, and he encouraged others to appreciate it also by the results of his biblical investigations. When Kline was a young boy, scientists devised means through terrestrial telescopes to prove there were multiple galaxies; by the time he died, orbiting celestial telescopes portrayed in splendid color an even more majestically glorious cosmos that produces a quantum-leap magnification of the unfathomable love of a Creator who also amazingly redeemed members of a rebellious species on a little blue planet—a theme Kline devoted his energies to articulate. ©

**Meredith M. Kline** *is the former director of the Goddard Library and was Ranked Adjunct Assistant Professor of Oriental Languages at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. His ThD thesis was on Ecclesiastes, and he is a member of First Presbyterian Church, North Shore (PCA) in Ipswich, Massachusetts.*

# Reading Meredith G. Kline: Where to Begin?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2022[1]

**by John R. Muether**

If someone were to begin to read the works of Meredith Kline, where are the best places to start? I am often asked that question, and I have my list of a dozen or so pieces that fall in chronological order, from "The Relevance of the Theocracy" to "Covenant Theology Under Attack." I began to wonder, however, how others might respond to that question. And so, I polled several former students and colleagues of Kline, from different eras and schools (Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia [WTS], Gordon-Conwell Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts [GCTS], and Westminster Seminary California in Escondido [WSC]), who offered a variety of approaches.

Miles Van Pelt, who teaches Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson (and who studied with Kline at GCTS), commends *Images of the Spirit* as an accessible and rewarding first read. "It's a good introduction to Kline's thought and a place where he defines many of the terms he uses." Beyond that, Van Pelt points to the studies that form appendices to *Structure of Biblical Authority*. In particular, he cites "The Two Tables of the Covenant" and "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre." After that, the reader should proceed to *By Oath Consigned.*

Mark Futato (Kline student at WTS and teaching colleague at WSC, and now my colleague at RTS Orlando) divided the challenge into two particular categories: creation and covenant. For creation, "Because It Had Not Rained" and "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony" present Kline's framework interpretation, first in an early and simpler expression and then in a later and more sophisticated form. For covenant, "Intrusion and the Decalogue" masterfully handles challenges in Old Testament ethics, such as conquest, and his first two books—*Treaty of the Great King* and *The Structure of Biblical Authority*—brilliantly connect covenant and canon.

"Hands down, one must read *Kingdom Prologue* for his mature thoughts and *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* for his contemplations on heaven," suggested Peter Lee, OPC church planter and professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. (and Kline's student at WSC). Venturing into Kline's articles, Lee added two pieces that pair together well: "*Har Magedon*: The End of the Millennium" and "Covenant of the Seventieth Week." "Dr. Kline was critical of both dispensational premillennialism and postmillennialism," Lee explained. "These articles are a tour-de-force challenge to both."

Finally, a reading of Kline ought to expose the reader to his expertise also in the New Testament, and Lee suggests two articles in particular. "Gospel Until the Law" is important for three reasons. "First, it shows the importance Dr. Kline placed on the covenant of works with Adam. Second, it is one of the key New Testament texts he often cited to support his view of a works-principle in Moses. Third, it shows that he was just as insightful as a New Testament exegete as he was of the Old Testament." Lee concluded by insisting that "we don't really get Kline unless we end in the book of Revelation." So, he urged that "The First Resurrection" find its way into an introductory reading list.

Bryan Estelle, a student and later a colleague of Kline's at WSC, ventured into less familiar works. In the 1950s Kline had contributed to a "Bible Book of the Month" series in *Christianity Today*, and Estelle offered that his introduction to the Song of Songs was "perhaps one of Meredith's most popular and accessible pieces." He added that an alert reading will detect an adumbration of his later views on republication. Secondly, he pointed to the posthumously published *Genesis: A New Commentary*, which provides "the easiest ac-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1005.

cess to Kline's thoughts on Genesis." Finally, "The Oracular Origin of the State" is an important work on Kline's view of the state.[2]

T. David Gordon, recently retired from teaching at Grove City College (and a former colleague of Kline at GCTS for over a decade), reminds us not to overlook the obvious. The *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline*, an anthology edited by grandson Jonathan Kline, "is very good, because it ranges well across his career. I thought they were extremely well selected. I have been enjoying reading back through them (some for the first time), and I think they are very representative of his writing." In particular, Gordon noted that the collection "has good examples of how Meredith sometimes began with what appeared to be a small, technical linguistic matter that turned into something profoundly significant (such as 'Double Trouble' and 'Abram's Amen'). At this point, when I meet someone totally unfamiliar with him, I recommend this collection."

My respondents found it a challenge to keep their lists short. As varied as the answers were, a consistent feature in all of their responses was the inclusion of a particular work published about the time the respondent actually studied under him. Understandably, those paradigm-shifting moments made a great impression on each of them. Together, these suggestions underscore that there are many approaches to begin one's reading.

The reader should not despair at the seeming obscurity of some of these suggestions. All of these works are easily accessible on the Meredith Kline website (https://meredithkline.com). There you will find a complete bibliography and electronic texts of older and hard-to-find pieces. In addition, any student of Kline will be enriched by listening to the 190 episodes in the Glory-Cloud podcast (https://glorycloudpodcast.libsyn.com), recorded from 2016 to 2020. Hosted by three Kline experts (Chris Caughey, Lee Irons, and Todd Bordow), this remarkable resource includes an introduction to Kline's life and work, discussions of his significant articles, multi-episode analyses of his books (including 40 episodes on *Kingdom Prologue* and two dozen on *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*), and interviews of interpreters of Kline. Particularly worth noting are several installments devoted to "Meredith Kline Applied" that explore how his thought sheds light on contemporary challenges to the church.

Wherever you begin with Kline, you will find yourself challenged by his writing style, even in the more accessible and introductory materials. And so, it is fitting to conclude with suggestions about *how* to read Kline, and here we are helped by two OPC pastors who were among the last of Kline's seminary students when he retired from WSC in 2003. Brett McNeill, who pastors Reformation OPC in Olympia, Washington, had the advantage of hearing Kline in the classroom before he encountered him in print. "Listening to Kline and getting used to the cadence of his rhetoric," McNeill suggested, "made his syntax far more understandable for me, and this has been the experience of many others." He urges students of Kline today to do the same through recordings of Kline's lectures that can be found on the internet, including the Meredith Kline website listed above.

Zach Keele, pastor of Escondido Orthodox Presbyterian Church, wisely adds that a reading of Kline should be slow and deliberate. He writes:

> It is not unusual to hear that [Kline's] writing is difficult and inaccessible, but another estimate is more fitting. Although he may use language that is unfamiliar in everyday parlance (and he enjoys his hyphens!), Dr. Kline can weave together beautifully rich sentences, where form and meaning are wonderfully matched. In this way, Kline resembled the authors he spent so much time studying: the prophets. The blackbelt skill of the prophets was the rhetorical creativity they pulled from the law and the culture around them to foretell the greater realities to come. Meredith

2 Estelle himself applies some of these Klinean principles in his own recently published book, *The Primary Mission of the Church: Engaging or Transforming the World?* (Fern, Rosshire: Mentor, 2022).

G. Kline was the student who followed the example of his teachers. . . . I encourage readers to go forth and not just learn, but enjoy.[3] ©

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3 Zach Keele, "Review of Essential Writings of Meredith Kline," *Modern Reformation*, 28 (Nov–Dec 2019), 57–58.

# Reflections on *Ordained Servant* at Thirty by Others

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* January 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds, editor**

The following are reflections by some of the people connected with *Ordained Servant* (*OS*) over the years of my editorship. Not only would the publication of *OS* have been impossible without them, but I count it a great privilege and blessing to work with such talented and delightful people.

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**Ann Henderson Hart**, copyeditor for the print edition (2008–present)

I began copyediting *Ordained Servant* in the spring of 2008, the season that my father, a faithful minister, died. Carefully reading through the editorials, articles, and reviews in the journal had a special resonance for me that year. A sustained meditation on Christ, his church, and eternal things meant a great deal to me. In the years since, I have continued to appreciate the range of offerings each year in the journal, from deep theological reflections, to practical pieces on the life of the church, to reviews of quality Christian and secular books.

Edifying is the word that most often comes to mind after proofing the annual volume from cover to cover. One is reminded that you are engaging with thoughtful authors nationwide, who share a love for Christ and his church—whether they are pastors, elders, or deacons.

The breadth of subjects addressed and range of authors from across the country is heartening. Having worshipped in Orthodox Presbyterian churches in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and California, I am thankful to see how God is building his church.

The print version of *Ordained Servant*, in particular, invites readers to move away from their computer screens, slow down, and focus on carefully curated submissions. It also provides a permanent record that can be put on the bookshelf and consulted later.

I appreciate the energy that editor Greg Reynolds brings to his post. Often the handsome cover of *OS* journal is a photograph that he has taken of a church steeple in his beloved New England. The layout is appealing, and the contents are easy to follow with titles, including: "Servant Tribute," "Servant Worship," "Servant Word," "Servant Training," "Servant Living," and more. The editor encourages church officers to be stewards of the Word, as well as attentive readers of the words of hymns, poetry, and serious literature.

Writer Marilyn Chandler McEntryre, in her memorable book *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*, challenges readers to care deeply about words both spoken and written. She writes, "To be good stewards of words—we have at least to do three things (1) to deepen and sharpen our reading skills, (2) to cultivate habits of speaking and listening that foster precision and clarity, and (3) to practice *poesis*—to be makers and doers of the word."[2]

Pastors, elders, and deacons are stewards of the Word, whether from the pulpit, engaged in mercy ministries, or by example. *Ordained Servant* has been a complement to those endeavors for thirty years. While the printed journal is for church officers, the monthly editions of *Ordained Servant* are available for the edification of all readers at the denomination's website, opc.org.

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1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=940.

2 Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 10.

After all, at the end of life's journey, all true followers of Christ long to hear the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

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**Darryl Hart**, chairman of the Subcommittee on Serial Publications of the Committee on Christian Education (2002–present)

"Ruling Elders Rule"

One of the striking features of *Ordained Servant* has been the attention its contributors and editors have given to the office of ruling elder. In the first two years of the magazine's publication, it featured four articles on eldership. Over the last three decades, it has accumulated eighteen articles on the topic. This reflects the original editor's vision in some ways. In his first editorial, G. I. Williamson asserted that *OS*'s purpose was "to provide materials to help in the training and effective functioning of the elders (both teaching and ruling) and the deacons of our church." He argued this was a need, since in the United States at the time (January 1992, just after the Cold War) an "exaggerated individualism" raised serious problems for the work of church officers and for appreciating the seriousness of church membership. "Can we honestly say, without hesitation," he added, "that the elders of Orthodox Presbyterian congregations are faithfully exercising oversight of the flock according to biblical standards?"[3] To address that question, Williamson then—and Greg Reynolds more recently—have addressed the nature and function of ruling elders in Presbyterianism. For the sake of comparison, only "deacons" have received more attention—twenty-one articles. Church discipline, for instance, has attracted eight articles over thirty years.

This emphasis on office, and especially the office of ruling elder, is something of an anomaly in the history of Presbyterianism as a theory of church government. The Church of Scotland's *First Book of Discipline* (1560), for instance, devoted a chapter to the election of elders and some criteria for those elected to office but did not spend much time on theological grounds for ruling elders as an office distinct from pastors.[4] The *Second Book of Discipline* (1578) added a chapter, "Of Elders and Their Office." It described their work as watching "diligently upon the flock committed to their charge, both publicly and privately, that no corruption of religion or manners enter therein."[5] But the major debate in Scotland and England after 1560 was whether to govern the church through bishops (usually appointed by the Crown) or by assemblies (independent of the civil authorities).

Even in the OPC, when in the 1950s the church revised its form of government, there were debates about the eldership that may have struck the original readers of *OS* as odd. One matter that received considerable debate was whether an elder was an office limited to active service or one that remained as long as the officer lived. Revisions allowed elders to leave office for non-judicial reasons, which some who resisted the revisions saw as a deficient understanding of the office.[6]

The current *Form of Government*, approved by the OPC's General Assembly in 1979, has a lengthier description of the work of elders than many iterations of church polity from other and older Presbyterian communions. It reads in part:

> [Ruling elders] are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. . . . They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of

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3 G.I. Williamson, "Introducing Ordained Servant," *OS*, Jan. 1992, 2.

4 *First Book of Discipline*, available at https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-first-book-of-discipline-1560/.

5 *Second Book of Discipline*, 6.4, available at https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-second-book-of-discipline-1578/.

6 See D. G. Hart, *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian, 2011), 65–66.

the Word and help him in his labors.[7]

Whether that description was on the mind of Mr. Williamson when he took up the reins of editing *OS*, under Greg Reynolds's watch it has clearly carried over to the pages of the magazine, as the current commentary by Alan D. Strange on the *Form of Government* indicates.[8] That sort of attention to the work of all officers, pastors, elders, and deacons has been one of the hallmarks and positive contributions of *OS*.

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**Diane Olinger**, copyeditor for the digital edition (2006–2020)

I was part of the *Ordained Servant* team when Gregory Reynolds first became editor. This was the beginning of online publication of monthly issues as well as a new style sheet, new formats, and new features. During the next fourteen years, Greg and I corresponded monthly concerning the work that needed to be done in preparing each issue. Our emails were brief and to the point: "articles x, y, and z attached," followed by "mark up of articles x, y, and z attached." But in the comments in the margins of the articles, we regularly exchanged views on some of the more esoteric rules of the *Chicago Manual on Style*—and occasionally on weighty matters of Reformed theology. Some of the most difficult articles for me, but also perhaps the most worthwhile, were those in which authors were vigorously expressing opposing views. This is one area where good editing can foster understanding and appreciation, if not agreement, by stressing the need for clarity of expression and fairness in argument (e.g., representing another's view accurately). I believe *Ordained Servant*, at its best, has served the church in this way.

My favorite *OS* author during my stint with *Ordained Servant* was, of course, Danny Olinger, whose in-depth writing on a variety of topics (including Roman Catholicism, Updike, Flannery O'Connor, Vos, and Kline) I frequently saw long before it arrived on Greg's desk. Greg's love of words and the Word, expressed in his writing on media, ecology, and poetry, introduced me to new ideas and beautiful expression. T. David Gordon and D. G. Hart were pithy—and required only the lightest of edits. Copyediting the profound and precise work of Dr. Gaffin and Dr. Tipton, I considered an honor.

My small contributions to *Ordained Servant* were often made in between loads of laundry or while the kids were napping. The laundry continues, but the kids are (nearly) all grown now, and I have moved on to other endeavors. Still, I am thankful to have had this opportunity to serve the OPC and its ordained servants.

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**Stephen Pribble**, webmaster, senior technical associate, and proofreader (2006–present)

It has been my privilege to work with *Ordained Servant* for the last twenty-four years. In 1998, I was asked by then–General Secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, Ross Graham, to take over opc.org. Initially I did not have a job description; I was simply told to look over the website, make improvements, and be on the lookout for appropriate content. Ross gave me a few weeks to get started; then we had a one-hour phone call to talk things over, and that was that—I had become the OPC website manager! I did not know till months later that a small salary came with the job.

I remember when *Ordained Servant* first began arriving in my mailbox in early 1992, printed on sheets of office paper, three-hole-punched to facilitate storage in binders. Having been ordained as an independent Baptist (later received into the Presbytery of the Midwest via the PCA), I was amazed at *OS*'s good content. I was impressed that veteran minister G. I. Williamson was the editor. He was a hero of mine, since his study guides on the Westminster Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism, and Heidelberg Catechism had given me great encouragement in my journey from

7 *Form of Government*, 10.3, available at https://opc.org/BCO/FG.html#Chapter_X.

8 Alan D. Strange, "Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Preface," *Ordained Servant Online*, April 2020, was the first in the series.

independency to Presbyterianism. I was moved by the realization that the Committee on Christian Education would pour considerable resources into the ongoing training and equipping of ministers, elders, and deacons—something I had never experienced in independent Baptist circles. Only later did I come to understand that this was an intentional effort to fulfill the Great Commission's "teaching-them-to-observe-all-things" clause.

When I began receiving the four-times-yearly issues of *OS*, I immediately thought that such good content needed to be permanently archived on opc.org. I phoned G. I. Williamson and persuaded him to send me the issues in PDF format (the only way we could manage it, since at that time he was using a Mac and I was using Windows), and I began posting the PDFs on the OPC website. The PDF format, while workable with many kinds of computers, did not, however, lend itself easily to the correction of minor errors.

When Greg Reynolds took over as editor in 2006, *OS* began monthly publication (except for July and September) in HTML with an annual printed edition. Greg began sending me articles in Word format for posting. I also helped with proofreading, especially with regularizing and standardizing Greek and Hebrew citations and transliterations (something that became easier over time with the development of the Unicode, Times New Roman, and Arial fonts). It was a joy to be able to see *OS* content in advance of the general public and to have a part in putting it into good form. The Committee on Christian Education entrusted me with the task of preparing Mobi (Kindle) and ePub editions. During fifteen years of service on the Committee on Christian Education, I had the opportunity to work personally with both G. I. Williamson and Greg Reynolds as well as Tom Tyson, Larry Wilson, Danny Olinger, John Galbraith, and others for whom I have the greatest respect.

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**James W. Scott**, layout-typographer and proofreader for the print edition (2006–2018)

From its beginning thirty years ago, *Ordained Servant* has worked to bridge the ever-widening gap between *New Horizons*, aimed at Orthodox Presbyterian Church members in general, and the *Westminster Theological Journal*, aimed at the Reformed academic world. Into the gap stepped *Ordained Servant* in 1992, edited by G. I. Williamson for the Committee on Christian Education. Initially it was a modest publication, about the same size as *New Horizons* and published less often. It mostly addressed the practical concerns of Orthodox Presbyterian ministers, elders, and deacons. Over the years it gradually grew in size.

At the end of 2005, G. I. Williamson retired, and Greg Reynolds became the editor. Under his leadership, *Ordained Servant* gained a wider theological focus. Starting with volume 15 for 2006, *Ordained Servant* became a monthly online publication, and at the end of that year (and every year thereafter) the chief contents of those issues were assembled topically in a beautiful printed volume, utilizing a new format designed by Chris Tobias. Greg brought in a number of people to assist him editorially and graphically with the online and printed editions. As an employee of the Committee on Christian Education, I was assigned the task of putting the annual printed volume together, beginning, if I am not mistaken, with volume 16 in 2007. My work continued through volume 26 in 2017 (produced in 2018). As part of my rolling retirement from working for the OPC, my layout/typesetting work was passed on to Judith Dinsmore.

When Chris Tobias designed the new format of *Ordained Servant*, he of course had the reader in mind, not me putting it together. That is, the book is attractive in its design and easy to read. But the mix of fonts and styles makes it rather complicated to format. There were also a number of technical software issues (e.g., involving footnotes), but I figured out what I thought was the most efficient way to handle them. I passed on my secrets to Judith, who has no doubt figured out better ways to do things.

Greg always wanted me to do a final proofing of the printed volume. Since it had already gone through several layers of editing and proofing, I was reluctant to take on such a time-consuming job. But I looked over the material that seemed

to be in good shape and spent more time with material that clearly needed more work (especially where Hebrew and Greek text was involved). I did what I could in the time available, but more thorough work could have been done.

I must say that I was consistently impressed by the high quality of the articles and book reviews that I was putting into print. Written mostly by Orthodox Presbyterian ministers, they showed mature insight into the subjects addressed. While my contribution to *Ordained Servant* was relatively minor, I was always glad to help facilitate the ministry of Christ's church.

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**Ayrian Yasar**, copyeditor for the digital edition (2020–present)

James 1:5 states, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him." While we pray for wisdom from the Lord, and know he is the one who provides it, he often uses other believers in our growth and acquisition of wisdom. In our current postmodern society there seems to be no loss for experiencing lack of wisdom to deal with current events and secular thought. In this regard, *Ordained Servant* is a useful tool for ministers in that it offers biblically based reflections on issues of the church and keeps ministers aware of current secular thought and biblical resources for various concerns. It is a means for passing along wisdom.

For ministers who find themselves in the trenches in their churches, *OS* provides a means by which these pastors can get a taste of what is going on in academia and the broader culture. It provides an opportunity for pastors to be aware of important issues, but with only a small use of precious time. An article like "*Imago Hominis*: Our Brave New World" by Gregory E. Reynolds is a great example of shedding light on an important subject via reviewing Jacob Shatzer's book *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*.

For ministers who need encouragement, that also can be found in *Ordained Servant* with selections like "Poured Out Like a Drink Offering: An Ordination and Installation Charge" by Richard B. Gaffin, to just name a recent article among others. Such articles follow the directive in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." As ministers are not immune to burnout from their ministries, *Ordained Servant* is a blessing and means of encouragement to pastors through its writings.

Whether it is understanding church history or current secular thought, gaining a better knowledge of the church standards, discovering an appreciation for poetry, or learning about influential biblical resources, *Ordained Servant* brings an assortment of valuable material for the minister that aids in his growth in wisdom. But in all this accumulation of useful information, in this sharing of each one's gifts and time as individuals write articles and review books, is the understanding that this work is a blessing to Christ's people, and specifically fellow under-shepherds. The coming together to build each other up and to be a source of encouragement and wisdom to each other is a beautiful thing that will, Lord willing, continue to show how Jesus blesses his people as they love him and love each other. Ⓢ

# *Ordained Servant* at Thirty

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**by Danny E. Olinger**

When the members of the Committee on Christian Education (CCE) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) gathered on Friday, September 29, 1989, at the OPC administrative building on 7401 Old York Road, Melrose Park, Pennsylvania, the excitement revolved around the appearance of the newly appointed general secretary, Thomas Tyson. Ross Graham, the director of the intern program, reported on his activities. Finance subcommittee chairman Payton Gardner made sure to introduce everyone to David Haney, the new controller for the Committee on Coordination. Then, at the end of the meeting, the final action taken was the establishment of a Special Committee on the Equipping of Ordained Officers. The CCE appointed G. I. Williamson, pastor of Bethel OPC in Carson, North Dakota, and two ruling elders newly elected by the Fifty-Sixth General Assembly and attending their first CCE meeting, James Gidley and David Winslow. The mandate given the Special Committee was to "begin to prepare periodic study materials for churches designed to assist the office bearers of the church in their God-given task of the edification of the whole body."

The Special Committee went to work, and nearly two years later, on September 13, 1991, they brought a recommendation that the CCE publish a journal designed to help church officers. The CCE approved the recommendation and then engaged in a discussion based upon the Special Committee's additional recommendations on what the journal should look like. The presentation of the work of the elder and deacon would be theoretical and practical. The church standards—the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the Book of Church Order—should be emphasized, along with historical studies of other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The practical was to include the session's oversight of Word, sacraments, and discipline and its leadership in worship, evangelism, and edification. Regarding deacons, the CCE sought to identify the task of deacons in the local congregation and to discuss practical problems that deacons face.

After determining the content, the CCE appointed G. I. Williamson as the editor. Ordained to the gospel ministry in 1952, Williamson had served as a pastor in five different denominations: the United Presbyterian Church of North America (New Bedford, Pennsylvania, and Fall River, Massachusetts), the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (Monticello, Arkansas), the Reformed Church of New Zealand (Auckland and Silverstream, New Zealand), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Wichita, Kansas), and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Fall River, Massachusetts, and Carson and Lark, North Dakota).

As editor, Williamson chose *Ordained Servant* for the title of the new journal—the two options that the CCE had approved were either *Ordained Servant* or *Ordained to Serve*—and decided to print it locally through Pleroma Press in Carson, North Dakota. Since Pleroma Press was, in the words of Williamson, "a fledgling operation" without even the standard press equipment of a mechanical page assembler, much of the work fell upon the members of Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church where Williamson served as pastor. But, as Williamson also noted, the work was done "willingly" by these members as they understood how important it was to the church to have faithful pastors, elders, and deacons.[2]

For the inaugural January 1992 issue, Williamson put on the cover a portrait of John

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=941.

2 G. I. Williamson, "Editorial," *Ordained Servant*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1993): 2, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV2N1.pdf.

Calvin.[3] In his editorial, "Introducing *Ordained Servant*," Williamson stated that the aim of the journal was to provide materials to help in the effective functioning of elders and deacons in the OPC. He also declared that it was not the intention of the journal to promote a partisan viewpoint, such as a two- or three-office view, as exclusively legitimate. Rather, the task before him as editor was to find the best material to help ordained servants in the church.[4]

Two articles in the first issue, "How to Get Started" by Williamson and "Taking Heed to the Flock" by Peter Y. de Jong, concentrated on what would become a primary focus of *Ordained Servant*—the practice of family visitation by pastors and ruling elders.[5] De Jong's "Taking Heed to the Flock" would appear in ten installments in *Ordained Servant* over the next three years. An "Elders Visitation Roll" was even included on the concluding pages of the first issue so that session members could keep a record of families visited.

In the 1998–1999 volume, Williamson revisited the themes of the de Jong articles with a smaller three-part series by David Winslow Jr. In his article "A Sample Sessional Calling Record," Winslow explained that the goal "in doing Home Visits is to help the lambs of the flock see their lives hidden in Christ, our Good Shepherd; to encourage them to follow him in the obedience of faith."[6] So that the time of the visit did not turn into an opportunity to criticize the pastor, Winslow suggested that the visiting elders not ask, "Do you like the pastor's preaching?" but "Are your understanding it?" and "Do you see that you are growing spiritually through it?"

Williamson, however, also gave notice that *Ordained Servant* was going to focus on the diaconate, with C. Van Dam's "Some Old Testament Roots and Their Continuing Significance."[7] Van Dam maintained that the diaconal task was to provide congregational fellowship in the joy of the Lord. In the second issue, April 1992, William Shishko built upon Van Dam's start with a three-part series, "Reforming the Diaconate." Shishko argued that Acts 6:1–6 presented the origin of the diaconate as a distinct and uniquely New Testament office. He then identified what he believed were the specific responsibilities entrusted to deacons, not only making provision for the basic needs of widows, but just as importantly relieving those entrusted with the ministry of the Word from responsibilities that detracted from this most important work of the church.[8]

The publishing of de Jong, a Christian Reformed minister, and Van Dam, a Canadian Reformed minister, previewed Williamson's penchant for utilizing theologians from the Dutch continental tradition. Most often an issue of *Ordained Servant* would include a mix of articles and reviews written by Orthodox Presbyterians and Canadian Reformed, United Reformed, and Reformed Church of New Zealand authors.

But the opening issues also revealed some of the difficulties involved with trying to write, edit, and print a periodical all by oneself, as Williamson was attempting to do. Five different times during the publishing of de Jong's "Taking Heed" series, the contents page listed the wrong numerical installment of the series. Grammatical errors were commonplace, and the paper and ink combination used in printing varied from faint and hard to read to bold and blurry.

Some also noted that, despite the editor's declaration in the opening issue that *Ordained Servant*

3 The cover portraits of the first two years of *Ordained Servant* following the initial Calvin cover would be J. Gresham Machen, Martin Luther, John Murray, Calvin, B.B. Warfield, and Martin Lloyd-Jones.

4 G. I. Williamson, "Introducing *Ordained Servant*," *Ordained Servant* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1992): 1, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV1N1.pdf.

5 Williamson, "Introducing *Ordained Servant*," 5 and 8.

6 David Winslow Jr., "A Sample Sessional Calling Record," *Ordained Servant* 7, no. 2 (Apr. 1998): 29, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV7N2.pdf.

7 C. Van Dam, "Some Old Testament Roots and Their Continuing Significance," *Ordained Servant* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1992): 14, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV1N1.pdf.

8 William Shishko, "Reforming the Diaconate," *Ordained Servant* 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1992): 42, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV1N2.pdf.

did not want to enter the two- or three-office debate, Williamson's emphasis and terminology was decidedly two-office. In the second issue, Williamson's "A Look at the Biblical Offices" argued that more important than the way that the offices are classified is the way the offices are defined.[9] Larry Wilson supplemented Williamson's article with one expressing what he believed were the practical concerns of the office debate in the OPC.[10] Wilson maintained that the three-office position on the one hand was concerned with guarding the faithful ministry of the Word by maintaining its necessity, distinctiveness, and importance. On the other hand, three-office advocates did not want to undermine the office of ruling elder by disqualifying men from that office who did not have gifts or training for publicly teaching the Word. The two-office position sought to guard the parity of the governing officers of the church and to avoid hierarchicalism. Wilson thought that each of the concerns were biblical and that the church should endeavor to emphasize all four concerns.

Over the years, the two- or three-office became less of a debate in the pages of *Ordained Servant*. One reason was that it was apparent that the predominantly three-office OPC and the predominantly two-office Presbyterian Church in America were not seeking to join, as they had officially attempted in 1981 and 1986. Another reason was the appearance of Mark Brown's 1993 book, *Order in the Offices*. In his *Ordained Servant* article accompanying the appearance of the book, "Why I Came to a Three-Office View," Brown argued that the historical Presbyterian position was correct: the minister is not an elder who teaches but a preacher who also governs.[11]

Williamson revisited the topic in the January 2003 issue with his article, "The Two- and Three-Office Issue Reconsidered." He confessed that he had long hesitated on the issue, in that 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9 seemed to him to be only speaking of elders and deacons (a two-office view), but 1 Timothy 5:17 proves that there was a marked division of labor among those who were called elders (a three-office view). Williamson confessed that he had been wrong in believing that Paul only lists the qualifications for two offices: the elders and the deacons. Rather, it is more accurate to say that he lists qualifications for three offices: (1) the deacons, (2) the elders who rule but do not labor in the Word, and (3) the elders who labor in the Word and rule as their vocation. The qualifications for category 3 are found in the entire content of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, not just in those portions of Scripture like 1 Timothy 3 that speak of the qualifications for categories 1 and 2. He concluded, "So I am finally driven to the conclusion that the three-office view is really what the Scriptures teach. But I also see that recognition of this in no way implies—in the slightest degree—any hierarchical status for ministers."[12]

Another issue that Williamson eagerly engaged at the start of *Ordained Servant* was the more effective use of modern technology. In his judgment, just as the invention of the printing press was vital in the promotion of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, so the electronic revolution could be of similar importance to the church in the future. He marveled that with a Macintosh IIsi computer and a small GCC personal laser printer, a master copy could be produced for the printer. The first of many reviews keeping readers updated on new technology for the church came from Leonard Coppes in the January 1993 issue. Coppes highly recommended the Logos Bible Study Software that was compatible with MS Windows 3.0

9 G. I. Williamson, "A Look at the Biblical Offices," *Ordained Servant* 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1992): 30, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV1N2.pdf.

10 Williamson, "A Look at the Biblical Offices," 38. On the Contents page, the article is named "The Office Debate." On page 38 where the article appears, the title is "How Many Offices are There? Practical Concerns."

11 Mark Brown, "Why I Came to a Three-Office View," *Ordained Servant* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 18, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV4N1.pdf.

12 G. I. Williamson, "The Two- and Three-Office Issue Reconsidered," *Ordained Servant* 12, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 6, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV12N1.pdf.

and 3.1.[13]

In keeping with the stated goal of providing resources for the training of elders and deacons, Williamson notably published during 1993 and 1994 John Hilbelink's "A Training Course for Elders and Deacons"[14] and Archibald Allison's "Biblical Qualifications for Elders."[15] In addressing practical problems that deacons face, Roger Schmurr's 1995 article, "Deacons and/or Trustees" sought to answer the question whether the handling of finances and the physical upkeep of the church property was limited to ordained individuals or not.[16]

As the years progressed, Williamson and *Ordained Servant* fell into a comfortable rhythm as such topics as confessionalism, Presbyterianism, expository preaching, and church discipline were regularly discussed and wholeheartedly endorsed. What Williamson never quite achieved, however, was consistency in the editing and printing of the journal.

At the close of 2005, Williamson retired at the age of eighty. During his fourteen years as editor, he produced fifty-one issues and wrote ten editorials, thirty-five articles, and twenty-three book reviews. More than that, he established a standard of commitment to confessional fidelity.

The introduction of Gregory Reynolds as editor in 2006 brought subtle changes to the content of *Ordained Servant* and drastic changes to the production and printing. Rather than sending up to four issues in the mail to sessions, the new format was an online monthly issue (except July and September) with a single print edition of the articles made available the following year. Regarding the content, Reynolds declared in his opening editorial, "Galvanized Iron: A Tribute to G. I. Williamson for His Pioneering Work on *Ordained Servant*," that he intended to build upon Williamson's "fine efforts to cultivate confessional consciousness in the mind of the church through the faithful ministries of its officers, that the Scripture may be understood and lived to the glory of God."[17]

In moving forward, Reynolds articulated that exploring the combination of digital and print publications for *Ordained Servant* represented a challenge. Digital publication brought with it the efficiency and accessibility of the internet; printed publication brought with it greater thoughtfulness and durability. In Reynolds's judgment, both had benefits and liabilities.

Finally, Reynolds proposed J. Gresham Machen as the model of piety, doctrinal integrity, and intellectual cultivation that should mark *Ordained Servant*. According to Reynolds, Machen had been able to communicate profound ideas with cogency and focus. This was accompanied with strong conviction, but those strong convictions were always held as a true Christian gentleman.

The January 2007 online issue, the first one solely assembled under the editorship of Reynolds, was devoted to the ruling elder. In his editorial, "Ordained Servants: The Ruling Elder," Reynolds lamented that one cause of the weakness of the contemporary church was its failure to understand, accept, and implement the biblical form of government, particularly the scriptural office of ruling elder. For Reynolds, too many religious leaders had concluded that careful oversight and feeding of the flock might take the church away from the task of evangelism. But Christ, the head of the church, instituted the office of ruling elder for the spiritual welfare of his people. Further, only a biblical view of eldership will enable the church to avoid the Scylla of dictatorship and Charybdis of

13 Leonard Coppes, review of Logos Bible Study Software, *Ordained Servant* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1993): 24, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV2N1.pdf.

14 John R. Hilbelink, "A Training Course for Elders and Deacons," *Ordained Servant* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1993): 3, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV2N1.pdf.

15 Archibald A. Allison, "Biblical Qualifications for Elders," *Ordained Servant* 3, no. 4 (Nov. 1994): 80, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV3N4.pdf.

16 Roger W. Schmurr, "Deacons and/or Trustees," *Ordained Servant* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1995): 20, https://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV4N1.pdf.

17 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Galvanized Iron: A Tribute to G. I. Williamson for His Pioneering Work on *Ordained Servant*," *Ordained Servant* 17 (2006): 6, *Ordained Servant Online* (Jan. 2006), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=4.

individualism.[18]

William Shishko contributed two articles—an essay on ruling elder Herbert Muether entitled "Lessons from the Life of an Extraordinary Ruling Elder" and "Tools for the Elder's Toolbox." In the former article, Shishko emphasized that he learned from Muether that part of an elder "ruling his household well" (1 Tim. 3:4) is that he "seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33) in everything.[19] In the latter article, Shishko reviewed a reprint of David Dickson's *The Elder and His Work*. Shishko appreciated the fact that Dickson, a nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian, was enthusiastic about the practical benefits of Presbyterian church government. Dickson argued, "We need no new machinery in the Christian church. It is all provided ready in our hand in the Presbyterian system. What we need is motive-power to set it going and keep it going."[20]

If that issue showed the continuity that would exist between the Williamson and Reynolds editorships, the March 2007 issue, "The Importance of Reading Fiction," revealed how Reynolds intended to broaden the scope of the articles that appeared in *Ordained Servant*. Reynolds's "Preaching and Fiction: Developing Oral Imagination" encouraged ministers to consider reading fiction to improve their preaching. Good fiction presents a picture of humanity that squares with reality, helps one become a better storyteller, and expands the color and cadence of the preacher in the preaching moment.[21]

Craig Troxel's "Why Preachers Should Read Fiction" furthered Reynolds's contention. Troxel maintained that reading fiction is a helpful way of gathering sermon illustrations. But mining for illustrations is the lesser reason why preachers should read fiction. The better reason is developing as pastors and persons. Troxel related that when he came to minister in suburban Philadelphia, the standard allusions and examples understood by friends and family in rural western Nebraska did not always translate smoothly. Reading fiction helped him expand his horizons and, most importantly, to sympathize with others.[22]

Danny Olinger positively reviewed Ralph Wood's *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*. Olinger affirmed Wood's premise that O'Connor's literature has supreme value for the church because in it "she was willing to slay certain things that seem to be good—the seemingly necessary modifications of the gospel that would make it fit modern needs and thus ensure its success."[23]

Another sterling example of the literary emphasis was the April 2016 online issue devoted to William Shakespeare. Leland Ryken's "Why Shakespeare Matters" encouraged Christians to take up the Bard's writings for four reasons. Shakespeare matters because beautiful language matters; understanding of human experience matters; good entertainment matters; and the Bible matters. Ryken also maintained that Shakespeare was a "Christian" writer, one whose literary world is based on Christian premises.[24]

Reynolds also devoted issues to anniversaries of significant figures in the history of the Reformed church. In 2009, to celebrate the semi-millennial anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, Reynolds published back-to-back issues of "Calvin at

18 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Ordained Servants: The Ruling Elder," *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 9, *Ordained Servant Online* (Jan. 2007), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=31.

19 William Shishko, "Lessons from the Life of an Extraordinary Ruling Elder," *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 44, https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=28.

20 William Shishko, "The Elder and His Work," *Ordained Servant Online* (Jan. 2007), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=30.

21 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Preaching and Fiction: Developing Oral Imagination," *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 14, *Ordained Servant Online* (Mar. 2007), https://www.opc.org/os.html?issue_id=19.

22 A. Craig Troxel, "Why Preachers Should Read Fiction," *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 51, *Ordained Servant Online* (Mar. 2007), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=37.

23 Danny E. Olinger, review of *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* by Ralph Wood, *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 124, *Ordained Servant Online* (Mar. 2007), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=38.

24 Leland Ryken, "Why Shakespeare Matters," *Ordained Servant* 25 (2016): 67, *Ordained Servant Online* (Apr. 2016), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=547.

500: The Word" and "Calvin's Soteriology." In his article "John Calvin: Servant of the Word," Glen Clary argued that Calvin was above all else a preacher, one whose entire theological labor was the exposition of Scripture. Calvin's devotion to the whole counsel of God was also seen in his commitment to the *lectio continua* ("we must not pick and cull the Scripture to please our own fancy") in the selection of texts.[25]

Richard Gaffin's "Calvin's Soteriology" examined the structure of the application of redemption in book three of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Gaffin started by quoting Calvin:

> Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by his Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.[26]

Gaffin emphasized from this the twofold grace of justification and sanctification in Calvin's soteriology. First and foremost, the focus is on the person of Christ. The saving benefits in view, justification and sanctification, do not accrue to faith apart from the person of Christ. It is in the believer's union with Christ that the benefits are "grasped" and "possessed."

Secondly, by partaking of Christ, believers principally receive a double grace. Gaffin argued that concerning justification, believers are reconciled to God, he being a gracious Father rather than a wrathful and unreconciled Judge. Concerning sanctification, believers, having been joined to Christ, are to cultivate blamelessness and purity of life. In Gaffin's judgment, Calvin then affirms an aspect that is settled, justification, and an aspect that is continuing, sanctification. Even then, however, it is just as believers have been and already are sanctified, in distinction from having been justified, that they are to cultivate a life of holiness.[27]

Just as Williamson had been interested in the intersection of technology and the church, so was Reynolds—but in a way that went beyond simply suggesting resources. Particularly, Reynolds focused on media ecology and the church. In his December 2011 article, "John, the Media Ecologist: Why I am a Media Ecologist," Reynolds argued that media ecology for the Christian is a part of the general stewardship of life in this world. He did so by focusing on the insights of Marshall McLuhan on technology and how it applied to the internet age. Technology is not neutral. For instance, the internet may expand our knowledge of the world, but at the same time it may narrow our view of the world to the social networks we know. Reynolds was not advocating the avoidance of the internet but of engaging with the technology in a way that brought glory to God.[28]

In his December 2012 article, "Face-to-Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life," Reynolds appealed to J. Gresham Machen's "Mountains and Why We Love Them." As Machen warned of a centralized tyranny in a technological civilization that undermined liberty and diminished the human spirit, Reynolds urged that we should be concerned not to use technology to centralize and thus diminish liberty and face-to-face interaction in the church. Ministers and ruling elders need to encourage church members to ask themselves how their use of electronic media advances healthy personal relationships in the church.[29]

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25 Glen J. Clary, "John Calvin: Servant of the Word," *Ordained Servant* 18 (2009): 77, *Ordained Servant Online* (Oct. 2009), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=170.

26 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Calvin's Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemption in Book Three of the *Institutes*," *Ordained Servant* 18 (2009): 68, *Ordained Servant Online* (Nov. 2009), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=174.

27 Gaffin, "Calvin's Soteriology," 68.

28 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "John, the Media Ecologist: Why I am a Media Ecologist," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 24, *Ordained Servant Online* (Dec. 2011), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=282.

29 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Face-to-Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life," *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 20, *Ordained Servant Online* (Dec. 2012), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=340.

During the COVID-19 period in July 2020, Reynolds wrote "Reflections on Virtual Church Meetings in a Time of Coronavirus." Citing 2 John 12, "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete," Reynolds acknowledged that, while a mediated media connection with other people is good in certain circumstances, nothing can replace their actual presence. "The present necessity is like John's paper and inking—better than nothing—but making us long for a better day." [30]

Another feature of *Ordained Servant* that Reynolds stressed in the media ecology realm was the reviewing of books that touched on that theme. An example of this was T. David Gordon's January 2013 review article of Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Gordon supported Turkle's notion that the powerful technologies of the modern world come with human cost. Turkle wrote,

> The ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are ties that preoccupy. We text each other at family dinners, while we jog, while we drive, as we push our children on swings in the park. We don't want to intrude on each other, so instead we constantly intrude on each other, but not in "real time."[31]

As *Ordained Servant* moves forward, it continues to seek to serve the ordained officers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Among Reynolds's editorial goals are to cover issues that threaten the unity and faith of the church.

> These issues come from within the church and from outside. They often come from our culture and infect the church. In their worst form, these beliefs and practices come in the guise of true spirituality within the church. An example would be the idea of many American Christians that formal membership or a membership role book are unspiritual, when in fact the biblical case for these is overwhelming. This is the spirit of radical individualism in the guise of true spirituality.[32]

The CCE gives thanks for thirty years of *Ordained Servant* and the work of its two editors, Williamson and Reynolds, and the many others who have contributed to it as writers, copyeditors, and proofreaders. This journal for church officers has seen a great deal of change over the years, but what has not changed is a commitment to encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ⓢ

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30 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Reflections on Virtual Church Meetings in a Time of Coronavirus," *Ordained Servant* 29 (2020): 9, *Ordained Servant Online* (June-July 2021), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=826.

31 T. David Gordon, review of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* by Sherry Turkle, *Ordained Servant* 22 (2013): 124 (citing Turkle), *Ordained Servant Online* (Jan. 2013), https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=344.

32 Gregory E. Reynolds, "Grace in Winter: Reflections on *Ordained Servant* at Thirty," *Ordained Servant Online* (Jan. 2022), https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=939.

# Needed: Congregational Historians

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**by John R. Muether**

When I stepped down as historian of the OPC last year, after the privilege of serving for two decades, I left with the joy and satisfaction of working with wonderful colleagues on the Committee for the Historian. Among the highlights of my tenure were establishing the Grace Mullen Archives room in the denomination offices in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the denomination, and offering daily features of OPC history on the church website.

Yet I also left the post with one unfulfilled ambition. Over time, I grew in the conviction that training in local history was lacking in our church. It was my hope to develop resources to encourage the writing of congregational histories throughout our denomination. But for a variety of reasons, this goal was unrealized.

A recent conversation with a Presbyterian minister has rekindled this interest. My friend pastors a well-educated, established congregation that recently exited the mainline Presbyterian denomination. He conducted a brief survey of his congregation's historical awareness and found that few members had any knowledge about the history of the church prior to their joining. They knew almost nothing about its founding or the history of their former or new denomination. Most could not name the church's former pastors.

These results were eye-opening to him, but they hardly took me by surprise. After all, a disregard for history is a long-established feature of the American temperament. This church is simply displaying our predilection toward "pastlessness." History is a burden that Americans, even American evangelicalism, are all too eager to shed. The result is a lack of historical consciousness in the life of many congregations.

My initial reaction also contained a measure of pride. This problem generally does not bedevil the OPC, I thought. On the contrary, Orthodox Presbyterians have a far better appreciation for history. As I have visited OP congregations, it has always impressed me how many members of our churches are familiar with the events surrounding the founding of our denomination. They have read about the life of Machen, and they are aware of significant events like the founding of Westminster Seminary and the leadership of its early faculty. Instruments like *New Horizons* make possible a strong sense of connectionalism within our denomination.

Upon further reflection, however, I wondered how well we know the stories of our own congregations. When and why did the church begin? Who were the former elders and pastors of the church? Increased geographical mobility presents a particular challenge to remembering local stories. This heritage will often disappear with the passing of the founding generation. While stewardship of our history seems well maintained on a General Assembly level, congregational memory is at greater risk.

Where might one go to find that information? Perhaps to church websites? I conducted my own survey of forty-five randomly selected Orthodox Presbyterian congregational websites and discovered that our congregations approach their history unevenly. Only a third (15) devoted any attention to its story. For those that did, the length varied from as little as 65 words to as many as 800. The median was 350 words—which is not a lot of attention. I will grant that a website may not be the best place to cover at length a congregation's history. But ought not it to say *something*? Might it not serve even an evangelistic purpose, as witness to the work that God has done in and through this little flock?

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=992.

## What Local History Provides

As beneficial as congregational histories can be for visitors and inquirers, they can accomplish a lot more. The history of your church will augment officer training and new members classes. An incoming pastor will gain helpful insights into your congregation. In addition to enhancing a church website, excerpts can be an occasional feature in the church bulletin. Local history can prompt healthy congregational reflection and recommitment to the church, especially as it celebrates an anniversary.

Harry Reeder in his book *Embers to Flame* even goes so far as to suggest that "connecting to the past" is the first step toward the revitalization of a struggling congregation. He writes:

> Connect your church to the vibrancy of its past. Do it with celebration and worship for what God has done, just as the Israelites would pile up stones to teach the next generation what the Lord had done. Celebrate the past victories, investigate and identify the principles that the Lord blessed, and then contemplate how to implement them in the present, remembering that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The goal is to have a church that does not live in the past, but does learn from the past, and then lives in the present in order to shape the future.[2]

Yet even these suggestions do not exhaust the value of congregational history. Consider, for example, a study of worship in the OPC. One important window on worship is the hymnody of the church. We can review the denominational efforts that produced the original *Trinity Hymnal* (in 1961), the revised *Trinity Hymnal* (1990), and the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (2018). By this we can judge what Orthodox Presbyterians consider the proper songs of public worship.[3]

But what do Orthodox Presbyterians actually sing? The canon of song of a particular church is far smaller than the more than 600 selections in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. How many of those pages are dog-eared, and which of them remain pristine? Reviewing congregational worship practices (from church bulletins or other records of hymn selections) would provide a fascinating window on the music of the church.

We can say the same about other worship practices across the OPC. What are the versions of the pew Bibles in our churches, and when did that change? How has the Lord's Supper frequency changed throughout our history?

Even more significantly, congregational histories can tell the stories of the people in the pew. My predecessor as OPC historian, Charles Dennison, has argued that "the unknown have contributed more to the progress of the church than the known." This is especially true, he writes, about the women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

> Many unknown but remarkable women have forged the OPC. Their modesty has not meant any lack of assertiveness by way of positive example, clarity of vision, or decisiveness, at times surpassing that of the men in the church. In fact this modesty has been matched by something of the "frontier spirit." One OP woman, while reflecting on the early days of the church, was heard to say, "It was thrilling, an actual revival. We all were exhilarated about the movement and sensed we were involved in something of overwhelming importance." Another told her husband, who was about to lose his church and the security it promised for her and their children, "John, you do what you know is right and leave the rest to the Lord." Later, as her husband finished his farewell sermon and walked out of

2 Harry L. Reeder III, *Embers to Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 192–93.

3 See especially chapter 2 (on the *Trinity Hymnal*) in Darryl Hart's *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011).

his large mid-western PCUSA congregation, she rose, "dragged" her children from the pew, and marched out the door behind him. Three hundred followed.[4]

These are the stories we risk losing, and they can only be stewarded by congregational historians.[5]

## Getting Started

My hope is that these reflections might encourage some readers either to take up this calling or to encourage budding historians in their churches to narrate their story. If this sounds too daunting a task, let me offer some suggestions for beginners to dip their toes in these waters.

If your church lacks an archivist, perhaps the best place to start is to offer your services. Good history requires access to primary sources. Gather together sermons (written or recorded), bulletins, annual reports, pastoral letters, and other communications. Photographs, of course, are also a vital feature of your history. Collect and organize photographs of your church, taking care to label each one as best you can. For historical purposes, an unidentified photo is a useless photo. Some churches may have stashes of unlabeled photos with little clues of their significance. A creative way to solve that problem is to gather the senior saints and long-standing members of the church, perhaps over a meal, and make a collective effort to jog memories in order to identify occasions, people, and dates of your pictures.

If your congregation is in the habit of producing a series of reports for an annual congregational meeting, volunteer to write a "year in review" of your church. By saving the weekly church bulletins and other church communications over the course of the year, you have the raw material to compose the review. After a few years, you have amassed a portfolio of accounts, and you have gained a little experience in telling a congregational story.

Another opportunity is to contribute to the daily feature on the OPC website, "Today in OPC History." The Committee for the Historian of the OPC is always eager to get brief accounts of milestones in the life of OPC congregations—church anniversaries, new buildings, pastoral transitions, and the like. Consider how an episode from your church can become a feature story.

If you want to write a fuller narrative, perhaps on the occasion of a church anniversary, there are further steps you can take. Read many different congregational histories. For a fine example of a collaborative effort by professional historians, read the story of Tenth Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Philadelphia.[6] Read amateur efforts as well. You will find accounts that vary widely in size and quality. Plenty of them are nostalgia masquerading as history or enthusiasm that focuses entirely on positive and upbeat stories. Take note of the strengths and weaknesses, the features emphasized, and the topics omitted. I remember finding a pamphlet-sized history of the church my mother-in-law grew up in. I was stunned to find that this celebration of three centuries of congregational life failed to mention either God or Christ even once! (That it was a Unitarian Church perhaps lessens the shock a little.)

In addition, look for local histories of your community or histories of other churches in your town. These will alert you to local issues that have affected congregational life. Consult local and regional historical societies for information they might have on your community and its patterns of church life.

Session and Presbytery minutes will reveal

4 Charles G. Dennison, ed., *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 1936–1986 (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986), 313.

5 Inspiring profiles of many women serving in the OPC have been captured well by Pat Clawson and Diane Olinger in their editing *Choosing the Good Portion: Women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2016). But as they note, there are many more stories to tell.

6 Philip Graham Ryken, ed., *Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia: 175 Years of Thinking and Acting Biblically* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004). Another model is David B. Calhoun, *The Glory of the Lord Risen Above it: First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina, 1795–1995* (Columbia, SC: First Presbyterian Church, 1994).

key decisions that shaped the story of your church. Financial reports will reveal times of plenty and want that have affected church life at various times. Work through annual membership statistics; put them in a chart and study the trends they suggest. Write up brief biographies of former pastors.[7] Write up the stories of the missionaries your church has supported and about their visits to your church.

One important way to begin to capture the lived experience of members is by conducting oral history interviews. There is an art to effective interviewing that I cannot claim to have mastered. But I have found some helpful advice for conducting effective interviews. Among the things I have learned:

Remember that an interview is not a dialogue. You must decrease so that your interviewee may increase. Avoid saying too much, and do not seek to control the conversation. Rather, welcome whatever anecdotes your guests relate. Careful follow-up questions can guide their reminiscences. And strive to avoid "yes or no" questions: you will likely get one-word responses! Especially seek to evoke your narrator's eyewitness testimony: what was particularly noteworthy about your pastor's pulpit presence? What did his sermons sound like? What did you appreciate (or dislike) most about Sunday school?

There are limits to oral history, to be sure. Memory is fragile and malleable, and you will want to confirm it, when possible, from other sources you have recorded. Many of your stories will be positive and encouraging, but not all of them. All churches experience seasons of growth and retrenchment, with struggles and controversies along the way. Exercising discretion while telling the truth will be one of your greatest challenges.

There are additional resources you should be aware of. The Presbyterian Historical Society's website contains guides for the aspiring congregational historian, including the article "Writing Congregational Histories." Wayne Sparkman, the archivist of the Presbyterian Church in America, has done a remarkable job of curating the story of his denomination at the PCA Historical Center in St. Louis (and he has generously lent his time and insights in the establishment of the OPC Archives). The PCA Historical Center's website has several helpful materials, including an introduction to writing local church history. Under the able oversight of archivist Abby Harting, the OPC Archives continues to expand its holdings, including files on local congregations. Whatever the form your church history takes, be sure to deposit a copy in the OPC Archives.

## Why Now?

The OPC's centennial, fourteen years away, suggests that this is a particularly opportune time for churches to take on this challenge. A previous effort to encourage congregations to tell their stories took place for the OPC semi-centennial in 1986, with the production of the large commemorative book, *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936–1986*, edited by Charles G. Dennison. Through text and pictures, this oversized book captured the accounts of the twelve presbyteries of the church and over 250 congregations, including ones that shut their doors or left the denomination. (One entry was a two-sentence description of a church's coming into the OPC from independency and returning to independency eleven months later.) Relying largely on the contributions from churches, these accounts included tales of humble service and faithful cross-bearing. I am not aware of anything like this, at least among American Presbyterian denominations. The Committee for the Historian (on which I continue to serve) is hoping to gather congregational stories again for the OPC centennial in 2036. What the final product may look like remains to be determined. But to do anything effectively, it is wise to begin planning now, over a decade in advance.

Psalm 78 instructs us to look back at history, draw lessons from the past, and pass it on to the next generation. The "mighty acts of God" in

7 Here you will find enormously beneficial the *Ministerial Register of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, produced by the Stated Clerk of the OPC and now in its seventh edition.

that psalm focus on the miraculous wonders of redemptive history. But congregations do well also to reflect on their own history and the particular blessings that God has graciously bestowed on them. Telling the story of a local church, how it came to be and how God has sustained it over the years, is always a worthwhile task.

So consider how you might serve your church and your denomination in this way. In doing so, you will also help me meet my unfulfilled ambition. ©

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# Servant Word

## A Living Sacrifice

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**by James S. Gidley**

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1).

What is the heart and soul of Christian ethics?[2] As those who are well-schooled in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, we might immediately respond, "the Ten Commandments." The Ten Commandments were spoken by the voice of God from Mount Sinai, engraved by the finger of God upon the stone tables, and written by the Spirit of God upon the hearts of his people! Why should we look further? Because the Bible compels us to look further.

If not the Ten Commandments, then must it not be the two greatest commandments? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind," and "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). No less an authority than our Lord Jesus Christ himself has declared that all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments (Matt. 22:40). Need we go further? The Bible compels us to go further still.

It is a curious fact that the New Testament epistles do not quote the greatest commandment. Never in the epistles, never in the wealth of ethical instruction that we find there, do we find the command to love God. Were the apostles forgetting something? No, when the Bible leads us into the inner sanctum of Christian ethics, into the heart of hearts, we find something there even more profound than the command to love God.

In seeking for this heart of hearts, we can do no better than to examine Paul's epistle to the Romans. Here is Paul's fullest and most systematic exposition of his gospel, of which Calvin justly remarks: "when anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."[3]

In seeking for the heart of the ethical teaching of Romans, we can do no better than to turn to Romans 12:1. The first verse of the twelfth chapter of Romans is the turning point of the epistle. Paul has brought his doctrinal teaching to a climax at the end of chapter eleven, concluding with the marvelous doxology, so full of reverence and awe at the mystery of God's eternal purpose (Rom. 11:33–36). Now with a brief "therefore" Paul turns to exhortation.

Let us not rush over this "therefore" too quickly. This little conjunction is remarkable. It stubbornly contradicts modern ethical philosophy. It is well-nigh an axiom of modern philosophical ethics that the indicative does not imply the imperative; that is to say, no account of what *is* can imply what *ought* to be. With a single word, the Spirit of God speaking through Paul contradicts this error. For eleven chapters, he has been expounding to us what *is*: what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. With a single word he tells us that these great indicatives imply the imperative.

Such is the case with the whole structure of biblical ethics. What we must do follows from what God has done for us. Remove "therefore," and you completely alter the teaching of the Bible.

There is a sense in which this single word

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=978.

2 Exhortation by James S. Gidley, moderator of the 67th General Assembly, to the 68th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, May 30, 2001.

3 John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, "The Argument," *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. XIX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979): xxix.

begins to answer the question that I have posed to you at the outset. The heart and soul of biblical ethics cannot be found in command alone. The imperative cannot be detached from the indicative. You cannot do without "therefore."

That this is not merely a question of form or grammar becomes evident immediately upon examining the clause in which "therefore" appears. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God." The earnest entreaty that the Spirit makes to the Romans comes not with the thunder of Sinai, not with the threat of wrath, but with the blessing of grace. The verb that he uses, παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*), is a warm word, which is elsewhere translated "encourage" or "comfort," and which forms the root from which we get one of the names for the Holy Spirit, παράκλητος (*parakletos*)—"helper" or "comforter" (John 14:26).

To this tender, appealing verb, he adds the phrase "by the mercies of God." He is not calling us before the bar of God's outraged justice but inviting us to the mercy seat. Here God does *not* threaten us with death if we dare approach too near to the Holy Mount. Rather, he sweetly draws us with cords of love—divine love that expresses itself to sinners as mercy.

A singular mercy would be quite enough for poor sinners such as we are. But it is merc*ies*, plural. There is a divine fullness in this plural, "mercies." It is mercy *to* which we respond, and it is mercy *by* which we respond.

There is something deeply instructive in Paul's gentle appeal. The opening words of Christian ethics should always reflect this gentleness, for the opening words of Christian ethics always follow the Word of God's mighty acts on our behalf. The people of God are no longer to be subjected to the deadly threats of the broken covenant of works. Dear fathers and brothers, as you address the flock of God that is your charge, be mindful of this! Draw them with mercy!

Now to the heart of the matter. What is it that God so sweetly draws us to do? To present our bodies a living sacrifice.

The sacrificial language has often sent commentators to the Old Testament. It seems that Paul is alluding to the Old Testament sacrificial system. Some find an allusion to the fact that no dead animal could be offered to God; hence the "living" sacrifice means that which is brought to the altar alive and there slaughtered before God. Others find contrast with the Old Testament: whereas the Old Testament sacrificial animals were slain as they were offered, Paul describes a sacrifice in which the victim continues to live.

Both insights are part of the richness of the text, but they fall short of the mark. The whole sacrificial action that Paul commends to us should be kept in view: "present your bodies a living sacrifice." I ask you: Which of the sons of Aaron ever offered his own body in sacrifice? What Israelite ever came to the altar prepared to offer his own body? No, it is not the Old Testament priesthood of which Paul speaks.

But there *is* a priest who has offered his own body in sacrifice. There is only *one* priest who has made such an offering: none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. It is *his* sacrifice that the Holy Spirit wishes us to see as the very pattern of our own duty.

Paul has given us other clues that this is his meaning. What he here commands is based on what he declares in chapter 6: "we have been crucified with Christ." (By the way, our own beloved John Murray makes this connection.[4]) Paul tells us in chapter six that we *have been* crucified with Christ. Here he commands us to offer our bodies in sacrifice. We have indicative followed by imperative, so characteristic of Paul's theology. We have what *is* by divine grace being followed by what we *ought* to do.

But it is not merely a matter of sequence. It is not merely that command follows doctrine. And it is not merely logical implication. It is not merely that the word "therefore" stands between doctrine and ethics, as vital as that conjunction is.

It is rather a matter of vital union between doctrine and practice. Or to speak more biblically, it is a matter of union with Christ. The Spirit

4 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 111.

wishes us to see our lives as so united with Christ in his death and resurrection that we reproduce the pattern of that death and resurrection in our lives.

For it is the pattern of death and resurrection that gives us the phrase "living sacrifice." "Living" means resurrected. You will say to me: "How can this be? How can that which is resurrected be offered in sacrifice?" It is possible in the mystical union with the crucified and risen Lord.

This is not the only place where Paul inverts the order of death and resurrection. In Philippians 3:10–11, Paul prays that he "may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Notice that the power of the resurrection *precedes* the conformity to Christ's death. Or to speak more fully, it is precisely the power of the resurrection in Paul that will make it possible for him to participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and be conformed to his death.

For us, then, it is not a question of how resurrection can precede sacrifice. Oh, no! The question is all the other way around! How can we, poor sinners that we are, offer *any* sacrifice to God *unless* we are empowered by the resurrection? The *sequence* of death and resurrection in the experience of Christ has become *simultaneous* in our experience. We offer our bodies in the spirit and power of the resurrection.

You see that we have come beyond mere metaphor. Let us be clear upon that point. If Paul were dealing in metaphor, he would simply be saying that there ought to be something in *our* experience that is like something in *Christ's* experience, or like something in the experience of the Old Testament priests as they offered their sacrifices. Sadly, it seems that this is how most of Paul's interpreters take Romans 12:1.

But if you will allow the Spirit of God to be his own interpreter, you will find him using the language of *union* with Christ, not merely *likeness* to Christ. In Romans 6, you will find the phrase "the likeness of his death" only once (v. 5), but repeatedly you find the language of union—for example: "crucified *with* him" (v. 6), "live *with* him" (verse 8), "baptized *into* his death" (v. 2). Even verse 5, which speaks of likeness, says, "we have been *united together* in the likeness of his death." The language of union predominates.

Why is this important? I ask you: Do you think that you can take one step in the Christian life apart from union with Christ, apart from the power of his death and resurrection? Do you think that the greatest act of sacrifice that you can ever make, considered in itself, could bear comparison to the sacrifice of Christ? No, to begin to think of our sacrifice apart from union with Christ's sacrifice is to begin to transform biblical sanctification into humanistic moralism.

What then is the heart and soul of Christian ethics? The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this sounds strange to our ears, perhaps it is because we are too accustomed to thinking of Christ's death and resurrection exclusively in a substitutionary way. That is to say, we think of Christ dying so that we might not die, and his rising as that which secures the efficacy of this substitution.

But the Bible presents the death and resurrection of Christ not only as that which takes place *on our behalf* but also that which represents our *union* with these events. Christ's death is not only *for* us but also *in* us. We are *united* to him in his death and resurrection. The New Testament consistently urges this consideration upon us—that Christ's humbling himself to the point of death is the pattern for our life. A classic example is Philippians 2, which speaks of Christ's being in the form of God and yet humbling himself to the point of death, even death on the cross. Paul introduces that teaching with "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God . . ." (Phil. 2:5–6).

The ethical side of the cross is present from the moment that Jesus begins to teach his disciples about it. You will remember the great scene at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus leads his disciples, through Peter as spokesman, to acknowledge him as the Christ. Immediately thereafter, as Matthew 16:21 says, "From that time Jesus began to show

his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." And what is the sequel? Peter begins to rebuke Jesus, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord; this shall never happen to you!" (v. 22).

Do you think that this was a case of misguided zeal and concern for Jesus's honor and wellbeing? No, Peter is concerned for something much closer to his own skin! He knows, perhaps better than we do, that the disciple is not above his master (Matt. 10:24–25). If a cross awaits his master, surely a cross awaits him too. We may read Peter's rebuke much more personally: "Far be it from *me*, Lord; this shall not happen to *me*! I'm looking for a crown, not a cross!"

You think I do Peter a disservice? Immediately after Jesus rebukes Peter, we find this in Matthew 16:24: "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" Jesus has read what was in Peter's heart, and here is the teaching that he so much dreaded: there is a cross for you too, Peter, and for each of my disciples.

Dear fathers and brothers, you cannot rightly preach the cross without *both* the redemptive side and the ethical side. Conversely, when you do preach the cross, you are always in reality not only teaching the people their hope of redemption but also their pattern of life. The cross is full of ethical instruction unless we take pains to suppress it.

But lest this seem to cast a morbid pall over the Christian life, let me remind you of something. Notice the last thing on Jesus's lips in Matthew 16:21 just before Peter begins to rebuke him: "and on the third day be raised." It is as if Peter never heard that last phrase! Peter is missing more than just the cross when he rebukes Jesus. He is missing the resurrection!

Yes, people of God, there is a cross for you to bear, but there is also a resurrection. And if you will but see it, the power of that resurrection is at work even in your bearing of the cross.

Now let us return to Romans 12:1. If indeed the heart and soul of Christian ethics is the cross and resurrection of Christ, what implications does this have for the way we are to live? The Spirit of God does not leave us in the dark!

First consider the nature of the sacrifice that Paul urges us to make. Clearly, a sacrifice implies that we must offer something. We are to offer our bodies. In conformity to Christ's offering, this means the offering of our lives.

It is conceivable that what Paul is saying is that we are to give up the fleshly lusts of our bodies, to crucify our old nature, to put to death what is earthly in us. You will recognize in these phrases the very language of Paul in other epistles: Colossians 3:5 and Galatians 5:24 are examples. As Christ became sin for us and so was put to death as our sin, so also we are conformed to the cross by the putting to death of sin in us.

As true as this is, however, it is *not* what Paul has specifically in view in Romans 12:1. Here in Romans 12:1, Paul describes the living sacrifice as "holy, and acceptable to God." He is focusing on the fact that Jesus was the blameless, unblemished sacrifice. He is saying that we too, as those who have been made blameless and unblemished in Christ, are to offer our justified and sanctified selves as a sacrifice pleasing to God.

I trust that you see that Paul is thus drawing you to an infinitely higher plane! What you are to offer up in sacrifice is not that which is *worthy* of death. Rather, what you are to offer up is precisely that which is now worthy of *life*! You are to offer up what is good in you, the very good that has been created in you by God himself. You are not to hoard it up like some treasured possession that you will never let out of your grasp. No, immediately upon receiving it, you are to give it up again to God who gave it!

You will perceive then that on no account can we imagine sinners making such a sacrifice in their own strength. Sinners, as sinners, do not have something holy and acceptable that they can offer to God. This is a sacrifice that is inconceivable apart from grace!

Again, I ask, what implications does this have for the way we are to live? First and foremost, it forever banishes the selfish motive for holiness. Yes, there is such a thing as a selfish motive for

holiness. The whole pursuit of holiness can be and often has been presented as a means of personal attainment, of holy self-actualization, if you will. The Christian life—sanctification—is conceived of as a lifelong self-improvement project. Under this kind of teaching, we conceive of the Christian life as a building up and a conserving of the life that God has given us, not as a giving of that life away in sacrifice.

But if we have heard what our text is saying, we must conceive of the Christian life far otherwise. The sacrifice that we are to make does *not* have in view the improvement of the self who sacrifices. Paul describes that self as already holy and acceptable to God, as that which God will gladly accept. What then is the end of this sacrifice? The glory of God? Certainly! But also the good of our neighbor. Ephesians 5:1–2 says it plainly: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Did Christ offer himself for the purpose of self-improvement? God forbid! He offered himself to God *for us*. That is the nature of the Christian life! Offer yourselves to God for others!

Don't you see that this is precisely where the Spirit of God leads Paul in Romans 12? He immediately begins telling us about the gifts that we have, and how we are to use them for the good of the body (Rom. 12:3–8). Then he paints a beautiful picture of selfless serving in the remainder of the chapter (Rom. 12:9–21). Do not think of how well you are doing! Think about how well others are doing, and what you might do to serve them!

You will object: "Am I not supposed to be improving in my Christian life? Shouldn't I be getting better?" Yes, but if that is your primary aim, you will become worse. Here as elsewhere, he who seeks to save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it (Matt. 16:25). Yes, you ought to improve. But do not serve others that you may improve. Rather, improve that you may serve others better.

Selfishness in the pursuit of holiness is perhaps the most refined and subtle kind of selfishness. But for that very reason it is deadly. How shall we escape it? The cross, the cross, the cross! The self-centered pursuit of holiness will never pursue the cross. The self-centered pursuit of holiness usually fastens itself in one way or another upon the law. Not the law rightly understood, but the form and outward appearance of the law.

Do not misunderstand me. The law of God is indispensable to true holiness. The law of God is like the skeleton of the Christian life. A body without a skeleton would be shapeless, useless, hideous. So also is a so-called Christian life that disregards the requirements of the law.

But the law does not contain the vital organs of the Christian life. It is the bare skeleton, which, being found without flesh and sinew, is the hideous face of death. So also is a so-called Christian life that goes no further than the law.

What God commands in our text is something that the law has no power to command. The law says, "Thou shalt not kill" but never says, "present your bodies a living sacrifice." The law teaches you not to harm others, but the law does not teach you to give yourself away.

Only the cross can teach you to give yourself away. Who would ever think to do so unless Christ had first given himself away for our sakes? Self-centered piety is drawn to the principle of the law as the covenant of works. That principle is self-preservation: "Do this *and live*" (Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5). But the cross is self-abnegation: "You have been made alive; *now give your life away*."

How then shall we give ourselves away? Read the rest of Romans 12!

There is a particular relevance of all this to the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. There is a great deal of adherence to law in the assembly. We know our rights and we cling to them! Rights and legality are not evils, but if they are all that we have, then are we most pitiable.

How long shall it be in this assembly before we hear bitter words of anger? How long before we verge upon slandering one another? How long before we treat one another not as precious brothers, but as enemies? And even if we *were* enemies, our

Lord says, "Love your enemies" (Matt. 6:43–48). Imagine rather a General Assembly in which these things abound:

- Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.
- Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
- Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.
- Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
- If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(Rom. 12:9–10, 14–18, 21).

These things are the outworking of the presentation of your bodies as a living sacrifice! A living sacrifice—that is the heart of the matter. Bear with me a little longer, for there is more that we can draw from these words.

You may have noticed that I entitled this exhortation "A Living *Sacrifice*," singular. That is how Paul in fact puts it. Present your bodies, plural, a living sacrifice, singular. At first glance, this seems to be a trivial thing. It is the kind of slip of the tongue that is common enough and causes no confusion in conversation. For example, I might say to a class, "I expect all the students in this class to write a term paper." Only the pedantic and legalistic would interpret me to mean that all the students, together, should write a single paper.

So also here it has generally been assumed that Paul is guilty of an innocent solecism. He says, "a living sacrifice," (*thusian zōsan*, θυσίαν ζῶσαν) but he means "living sacrifices." So, the New International Version has actually translated it that way. But it is not so easy for me to believe that this is all there is to it. Not that I believe that inerrancy requires a pedantic grammatical precision. Rather I have concluded from the text itself and from the context that the singular is deliberate and meaningful.

In fact, it is not only the word "sacrifice" that appears here in the singular. There are six closely connected singular words in this sentence. (For those of you unfamiliar with Greek, nouns, adjectives, and participles have endings that denote, among other things, whether they are singular or plural.) Stating the words in the order in which they appear in the Greek text, we have: *sacrifice* (singular), *living* (singular), *holy* (singular), *acceptable* (singular), *reasonable* (singular), *service* (singular). Like six ringing hammer blows, these words emphasize the singularity of the sacrifice. It is difficult to imagine that Paul's original audience would not have heard this emphasis as they heard the letter read aloud to them.

What is the significance of this? First and foremost, it is another reminder that the Holy Spirit is speaking here of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ and that he wishes us to see our sacrifice in union with Christ's.

But there is more! We are to conceive of *our* living sacrifice collectively. To be sure, each of us individually is called upon to make this sacrifice, but the text leads us to think of all our bodies together as making up one great living sacrifice. Consider the surrounding context. In chapter eleven Paul has been expounding on the unity of God's people, Jew and Gentile, under the image of the one olive tree. In the following context, chapter 12, verses 3–8, he will speak of the people of God as the one body in Christ. Here, between those two images of unity, he describes the church as one living sacrifice.

In the broader context, Paul will go on in Romans 15:16 to speak of the Gentiles collectively as an offering (singular) which is made acceptable by Paul's apostolic ministry. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 66:19–20: "And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD . . ." These texts make plain that the people of God, collectively, are one offering to God.

It is a marvelous image, is it not? The whole

church of Jesus Christ, in all ages and places of the world, offered as one great living sacrifice, empowered by the one great sacrifice of Jesus Christ himself. And it is more than just a literary image.

The gospels make plain that Christ was utterly alone on the cross. Betrayed by Judas, abandoned by his disciples, condemned by the Sanhedrin, condemned by Pilate, sacrificed by the crowd for Barabbas, mocked by the onlookers and even by his fellow-sufferers, and last of all, abandoned by God himself. Who can imagine such loneliness as this!

Yet in *your* sacrifice you are never alone. First of all, you are always united to Christ himself. You are never alone because Christ is with you.

But union with Christ is never merely a matter of Christ with you as an individual. No, union with Christ means union with his people as well. You are never alone, for the whole company of all the saints in every age and every corner of the world is with you also. You, together with them, make one great living sacrifice to the one true God and Savior. You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), but do not conceive of those witnesses as pitiless judges who are watching to see if you will slip up! Oh, no! These witnesses are united to you by the bonds of love and affection, and they gave their lives in sacrifice for your sake, that you also might join them, the happy throng who have found their lives by giving them away.

Are you still taken aback at the demand that the gospel lays upon you? Does it seem to be a daunting task that I have laid before you—one perhaps that is too heavy to bear? Listen once more to the Word of God. The last words on the living sacrifice are that it is "your reasonable service." I am convinced by all that the Spirit has packed into this text that what he means by "reasonable" here is "fitting." It is a fitting thing that you offer yourselves. Does it seem too great a thing to ask of you? Consider what Jesus has given for you. And after all, you will come to see that what he asks of you is only fitting. Amen. ©

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# Servant Living

## Connecting Some Dots on Disconnection

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**by Judith M. Dinsmore**

The last three years underscored what many were already realizing: it is both possible and terrible to avoid human contact. Pre-COVID, loneliness had become serious enough to be grouped into our country's burgeoning mental health issues. A study from 2018 indicated that one in five Americans "rarely or never feel close to people."[2] The same study indicated that Generation Z (those born after 1996) may be the loneliest. More recent research may show that the pandemic exacerbated loneliness.[3]

For a conservative, Christian churchgoer, however, loneliness in the big, national picture is perhaps not as important as loneliness in the small, local picture. How can it be so easy for us to avoid human contact; how might it be terrible? Written from the perspective of a layperson, this article uses insights from a few recent, accessible books to attempt to connect some dots on disconnection and loneliness.

### Our Busy, Efficient Lives

A few weeks ago, I was at the grocery store with my two sons. While I was staring at the shelves making cost calculations, a woman stopped by my cart and locked eyes with my baby, who lit up. The woman, past retirement age, had an engaging smile and was quick to make conversation about my kids, their blonde heads, and their little active legs. After a few minutes, I began inching away toward the next item on my grocery list. She kept talking. She lived in a retirement home nearby, I learned; she was happy to be there; she loved children; she missed children; no children ever came to the home; the activities at the home were nice; but without children, there was somehow no *life*. I smiled, agreed that children were lively, said goodbye, and went cruising off with my cart. As I walked, my baby bobbed his head around me, trying to find the woman again.

This was not a high point for me. I drove home repentant. Here was a woman sending me all the signals of loneliness, and my attention remained fixed on whether the organic salsa was worth the extra cents per ounce. *What is wrong with me?* I thought. *Why didn't I at least ask for her name?*

Perhaps because it would have been an "inefficient" use of my time. In *You Are Not Your Own*, college professor and PCA member Alan Noble argues that the "power of numbers" tends to guide our behavior and life. The world we live in has become inhuman, he writes, and one aspect of its inhumanity is its efficiency:

> There is no space in contemporary life that has not become subject to the dominion of rational methods for achieving maximum efficiency . . . That's not to say we never prioritize other values—we certainly do—but our one agreed-upon value in nearly every sphere of life tends to be efficiency.[4]

Noble demonstrates that even leisure activities

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=984.

2 Cigna, "2018 U.S. Loneliness Index," https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf (accessed July 1, 2022).

3 American Psychological Association, "COVID-19 pandemic led to increase in loneliness around the world," (May 2022) https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2022/05/covid-19-increase-loneliness (accessed July 1, 2022).

4 Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2021), 55.

are often justified by appealing to their efficiency: a nap will make one more productive; a run will improve one's health; watching a game will give one rest. But what would prolonging a grocery store conversation give you?

Well-meaning Christians may be unreflectively embracing maximum efficiency as a way to get more done for the kingdom. But efficiency as a moral value is frequently at odds with loving others. Many (most?) interactions with other humans are incredibly inefficient and quickly absorb more time than we, consciously or unconsciously, portioned to them. If we love our neighbor, we will move an interaction along when the occasion calls for it. If we love efficiency, we will pretty much always be moving the interaction along.

Author and RPCNA member Rosaria Butterfield, in her book on hospitality, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*, describes how her household consciously opted out of an event-filled life so that they could be occupied with a people-filled life. Her detail-rich narrative is honest about the difficulty of living so inefficiently. In one scene, a cat that was entrusted to Butterfield's care while its owner is on vacation becomes mortally ill. The situation is messy. The cat is in pain. Butterfield writes:

> I had allotted—generously, I had believed—thirty minutes each day to care for, pill, feed, and clean up after these cats during my neighbor's vacation. But twenty-four-hour cat crisis management, and neighbor-worldview-clash-grief ministry on top, well, this was simply not on my list of things to do . . .[5]

But she stresses the necessity of inefficient, interruptive hospitality to provide what our neighbors often lack: connection. "We live in a world that highly values functionality," she reflects earlier in the book. "But there is such a thing as being too functional."[6]

The inefficient interactions of real life are not pebbles in the machine of our otherwise humming-along plans. They may be the means through which the Spirit works.

And not only in the hearts of neighbors. It must be noted that had I talked longer to the woman at the grocery store to accomplish a feel-good moment of being nice, still my values would have been skewed toward efficiency and functionality, with a Christian veneer. In other words, I would have been loving not so much her as the buzz from completing a friendliness objective. That lonely woman, in contrast, delighted in my children for their very being—their inquisitive eyes and active legs that I hustled through the store. The encounter was, in hindsight, a visitation of grace in the chip aisle. How dangerous it is to avoid human contact in pursuit of efficiency when from its unpredictable interactions we may receive such precious reproof from the Lord.

## Our Performative Instinct

Being busy is not just a hindrance practically to human interaction; as a sort of status symbol, being busy can also be one of many efforts to project a brand, to convey what kind of person we are. This performative instinct may be another, deeper trend weakening relationships and exacerbating loneliness within the church. Busy lives can prevent contexts for connection. Performative instincts can prevent connection inside the contexts where it ought to flourish, like the church.

The act of creating an identity—often with the help of specific products—and projecting that identity for the approval and even "consumption" of others is second nature to digital natives. Some are professional brand-builders; perhaps they work in public relations or graphic design; perhaps they are an influencer of some kind being paid for product placement on their social media posts. The rest of us just pick branding up instinctively. Buzzfeed author Anne Helen Petersen wittily summed up some examples of informal branding in her book *Can't Even*: "I have a friend whose brand is 'Parenting is hard but always worth it.' Others include 'My kids are so bizarre!'; 'I'm a Cool Dad'; 'Wil-

5 Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 164.

6 Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*, 111.

derness overposter'; 'Books are life'; 'Wheels up'; 'Culinary adventuress,'" etc.[7]

Effortless on a texting thread, branding can also spill from my tongue in real life. At church coffee hour, for example, I might notice and approve someone else's self-branding (shoes! diaper bag! weekend activities! political opinion!) and, in turn, they might recognize mine. It is pleasant. It feels affirming. And it is problematic.

The scaffolding for our billboarded lives has been a long time in the making. In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, writer and OP minister Carl Trueman provides an intellectual genealogy for our modern sense of self, one aspect of which, he says, is its inward turn and another its need for recognition by others.[8] Alan Noble would add that there is no line between the two: "Expressing your identity is the same step as discovering or creating it."[9]

This has profoundly affected how we relate to one another inside institutions, including the church. Trueman explains that instead of finding purpose and well-being by being connected to something outside ourselves, now our commitment is "first and foremost to the self and is inwardly directed. Thus, the order is reversed. Outward institutions become in effect the servants of the individual and her inner sense of well-being."[10]

How does the outward institution become a servant to the individual? By being a platform for them to perform upon, argues Yuval Levin in his 2020 book A *Time to Build*. "Americans increasingly expect institutions not to form and socialize the people within them but rather to display those people and provide them with arenas for self-expression," he writes.[11] We come to an institution not to be molded and trained in almost-imperceptible ways but to build our brand or project ourselves. This is an inherently lonely endeavor: "[Institutions as platforms] can become venues for acting alone, more than together, and they therefore contribute to the sense of alienation and detachment that pervades our social life."[12]

As churches slowly fill with people who, thanks to the culture they live and breathe, conceive of themselves as beings who need to both express themselves and be recognized, it becomes natural to begin to relate to each other as performer and audience, a self-conception that subsumes roles of pastor or parishioner, brother or sister. And the bonds between performer and audience are notoriously weak and capricious.

Performing is lonely work; no matter how vulnerable you are, if you are doing it to build your brand, you forever "use" the other and reserve yourself from being known. "Our moments of vulnerability are often carefully cultivated and prepared for public consumption to maximize attention and develop our image," observes Alan Noble.[13] Sometimes the temptation to perform is obvious, such as using the church as a launching pad for snappy statements on hot-button issues. Other times it is less so: forever standing apart from the institution to comment upon it (the music! the sermon length! the elders!) can be the dis-associative impulse of a performative individual. Being an audience member can also be lonely; no matter how affirmative you are, you are always commenting as an acknowledged outsider—as a fan, not a friend.

It can be an uphill battle on Sunday morning to lay aside the roles of performer and audience and to move beyond the flurry of giving and receiving small affirmations. Yet failing to may be a decided hindrance to Christian love. Social media demonstrates this. There has been a debate bubbling up even within church conversations about whether social media is a tool, which can be used

7 Anne Helen Petersen, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* (New York: Dey Street Books, 2020), 163.

8 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 60.

9 Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*, 44.

10 Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 49.

11 Yuval Levin, A *Time to Build* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 137.

12 Levin, A *Time to Build*, 37.

13 Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*, 102.

for good or for ill, or something more sinister that makes its users more miserable, more lonely, and more angry. Simply by being a platform, however, surely social media supports its users' sense of self as performers. "Mediating our social lives through information and entertainment platforms suggests we understand our social lives as forms of mutual entertainment and information," writes Levin.[14] How's that going? On social media, real knowledge of one another seems to be dwindling away, leaving in its wake only expressions of affirmation (or disapprobation) for someone else's performance. What Levin says next seems to be increasingly undeniable: "The sense of being connected but lonely, in touch but untouched, is pervasive in the age of social media, *and it is hard to overcome on the platforms*" (emphasis added).[15] Our obstinate, modern, performative instinct, centuries in the development and only accelerated by social media, makes it challenging for Christians to interact both on social media platforms (it is hard to stop performing when you are standing onstage) and in person (habits of communicating in order to entertain and inform bleed readily into real life).

## Our Relationships

What we need from one another is not entertainment nor information; we have Google (ahem, DuckDuckGo) in our pockets. What we need from one another is not more branding or product reviews; we see literally thousands of ads a day. What we need is what is scarce: relationships.

How scarce are meaningful, connected relationships? Very, argues journalist Johann Hari. In his 2018 book *Lost Connections*, Hari tackles the mountain of research surrounding the wider sociological forces of disconnection, beginning with Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* and including Hari's own childhood in quiet, alienated suburbia. Hari began taking anti-depressants as a teenager and continued taking them for the next decade and a half before questioning their efficacy, as he recounts in the book. He develops the controversial argument that the burgeoning prescribing of antidepressants over the last few decades ignores not only the questionable data about the benefits of their long-term use but also the underlying cause of many of the symptoms of depression, which he sums up in his title—lost connections.

The understanding of depression as only biological malfunction says that there is a "war taking place in your head," Hari writes. "On one side there are your feelings of distress, caused by the malfunctions in your brain or genes. On the other side there's the sane part of you. You can only hope to drug the enemy within into submission—forever. . . . [But] you're not crazy to feel so distressed. . . . 'It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a sick society.'"[16]

In other words, to be in mental distress—to be sick—in a sick society makes good sense. Hari interviewed a mother, and clinical psychologist who specialized in traumatic bereavement, who had lost a child. He describes his insight in the culminating chapter of his book:

> Deep grief and depression, she explained to me, have identical symptoms for a reason. Depression, I realized, is itself a form of grief—for all the connections we need, but don't have. And now I realized—just like it is an insult to Joanne to say that her ongoing grief for her daughter is a form of mental dysfunction, it was an insult to my teenage self to say that this pain was just the result of bad brain chemistry. It was an insult to what he had been through, and to what he needed."[17]

Is it possible that busy, efficient lives and performative instincts might be signs of being well-adjusted to a society that is not well? Perhaps, conversely, following Hari's reasoning, some manifestations of depression (and what Hari calls the same song covered by a different band—anxiety)

14 Levin, *A Time to Build*, 121.

15 Levin, *A Time to Build*, 124.

16 Johann Hari, *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression—and the Unexpected Solutions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 155.

17 Hari, *Lost Connections*, 259.

are signs of what we lack.

Hari, writing from a secular perspective, gives some interesting solutions, not all of which are necessarily advisable. Most involve making more connected choices.

For us believers, perhaps the emphasis ought to be different. We who once were afar off have been brought near, through no wisdom or excellence of our own. In union now with the second person of the Trinity and filled with the third, we are not choosing our own, more connected future but trusting in the sovereign work of our God in us and through us. The church we are a part of; the family we have; the neighborhood we live in—these relationships are not accidental. They are where the Spirit works. Slipping into patterns and mindsets that lead to alienation, as the world around us does, is to perpetuate sickness. There is better news to be had. There is better news to be shared. There is a God who is *with us*. Ⓢ

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# 11 Passages to Read When You Feel Lonely

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**From the Crossway *Passages to Read* series (July 4, 2022)**

**1. Joshua 1:9**

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

**2. Psalm 73:23–26**

Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

**3. Mark 10:29–30**

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

**4. Isaiah 41:10**

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=985.

**5. Lamentations 3:22–24**

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."

**6. 2 Corinthians 1:3–5**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

**7. Psalm 25:14–18**

The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.
Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.
Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

**8. 1 Peter 5:6–7**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

**9. Isaiah 53:3**

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

**10. Hebrews 4:15–16**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**11. Psalm 139:1–16**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.
Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.
For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them. Ⓢ

# After the Election

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**by D. Scott Meadows**

The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is approaching with another national midterm election. Many exaggerate its importance—pundits to boost ratings, politicians to secure votes. In this article[2] I do not endorse any candidate or party. I would rather proclaim God's Word for your upbuilding and encouragement and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3).

Please consider some biblical truths to apply, especially, *after the election*, however it turns out. Whatever the outcome, beware of being too positive or too negative. If you like the results, you may be tempted to think they will solve our nation's problems. They will not. On the other hand, if you are sorely disappointed, do not yield to a toxic mix of panic, depression, and despair. All is not lost.

What should Christians remember after the election? It will help us all to remember three truths: (1) The Lord Jesus Christ still reigns, (2) The government is still ordained by God, (3) The church is still triumphing in Christ. Let us reflect upon them one at a time.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ Still Reigns** (Acts 2:36; Ps. 2:1–4)

First, the Lord Jesus Christ still reigns. Jesus of Nazareth, once crucified and risen from the dead, has been exalted to heaven's throne and to the office of Lord and Christ by the absolutely almighty and sovereign God. Jesus Christ is, objectively and eternally, King of kings and Lord of lords, and no wicked powers of earth or hell can change that.

The apostle Peter stressed this in his sermon to the unbelieving Jews on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:36. His dramatic, climactic thesis statement at the end of the sermon is this: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." This is not an exhortation for people to do anything but an announcement about what God has already done. When Peter said, "Let all the house of Israel . . . know," he is not asking their consent to know. This is just a prefatory comment to what they are about to know, because Peter is about to tell them.

Of course, Scripture affirms that Jesus, even before he completed his mission on earth, was the Son of God, the Christ, and the Lord of lords, but his triumph and glorification took a giant leap forward when he had made atonement for our sins on the cross by dying in our place. His resurrection from the grave, his appearances as the living Savior to his disciples, his ascension to heaven, and his present session there at the Father's right hand—all these are aspects of his triumph over the powers of hell. Christ's eternal glorification as the conquering Savior began long ago and is well underway.

Beloved, after the election, all of this is still true and real. No politicians or electorate can dethrone the Lord Jesus Christ. "Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished" (Prov. 11:21). God even mocks their ridiculous attempts, as Psalm 2 testifies:

> Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. (Ps. 2:1–4)

Jesus is Lord today in the USA. Jesus was Lord when the Roman Empire was throwing Christians to the lions in the Colosseum, during Muslim expansion in the lead-up to the Crusades, when the Roman Catholic Church was torturing our forefathers in the Spanish Inquisition, and when Hitler was tyrannizing Europe. Jesus will remain Lord whatever efforts might be made by all in this

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=998.

2 This article was originally a sermon preached by Pastor Meadows several years ago.

country who oppose our biblical faith.

Jesus is Lord. This is our faith, and our joy, and the basis of our confident expectation for the future. After the election it will be helpful to believe this and call it to mind.

This victorious, effective reign of our Lord Jesus has vast implications for life in this world. Let us consider two of them—first, with respect to civil governments, and second, with respect to the ministry and future of the church.

### The Government Is Still Ordained by God (Rom. 13:1–7)

The second vital truth to keep in mind, especially after the election, is this. No matter what happens, the civil government after the election will be the exact one which the Lord Jesus Christ himself has ordained. That has always been the case in human history throughout the world, and it will be until "Kingdom Come," as they say—when Christ returns from heaven. After the election, the government is still ordained by God.

I would not be able to say this so surely except for the fact that Scripture teaches it very clearly. In many passages this truth is assumed and implied, but it becomes explicit most famously in Romans 13.

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Rom. 13:1–7)

Remember by whom this was written and under what circumstances. Paul the apostle wrote it when Nero was the Emperor of the Roman Empire—the infamous Nero, whose very name is synonymous with cruelty and debauchery. And what counsel does Paul give the Christians about their view of this government and their relationship to it? He tells them to view it as ordained by God and to live as good citizens under its authority, being subject to it and paying taxes and giving honor to whomever these things are due. In general, Christians, the beloved children of God, are morally bound to be subject even to the most wicked rulers, honoring them and supporting their government, in as much as they are not asked to deny the faith or affirm anything against God's law.

In Paul's argument, once it is established that whatever civil authorities exist are placed there by God and possess divine authority to carry on the functions of civil government, then it necessarily follows that we Christians must be subject to them, honor them, and pay taxes. Failure in this is to revolt against God himself, Paul says—with Christ's authority as an apostle, no less. This truth and responsibility will not change after the election.

The third major truth for after the election also follows from the unshakeable sovereign reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it pertains to something much more important than civil government—the church.

### The Church Is Still Triumphing in Christ (Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 2:14)

Because Jesus is Lord, after the election, the church will still be triumphing in Christ. Defying all hostile powers, Jesus boldly proclaimed, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). We all know that the church Jesus has in mind here is not a building or even an organization but a redeemed people,

a spiritual body, the elect of God called out from the kingdom of Satan, delivered from the powers of evil and given life and liberty in Christ for all eternity.

This proclamation is the cosmic battle-cry of our Warrior-King Jesus Christ and a divine prophecy guaranteeing valiant conquest in his long siege against the enemy. It is very emphatic by the use of positive and negative affirmation. "I will build my church," the risen Lord says, who has received all power in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18). He first said this 2,000 years ago, and he has been building it ever since. He also said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," using an idiomatic expression for the powers of death—a symbol of all that is anti-God, miserable, and under a just curse for its evil. The devil and his minions have fervently opposed the spread of the gospel, the salvation of souls, and the glorification of the name of Jesus Christ throughout the world, and all to no avail. Every single one of the persons for whom Christ died has either been saved already or will be in his time, and the host of Jesus's faithful disciples has already grown beyond all human measure, including individuals "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

From the little band of 120 mentioned in Acts 1, adherents have increased to the point that those who identify as Christians number between two and three billion in our time—far more than any other religion. I would not suggest that all these people are saved. Rather, in a very dramatic way, against great opposition, the living, reigning Lord Jesus has been doing battle with the devil and prevailing over him, rescuing from his clutches every single sinner chosen by God from eternity to be saved. Hundreds of millions more people identify as Christians than as Muslims, the second largest religious group. Hindus, secularists, Buddhists, and other religious groups are much, much smaller.

When there were not nearly so many Christians in the world, the apostle Paul in his generation served Christ with good morale and confident hope that the gospel ministry was not in vain. He believed it was accomplishing exactly what Christ intended. That is why Paul could write, "Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere" (2 Cor. 2:14). Here,

> Paul compares the irresistible advance of the gospel, in spite of temporary frustration, to a Roman *triumphus* ("triumph") in which the victorious general, along with his proud soldiers, used to lead in triumphal procession the wretched prisoners of war who were thus exposed to public ridicule. (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, in loc.)

Nero in Rome might seem impressive as he fumes against the Christians, but God leads his servants in Christ anyway. Our trek is an unstoppable march to victory as the gospel spreads and the well-deserved fame of our Savior becomes more and more widely known. Nero could not do anything to stop it.

Call all this to mind after the election. No matter what, the church is still triumphing in Christ. Many professing Christians seem more concerned about the well-being of the United States than they are about the church, or they think the church's fortunes rise and fall with religious freedom in the USA. That helps account for their obsession with politics and neglect of worship and fellowship and evangelistic witness. They are far too elated and dejected with various political upheavals.

Does Scripture reveal anything about the destiny of the United States of America? In general, it does. As a political entity it is destined for the trash heap of history—if not before Christ returns, when he returns. That great judgment day is described symbolically in Revelation 14:8: "Another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made *all nations* drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality'" (Rev. 14:8) (emphasis mine). We read elsewhere in Revelation that all nations were deceived by her sorceries (18:23), and that includes our beloved nation with all the rest. You see, all that finally matters is that the one holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9), the spiritual Israel, which is the Church of the Lord

Jesus Christ, and it alone, shall be saved. And because Jesus is Lord, it shall.

I sincerely love my country, the United States of America. I have been a patriot from my boyhood, when I had bedroom curtains with themes from the American Revolution. I have held a secret security clearance and performed defense work as an electrical engineer for the US military, and I am glad to have rendered this service. I proudly display an American flag, and I love the national anthem. I know that important issues are at stake in this election. I fully intend to vote, as is my habit even in primaries and local elections. I will not be very happy about certain candidates winning, and I will breathe a sigh of relief if my candidates prevail.

But after the election I will remember that Jesus Christ is Lord, whatever government comes about is ordained by God, and, finally, that the church is continuing in triumph toward an ultimate victory over all our foes. As the hymn writer said so eloquently,

> The church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend,
> To guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end;
> Though there be those that hate her, and false sons in her pale,
> Against or foe or traitor she ever shall prevail.
>
> 'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
> She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;
> Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
> And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.
>
> —Thomas Benson Pollock, 1871, "The Church's One Foundation"

The upcoming election is completely in the hands of God—the God we worship, the God who loves us as his own chosen people, bought by Christ's blood and preserved for his everlasting kingdom. Keep everything in perspective. We are on the winning side already, and our ultimate victory is assured. Let not your heart be troubled. The Lord reigns. He sets up rulers and casts them down at his good pleasure. He is with his church to the end, to defend, guide, sustain, and cherish her for the praise of the glory of his grace, in this age and the age to come. Be comforted and pray that he will show us his mercy. Amen. ☺

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# Servant Work

## The Priority of Prayer for the Pastor

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**by Bruce H. Hollister**

### Adolph Monod on Prayer

It was several years ago now that the Lord graciously brought to me a season of refreshment in my own prayer life. In his kind providence he brought to me a particular prompting, or "wake-up call," as I was reading excerpts from a spiritual classic: Adolph Monod's *Les Adieux* ("Farewells").[2]

Adolph Monod was a French Reformed pastor and was one of the greatest French preachers of the nineteenth century. Struck with cancer at age fifty-three, he went to be with the Lord about a year later. While in declining health, surrounded by family and friends, Monod presented from his sickbed a meditation on each of the last twenty-five Lord's Days of his life. His family carefully kept record of these devotional talks. Monod's dying testimony is most inspiring and instructive.

One of Monod's regrets was that he had not prayed as he should. He put it this way: "My dear friends in Christ, among the subjects about which a Christian who believes himself to be near his end carries regrets, there is certainly none he would want so much to reform, if he returned to life, as prayer."[3]

And this:

> Ah, if I were restored to life, I would like, with God's help, and in spite of myself, to give prayer much more time than I have done and to lean on prayer much more than on work. It is our duty never to neglect work, but work has no strength except when supported and animated by prayer.[4]

Monod's comments strike at the heart of what we as pastors and elders—indeed, as Christians!—already know concerning prayer, but what, all too often, we sadly fail to act upon. We are just not sufficiently convinced that our work *truly has no strength* except when supported and animated by prayer.

Monod mentions the well-known example of Martin Luther. It is said that Luther, during the period that he was appearing before the Diet of Worms, spent three hours each day crying aloud to God. Luther's friend Dietrich overheard Luther and took it upon himself to assemble those prayers for the good of the church. Dietrich observed that there was not a single day in which Luther did not reserve at least three hours for prayer, those hours taken from the time during the day that was most conducive to work. Luther clearly believed that his work had no strength except when supported and animated by prayer! How was it that Martin Luther accomplished what he did for the kingdom of God? By faith in the Word of God *and by prayer!*

All of us as pastors and elders must ask ourselves this question: "What is it that will most impact my life and the life of those around me?" Or to put it another way: "What is it that will secure the greatest blessing for the church and for those to whom I minister?" Listen again to Monod: "Prayer is the distinctive mark of the Lord's powerful servants. *All of them*, in spite of considerable differences, offer to us this common trait: They are

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=949.

2 Adolphe Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory: A New Translation of a Spiritual Classic*, Constance K. Walker, trans. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002); an older edition is Adolphe Monod, *Adolphe Monod's Farewell to His Friends and to His Church*, trans. Owen Thomas (1874 repr.; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962).

3 Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, 152–53.

4 Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, 159.

men who pray much and who pray fervently."[5]

### The Apostolic Lesson

The priority of prayer for the pastor was recognized and affirmed very early on by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. When pressed by other important and worthy needs of ministry, they embraced this priority along with the priority of the ministry of the Word of God. Every pastor who is at all serious about his work knows by memory the familiar words of Acts 6:4: ". . . we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Prayer and the ministry of the Word: these two priorities are to be seen in tandem. Neither can be neglected and there result a thriving or fruitful ministry. What was the wonderful outcome of the apostolic embracing of these priorities? "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (v. 7). Yes, all of us know this lesson well—at least theoretically. Or perhaps better said, we are commonly guilty of knowing and applying only half of the lesson. The "ministry of the Word" part, we know. But what about the other half of the lesson concerning prayer? And in this case, to know only half of the lesson is not to know the whole lesson! As pertains particularly to prayer, we commonly fail to live the lesson out practically, and our ministries suffer because of it. Yes, as Reformed pastors and elders we generally pride ourselves concerning our seriousness about the ministry of the Word, while our devotion to prayer may be quite lacking. A great contradiction!

### The Neglect of Prayer

Of course, when we have been neglecting prayer, we become largely desensitized and oblivious to the blighting effects such neglect has upon our ministry. Perhaps we have neglected prayer for some long time, and so our ministry experience and its corresponding barrenness simply seems "normal" to us. What has happened? We have adjusted our thinking and have conditioned ourselves to find satisfaction in our labors in *other* ways. We spend many hours and work hard at sermon preparation. We busy ourselves with much activity—meetings and counseling and administrative chores. There is *always* so much to do! So we secretly salve our consciences and foolishly comfort ourselves with the thought of our many hours of labor or with the thought of the particular strains of our labor. Do we not labor more than anyone else in the congregation? Do we not feel the burden of such labor more than anyone really understands? But in reality we have become spiritually dull, spiritually desensitized. Let us be honest with ourselves, brothers. Where prayer is neglected, to that degree it is being neglected, we are not walking by faith but in the flesh. We are in fact leaning on our work rather than on our Lord through prayer. And as Monod said, "work has no strength except when supported and animated by prayer."[6] Heaven alone knows the reality of how very barren our service is when we are in such a state!

### Busyness—a Lame Excuse

There, I have already made my point, but let us fill it out just a bit. We commonly excuse ourselves for our neglect of prayer because as pastors we are so very busy. However, the example of our Lord instantly exposes how very juvenile and misguided is this excuse. Jesus was arguably (and legitimately!) the busiest man the world has ever seen. Busy to the max, going about doing good, preaching and teaching and healing. His schedule was *always* full to the brim. So what about prayer amid such busyness? What was his practice? We see it wonderfully summarized in Luke 5:15–16: "But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

Our Lord steadfastly guarded the priority of communion with the Father through prayer. We see this described at several points in Luke's gospel

5 Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, 156, emphasis added.

6 Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, 159.

(3:21–22; 4:42–44; 5:15–16; 6:12–13; 9:18–22, 27–30; 11:1ff.). For now we simply observe that for our Lord, busyness in ministry *never* supplanted the priority of seeking the Father in prayer. Indeed, we can say that the secret of his massively fruitful and powerful ministry centered in his communion with the Father through prayer.

### The Insidious Pressure of the CEO Pastor Model

There is another problem closely related to busyness in pastoral ministry. The broader evangelical church is flush with its adulation for the CEO-pastor model. And we have all been tainted by it: the specter of (admittedly) very gifted and energetic men who are doing so much and *seemingly* accomplishing so much; burgeoning churches with multiple services, a vast array of growing programs and ministries, and "leadership teams" that are constantly brainstorming—"casting visions"—about yet more growth and ministry. This begs the question: when do these men pray? Answer: probably rarely, briefly, and "on the run." And they excuse this because they are so very busy serving the Lord! We must honestly observe that such men are not particularly *spiritual* men; they are primarily functioning as CEOs who happen to possess significant spiritual gifts. They are men who lean on their work rather than on the Lord through prayer. And in such cases the fawning church gets what it craves, what it admires; it gets what it believes is really impressive and effective in ministry. We who pastor small congregations comfort ourselves: "*We* are not like that!" But to the degree that we neglect prayer, we are just like that: leaning on our work rather than on our Lord in prayer; praying rarely, briefly, and "on the run."

### The Practice of Prayer for the Pastor

As pastors, nothing is more essential to our own spiritual life and to our ministries than daily seeking our God in prayer. Prayer is at the very heart of our communion with God, and where prayer is lacking, our communion with God is lacking. Further, we must say that where prayer is lacking, *faith* is lacking, and—whether we are conscious of it or not—our old, native self-dependence *instantly* fills that vacuum. Said another way, we are failing to abide in Christ (John 15); we are in fact leaning upon our own wisdom and strength. In this state, fruit-bearing dries up. Jesus says, "Apart from me, you can do nothing" (v. 5). We may be "doing" plenty, but where prayer is neglected, we are bearing little fruit.

Our communion with Christ is always to be at the center of all of life and ministry. That is *the* great priority above all else. That communion is essential to all fruitfulness, and that communion is cultivated by prayer. Consider carefully from Mark 1:35–39 (Lk. 4:42–44) how our Savior guarded the priority of his communion with the Father. The previous day had been a very busy one for our Lord as he ministered. He had taught in the synagogue, and the people were astonished at his teaching. There he had cast a demon out of one who was possessed. He then went to the house of Simon and Andrew and there healed Simon's mother-in-law. At evening they had brought to him all who were sick and those who were demon possessed. He healed many who were sick. He cast out many demons. The whole city was gathered together there.

This must have been exhilarating for our Lord, but also exhausting! So much activity! Such constant pressure! So many demands! And this was no doubt a *typical* day for him. It would seem that he could hardly have had a private or quiet moment to himself. How could he continue on? How could he bear up under the pressure? How could he continue to preach, and teach, and counsel, and contend with his adversaries? What was the secret of his strength, his calm, his authority in teaching, his penetrating discernment in every situation? We see it here—wonderfully summarized, expressed (v. 35): "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."

We note these things particularly: Jesus rises and seeks the Father "in the morning" to be prepared for the day. He rose "very early in the morning, while it was still dark." Why? He must have private, uninterrupted time, and this is the only

way he will get it! He went out and departed to "a desolate place." He thus *purposed* that there should be no distractions or interruptions. No one knew where he was! Simon and those who were with him searched for him! So-called "emergencies" must wait! Other legitimate needs must wait! This is the will of the Father! Thus, we see our Lord's dependence upon the Father amid an unceasing crush of demands. (Who do we think we are?!)

We see also from this brief passage that it was through prayer that our Lord maintained a clear sense of priority in ministry. When Peter and the others found Jesus, they said, "Everyone is looking for you!" (v. 37). In effect they were saying, "Lord, there are all kinds of needs requiring your attention!" But Jesus knew precisely what was to be done. He said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out" (v. 38).

### The Benefits of Prayer for the Pastor

The benefits of prayer for the pastor are manifold. We mention here just a few.

As we just noted by our Lord's supreme example, nothing better helps us to hold to the biblical priorities of pastoring than daily prayer. Pressed with busyness and a multitude of people and needs—most all of them "legitimate," and all of them arguably "great opportunities" for ministry—Jesus retained a crystal-clear sense of ministry priority. The same is vital to us as pastors. This sense of priorities and of the will of God cannot be maintained in any other way.

It should be our practice as pastors to seek the Lord early in the morning in prayer, and of course, beyond this, all through the day in the midst of our labors. A practice that I personally have found helpful is this: there is a chair in my study on the other side of the room from my desk, or work area. During sermon preparation I would periodically pause, go to that chair on the other side of the room, sit in quiet, and pray. This was helpful to me to maintain a greater sense of dependence upon God while immersed in the hard work of sermon preparation.

Nothing better enables us to see the hand of God in his providences than communing with him daily in prayer. It is in and through prayer that the invisible world is opened to us, and we are enabled more clearly to see things from the perspective of the throne of God. Furthermore, nothing is more calming and refreshing to our souls, when pressed with the many and constant demands of pastoral ministry, than to frequently draw aside in prayer, seeking communion with our Lord.

As pastors, nothing keeps us so in touch with and tender toward the life and needs of our people than daily praying for them. Jesus said concerning his sheep, "I know my own, and my own know me" (Jn. 10:14). If I am praying daily for the precious ones committed to my charge, I truly grow to know them better, and it becomes apparent *to them* that I know them and am in touch with their lives! Thereby they also know that I love them. This opens ministry to their hearts as nothing else can! Nothing better helps us or prepares us for our personal ministrations to those of our flock than daily praying for them.

And what about our preaching? Nothing better prepares us to preach Christ to our flock than daily praying for them. It was my own practice in pastoral ministry every Saturday evening to pray for all of the members of my congregation, that the power of the Spirit of Christ might rest upon them in the Lord's Day worship in the day ahead. Among other things, I discovered that this very much shaped my preaching to them. I think it is accurate to say that because of this I enjoyed a unique connection with them amidst the preaching.

### The Elders Encouraging their Pastor in Prayer

Our Form of Government makes clear that our ruling elders are to pray with and for the people of the congregation. Also, they are to "have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors" (FG 10.3). It goes without saying that this concern must surely include daily prayer for their pastor. But directly related to this concern, and to the

concern that daily prayer should elicit, is the need of encouraging the pastor in the priority of prayer as a central feature of his ministry. I suspect that it is too seldom the case that elders ask this question of their pastor: "Are you getting the time in prayer that you need?" Or this vital follow-up question: "What can we do to remove other burdens of labor that may be keeping you from your necessary focus on prayer?" As noted above from Acts 6, the pastor is to be devoted to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. Once again we say that as good Reformed church officers, we tend to be much attuned to the necessity and priority of the ministry of the Word but not so attuned to the necessity and priority of prayer. All of our ministry suffers accordingly.

I heard one fellow pastor recently mention that his session was being sanctified in the area of prayer. He explained that they had begun, amidst their meetings, to pray after each item of business or discussion. This is a great way not only to encourage the pastor in prayer but also to encourage one another to prayer and to a greater dependence upon God—session meetings sprinkled with prayer! What a precious and edifying thing! This would surely imbue all with a clearer heavenly focus, not to mention making brothers more tender to one another amid sometimes difficult discussions or disagreements!

As we said above, nothing keeps a pastor so in touch with and tender toward the life and needs of his people than praying for them daily. The same holds true, of course, for elders, not only in their relationship with one another but also in their relationship to their pastor. Generally, an elder has assigned to him particular members to whom he gives a special care. If he is praying for these daily, it will render him more tender toward their lives and their needs. He will certainly be thinking about them and most likely will check in on them more often! And he will thus engage them more tenderly and pastorally. It is vital to observe here that the same holds true in his relationship with the pastor. If an elder is praying daily for his brother in Christ, it should render him all the more tender to him. He will thus support him in the best way, engaging him with greater affection.

Most of all, for pastor and elders alike, we can point out this singular benefit of devotion to prayer. We will know an increasing liberty to ask for much, and we will have a deep and happy assurance that we will bear much fruit. This is in full accord with our Savior's great promise in John 15:7–8: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Our Lord could not be more explicit. He clearly promises that through prayer and through our communion with him we will bear much fruit. All that we have said thus far with respect to the benefits of prayer are features of such fruitfulness. But we can say more. It is in and through prayer that an exciting world is opened to us—a "window" into the kingdom and into what God is doing. Every conversation, every interaction, every activity is then illumined with the light of our Savior's presence. Out of our communion with him it is his design that we should see a continual bearing of fruit though the whole of our life and our ministries—continual answers to prayer, countless answers to prayer—answers to prayer every day of our lives! That is surely what our Savior intends. Again, he could not have been more explicit. We are frequently guilty of shrinking our Savior's great promise with various well-intended and biblical qualifications. Too often this simply serves to mask our prayerlessness.

Hear the dying Monod again:

> Altogether, with one spirit and one heart, humbled by the slackness of our prayers, let us form the holy resolve finally to know through experience the true promises of prayer so that we might harvest from it the blessed heritage of the invisible world."[7] ☉

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7 Monod, *Living in the Hope of Glory*, 160.

# Servant Care

## The Value of a Study Break for Pastors

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2022[1]

**by Wayne M. Veenstra**

Every congregation that gives its pastor a week or two each year for study is making a great investment—and I want to congratulate congregations that do so. The investment I am talking about is pastoral study breaks; and, at the risk of sounding self-serving, on behalf of my fellow pastors, I want to express how helpful it is that a congregation grants its pastor(s) regular study breaks.

In my own call, the church has granted me two weeks of study break each year. Whenever I return from one of these study breaks, people will ask me about them. Admittedly, most occupations do not get study breaks (when is the last time the tradesman or stay-at-home mom got a study break?), and so study breaks are unfamiliar to many in our churches. So, you might have questions: what typically happens on a study break? Why are they helpful?

The concept of a study break is fresh for me, since my most recent study break was mid-October of last year. Sometimes pastors will get out of town for study to allow for some more uninterrupted time. Shifting locations can sometimes help us turn our attention from ordinary routines to more focused study and planning. For my most recent break, we spent some time in Canada (where our families are located) and the rest at home since we now have our oldest daughter's school schedule to work around.

Typically, it takes a day or two to begin "shutting off." I have typically had to press harder before the study break to tie up loose ends, and then my brain is still thinking about pastoral concerns, to-do lists, and other projects. But then the rest of the time is spent reading, writing, planning, resting, and spending time with the family—all while resisting the urge to check my email or phone.

Though each pastor's study break is different, my own goal is to spend four to six hours per day on study-related things. Some specific projects I have worked on in the past during my study break have included preparing an adult Sunday School class, pulling together small-group leader training, planning a long-term initiative for developing a culture of disciple-making at our church, and studying for my next preaching series. On other study breaks I have chosen to focus less on specific projects and more on reading as much as I can to develop personally and as a pastor.

But why give your pastors time to do this sort of thing? Let me quickly suggest five benefits.

**1. The pastor gets to read and think.** On my study break in October, I was able to start and finish four books. I was also able to finish up another three books that I had previously started. Some of these books were read for leisure, others were read for personal edification, and still others were read for specific church work. Being able to get away and read is an opportunity to help me grow.

**2. The pastor can get some perspective on his ministry.** When your weeks are stuffed with counseling appointments, meetings, and sermon preparation, you can lose sight of the "big picture" of ministry. What are our goals for this season? What things do I need to work on? What things do I need to begin planning for in the future? These are bigger vision and strategy questions that sometimes get lost in day-to-day duties. One important aspect of leading an area of ministry in the church is that you need to be able to think not only in terms of week-to-week responsibilities but also in six- or twelve-month intervals so that there is clarity on long-term direction. A study break can give

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=968.

pastors a time to provide clarity on ministry vision and strategy that can strengthen congregational ministry and support the ministry of congregational members.

**3. The pastor can recharge, replenish, and have some fun before jumping back into the fray.** Pastoral ministry is a great and demanding calling. I find that getting the chance to retreat, read, spend time with friends, and pray does wonders to restore energy levels that can be invested back into my family and church. Study breaks are useful tools to help your pastors persevere in ministry.

**4. The pastor's family gets to see him around in the evenings.** An occupational by-product of being a pastor is that your evenings are quickly filled up by evening appointments. This is understandable because most congregants are at work or school during the day, and so evenings are when a lot of meaningful pastoring gets done. The result is that the pastor is away from home several nights a week. A study break is a great gift to the pastor's family because it means that they can have a week where dinners are unhurried, and the pastor's family receive more focused attention. An important qualification for a teaching elder is how he leads and cares for his family. By encouraging the pastor to have some extra time at home, the congregation is helping him to safeguard his ability to minister to his family.

**5. The pastor gets to reset devotional routines.** Yes, even your pastors can struggle with their personal devotions. At least I do. Having a week without meetings can give me some runway to reestablish some healthier habits of devotion. This is so important because pastors must be meeting Jesus in his Word if they are to lead the congregation spiritually.

For these reasons, I am grateful to my congregation for the support they show their pastors in granting us regular study breaks. I am so thankful for how they encourage us to take study breaks and how they inquire about them, without making us feel guilty for taking the time away from our normal labors. Speaking for my fellow pastors, we are blessed by this, and we hope that our congregation in turn is blessed through its pastors being sharpened and renewed for ministry. Ⓢ

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# Promoting Happy Pastors

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## by Timothy D. Hopper

A deacon has countless opportunities to bless his pastor and make his calling a joy. R. C. Reed said, "A good deacon is the pastor's most valuable ally." Here are fifteen practical ways to do that.[2]

> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. *Let them do this with joy* and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrew 13:17)

> To avoid friction between members, *to promote happy pastorates*, and to develop the grace of liberality, nothing is more important than a good deacon, one who can be patient, who can smile at unreasonable people, and

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=970.

2 This article is based on a presentation given to the presbytery at Heritage OPC in Wilmington, North Carolina, on January 30, 2022.

> speak a soft word to turn away wrath, one who is willing to give time and take trouble on himself, and make himself "all things to all men" in order to promote the interests of his Master's cause. A *good deacon is the pastor's most valuable ally.* Officially he is worth two good elders.[3]

### 1. Know the Flock

> I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name. (3 John 13–15)

Diaconal aid is easier when you know the people personally, face to face. You may start with small talk, but do not stop there. Aspire to know something you could be praying for for everyone in your congregation.

Recommended Reading: Ed Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

### 2. Grow in Wisdom

> 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)
>
> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. (Acts 6:3)

We learn wisdom by knowing Scripture and by reading good books about the truth of Scripture and its application. Ask God for wisdom in applying his truth to your life and ministry. Surround yourself with wise saints and learn from them.

Recommended Reading: *Letters of John Newton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007).

### 3. Befriend Your Pastor

> May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. (2 Tim. 1:16–18)

Since pastoring can be a lonely calling, deacons have a unique opportunity to encourage the pastor. Take care to discover the unspoken needs of your pastor and his family.

### 4. Speak the Truth in Love

> Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Eph. 4:15)

The diaconate provides many opportunities to encourage, admonish, and counsel. A deacon must have the wisdom, courage, awareness, and love to make the most of these situations. Remember 1 Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4:29—"give grace to those who hear."

### 5. Promote Peace

> A soft word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1)

Deacons often hear frustrations and complaints. How you respond to them will have a significant impact on your church. R. C. Reed says the deacon must be always ready to "speak a soft word to turn away wrath"; in doing so, you stop a cancer before it grows and bless your pastor and elders. Most of all, a deacon must not grumble and spread discontent by his own speech.

### 6. Guard Your Tongue

> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not

3 R. C. Reed, "The Deacon," *The Union Seminary Magazine* 15.2 (1903): 215–24.

double-tongued . . . . (1 Tim. 3:8)

John Lorimer in *The Deaconship* counsels us: "A deacon, to be relieved from the annoyances sometimes connected with the discharge of his duties, is tempted to put the poor off with insincere words—to say one thing to one man, and an opposite to another." Fight this temptation.

Deacons should speak well of the session and support them. Consider the Larger Catechism on the fifth commandment (Q. 127).

Recommended Reading: John G. Lorimer, *The Deaconship: A Treatise on the Biblical Office* (1842).

### 7. Keep Your Word

> Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matt. 5:37)

John Lorimer on keeping promises in *The Deaconship*: "He is in danger also, perhaps, of promising to the pastor, and not fulfilling. This is justly fatal to character and to usefulness. It prevents confidence and creates contempt. The deacon, then, must be sincere."

Diaconal work comes with many tasks that need to be done. You need a system to help you keep track. Do not build a reputation as one who does not keep his word.

Recommended Reading: Tim Challies, *Do More Better: A Practical Guide to Productivity* (Cruciform, 2015).

### 8. Anticipate Needs

> Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. (Isa. 65:24)

Our Father in heaven knows our needs before we even ask (much like we do our own children)! Be on the lookout for financial, physical, and emotional needs within the congregation; keep your ear to the ground. Look for things your session may have overlooked, and do them.

### 9. Spend and Be Spent

> I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. (2 Cor. 12:15)

Our Lord came not to be served, but to serve. (Not to be deaconed, but to deacon!) The diaconate is an office of sacrifice and service. It is an opportunity to lay down your life and work tirelessly for the needs of the saints. Being a church officer is not convenient.

### 10. Communicate Clearly

> The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. (Prov. 16:23)

Communicate regularly with your session (Form of Government 11.5). Let them know of your labors and your struggles. Work together on common concerns. Communicate clearly with your congregation about your work and how they can work together with you. Learn to run a profitable deacon meeting, including preparing an agenda, moderating discussion, and keeping minutes.

Recommended reading: Alexander Strauch, *Meetings That Work: A Guide to Effective Elders' Meetings* (Lewis & Roth, 2001).

### 11. Delegate Duties

> Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. (Acts 16:6)

Deacons do not have to do everything; in trying to do so, you remove opportunities for others to find joy in serving the Lord. Delegate anything inhibiting you from your core concern: carrying the poor, sick, and lonely in the body.

### 12. Manage Your Household Well

> For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (1 Tim. 3:5)
>
> But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. (1 Cor. 7:33–34)

Giving yourself to Christ's church is not at the expense of your family. You set an example to the congregation of family life. It will not go unnoticed.

### 13. Humble Yourself

> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . . (Eph. 4:1–2)

Deacons, like elders, are to be examples of humility, "not domineering over those in your charge" (1 Pet. 5:3). Study the humility of Christ, who "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). Be open to advice and correction from your pastor and elders—and congregation.

### 14. Pray for Your Pastor

> [Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. (Eph. 6:19)

All saints should pray for their pastor; deacons doubly so. Let your pastor know how you are praying for him.

### 15. Sit at the Master's Feet

> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41–42)

Do not let the business of diaconal labors distract you from the worship of God. Be diligent in your private, family, and public worship. Hide God's word in your heart and meditate on it.

"We are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day" (Larger Catechism 117). ©

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# *Book Reviews*

## Digital Life Together: The Challenge of Technology for Christian Schools

### *by David I. Smith, Kara Sevensma, Marjorie Terpstra, and Steven McMullen*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2022[1]

**by T. David Gordon**

*Digital Life Together: The Challenge of Technology for Christian Schools*, by David I. Smith, Kara Sevensma, Marjorie Terpstra, and Steven McMullen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020, x + 377 pages, $29.99.

### Introduction

Titles and subtitles are tricky, but often follow a pattern: the title is designed to attract readers, and the subtitle to tell them what the book is about. The title of this book—*Digital Life Together*—might suggest that it is written for a large audience, since digital technologies are a ubiquitous aspect of life in the third millennium. The subtitle, however, suggests a much more targeted/restricted audience, limiting the scope of the book to the challenge of technology (mostly digital) for Christian schools. This reduces the otherwise-potential readership by about 97 percent and limits it further to those associated with Christian schools who have governance responsibility. This could include administrators and instructors, and also parents or other interested individuals. If the title suggests the kind of sweeping technological vision of Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, or Neil Postman, let the subtitle return you to earth. That its potential readership will be small is not a defect; I suspect the textbooks employed in most graduate schools have a small readership also, yet they serve the broader human society very well. To what subset of our society is this book aimed?

The legacy of President George W. Bush will include his No Child Left Behind initiative, in which educational institutions at all levels—kindergarten through graduate school—were required to expend time, resources, and energy not merely on teaching but also to assessing the results of that teaching to assure that they were achieving some demonstrable good. This well-intentioned proposal assumed four things that not everyone assumes:

1. That a president, who admittedly partied his way through college, was competent to reform American education
2. That all the goals of education are tangible and/or measurable (how do we assess whether a student has come to appreciate what is good, true, or beautiful?)
3. That institutions required to satisfy the measurable goals in order to maintain their funding would not drop some of the good things they had previously done in order to "teach to the test"
4. That institutions would not effectively lose funding as soon as the initiative began, because resources that had previously been devoted to education would now be devoted

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=944.

to assessing education (how many former classroom teachers are now assessors?)

I accepted none of the four assumptions. The simple fact of the matter now, however, is that Bush's NCLB initiative will likely have as permanent a shelf-life as Roosevelt's Social Security Act; federal bureaucracies (unlike old soldiers) neither die nor fade away. All American educational institutions—private or public—are now required to maintain their accreditation (and funding) by demonstrating—to the satisfaction of some agency or another—that they are "doing their job." Some readers of *Ordained Servant* are part of that current educational circumstance; and those who are may as well learn how to do what is required, and hopefully in a manner that some good will come of it. For such readers this book was written (although the authors do not state—or even hint—that satisfying President Bush's initiative was/is part of their intention):

> In this book we approach key questions about *digital technology and Christian education*. . . . We draw on extensive data from *classroom observations, focus groups, surveys, and school documents*. From this data, we will be tracing the ways in which *Christian teachers, learners, administrators, and parents* are seeking healthy connections between new technologies and the task of maintaining a discerning Christian learning community. (3, emphasis added)

The book is therefore about "Christian education," informed by "classroom observations, focus groups, surveys, and school documents," and is likely to be of primary interest to "Christian teachers, learners, administrators, and parents." I taught at a Christian college, so I have an interest in Christian education, and, on my good days, I suppose I am a "Christian teacher." I have little interest in classroom observations, focus groups, surveys, or other school documents, however, for reasons that need not detain anyone here. It is merely to indicate that the book addresses technology in Christian education, and it does not address those who have little interest in focus groups, surveys, or other school documents. But for those who are part of the now-necessary educational apparatus that requires institutional self-assessment, this volume will provide both a template and some very helpful and interesting information.

## Some Specific Observations

There is nice and helpful nuancing about what "technology" includes, and the authors include "technique" (behaviors) along with particular "tools," though they do not go so far as Ellul, either in rejecting the English ruining of the term ("geology" is the study of rocks; "technology" *should* be the *study* of tools and how we use them) or in his use of technique to refer (as Postman later did) to a worldview that expresses confidence (sometimes messianic) in Technology to save us from all our woes.

It was very good of the authors to divide the book into many (39!) brief chapters to permit readers to select the ones most pertinent to their circumstances. These chapters are located in six sections: Context, Mission, Teaching and Learning, Discernment, Formation, and Community.

The authors intend to avoid/evade the pro-tech/anti-tech polarity, while providing at least brief bibliographies reflecting that polarity. They also indicate good awareness of reciprocity: we shape tools and tools shape us.

This volume will likely have a fairly small but very grateful readership. Institutional self-assessment is now a regular feature of academic life, and the digital footprint is as ubiquitous in the academy as it is elsewhere. Nearly every Christian education institution either has a permanent technology committee (however they name it) or an occasional *ad hoc* committee of the same kind. All such groups will benefit greatly by observing how these authors have addressed these matters and will appreciate the clarity, organization, and documentation provided here. To such groups I sincerely commend it. ©

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# *Duplex Regnum Christi*: Christ's Twofold Kingdom in Reformed Theology

## *by Jonathon D. Beeke*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* January 2022[1]

**by Ryan M. McGraw**

Duplex Regnum Christi: *Christ's Twofold Kingdom in Reformed Theology*, by Jonathon D. Beeke, vol. 40, Studies in Reformed Theology. Leiden: Brill, 2021, xiii + 255 pages, $62.09, paper.

Two-kingdom theology has become a vexed question in contemporary Reformed circles. The issues usually press upon the proper understanding of the relationship between the church and state, and both in relation to God's law, enveloping vexed questions about the nature of natural law. Frequently in discussions over two-kingdom theology, authors appeal to historical precedents in Protestant churches, aiming at systematic formulations. Targeting historical developments rather than contemporary questions, Jonathon Beeke explores Christ's twofold reign in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century contexts, seeking to understand his chosen authors on their own terms and in their own times rather than in light of contemporary debates (12). His valuable research presses modern readers to step back for a moment to listen to the voices of older authors from different times and places. Doing so often places different options on the table than what we find in modern discussions, enabling readers to take stock, since they often claim to be close or far away from historic Protestantism (14). Ultimately, he argues well that Reformed orthodoxy opted to refer to Christ's twofold kingdom, essentially as God and economically as God incarnate, rather than to two distinct kingdoms. This has potential to alter the direction of current debates, at least to an extent.

Beeke's aim in this work is to investigate what select early modern Reformed authors taught about Christ's twofold reign and why they did so (14). His thesis is that Reformed orthodox portrayals of the *duplex regnum Christi* stood in basic continuity with early Reformed formulations, with some significant developments (19, 215). Following a general introduction and statement of his argument, Beeke surveys patristic and medieval foundations for the twofold reign of Christ in chapter 2. This sets the stage for his treatment of Luther in chapter 3, completing his overview of the Reformation period with Bucer and Calvin in chapter 4. Chapter 5 marks a shift toward Reformed orthodoxy as his main target by highlighting key terms and ideas related to the question. This paves the way for chapters 6 through 8, focusing on Reformed scholastic university instruction at Leiden, Geneva, and Edinburgh, as each illustrates Reformed views of Christ's twofold reign in varying contexts. Beeke takes readers off the beaten path of treating familiar authors, doing groundbreaking research on figures such as Franciscus Junius, Johannes Scharpius, and David Dickson. Chapter 9 concludes the work via restatement, summary, and assessment of the whole.

From the outset, Beeke notes that "two-kingdom theology" is actually an anachronistic term, likely stemming from Karl Barth's description of Lutheranism in 1922. He retains the language, partly due to its prevalence in secondary literature (2), noting as well that for early-modern Reformed authors, church-state relationships became a secondary issue when establishing Christ's twofold reign (13). The main concerns related to this doctrine in Reformed thinking were Christological and covenantal, saying more about Christ's pre- and post-incarnate states and what implications this had for our relation to him. The fact that Beeke draws similar evidence from Leiden,

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=945.

Geneva, and Scotland, among other sources, illustrates that stressing Christ's single reign with general and mediatorial aspects was shaped more by the trajectory of Reformed thought than by local and national contexts (216). The result is a clear and broad characterization of the Reformed tradition on this point, which holds great promise for further research.

While several features of this work stand out as particularly clear, shedding light on much recent debate, two stand out. First, Beeke's contrast between the Lutheran two-kingdoms teaching and the Reformed conception of Christ's twofold kingdom is a substantial dividing point that should shape any contemporary discussion. "Two-kingdoms" ideology aimed to explain the different responsibilities of magistrates and ministers, while Christ's twofold kingdom aimed to press people's relationship to Christ as both Creator or Redeemer. Second, he shows the development of Christ's twofold kingdom in Reformed thought, especially in light of Christology and covenant theology. Specifically, the connections he makes between Turretin's treatment of the covenants of nature and of grace, with Christ's twofold reign as Creator and Redeemer, breaks new ground (169) and sheds light on the crux of the matter. The primary issues are not thus church and state relationships as much as who Christ is and how people relate to him.

Though the author asserts repeatedly that church/state relationships were not primarily in view under the idea of a twofold reign of Christ—one essential and eternal, the other mediatorial and (maybe) temporary (e.g., 118)—the distinction and relation of powers in the church and state remains a natural ancillary discussion. Christ governs the world essentially as God, and world government should respect his law as the eternal Son of God. Christ then rules over the world for the sake of the church as Mediator, with a special aim toward the redemption of the elect and the transformation of heaven and earth.

Surely this distinction still results in different ways in which the state and the church relate to God's law, as it did in James Bannerman's *Church of Christ*, for instance. Reformed orthodoxy may present a twofold kingdom of one Christ rather than two kingdoms, yet Christ's twofold reign is a Christological issue with important implications for church/state relations. All people are subject to law under Christ as Creator, and he reigns over all as mediator, calling people to repentance and faith. However, it remains striking, as the author notes, that Reformed treatments of Christ's twofold reign appeared in Christologically grounded theological loci and not in relation to pastors and magistrates (148–49). The larger picture that emerges is that Christ's twofold reign was primarily a Christological issue, with implications for the distinction of power in church and state. This overlap of issues appears more readily in authors like Turretin, as Beeke acknowledges (e.g., 165), but the connection between Christ's twofold kingdom and church-state relationships remains a natural one. Keeping this caveat in mind, Beeke rightly observes that confusion often results from the fact that people treat the scope of Christ's mediatorial kingdom as narrower than that of his universal kingdom as Creator, while in classic Reformed thought the scope of two aspects of Christ's reign remained universal, though with differing aims and relations (e.g., 21, 114, 224). This point can help alleviate some confusion and charges of inconsistency among Reformed authors as they come to bear on modern debates.

Historical theology cannot tell the church what to believe, but it can tell us what the church has believed. It is vital to hear historical people with their own accents in their own contexts without running into the danger of seeing our own reflections in their viewpoints. This is precisely why historical studies like this one can help modern theological debates, giving us other ideas to evaluate and making some lines in the sand clearer (12). Beeke's book, as an exemplary model of historical theology, thus contributes something vital to ongoing discussions of two kingdoms theology today, pressing toward sound historical exegesis rather than mere theological eisegesis. Not all will be satisfied with his conclusions, but that is part of the beauty of historical theology. Readers are not

obligated to like what they find, even as they seek to learn from what they find. I cannot commend this book highly enough, both in relation to the history of Reformed thought and for its potential to clarify contemporary discussions. ©

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# Reflections on Revelation in the Time of COVID: Finding Hope When Life is Hard

## *by Susan E. Erikson*

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**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

*Reflections on Revelation in the Time of COVID: Finding Hope When Life Is Hard*, by Susan E. Erikson. Eugene, OR: Resource, 2021, xii+ 177 pages, $20.00, paper.

This book of poetry is composed in free verse. Free verse is free of both meter and rhyme. Blank verse, as in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, has meter but not rhyme. Erikson employs free verse, which has dominated the twentieth century, but in Erickson's case with excellent poetic rhythm, which mimics ordinary language and is artfully done.

The New Formalism, to which I as a poet subscribe, has surprised the modern world with a return to poetic structure of all kinds, from the quatrain to the sonnet and the pantoum. My quarrel with the modern dominance of free verse should not mean the elimination of free verse but rather the happy inclusion of historic forms, and perhaps the invention of some new ones.

The essence of free verse hearkens back to oral culture, which is what poetry is all about—memorable, sounding in the ear in unforgettable ways! As T. S. Eliot concludes in his essay "Reflections on *Vers Libre*," "we conclude that the division between Conservative Verse and *vers libre* does not exist, for there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos."[2] Alas, the mnemonic power of poetry is the great resource of the preacher. Its lack in the contemporary scene is directly related to the failure of poetry to capture the popular imagination.

Erikson divides the book into four parts: "I Need You Lord" (five poems), "The Church in Christ" (nineteen poems), "We Battle in Christ" (twenty poems), and "Our Victory in Christ" (eleven poems). The shape of the book is consistent with the theme revealed in the subtitle, "Finding Hope When Life Is Hard." As with the book of Revelation, there is an eschatological movement represented in the move from the opening poem, "The Spirit of the Age" (2–4) to the concluding poem, "The Age of Eternity" (175–77). Identical tercets begins each poem, connecting the two.

> I feel as if the world is falling down a rabbit hole,
> And I am Alice,
> Tumbling right behind.

The two couplets following these tercets are:

> Are you there, LORD?
> My soul is full of troubles.

> *I AM coming soon*,
> He says.

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=953.

2 T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on Vers Libre," in *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), 189.

The next long stanza is repeated in both places, followed by a significant variation:

I need you, LORD.

*I am the Alpha and Omega,*
*First and Last,*
*Beginning and the end.*
*David's son and David's Lord,*
*I bring God's glory and His grace,*
*I wield the sword.*

The opening poem ends with a simple couplet query:

Is this the end?
Is this the time You will appear?

The concluding poem answers the query with an apocopated summary of the judgment and the eschatological Paradise state, ending, as the book of Revelation does, with the confident prayer, *Come Lord Jesus! Come!*

I say all of this to demonstrate that well-crafted free verse is not chaotic. Erickson displays considerable care and subtlety in her poetic structure.

Typographically there are inconsistencies in the two poems. The norm is to capitalize the first word in each line. Another way of doing this is to lowercase the first word of lines not preceded by punctuation in the last line. This might be better done when all but periods precede. In other words, only complete sentences begin with capitals. However, that second way of capitalizing, mentioned above, seems to be consistently done throughout most of the book.

The range of content makes for an interesting variety, displaying the Old Testament roots of Revelation in, for example, "And Moses Said" (14). Each poem has biblical references footnoted. Entire Scripture passages are interspersed throughout the collection (1, 18, 68, 146). Some poems are explicitly related to a text in Revelation. For example, the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 are each the subject of separate poems (19–40).

Erikson often refers to our contemporary situation, demonstrating the power of John's apocalypse to apply to every age between the two comings of Christ. Yet, such references will apply in any time before the coming of our Savior.

I am an exile in a wilderness of strife,
An anxious neighbor to an angry crowd,
And I am bowed
by my own sin as well as theirs. (100, "Holy War")

The biblical humility of the poet is beautifully expressed. This should also be a creative aid to preachers as they contemplate how to relate the text of Scripture to their congregations. For those unfamiliar with poetry, this may be a good place to start, since it digs into subject matter familiar to the pastor. Erikson is rarely specific about our contemporary situation. In "Jars of Clay" she begins,

COVID digs by harrowing,
Its fiercest teeth are plowing through
our covenants with death,
Our covenants that honor kings above all else,
That rest in shelters
we have fashioned out of us,
Constructed out of narratives that put our egos first.
We are a constant chattering,
A gathering of birds,
A murmuration mumbling the ancient lies
as if our chittering could muzzle sacred words (135)

I would like to see more enjambment in these poems. Enjambment is seen when a poetic line stops before its natural linguistic pause.

I love to open Your Word.
It feels like
Opening the back door on a summer day. (11)

Smell the ruthless wind that blows in from the viper's nest,
And from such arrogance,
*How delightfully depraved,*
They brag,
*How decadent to drink down to the dregs*
*the blood of saints,*
*The blood of those who would not bend a knee*
*before the kings and priests of our rapacious immorality,*

*Before the worshipping of sex and stuff.*
(113–14, "Bending")

Enjambment seems especially suitable to free verse. But Erikson's staccato rhythms make up for this to a large degree, since when read aloud, the meaning strikes home, echoing the power of the text of Revelation. Such oral structure should also be of help to the preacher, especially one who may be overly tied to a manuscript.

On a topic circumscribed by a subject like COVID and the book of Revelation, I would have been inclined to produce a briefer chapters.

Poetry based on the Bible is not easy to write. Erikson has done a wonderful job. In these poems we find a deep sense of human need, a realistic view of our fallen world, and the power, holiness, and grace of God exalted. Anyone who needs encouragement while living in this fallen world will surely find it here, since her poems are rooted in the infallible Word of God. ©

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# The Cottage by the Bridge

## *by Ivars Fridenvalds*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2022[1]

**by Frank J. Smith**

*The Cottage by the Bridge: One Latvian Family's Escape to America during WW II*, by Ivars Fridenvalds. Kindle Direct Publishing, 2021, x + 102 pages, $5.00.

Human pathos set on the stage of World War II. Tyrannical cruelty. Displaced persons. Escape to neutral Sweden. Adventure on the high seas. Cold War intrigue. An unlikely accident. Love of liberty. Challenges of immigration. Patriotism—for both one's native nation and adopted country. Family ties and relations. Romance. A hard-work ethic. Conversion stories. What more do you want in a novel?

But, of course, this is not fiction—it is all true.

This story is a deeply personal account painted in moving colors. It was written by a humble man—a wonderful man whom I was privileged to know for three decades, having been his pastor for five years. This autobiography is set against the backdrop of world history, in which the lives of various individuals were divinely woven together into the fabric of global machinations. And overarching the tapestry was a Providence that was producing eternal blessings.

Ivars Fridenvalds (1935–2021) was born in Latvia, a small country often linked with two other Baltic states—Estonia and Lithuania—all three of which were (illegally) annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. Like the Poles, Finns, Estonians, and Lithuanians, the Latvians were caught up in

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=961.

the winds of war. Ivars's childhood was marked by memories of unwelcome troops and airmen wreaking harm and devastation. The Nazis utilized emaciated Jews in tattered clothing as slave labor. The Communists deported 35,000 Latvians to Siberia. And at the age of seven, Ivars witnessed his mother's horror and pain when an aerial bomb caused her wounded leg to be amputated.

The opening scenes take place in and around the seaside town of Mersrags. What should have been an idyllic setting was transformed in 1940 into a theater of threats and torture, suffused with Communist propaganda seeking to brainwash a subjugated people. In 1944, the Fridenvalds were able to flee to neutral Sweden, though their safety was not guaranteed there, as the Russian overlords wanted all Latvian refugees returned. The specter of deportation was mingled with experiences of delousing and diphtheria. In 1950, the family joined others in a trans-oceanic journey aboard the *Masen*, an old Canadian minesweeper. A southerly route was chosen so as to avoid Russian submarines prowling the North Atlantic. On August 28, 1950, in a dense fog in the Georges Banks off the New England coast, a large fishing trawler collided with the emigrants' vessel. The crash resulted in the U.S. Coast Guard escorting the boat into Boston harbor. Eventually, the Fridenvalds family was taken to Ellis Island, "known as both the 'island of tears' and the 'island of hope,' and so it was. Many human tragedies were played out on this island, for here many dreams were fulfilled, but also many dreams were dashed" (55).

In 1954, the dream almost turned to tears, as there was a real threat that the entire family would be forced to return to Sweden. However, many friends and interested parties got involved in the Fridenvalds's plight, and a private bill was introduced in Congress to resolve the matter. (So, it literally took an act of Congress!)

Ivars gratefully accepted the duties of being an American. In 1958, having been drafted, he was inducted into the U.S. Army and served in Germany. Within a couple of years, he had returned to New Rochelle, New York, and transitioned to civilian life, taking up again his occupation of being a painter. On May 12, 1962, he married the love of his life, Grace. A daughter and two sons soon followed.

But there was one more major factor, and that was the spiritual. In 1975, on a Sunday morning, he happened to hear hymn singing coming through an open window at a YMCA building in New Rochelle. He stopped and finally decided to find the room where the small congregation was meeting. That mission work was under the auspices of Franklin Square Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Long Island. The pastor was Malcolm Wright, who that day preached from Romans 12:1–2. Soon Ivars came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, came to faith in Christ, and became a member of the church. A few years later, his wife Grace, who was raised Italian Catholic, joined him in his profession. In 1985, during the time that Greg Reynolds was the pastor, Ivars was ordained as a deacon. Eight years later, he and Grace became members of Affirmation Presbyterian Church (PCA), Somers, New York, and shortly thereafter he was ordained as an elder, a post he held until his death on December 15, 2021—about a month after the publication of this book. He was eighty-six years young.

Ivars could wax poetic. In a poem about his sister who remained in Sweden, entitled "A Candle Burning," he wrote:

> Why did you stay behind?
> We loved you.
> The years passed into eternity.
> They never saw you again.
> I saw you, but there was a gulf, a distance
> separating us.
> Time had removed our closeness
> which we enjoyed in our youth.
> Our leaving was a tragedy.
> It was all a tragedy that happened to us.
> Even the way your life ended.
> You were alone with a candle burning.

He could also be very reflective philosophically and theologically. In searching "for answers to [the] human tragedy" of how the Jews were treated by the Nazis, he noted that over the years he had

come to understand the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity. Nevertheless, toward the end of his life he declared:

> I am still searching for answers. I have reached back into the nineteenth century and read philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, George Hegel and Karl Marx. I saw the influence these thinkers had on the despots who would commit such crimes on fellow human beings. That one can take another man's most precious possession, his wife and his children, away from him and totally destroy them. This happens when man believes that he is God. (9)

And he could express his highest priorities:

> Now, as I come closer to the end of my own life, I have reflected on my life's journey and reconsidered all that has transpired. It has been a fascinating personal journey from Latvia to America. Yet, I am most thankful for my spiritual journey and how God opened my eyes to the truths of the Gospel. My deepest prayer is that many whom I know and love will come to know these truths for themselves. (102)

Faithful. Kind. Humble. Godly. Wise. Steadfast. Loyal. Supportive. These are among the qualities I recounted when I wrote a eulogy for Elder Fridenvalds. After leaving my pastorate in New York in 1998, I would keep in touch with him from time to time. Every conversation I had with him reflected his spirit—cheerful, upbeat, encouraging. I shall miss the opportunity to pick up the phone and speak with him. However, I am grateful for this autobiography and commend it to others. For he, being dead, yet speaketh. ⓢ

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# The Making of C. S. Lewis

## *by Harry Lee Poe*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2022[1]

**by Charles M. Wingard**

*The Making of C. S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist (1918–1945)*, by Harry Lee Poe. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021, 399 pages, $32.99.

For several years, "deconversions" have been a hot topic on social media as a succession of Christian celebrities—including pastors—have announced their departure from the faith. Apostasy is a tragic but not-new phenomenon; one need look no further than the New Testament and Demas (2 Tim. 4:10). While writing this review, I am reading a biography of George Eliot, who abandoned the Christian faith and the evangelical doctrine she once ardently espoused.

The current interest in evangelical deconversions makes it a good time to examine one of the more remarkable conversions in recent Christian history—that of C. S. "Jack" Lewis. Harry Lee Poe tells this unlikely story exceedingly well in *The Making of C. S. Lewis*, the second in a projected three-volume biography. His narrative covers the period from Lewis's post World War I convalescence from severe battle wounds to the end of World War II, a period during which Lewis moved from atheist to theist to Christian, and ultimately to formidable advocate of the faith.

Jack Lewis's life was one of privilege and pain. During the Great Depression, when much of the world was in dire straits, he lived comfortably (217). His father, Albert Lewis, financially supported him well into adulthood, making it possible

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=966.

for him to pursue his Oxford studies. Albert, a lawyer, refrained from pressuring his son to follow in his profession. Instead, he encouraged his love for books—not only by purchasing them but also by becoming his conversation partner in discussing them. "In the end, Albert Lewis had the greatest role in the making of C. S. Lewis as a literary man" (127). In later years, with the arrogance of youth gone, Lewis would sadly recall that his stance toward his father was far from upright. He frequently deceived him regarding his use of money and other matters, withheld from him his true views about religion before his conversion, and spoke to others about him with contempt. Opportunities to set things right were gone, much to Lewis's regret (340). Heartache was a traveling companion on Lewis's journey to Christian maturity.

One of the excellent features of this book is the author's helpful analysis and critique of Lewis's works during this period, beginning with the publication of his first widely applauded and scholarly book, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936), and its study of medieval chivalry and the courtly love tradition. Poe says of this book, "In many ways, it is the only book Lewis ever wrote. All the other books flow from it like a stream" (151).

Poe comments on other books, including *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), *The Abolition of Man* (1943), and *The Great Divorce* (1945), as well as his famed BBC broadcasts during World War II, messages that would later become the basis of *Mere Christianity* (1952). In his addresses, Lewis presented reasons to believe in God and clear teaching on basic Christian doctrines. His keen ability to answer objections to the Christian faith was not surprising. In addition to his considerable intellectual gifts and the ability to write and speak to a popular audience, "he knew the materialist objections to Christian faith because they had been *his* objections" (342). Citing Dennis Beets, Poe observes that "Lewis was a pastoral theologian who aimed at bringing comfort to people who were confused and afflicted" (257).

In his first volume, *Becoming C. S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1898–1918)*, Poe observes that Lewis was "someone who collected friends like other people accumulate pennies" (255). Those friendships shaped him. About the Inklings, the author notes that they were "a company of friends who liked stories, poetry, and Jesus" (316). In that group were J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams, his closest friends. One member exaggerated when he wrote, "I believe Williams was the only one of us, except perhaps Ronald Tolkien, from whom Lewis learnt any of his thinking" (311). Nevertheless, the influence was real and mutual. For example, Lewis's critiques and encouragements were critical to the publication of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (131).

Other friendships were cultivated through the exchange of letters, as in the correspondence over many years with writers and scholars of considerable intellectual depth. Among these correspondents were Sister Penelope Lawson and Dorothy Sayers. The latter shared with Lewis "the common concern for the representation of the Christian faith in popular culture" (306).

Readers like me, who have been heavily influenced by the Puritan tradition, will especially find interesting that during his journey from theism to Christianity, Lewis read Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. "He was struck by Bunyan's uncertainties, doubts, and fears even after his conversion, when he 'felt himself united to Christ.'" He began to see truth's "darker side" found in older works like this (132–133). Lewis "came to recognize the distinction between an idea or belief being out of fashion and being untrue" (83).

Attention is given to Lewis's long-time relationship with the separated but not divorced Janie Moore, who was twenty-six years his senior. They lived under the same roof for more than three decades. Poe offers, to my mind, a convincing argument that this was never a sexual relationship. Instead, Moore functioned as a surrogate mother (206–209; Lewis's mother had died in 1908). During World War I, Moore's son, Paddy, a friend of Lewis and fellow soldier, was killed in action. It is possible that Jack and Paddy had made promises

to care for the other's parent in the eventuality of either's death (*Becoming C. S. Lewis*, 257). In any case, Moore never experienced a religious conversion like Lewis's and became increasingly difficult to live with as the years went by. Lewis's perseverance in caring for her may have been an example of the chivalrous codes of conduct he came to love and live by.

I finished reading this wanting to know more about C. S. Lewis; I will be turning to several of the resources Poe recommends. Certainly there are beliefs Lewis held that, as a confessional Presbyterian, I must demur. His doctrines of biblical inspiration and atonement are inadequate. Nevertheless, as others have pointed out, he may well be the last Christian public intellectual with widespread name recognition and admiration throughout the English-speaking world. Many people trace their interest in the Christian faith to his writing. Others have found his apologetics helpful supports to their faith. If for no other reasons, one is well-served by studying his life and works. Ⓢ

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# The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work

## *by Faculty and Friends of 'Old' Princeton*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2022[1]

**by Joel D. Fick**

*The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work*, by Faculty and Friends of 'Old' Princeton. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2020, x + 272 pages, $20.00.

From time to time I have discussed with other ministers what sorts of things they are assigning and reading with their pastoral interns. Over the course of the years, many fine books and articles have found their way on and off that reading list. Today I am reviewing a wonderful little book that I will be commending to all my pastor friends—not only to assign to their interns, but also to pick up and read for themselves. The book is *The Pastor: His Call, Character, and Work*, by faculty and friends of "Old" Princeton.

For the bibliophiles out there, the book itself feels simple and refined. Published by Banner of Truth, it is bound in hard cloth with gilt lettering, beautifully laid out, including a dust jacket, and has that lovely sort of spine that makes you glad to be holding a Banner book. The footprint is on the smaller side, so it is not heavy in the hand, and its 272 pages does not feel overwhelming. It is the sort of book that makes you want to pick it up on a Lord's Day afternoon, and with the individual essays each standing on their own merit, it is easy to set down and come back to.

If the casing of the book is refined, it is

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=972.

exceeded in its refinement only by the richness of the content. Written by faculty and students of "old" Princeton, the book contains nine essays on the call, character, and work of pastoral ministry that are brimming not only with biblical erudition but with a deep sense of practical piety. The essay by William S. Plumer on "The Scripture Doctrine of a Call to the Ministry" will be particularly useful for younger men still wondering whether they might be called to the ministry, and what that call looks like. On the other hand, the essay by Archibald Alexander on "The Pastoral Office" will be particularly useful to reorient and recalibrate those of us who have been serving for many years.

One of the characteristics that sets this little book apart from so many others is the attention that is given to the importance of cultivating piety. Archibald Alexander contributes a useful essay "On the Importance of Aiming at Eminent Piety," but, really, the theme is like a rich vein that courses through the entire book. In the concluding address, entitled "The Ministry We Need," Nicholas Murray sums it up well: "No gifts, however splendid or attractive, can compensate for the lack of piety. . . . unless his heart is deeply imbued with the Spirit of Christ, he fails to accomplish many of the great ends for which the ministry was instituted" (213).

The emphasis on piety may lead us to ask with Paul, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The book also leads us back to the sufficiency of the Great Shepherd, and the chapter on "The Lord Jesus Christ the Example of the Minister" by J. W. Alexander stands out as a real highlight. The book wonderfully balances both the convicting and comforting influences of the Spirit, as Ashbel Green reminds us when he says, "I desire not to abate or soften any censure which a declaration of the truth may inflict. Let the truth do its office fairly with the consciences of us all" (207).

This is a wonderful little book that will help to "let the truth do its office fairly" and that will serve both pastors and prospective pastors well. Ⓢ

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# Augustine's Theology of Preaching

## *by Peter T. Sanlon*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2022[1]

**by Shane Lems**

*Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, by Peter T. Sanlon. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014, xxxiii + 211 pages, $24.00, paper.

For good reasons, many Christians are still interested in the writings of Augustine (354–430 AD). From *The City of God* to his *Confessions*, Augustine's works are still widely read, studied, and discussed. However, one aspect of Augustine's life and ministry has been in some ways neglected: his preaching. Peter Sanlon noticed this neglect and has sought to remedy it in his 2014 publication, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*. This book is basically an extended discussion about several aspects of Augustine's preaching based primarily on his *Sermones ad Populum* (*Sermons to the People*) and *De Doctrina Christiania* (*On Christian Doctrine*).

Sanlon's goal in *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* is to explain the "undergirding theological convictions which shaped and informed Augustine's preaching" (xvii). Sanlon argues that Augustine's sermons were eminently scriptural. Furthermore, Sanlon notes, the concepts of interiority and temporality were the hermeneutical keys of Augustine's preaching (xvii). By "interiority" Sanlon means the inner aspect of a person—the

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=973.

heart, the desires, and self-reflection. By "temporality" Sanlon means the flow and development of God's plan for creation "from beginning to consummation" (86). The bulk of Sanlon's book is devoted to showing how these two concepts often show up in Augustine's preaching.

*Augustine's Theology of Preaching* has eight chapters. The first two cover the North African context in which Augustine preached and the oratory background of his education. I appreciated these chapters because they gave me a window into the North African ecclesiastical climate in Augustine's day. In chapter 3, Sanlon explores *De Doctrina*, a book Augustine wrote to train preachers. One helpful aspect of this chapter was the discussion about Christ, the inner teacher. Because "we are blinded by disordered loves," Augustine argued, we need Christ to help us understand Scripture and the world God created. "Only the Inner Teacher can so reorder inner loves that Scripture and creation are understood aright" (64).

Chapter 4 is Sanlon's extended analysis showing how Augustine's preaching had a focus on interiority (the heart) and temporality (the flow of history). This chapter also shows how Scripture shaped Augustine's thinking and preaching in deep and substantial ways. Furthermore, in preaching Scripture, Sanlon notes, Augustine had a goal to change the listeners. I appreciated this chapter because I am very interested in these topics of preaching Scripture in a heart-felt way to the hearts of God's people.

In chapters 5 through 7, Sanlon talks about several topics in Augustine's preaching where interiority and temporality are evident. These chapters are "case studies" that display how the two main aspects of Augustine's preaching show up in his sermons. Sanlon specifically examines these topics in Augustine's preaching: riches and money, death and resurrection, and relationships such as marriage and friendship.

These "case studies" are very enlightening. Augustine's views of these topics are quite insightful and penetrating on their own. But it is especially helpful to see how Augustine discussed these topics in light of the heart (interiority) and temporality (present and future). For example, Augustine preached, "If with the love of money you desire to bind your heart, you are planting for yourself many sorrows" (109). When he preached about death and resurrection, Augustine mentioned the death and resurrection of Christ with an aim to bring those gospel truths to the hearts of the listeners in a life-changing way. When explaining the Gospel story about Jesus's resurrection, he preached, "So then, beloved, may we listen to these things, that those who live, may live on; that those who are dead, may come to life" (126). I should also mention that Sanlon's discussion of Augustine's preaching on relationships was excellent. In Sanlon's words, Augustine taught that "Together . . . friends help each other seek after God" (164).

After chapter 7 comes the conclusion, where Sanlon restates his main point: the hermeneutical keys to Augustine's preaching were interiority and temporality. In this chapter there is also a very short take-away section where Sanlon explains how we can learn from these aspects of Augustine's preaching.

*Augustine's Theology of Preaching* is an excellent resource for those interested in patristics. But it is also an excellent resource for preachers. It is well-written, easy to follow, and very applicable for preachers today. Modern Christian ministers can learn much from Augustine about preaching God's Word to his people. As Sanlon noted, Augustine "preached in a way that he hoped would enable ordinary listeners to make sense of their lives in light of God's revelation" (147). That is what I want to do as a Christian preacher today! This book encouraged me to read Scripture more, mediate on it longer, and let it affect my preaching in an even greater way. And this book reminded me about the importance of the heart in studying the Word and in preaching it. In fact, this book even made me pick up my copy of some of Augustine's sermons and start reading them for myself. Ⓢ

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# Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government

## *by Guy Prentiss Waters*

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**by Ryan M. McGraw**

*Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government*, by Guy Prentiss Waters. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2022, 100 pages, $8.99, paper.

Church government has been a divisive issue among Protestants since the Reformation. For this reason, few authors, and even fewer publishers, are willing to tackle the subject in our modern world. Although church government affects the well-being of the church without striking at the heart of its being, the Bible still has something to say about the subject, and for this reason so should we. Guy Waters, as a convinced Presbyterian, illustrates in these pages why Presbyterian government is rooted in Scripture and how Christ designed this form of government for the benefit of his people. This is an easy-to-read and a useful introduction to this subject that readers will find edifying, even if they do not agree with all of his conclusions.

Reducing the biblical principles of Presbyterianism to five points in chapters 2–3, Waters addresses the church, its members, offices, courts, and ordination. Of course, this material answers the arguments of the first chapter for the relative importance of church government—relative because church government relates to the well-being or health, rather than the being or foundation, of the church. Chapter 5 helpfully answers a range of questions arising in relation to church membership and church government. Concluding the work with three points of application, chapter 5 urges believers to think biblically, to choose self-denying love, and to be thankful to God and joyful in the church (85–88). The recommended reading list, following the conclusion, usefully introduces readers to material that can help them press further in exploring church government.

In terms of content, Waters's treatment in chapter 2 of what the church is and why church membership is biblical should be points that all churches have in common. Divergences among churches occur primarily in relation to his last three points of Presbyterianism in chapter 3. He argues that Christ has appointed elders, divided into two classes, alone to govern the church, with deacons serving over believers' physical concerns. Some Presbyterians have described this classification as two offices, with a distinction regarding Word and sacrament within the office of elder, and some as three offices, consisting of ministers, elders, and deacons (45). The common point between these models is that ministers and elders alone govern the church locally, regionally, and ecumenically through doctrine, order, and discipline (51–56). Fifth, and finally, officers in Presbyterian churches, and in Scripture, are elected by church members and ordained by elders through the laying on of hands (58–61). By contrast, Episcopal churches of various forms commit government into the hands of bishops in place of presbyters (elders), especially on the regional and ecumenical levels, while Congregational churches make church government terminate at the local level, whether elders or whole congregations govern such congregations. This presentation of Presbyterianism is biblically grounded, easy to follow, and punctuated by useful application to the church as a whole.

A few clarifying points are in order in relation to Appendix 2 by Bartel Elshout, who further illustrates what Presbyterianism is. Elshout augments Waters's material by adding that "two distinct

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=981.

models of Reformed church polity" emerged from the principle of Scripture alone: Presbyterianism and the Church Order of Dort. Both models stress Christ's headship, Scripture alone, rule by elders, and a federal relationship with other churches (94–95). He adds that they differ in the number of offices, in assigning rule to deacons as well as to elders (96, 98), in setting terms of service for elders and deacons (96; not for ministers!), in the autonomy of local congregations (97), in whether the term "church" extends to regional and ecumenical bodies as "permanent assemblies" of the church (98–99), and in the idea that church discipline can be "initiated and administered" only in local churches (99).

Readers should note, however, that many Presbyterian churches distinguish the offices of minister and elder, resulting in three offices, and that some implement terms for officers. This author questions whether setting term limits for elders and not for ministers can retain true parity of office. The main differences between Presbyterianism and Dutch polity, however, lie in their views of deacons being part of the church's governing body and in whether the term "church" applies beyond the local congregation. Deacons do not share in church government with the elders in Scripture, which is why elders must be "apt to teach," while deacons do not have this requirement (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). Elders are apt to teach because they must apply the keys of the kingdom in church government and discipline, while the deacons exercise authority over the church's temporal affairs (Acts 6). In this respect, Elshout is not quite right in saying that "both models are presbyterian" in that they recognize government by elders (94). Presbyterianism has always recognized that the elders govern the church exclusively and that "church" in Scripture includes local churches, regional churches, and the whole church, united in exercising elder government at its various levels. The Church Order of Dort, from which most Dutch churches draw their form of government, is more akin to English Congregationalism than it is to Presbyterianism, due to its refusal to apply the term "church" to synods and councils. This may have resulted from the number of Congregational Puritan refugees in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In any case, Dutch polity differed from other continental forms of church polity, such as seventeenth-century France and Geneva (via Francis Turretin, for example), which remained distinctively Presbyterian. In Congregationalism the church terminates at the local level, while in Presbyterianism elders govern the church in its regional and ecumenical forms as well.

Though the excellent features of Waters's book are hard to overstate, one additional thing that is worthy of note in relation to Appendix 1 is the content of the PCA's membership vows (91–92). While officers in Presbyterian denominations subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, the only "creed" required of members is their membership vows. Such vows express one's faith in Christ, rooted in the fundamental ideas of Christianity. In this light, it is unfortunate that these vows include nothing explicit about the Trinity and the incarnation, as do vows in churches like the OPC, the URC, and many Baptist congregations. This is a sad omission, since the Trinity and Christ's incarnation have always been the bedrock of biblical Christianity from the time of the Apostles, through the early church and Middle Ages, and into the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. Knowing the one Triune God through the one Mediator between God and man is the most essential component of the Christian faith, without which everything else we believe stands on thin air. Such a confession of the Trinity and the incarnation undergirded Paul's summaries of the gospel in passages like 1 Timothy 3:16, and we would do well to retain and cherish it. The church today desperately needs to recover the Trinity and the person and work of Christ as the bedrock of biblically grounded faith and life. Though it may be controversial to say so, I believe that the PCA vows are defective in promoting a distinctively Christian confession that reflects the confession of both the Scriptures and of the church in every age. The point here is to challenge all churches to dig deeper into these key foundations as they lead

people into church membership.

Whether or not readers agree with everything that Guy Waters teaches in these pages, all believers will likely find elements that resonate. It is important to wrestle with the Bible's own teaching on church government as we seek to learn at Christ's feet, as he governs and shepherds us through his church. We should be grateful that Reformation Heritage Books was willing to publish a book on church government, helping promote the well-being of the church today. Though such books should never mark the lines between true and false churches, they represent attempts to teach the whole counsel of God in Scripture faithfully. There is likely none better than Guy Waters to take up this task with winsome charity, writing clearly with the health of the church in view. ©

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# The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis

## *by Jason M. Baxter*

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**by William Edgar**

*The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind*, by Jason M. Baxter. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2022, 166 pages, $22.00, paper.

We do not realize how infected we are by the Enlightenment worldview until we are confronted with something so alienated from it, we either recoil or become, perhaps, over fascinated by its counter-cultural offerings.

You may have thought everything possible had been written about C. S. Lewis. But there is still more in the till. Baxter's unique study shows how Lewis rejected modern positivism in favor of a more ancient mentality. There are three Lewises: the Christian apologist (think of *Mere Christianity* or *Miracles*), the mythmaker (think of his fantasies), and the medievalist. This third Lewis is the least well known and yet arguably the most important. He spent most of his working hours studying ancient texts and etymologies. His interests ranged from relatively well-known authors to obscure ones: Boethius to Macrobius to Chrétien de Troyes, Calcidius, Milton, and especially Dante.

Lewis was a conservative, but not in a cranky way. He was nostalgic, but not in a naïve way. If you have read the masterful *An Experiment in Criticism* or *The Abolition of Man*, you will encounter a man with a special burden to combat modern subjectivism with a sense that art objects have intrinsic value and are not primarily conduits for

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=982.

human feelings. Lewis's worldview centers on one notion: the universe reveals a very real *numinous*. This expression is not from Kant but from Rudolf Otto, the great German theologian who wrote on *The Idea of the Holy*, a text that claims that all people are longing for the *mysterium tremendum*. Although shrouded in mystery, the *numinous* is not inaccessible but simply inexhaustible.

For Lewis, this means a given text or a work of art ought to be valued for itself and not for its capacity to incite a feeling, or even a particular message. The art object belongs to a world in which the supernatural (an expression Lewis did not care for) transpires into our world. For Lewis "the medieval universe was not just a system of exploded scientific beliefs, but the natural icon of transposition" (22). This may surprise certain contemporary readers who find in his fantasies a not-so-subtle pedagogical statement of a message. As curious as it may sound to us, he thought of his writings, including the fantasies, as explorations into language and, of course, other worlds—but not sermons. In a memorable statement, he declared that Christian authors ought to have blood in their veins, not their ink.

One of many illustrations of this principle is the medieval cathedral. A somewhat obscure observer from the fourteenth century, Jean de Jandin, wrote that Notre Dame Cathedral was "terrible," meaning that it inspired wonder and awe. Its architecture is "saturated," meaning that it is pregnant with beauty and significance (33). Abbot Suger, who is credited with the creation of the Gothic style, wrote of the sensory overload of the elements of his buildings, their diversity centering in the unity of a divine encounter (34).

Baxter's book indeed resembles the cathedral (the mobile comes to mind), with its many components united in the service of one basic theme: the defense of a worldview fated to disappear. What has replaced it is mechanization. Curiously (perhaps), Lewis despised the newspaper and the automobile. These represented efficiency, quantification, and all the idols of modernity. In ways reminiscent of Jacques Ellul, Lewis eschewed the idol of efficacy. The so-called scientific revolution introduced a new period of ignorance (63). Science is an "evil enchantment" covering up the wonder of the world (69–85). Like Wendell Berry, Lewis believed the heart of the battle was in language (70).

Does this view make Lewis a Luddite? Not really, for he accepted the reality of living in our world. Yet he lived in constant tension with its pretensions. Like his friend J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis saw the world as a sacrament. But it was not an unidentifiable mess. We do not need to be overfascinated by the anti-Enlightenment view to perceive its limits.

As a Huguenot Protestant, I flinch at parts of this view. Lewis was an Anglican, which he recognized as part of the Protestant heritage. Yet, I must take seriously the objections to Lewis held by the greatest apologist of the twentieth century, the fiercely Protestant Cornelius Van Til. Van Til has written persuasively that Lewis is weak on the sovereignty of God and the sinfulness of man.[2] He compares him to Thomas Aquinas, with his frail view of divine election. I tremble to suggest this, but I believe Van Til has missed something of the genius of C. S. Lewis. He has missed Lewis's critique of modernity. Further, is there nothing in common between Lewis's sacramentalism and Van Til's doctrine of analogy? Is there nothing in common between Otto's *mysterium tremendum* and Van Til's insistence on the incomprehensibility of God? I offer these as items for discussion.

Baxter has articulately presented one of the greatest intellectuals of the twentieth century at his scholarly best. Lewis's rejection of the modern paideia and his articulation of an alternate view are deeply edifying and even moving. Such a book leads us to put into question our unthinking allegiance to the Enlightenment vision. But it does far more: it opens our eyes to sense the presence of the Lord in unsuspecting places.

Two minor quibbles: (1) The subtitle is not quite right. It is not so much "great books" as

2 See https://presupp101.wordpress.com/2012/08/23/the-theology-of-c-s-lewis-by-cornelius-van-til/.

medieval texts that shaped Lewis's mind. Certainly a few of the other classics are mentioned, but this is a volume about Lewis's encounters with the medieval mind, not great books. (2) The cover. I hesitate to do this. But why cannot Christians accept a degree of abstraction? The picture is a young man sitting in a chair, reading a book, with scores of books "raining" on him from above. Some are suspended on vines. Two great lions are pictured in the lower corners. Sorry, but it doesn't work. It comes across as a piece of pedagogical literalism the artist feels needs to be depicted, and then ornamented. Just the opposite of C. S. Lewis's aesthetics. ©

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# The Loneliness Epidemic

## *by Susan Mettes*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2022[1]

**by John M. Fikkert**

*The Loneliness Epidemic: Why So Many of Us Feel Alone—and How Leaders Can Respond*, by Susan Mettes. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021, xiv + 206 pages, $22.99.

Reflections and analyses abound on the effects of social isolation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020. In those initial days, many churches canceled in-person services and shifted to livestream while members remained sequestered in their homes, from a few weeks to many months. This level of isolation led many, including Christian scholars and theologians, to reflect on loneliness and the effects of technology and other factors on current levels of social engagement. As the book's title suggests, Susan Mettes's research reveals an epidemic of loneliness, both in America and around the world.

The author studied loneliness via surveys completed in partnership with the Barna Group, a Christian research organization. The surveys received sufficient responses from a wide demographic so that a broad range of subjects and people could be studied. In general, the surveys sought to measure both the frequency and the intensity of loneliness. Of special interest, the survey data was gathered both before and during the beginning of the pandemic, allowing for the study of the pandemic's effect on loneliness.

The true delight of the book is the level of nuance provided with the data. While anyone can take a statistic and spin it to mean whatever they desire, it takes more effort to untangle complex information and report it in a useful way. Mettes demonstrates her skill by explaining her data with sufficient detail, and she does so without a forced agenda throughout the book. Each chapter ends with an incisive summary of results. For instance, in the chapter on how age affects loneliness, Mettes contends against the common stereotype that older-aged people are the loneliest, as her research finds that younger-aged adults, especially millennials, report significantly higher levels of loneliness. The truth within the stereotype, however, is that factors that often coincide with aging, such as bereavement or developing a disability, do in fact result in higher levels of loneliness. She draws the conclusion from her data that the best way to address loneliness is not to focus on seniors but rather on those of all ages who are experiencing grief or managing disability.

Another commonly held belief is that single people are lonelier than those who are married. However, Mettes's study results show that the

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=987.

quality of relationships in a person's life is more impactful on one's experience of loneliness and connection than the type of relationships one has (including marriage). She recommends both single and married persons work at developing meaningful relationships that cultivate a sense of belonging to a church and civic community.

Subsequent chapters look at the impact of social media, insecurity, churchgoing, and privacy on loneliness. With each facet discussed, her results reveal new ways to understand and consider loneliness and what to do about it.

Of particular interest to readers of *Ordained Servant* is that the book was written to church leaders. The author uses her research to describe not only problems but also potential solutions to loneliness, and she sees Christian leaders as key participants in combating the loneliness epidemic. One of her recommendations to church leaders is not to rely on programs and provision of resources but to focus instead on personal attention and ways to foster meaningful interaction with leaders and other church members. Another recommendation is to encourage and model hospitality within the church community. More than just nice-sounding ideas, these and other suggestions are worth taking seriously, because they are supported by her research and are consistent with biblical wisdom regarding those who struggle with loneliness.

The book should be read with appreciation for the scope of the author's expertise. Mettes is a skilled Christian scholar in the field of behavioral science. At multiple points I found myself seeing potential biblical and theological connections to the data she was sharing: specific biblical accounts such as Adam's singleness in the garden, as well as larger themes like communion with God, communion of the saints, and the benefits of corporate worship. These topics would provide a special-revelation lens through which this valuable general-revelation data might be viewed. To be fair, the book provides a helpful appendix in which she touches on multiple Scripture verses on loneliness, but a more integrated treatment of these themes would enhance the book's usefulness to pastors and church leaders. I believe a good theological development on the problem of loneliness would show that the loneliness now found to be at epidemic levels in our age has always existed and is often addressed in Scripture, especially in the Psalms. As a result, I would love a companion volume of biblical and theological reflections on loneliness as they relate to the data shared in the book.

That said, the lack of theological integration by the author is not such a severe limitation that the book should be quickly dismissed. Christian leaders can gain much by learning from an expert in their own field. The advantage of a behavioral scientist walking through behavioral data is the level of nuance and insight that she can glean from it; such nuance might be easily missed by others who do not have the same facility with data and its analysis—much as an orthopedic surgeon can see more than others in an X-ray of a compound fracture.

I recommend this book as a lens to better understand loneliness, especially the loneliness prevalent among our younger people. If read with humility, it will help church leaders correct stereotypes they might carry regarding loneliness and will enhance awareness and empathy for those in our churches who are isolated and alone. Ⓢ

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# After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* by Michael Ward

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**by William Edgar**

*After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's* The Abolition of Man, by Michael Ward. Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire, 2021, x + 241 pages, $24.95.

Lewis's cryptic title reflects the reality of a Europe in deep trouble. It was in the midst of war. But it reflects an even deeper concern—the imminent danger of men (and women) "losing their chests." While the specific lens of Lewis's concerns is no doubt literary criticism, there is a far broader application: a growing distrust of both objective and traditional vision.

It is fair to say that Michael Ward has devoted much of his scholarly life to the study of C. S. Lewis. Particularly memorable are *The Narnia Code: C. S. Lewis and the Secret of the Seven Heavens* (Tyndale/Paternoster, 2010) and *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford, 2008). He has now delivered a labor of love, his commentary on Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*.

Some would consider *The Abolition* to be Lewis's most important book. Owen Barfield, Lewis's friend and mentor, declared *The Abolition* to be the best piece of discursive argument Lewis had ever produced. Praise for the work was not universal, but it was abundant.

*The Abolition* was based on a series of lectures delivered in 1943 but only published in 1947. The lectures were presented at the invitation of the University of Durham. The purpose of the *Riddell Memorial Lectures* was to take a subject that explored "the relation between religion and contemporary thought." He delivered them while he was a fully convinced Christian. However, the book hardly mentions his faith, even less any kind of theistic argument. Thus, Lewis's lectures said very little directly about religion itself; yet, they were certainly concerned with religious commitments. The subtitle of the lectures is somewhat misleading: *Reflections on education with special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools.* Though he does begin with considerations on a particular English textbook, the lectures rapidly become an extended argument against subjectivism in general.

The real title of the book under scrutiny was *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing*, which Lewis diplomatically called *The Green Book*. Its authors were Alexander King and Martin Kelley, but he dubbed them Gaius and Titius, presumably as not to appear *ad hominem*. Indeed, Lewis politely suggested the two did not really know they had entered such deep waters.

On the off chance you are not familiar with *The Abolition*, the premise is fairly simple, though the arguments are deep. Lewis begins by citing what is I. A. Richards's view that when we make statements about reality, we are not saying anything about the way things are, but about our feelings only. Though he obviously respects Richards, as well as fellow logical positivist A. J. Ayer, Lewis vehemently argues against their subjectivism.

To get at this problem of subjectivism, Lewis cites from the *Green Book* the well-known portion in Coleridge where two tourists are gazing at a great waterfall and the one declares it "sublime" and the other "pretty." Coleridge predictably endorses the first while rejecting the second. Gaius and Titius amazingly tell us the tourists are not saying anything about the waterfall but only about their feelings. Lewis goes to town on this and argues for the rest of the book against this kind of subjectivism.

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1001.

In a move that is reminiscent of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics, Lewis points out that in the search for absolutes the authors destroy the grounds on which they can be built. As Barfield puts it in his summary of the book, "Lewis contends that if man is nothing more than his freedom to reshape himself, if his nature is merely to be an isolated principle of will, then there can be no *reason* to shape himself after one pattern rather than another" (176). What would Lewis and Barfield say of today's culture of the autonomous self?

In a move that might prove difficult for Van Tilians (such as I), Lewis spends much of the rest of the lectures defending the universal appeal of *The Tao*. By this he does not mean the technical term from Confucius and Mencius but the general, somewhat vague, idea of natural law. The Tao for Lewis is a way of appealing to universal morality, the kind almost everyone acknowledges when probed deeply enough.

Space prohibits an extended discussion of the meaning of the *Tao* for Lewis. Despite appearances, what it is not is a neutral building block to be followed by theism. That is, it is not a metaphysical construct. If anything, it is a tactic for argument, as my good friend Alfred Poirier suggests. So, for example, in *Mere Christianity* Lewis begins by appealing to the commonly held rules in an argument. When two people disagree, they do not typically say that logic does not matter but that the interlocutor is not keeping to its rules. The point that this is not metaphysical is difficult to make since there is a surface step-by-step progression through theism to the Trinity (100–101).

Let us pause a bit longer on this point. In the only essay I could find in which Van Til directly addresses C. S. Lewis,[2] the Westminster apologist faults him, along with Roman Catholicism, for trusting too much in the moral awareness of fallen man. If this is an ontological statement, then of course neither the Bible nor the Reformed confessions allow for any such kind of meritorious knowledge. Yet surely they recognize our ability to discern right from wrong, if only to run away from it (Rom 1:18–23). Can the apologist appeal to that knowledge? Van Til himself expounds on the *sense of deity* in every person. But he carefully refuses to call it a steppingstone. I think a generous reading of Lewis would come to the same conclusion about his appeal to the *Tao*.

One thing to remember about Lewis is that he was first and foremost a philosopher before becoming an expert in Medieval and Renaissance literature. In *The Abolition*, his philosophical proficiency is fully demonstrated. One finds echoes of his arguments spread throughout both his texts on literature and his fantasies, as Ward meticulously demonstrates.

Two features make this a hard book to review. First, Ward claims, and I think mostly successfully, that he does not intend to pronounce any judgments on Lewis's views. Yet, they are there lurking in the corners. Second, as Ward himself admits, the bulk of his book is a detailed exegesis of *The Abolition*, virtually sentence-by-sentence. It is a microscopic treatment, full of learned quotes from other commentators. Every so often he helps us see the forest from the trees. I have read the book several times and been blessed each time, finding new elements.

The dark title *The Abolition* is further developed by Ward's title—*After Humanity*. While Richards's views were in the atmosphere, and so were the dangers to objectivity he underscored, it is the post-war era when humanity's future was at stake. Ward suggests the title may be more positive, deriving from the abolition of slavery in 1833.

This is an important companion to Lewis's masterpiece. One can learn a great deal from Ward's astonishing knowledge. ©

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2 Cornelius Van Til, "The Theology of C. S. Lewis," unpublished manuscript in *The Works of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. Eric Sigward, for (LOGOS) Libronix Software, https://presupp101.wordpress.com/2012/08/23/the-theology-of-c-s-lewis-by-cornelius-van-til.

# The Completion of C. S. Lewis

## *by Harry Lee Poe*

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**by Charles M. Wingard**

*The Completion of C. S. Lewis: From War to Joy (1945–1963)*, by Harry Lee Poe. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022, 413 pages, $34.16, cloth.

Sometimes work forces me to read. Lectures and sermons must be prepared, and reading is indispensable to the process. Whether I find the reading especially enjoyable or not, the commentaries and theological books and articles must be attended to.

But apart from work, I read mostly for pleasure, and Harry Lee Poe's three-volume biography of Lewis has been for me sheer pleasure. In addition to surveying the life of one of the twentieth century's great writers and formidable Christian apologists, I have had opportunity during the past year to read for the first time several of Lewis's books. Others I reread, some for a third or fourth time. I sympathize with Lewis's words to a friend: "You really lose a lot by never reading books again" (303).

The *Completion of C. S. Lewis* surveys the final eighteen years of Lewis's life. The author's literary output was impressive. Among the titles published during this period were *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–56), *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955), *Till We Have Faces* (1956), *A Grief Observed* (1961), *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958), and *The Four Loves* (1960). Numerous articles were later collected and published in several volumes, including *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (1970). Poe provides concise information about the books and articles, placing them in the context of Lewis's unfolding life and the broader world of English literature. The circumstances of Lewis's transition from Oxford to Cambridge are thoroughly reviewed.

Friendships, old and new, continued to play a critical role in his life. A special relationship developed with poet Ruth Pitter. There were both personal meetings and lengthy correspondence. Her pilgrimage to the Christian faith came, she said, "by the pull of C. S. Lewis and the push of misery" (102). She wrote to a friend, "I do delight in him" (166). So serious was the relationship that at least the possibility of marriage occurred to Lewis (225). I was amused to read that the relationship progressed for seven years before the pair spoke to each other on a first name basis (181). Lewis clung to courtly manners that the world around him was rapidly shedding.

Lewis's life was powerfully molded by a lifetime of suffering. His mother's death at an early age, World War I injuries, and tensions with his father shaped his early life.

As the years passed, Lewis's suffering compounded as he encountered new types of adversity. The experiences contributed to what his biographer calls "the completion of C. S. Lewis."

Along with his fellow countrymen, Lewis endured the nearly decade-long shortage of food and basic commodities in post–World War II Britain. For Americans of the boomer generation and younger, it is difficult to imagine the hardships that pummeled the nation after victory was secured. Lewis's burden was eased by the kindness of admirers in the United States who sent to him hard-to-find goods. Over time, his low view of Americans gave way to a profound appreciation for their care, support, and friendship.

The austerity programs imposed by the postwar Labour government may have displeased Lewis, but they failed to rob him of his humor. Poe notes that "when England had a beautiful May for the first time in many years, Lewis cynically remarked that the government had not yet found a way to ration the sunlight" (37).

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1008.

Other of Lewis's trials were relational and acutely painful. Until her death in 1951, Lewis continued to care for Janie Moore—a quarter century his senior—the mother of a friend and fellow soldier, Paddy Moore. During World War I, each young man had promised to care for the other's parent should he not survive the war. Paddy did not, and Lewis kept his word. For more than three decades he struggled to support a woman whose "worrying, jealous, exacting, and angry disposition" only worsened as the years passed (159). I could not help but think of the godly man of whom David wrote in Psalm 15, the man "that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." Medieval codes of chivalry were not merely the subject of his studies. They were one of the influences that molded him into the man he became.

Lewis was no stranger to familial suffering. A flourishing romantic love and marriage came to Lewis late in life. His union with Joy Davidman Gresham brought with it unanticipated happiness as well as the intense heartache that accompanied her lengthy illness and death. A depressed and alcoholic brother and a troubled stepson were recipients of Lewis's compassionate solicitude.

Controversy plagued Lewis at Oxford; he was never at home with political intrigue. His popular books, energetic personality, and religious devotion made him unpopular with many of his colleagues. Even his close friend and fellow faculty member and Inkling, J.R.R. Tolkien, objected to the attention Lewis gave to theology, a subject for which he had no formal academic training or credentials (52). When he was denied a prestigious English professorship that was given instead to Lord David Cecil, Cecil observed that although Lewis was the eminent member of the English faculty, "his forceful manner combined with his equally forceful piety [made him] unpopular with a prim and agnostic electorate" (74–75).

Concurrent stresses could be overwhelming. Tolkien's sharp criticism of the Narnian chronicles hurt, as did that of two friends, to whose daughter Lewis intended to dedicate *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The parents objected to the whole notion of children trapped in a wardrobe and furs stripped from the carcasses of helpless animals. The unfortunate recipe of a heavy workload, caring for his brother and Janie Moore, and friends' criticism of his books led to his collapse and hospitalization (46–47).

Poor lifestyle choices culminated in steep physical decline in Lewis's later years. Long walks, once a cherished routine, were no longer possible. But Lewis did not lose heart, bearing in mind that "mercifully the desire goes when the power goes" (260).

In his final chapter, one might think that Poe has moved from biographer to spiritual instructor. If so, I am grateful. He revisits several hardships and heartaches that Lewis experienced during his life. When considered together over the course of his life of nearly sixty-five years, these should be viewed not as obstacles to faith but as part of a process begun in faith and sustained by faith and finding full fruition in the mature faith of a complete man. Poe concludes, "Some will say that it was a tragedy for Lewis to have died so young. I think it remarkable that he became complete so young" (352).

Regarding Lewis, Helen Gardner wrote, "It was impossible to be indifferent to him" (75). And I am not. His books have enriched my life for more than four decades. Nor am I indifferent to Poe's three-volume biography. It serves as a splendid introduction to the man behind the books. Ⓢ

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# Theology Is for Preaching

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**by Charles M. Wingard**

*Theology Is for Preaching: Biblical Foundations, Method, & Practice*, edited by Chase R. Kuhn and Paul Grimmond. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021, 343 pages, $29.99, paper.

A pastor must be both theologian and preacher. In his mind, the union between them should be so strong than neither can be considered without the other. Theology and preaching are bound together like fuel and fire. Neglect theology and preaching becomes separated from the life-giving and life-sustaining truths of God's Word. Neglect preaching and there is no proclamation of divine truth, the truth that kindles a love for God and faith in Jesus Christ.

That love of theology and preaching distinguishes the twenty-one essays in *Theology Is for Preaching*. Contributors demonstrate expertise in their fields and a firm grasp of the place expository preaching holds in the life of God's church.

The editors, both lecturers at Moore Theological College in Sydney, are persuaded that "when we preach, we come to every text with a theology, and each text refines our theology as we carefully listen to the word" (xix). Therefore, faithful preachers pay attention to both biblical and systematic theology as well as adopting a preaching method that "will flow from theology" (xx–xxi).

Essays are arranged under five headings: Foundations, Methodology, Theology for Preaching, Preaching for Theology, and Theology Preached.

## Part 1: Foundations

In the opening essay, "Theology for Preaching, Preaching for Theology," Chase Kuhn makes the case that "preaching in its most biblically faithful form is deliberately theological" (1). The Reformation affirmation *sola scriptura* does not mean that interpreters approach a passage of Scripture as if it were a newly discovered island awaiting exploration, its terrain as yet to be mapped. Instead, there is a "nexus of recursion" between text and theology in which "theology informs our reading of Scripture, and our reading of Scripture continues to refine our theology" (10). Failure to study theology impoverishes preaching.

Mark Thompson contends that preaching is not a pragmatic tool chosen by the church to spread its message (31). Rather, preaching is grounded in the doctrine of God—the God who speaks—and with words reveals his character and plans. Indeed, "God's speech is the engine room of the biblical story" (23–24). His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, is the Word made flesh, and his life and ministry were "word-saturated" (29).

Other essays in this section include a lexical study of words translated "preaching" and "teaching" in our English versions, a historical examination of the Second Helvetic Confession's denominating the sermon "as the word of God," and a presentation of the biblical qualifications of preachers and the way they are set apart for the preaching office. The last essay (67–79) by Christopher Ash contains a helpful review of the

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=952.

qualification of pastors and the role that ecclesiastical bodies perform in examining candidates for ministry. The God who sends out ministers to fields of harvest is good and sovereign, and those preparing for ministry do well to "remember that God is able to get you into the service where he wants you, in the place he desires, in the time he chooses" (78). Candidates for ministry, sessions, and presbyteries will benefit from the authors's exposition of Scripture and prudent counsel.

### Part 2: Methodology

These seven chapters cover a variety of topics as they relate to preaching methodology and include the role of Scripture in the worshiping congregation, Old Testament hermeneutics (with a helpful explanation of the emphases of Christocentric and Christotelic views of preaching, 111–27), the implications of proclaiming Christ crucified in preaching, and the person of the preacher.

In his chapter "Expositional Preaching in Historical Context: A Rich and Inspiring Resource" (155–78), Peter Adam offers "twenty features of expository preaching" (156–57). He demonstrates how those features were displayed in the preaching of Augustine and Calvin. Their preaching methods serve as a vantage point from which contemporary preachers may evaluate their own work.

### Part 3: Theology for Preaching

How preaching is shaped by the doctrines of salvation, sanctification, eschatology, and worship is the focus of this section.

Although most readers of *Ordained Servant* are not a part of the Anglican tradition, they will still benefit in reading David Peterson's "The Priority of Proclamation: Preaching in a Liturgical Context" (236–50). He notes the inclusion of Psalm 95 in the order of daily morning prayer (found in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer) and its position before the day's other Scripture lessons. Psalm 95, he comments, "is both a call to corporate worship and also a challenge to hear God's voice and not harden one's heart against him" (242–43). Study of historic orders of liturgies can alert today's pastors to how the various parts of worship fit together and serve the ministry of the Word. We should assume that earlier generations may have captured significant insight that may well have escaped us. Whatever our tradition, we will prepare better for worship and ministry of the Word if we have taken the time to familiarize ourselves with the historic liturgies of the church.

### Part 4: Preaching for Theology

Theology shapes the lives of those assembled to hear God's Word preached. Just how this transformation takes place concerns this section's three essays.

According to Simon Gillham, as the congregation grows in right theology (its knowledge of God), hearers grow in maturity and godliness. Therefore, "there is a perpetual feedback loop, or better a feedback spiral. Knowledge leads to transformation (to fear of God, obedience, love, righteousness, and the like), and transformation leads to knowledge. What is more, both are expected to continue to do so" (254–55). Preaching, at its best, does more than derive a series of truths from a text and then present them along with applications. Biblical preachers must consider the literary forms of the Old and New Testaments, and how they should influence the composition of our message. He deals with two specifically: narrative and parables (260ff). The preached Word is meant to shape the congregation throughout the week as they live together in families and in communities, communicating within these contexts right theology (264–66).

A pastor instructs his congregation in how to listen to sermons. Helpful counsel for listening well is found in Jane Tooher's (269–85) essay. Her counsel is concrete and imminently practical. For example, she offers a list of questions that an "ideal listener" might ask in response to a sermon, including "What must I do? What might I do? What can I do? (actions)," "How does this change / challenge / encourage my thinking? (knowledge)," and "How does this passage challenge /

correct / encourage my emotions?" (278). Any reader—pastor or lay person—will benefit from her wisdom.

Paul Grimmond fittingly concludes this section with "Letting the Word Do the Work: A Constructive Account of Expositional Preaching" (286–97). Beyond question, biblical preaching must be faithful to the text and communicated in language that is accessible to the congregation, but it also must appeal to the heart. "Faithful expositional preaching will shape God's people by addressing their hearts in the very way that Scripture addresses the heart" (292). Week-by-week expositional preaching gives the congregation the "framework" they will need to live faithfully and obediently for Christ in their various relationships (292–93).

### Part 5: Theology Preached

The final section forces the preacher to consider what his congregation actually hears when he preaches.

Of course, they must hear a sermon that is faithful to the Word of God. For that to happen, argues Simon Manchester, the preacher must listen before speaking (301–12). This requires that the minister himself listen to God's Word before he preaches, a point the author ably demonstrates from Jeremiah 23:16–32. Are the preacher's words accurate expositions of the text, or does he only tell the congregation what he thinks they need to hear? The author shares that "one of the things I keep thinking through with my own team in the ministry is whether we are turning good news into bad and caning God's people, or are we turning bad news into good simply to satisfy our people and protect ourselves?" (304–5).

Phillip Jensen concludes the book with a sermon on Luke 5:1–11, "Meeting Jesus," (313) and offers observations about the sermon. In keeping with the book's premise, he explains how his commitment to the unity of Scripture shapes his message (322). I wish there had been additional chapters like this—sample sermons followed by the preacher's explanation about how he approached the text and selected his sermon's contents.

### Conclusion

I recommend this book. Its contributors succeed admirably in demonstrating the critical importance of theology to preaching. The link between right theology and faithful preaching is indissoluble.

*Theology Is for Preaching* is a much-needed corrective to an unfortunate trend in contemporary evangelicalism. We live in a time when many preachers, consciously or otherwise, approach preaching without regard to how their own theological tradition shapes their ministry of the Word. This is misguided. Theology has a disciplining effect on the preacher, directing both what he says and does not say. David Starling puts it well when he reminds that

> a prior knowledge of the theological tradition can have an appropriately chastening effect, reminding the brash or impetuous interpreter that he or she is not the first to wrestle with these verses, and that the conclusion that seems self-evident to one interpreter is not always so obvious to another. Theological understanding can sometimes help us to say less, not more. (91–92)

Do not look in this volume for any shortcuts to faithful biblical preaching. The preacher must perform strenuous spadework in the biblical text as he prepares his sermons. It is challenging, time-consuming work—so much so that the pastor ends up spending little or no time preparing the congregation to hear and apply the preached Word. The essays in part four will help pastors tend to this important duty.

Reading this book made me think of the treasure Presbyterians have in questions two and three of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Here we find our theology of the Word derived from Scripture itself: "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him." Here we find the preacher's task: He is

to study the whole counsel of God so that he may proclaim "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." ☉

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# Genetic Engineering, Human Nature, and Human Destiny

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**by David VanDrunen**

*Altered Inheritance: CRISPR and the Ethics of Human Genome Editing*, by Françoise Baylis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019, 304 pages, $24.95.

*The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing, and the Future of the Human Race*, by Walter Isaacson. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021, 560 pages, $35.00.

*Hacking Darwin: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Humanity*, by Jamie Metzl. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2019, 352 pages, $16.99.

The past few decades have witnessed astounding advances in understanding human physical nature. Scientists have mapped the human genome and learned how to edit human genes. This has already raised weighty and unprecedented moral issues, and more will follow. Many Christians are still only vaguely aware of all this.

The three books under consideration describe the dawning genetic revolution and grapple with the future it portends and the ethical problems it presents—although none of them from a Christian perspective. I will first introduce some historical background, then offer brief evaluation of each book, and finally reflect on some of the pertinent moral and theological issues that Reformed Christians would do well to consider as they prepare to engage these matters wisely.

## The Genetic Revolution

The (independent) work of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel in the mid-nineteenth century is probably the best place to begin the history of the genetic revolution. (It is interesting that Darwin once studied for the Anglican ministry, and Mendel was an Augustinian monk.) Darwin theorized that all life on earth developed from common ancestors through random mutations and natural selection. But he did not know how hereditary traits are passed down from generation to generation. Mendel did groundbreaking research on what would later be called "genes," although his work remained obscure until after his death. Although Christians must reject what might be called a materialist Darwinian worldview, it is clearly true that living creatures have genes and that genetic mutations produce biological changes over time.

Another crucial step in the history was James Watson's and Francis Crick's monumental mid-twentieth-century discovery that the structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is a double helix. DNA encodes instructions for building all sorts of cells. Watson was also a crucial figure in the beginnings of the Human Genome Project of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which mapped and sequenced all human genes.

Subsequent events bring us to the main concerns of the books under review. A number

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=959.

of researchers worldwide turned their attention to ribonucleic acid (RNA), which carries out the instructions encoded in the DNA. Their work led to the development, in 2012, of a gene-editing tool known by the acronym CRISPR ("clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats"). In this editing process, a single-strand RNA (the CRISPR) guides a Cas9 enzyme to a particular place in the genome, and this enzyme cuts the targeted strands of DNA. The DNA then seeks to repair itself, a process scientists can exploit to insert new code and change the DNA sequence. In the decade since, researchers have been applying this gene-editing technology to curing genetic diseases, developing better cancer treatments, and improving vaccines. Many people are dreaming of other ways to use it to improve human health, customize our descendants' genetic inheritance in the process of human reproduction, and enhance human capabilities. Many also worry about the consequences. This brings us to the three books.

## Recent Genetic-Engineering Literature

If I had to recommend just one of these books, it would be Walter Isaacson's *The Code Breaker*. It is primarily a biography of Jennifer Doudna, professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and co-recipient of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for her role in developing the CRISPR technology. Isaacson is one of the world's most accomplished biographers, and he writes a clear, engaging, and informative study. Along the way, readers learn a lot of science, meet many of Doudna's collaborators and competitors, witness battles over patents, prizes, and glory, and confront many of the pressing ethical issues. It is a good read.

Isaacson tries to keep an objective voice as he describes the exploits of Doudna and her frenemies in the international scientific community, and he largely succeeds. His book is not a hagiography, but he clearly admires Doudna. Accordingly, his moral judgments seem to track hers. Doudna is among the scientific elite who are fairly optimistic about the future and opposed to severe restrictions upon genetic-engineering research at the hands of governments or scientific ethics boards. Isaacson concurs: "I now see the promise of CRISPR more clearly than the peril. . . . All creatures large and small use whatever tricks they can to survive, and so should we" (480).

Françoise Baylis's *Altered Inheritance* is a much slimmer volume that lacks the historical and biographical material. Baylis, a Canadian philosopher and bioethicist, provides some helpful descriptions of the science behind gene editing but focuses primarily on the moral and public-policy issues it provokes. She aims to write an accessible book that will educate the public on this new technology and empower them to participate in coming debates about how to regulate it.

Like Isaacson, Baylis tries to maintain an objective voice. She regularly identifies the principal lines of ethical debates and describes both sides of the arguments. But her own inclinations seem to be consistently on the progressive left. She dreams of a world "where everyone matters," without "unfair class divisions," and with plenty of diversity, "solidarity," and "social justice" (e.g., 8, 124, 220–21). These inclinations lead her, not necessarily predictably, to be warier of the future than Isaacson. She calls for a moratorium on germline editing (that is, edits that future generations will inherit), something Doudna has resisted. Although she is open to it in the future, she professes to have "a number of worries about its possible use" (65).

Jamie Metzl's *Hacking Darwin* is an eyebrow-raising volume in several respects. Metzl admires and promotes himself throughout the work. He lets us know that his first book was "important" (though largely unread) (xviii), and he frequently mentions prestigious events where he spoke, prestigious groups he belongs to, and prestigious people with whom he collaborates. He even includes an interview with himself as an appendix. Metzl is also a "futurist," which explains why he makes many confident assertions about what coming decades hold. (Alas, they include no insight on the financial markets.) He foresees a future of virtually unstoppable advances in genetic engineering. Healthcare, human reproduction, sports, war, and many other things will be radically different from

today's versions.

If Baylis's work has a somewhat pessimistic aura, Metzl is, as he writes, "a technology optimist to my core" (xix). Although he disagrees with libertarians and transhumanists who want genetic researchers and entrepreneurs to have an absolutely free rein, Metzl believes the genetic revolution will only gain momentum. He advocates the development of "smart international regulation" (267) and "a globally harmonized regulatory structure" (269) akin to the international regulation of nuclear weapons, which has not been perfect but has prevented mass destruction.

### Theological and Ethical Reflections

These books contain nearly one thousand total pages, and they raise a multitude of weighty issues. This review cannot be comprehensive, but this final section offers a few reflections on some important matters.

I first observe an interesting difference between the old theological liberalism that has challenged orthodox Christianity over the past two centuries and the ideology of the new genetic revolution. Theological liberalism is fundamentally Pelagian, rejecting the classical Christian belief that there is something deeply wrong with our human nature. Genetic revolutionists, in contrast, are motivated by the conviction that human nature is terribly flawed. They remind us of how many ways our bodies and minds fail us because of our genes and what misery this brings to so many. Reformed Christians might derive small satisfaction from this recognition that human woes are rooted in the deepest core of our being. Yet the old liberals and the genetic revolutionists are not so different in another important sense: both think that if we are persistent and careful enough, we can solve our own problems. Genetic revolutionists may think that our problem extends all the way to our genes, but human ingenuity has now found ways to edit them. It is a previously unimaginable form of neo-Pelagian self-salvation. Another similarity between the old liberalism and the genetic revolution also bears mention: both offer only an immanent, this-worldly hope. Metzl speaks of humans' unquenchable desire for immortality (140)—also an unintentional confirmation of classical Christian belief—but the best prospect that even he sees is a considerably extended lifespan for future generations.

In short, genetic revolutionists tell us that our human problem is deeper than imagined, but now we understand not only how deep it is but also how to start fixing it—so that generations of people we will never meet will have healthier and longer lives with higher intelligence, better eyesight, and the like, provided that we do not create a dystopia instead. It is not much consolation for miserable people here and now. Even the best-case scenario makes for a pitiful gospel.

Related to this is the whole issue of human *nature*. Metzl claims that the "genetics, biotechnology, and longevity revolutions will challenge our current conceptions of what it means to be human beings" (171). That much is surely correct. For Christianity, there is something truly at stake in the idea of human nature. For the genetic revolution, however, human nature exists in a sense, but it is merely the product of innumerable random mutations over millions of years. Human nature may be fascinating, but it is not special. And if human nature is indeed just a blip on the screen of cosmic chance, there is no principial reason not to try to make improvements to it. Evolutionary forces will change it eventually anyway, so why not take whatever control of it we can? For Christianity, in contrast, God made *humans* uniquely in his own image, God's Son took on human nature and was resurrected with a glorified human body, and his people will be raised and glorified one day with the same human nature as Christ's. Christianity promises a truly *human* salvation. It offers not an escape from human nature to something else a little better, but a perfectly blessed eschatological human existence.

I mention these theological issues first because they put the ethical issues in perspective. As serious as many particular ethical issues the genetic revolution raises are, the most important things for Christians to keep before them is that we

cannot save ourselves and that our hope is certain, eschatological, and fully human. We, our children, and our grandchildren will surely benefit from precision medicine and other benevolent products of the new genetic science, and we should have a degree of concern about its great potential for abuse, but Christians should not be *too* exercised about this uncertain future. At its best, it is a pale comparison to our glorious Christian hope. At its worst, it is one more chapter in the long human history of hubris and rebellion, which God will bring to judgment one day.

When it comes to the ethics, it is also worth noting how difficult, even impossible, it is for our three authors to develop coherent moral arguments. The problem is not just that they ignore Scripture. They also have no teleological anthropology. If humans are simply the product of random mutations over millions of years, then we have no proper functions, purpose, or destiny. And apart from these, there are no truly *moral* reasons to pursue noble goals in this world or to treat each other in benevolent ways. This does not stop our authors from making many moral claims.

Baylis, for example, appeals to a number of (genuine) virtues that ought to guide bioethics (174) and to "values" such as "innovation, responsibility, and accountability" as well as the "common good" (184), but she provides no basis for such appeals.

Metzl's ethical discussions are particularly difficult to make sense of. He wants us to act "wisely" (176) and to be "mindful" (177) as we head into our inevitable genetically engineered future, but where such wisdom comes from or of what we are to be mindful remains unclear. He condemns "repulsive" and "pernicious social biases" that tempt us to use gene-editing powers to ensure that our children are not dark-skinned or gay (188–90). Yet given his view of humanity, it is difficult to see why choosing light-skinned, straight children is any worse than choosing taller, faster, or smarter children, which he thinks will be fine when we can do so safely and equitably. In fact, if Metzl really wanted to be bold and consistent, he should probably argue for the abolition of ethics altogether. After delighting in the deconstruction of God, the sacred, cosmic purpose, and much else, Metzl's dabbling in moral argumentation feels like an unprincipled attempt to stave off the worst implications of his larger philosophy—whether for his own psychological well-being or to appease his audience is not clear.

It is difficult to know how hard to push these points. Christians should remain thankful that God, through his natural law and common grace, continues to reveal his moral will and to preserve the testimony of conscience among all human beings. Our authors express concern about the unanticipated harm that gene-editing might do to its recipients, about exacerbation of social inequality as the rich avail themselves of technology that the poor cannot afford, and about increasing lack of human diversity as the multitudes select all the same attractive features for their offspring. They wrestle with whether certain distinctions are morally relevant, such as that between *somatic* gene editing and *germline* editing (only the latter is inheritable) or that between *treatment/therapy* and *enhancement*. They agonize about the proper power distribution between private parties (i.e., the market) and governments. These are serious issues, and their resolution promises to have profound implications for our societies and cultures in years to come.

Christians too will have to think prudently about them, both for making their own godly decisions about participating in the genetic revolution and for engaging their unbelieving neighbors in intelligible ways. Christians also need to be cognizant of some other moral issues that are perhaps even more important than the above. One is the purpose of sex, in light of the fact that in-vitro fertilization followed by embryo selection (and embryo genetic manipulation) promises to be increasingly common in coming decades. More precisely, Christians need to consider carefully the (multiple) purposes of sex and the interrelation of these purposes.

Another issue is the mass and wanton destruction of human embryos in the development and practice of the genetic revolution, especially when

it comes to reproduction. Baylis notes that "there are the thousands (if not tens of thousands) of embryos that will have been destroyed in developing the genome editing technology" (32). And Metzl refers to IVF and embryo selection as "the gateway procedures for heritable human genetic engineering." These, of course, "nearly always entail the destruction or at least permanent freezing of unimplanted embryos" (215). Mass murder is accompanying and enabling the genetic revolution. While our authors occasionally note that some (religious) people are concerned about this, they themselves think little of it. I must admit that, although I learned many things from these books, their nonchalance about this moral travesty leaves a bitter aftertaste.

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# The Old Testament Use of the Old Testament

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**by Andrew J. Miller**

*Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide*, by Gary Edward Schnittjer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021, 1,104 pages, $74.99.

Scriptural exegesis of Scripture is an engine of progressive revelation"—these words begin Gary Schnittjer's tome *Old Testament Use of Old Testament*. The Bible is its own best interpreter (WCF 1.9) and biblical authors after Moses advanced revelation by exegesis, building upon the foundation of prior revelation. The chosen men inspired by the Holy Spirit took previous biblical truths and expanded upon them. Schnittjer's aim is to show us precisely what they did and where they did it.

By speaking of progressive revelation, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* places itself in the popular field of biblical theology.[2] As J. V. Fesko explains, "biblical theology has been a part of the church's interpretive history from the earliest years, not simply in the patristic period, but stretching back into the very formation of the Old Testament (OT) canon, evidenced in its own intra-canonical interpretation."[3] Schnittjer's work offers something new, however: *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* proceeds book by book from Genesis to Malachi (or, more accurately, from Genesis to Chronicles, as Schnittjer follows the Hebrew

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=960.

2 Schnittjer studied at Dallas Seminary but has clearly drunk from the wells of the Reformed tradition, citing Vos in his first non-scriptural footnote (xviii and xlii).

3 J. V. Fesko, "On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology" in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in the Service of the Church, Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.*, eds. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 445.

ordering of the books).

In this, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* surprised me. Given the title of the book, I expected it to be like Beale and Carson's essential work *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). I gleefully anticipated an unfolding of each quotation, allusion, and echo, given that "Scripture is characterized by a rich intertextuality. On almost every page, the Bible either quotes or alludes to other biblical passages."[4] However, Schnittjer's book, though over one thousand pages, has a far narrower aim. Schnittjer limits his study to places where an Old Testament book exegetes and develops another OT passage. Jeremiah 17, for example, develops sabbath compliance by pointing out a particular application of the sabbath to a situation that was previously implicit and unspecified (275). Likewise, at the beginning of the chapter on Isaiah, Schnittjer helpfully describes how Isaiah 1:2 and 1:10 draw on Deuteronomy 32:1 but does not explain what it means that Isaiah 1:10 refers to God's own people as "Sodom and Gomorrah" (221). Schnittjer does acknowledge that many "non-exegetical" allusions exist, but his declining to interact with them will surely disappoint many readers.

Purchasers should be aware, therefore, that *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* is not a companion volume to *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Nevertheless, Schnittjer's book does not have some of the weaknesses of Beale and Carson's, for here the same author with the same standards of allusion evaluates each book, whereas *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* features numerous authors.

"While anyone is welcome to read this book," Schnittjer explains in his introduction, "it is designed as a reference study for students and ministers of the word" (xliv). Before delving into the biblical books, Schnittjer helpfully introduces readers to his project and various contemporary theories about intertextuality. Similarly, the large glossary in the back of the book contains helpful definitions of key interpretive terms, including "Seidel's theory," where an author draws attention to a quotation by reversing its ordering, as when Jonah 4:2 inverts Exodus 34:6, "a gracious and compassionate God" rather than "a compassionate and gracious God" (899).

Each chapter of *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* begins with an explanation of the symbols used to summarize exegetical innovations, followed by a list of uses of prior revelation in that biblical book. Schnittjer provides a valuable "Hermeneutical Profile" at the outset of each chapter that interprets some of the data he will provide. Finally, each chapter ends with a "Filters" section where the author mentions numerous other echoes and allusions that he deems "non-exegetical" and therefore does not cover.

Because some OT books are shorter than others, some chapters are correspondingly brief. Genesis, as the beginning of biblical revelation, provides one of the shortest chapters. The chapter on Numbers was one of my favorites, as Schnittjer explains how God advanced revelation through authorized interpreters to facilitate his ongoing covenantal relationship with the people (58–59). That chapter has numerous insightful points, such as that Numbers 24:9 blends the Abrahamic promise with the blessing of Judah, hinting at the future intertwining of Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (68).

Furthermore, Schnittjer's research prompts thought about the nature of progressive revelation and biblical law. He writes,

> Views of scriptural legal instruction that do not allow for the dynamics of revelatory advancement misconstrue the nature and function of biblical law. Divinely revealed law should not be treated as inert fossilized data. . . . law serves covenantal relationship, not the other way around. (71)

Thankfully, nowhere in the book does one get

4 Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 124.

the sense that progressive revelation is at odds with God's immutability (see 899).

One critical challenge in evaluating scriptural exegesis of Scripture is determining dating and dependence. Typically, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* gives some suggestion as to which text came first and which text "received" and exegeted a prior "donor" passage. Dating Chronicles "after the production of the majority of biblical writings," means, for example, that "Chronicles will be regarded as the receptor context in cases of scriptural allusion . . ." (695) This also reveals the potential value of Schnittjer's work in making exegetes really think through the old "chicken or the egg" problem; I was challenged to think, for example, about the assertion that Job 19 uses Lamentations, and therefore, "Lamentations is the donor and Job the receptor context," with the implication that Job was written after 586 B.C. (557–58). Scholars considering the dates of biblical books will especially be helped by *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament*.

These and many other positive attributes aside, I do have reservations about this expensive work. Most importantly, Schnittjer's distinction of exegetical advancement from other forms of intertextuality like echo and allusion limits the usefulness of the book. Exegetes should not expect *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* to be a one-stop shop for understanding how a text fits into its Old Testament context. Because the book focuses on lexical and linguistic links, many significant connotations will slip through the cracks, such as Amos 5's references back to Bethel and Gilgal and God's mighty presence and grace experienced there. Amos builds on Israel's history at those places, but readers of *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* would not know it.

Therefore, I wonder if pastors and students are really the best audience for this book. For students, there are other Old Testament introductions that cover each book in survey form, and preachers may be better served with a detailed commentary. Likewise, the book's many symbols and data make it difficult to navigate and use. References to "the Deuteronomist" (e.g., 204–5) will likely make some readers uncomfortable, and the lack of explanation about such matters suggests a more academic audience.

Furthermore, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* features a rating system that evaluates the likelihood of scriptural intertextuality (including A, "likely"; B, "probable interpretive allusion"; or C, "possible"). An "A" rating is only achieved by three shared Hebrew nouns or verbs. While three shared Hebrew roots is an objective standard, the author believes that seeing allusions is subjective: "Detecting allusions creates tension between art and science. . . . Decisions on more or less probability of allusion are necessarily subjective because of the literary artistry of the Hebrew Scriptures" (xxi, xxviii). Schnittjer would likely be more cautious than many of us in seeing intertextual links, and his method struck me as a strange mix of wanting certainty but also denying that it can be achieved.

These criticisms should not overshadow the evident hard work put into *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament*. It takes a love for the Word of God to prepare such an extensive book. Furthermore, Schnittjer has created something unique and thoughtful, a reminder that biblical authors faithfully tweaked, developed, and applied past revelation to new situations. As our Westminster Confession states, the way that the many books of the Word of God fit together ("the consent of all the parts") is one of the "many . . . incomparable excellencies" that testifies to its divine authority (WCF 1.5). This work highlights that harmony and should make us appreciate how God, the ultimate author and shaper of the canon, artfully exegeted past Scripture and events, revealing more and more over time. Add this helpful reference work to your church library. Ⓢ

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# Exposing the Fragility of Transgender Ideology

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**by Andy Wilson**

*When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, by Ryan T. Anderson. Encounter, 2018, 264 pages, $16.99, paper.

In February 2021, during the same week when the U.S. House of Representatives was renewing the effort to legislate transgender ideology through the Equality Act and when the Senate was holding confirmation hearings for the transgender appointee to the post of assistant secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources, online retail giant Amazon cancelled Ryan T. Anderson's acclaimed 2018 book *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*. That is, the book was thoroughly erased from Amazon's website and all of its platforms. This was a consequential move, as Amazon controls, by various metrics, between 50 and 80 percent of book sales in America. If Amazon refuses to sell certain kinds of books, publishers will likely be unwilling to publish such books. This is yet another example of a strategy that progressives employ as they strive to implement various aspects of their radical agenda for society: the strategy of making it very difficult for opposing arguments to get a fair hearing in the media.[2] As the publisher of Anderson's book pointed out, "Big Tech and Big Media have become drunk with power and . . . have begun to regard Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a how-to manual instead of what it is, a scarifying warning about the dangers of totalitarianism."[3] When I learned that Anderson's book had been memory-holed by Amazon, I ordered it directly from the publisher that very day. I am glad I did.

In a society that is truly dedicated to individual liberty and free speech, those who disagree with a particular argument will respond to it with an argument of their own. But in our society, proponents of transgenderism are unwilling to engage those who challenge their position. Instead, they typically denounce such people as dangerous bigots who need to be silenced. Why do they do this? Why not just refute the argument if it is so patently false and harmful? It certainly seems, to use the words of Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet*, that they "doth protest too much."[4] Or as Anderson puts it, the fact that transgender activists constantly adapt their creed, expand their demands, refuse to engage contrary evidence, and employ coercion "suggests a posture of defensiveness—that activists know their claims can't stand up to scrutiny" (28–29).

*When Harry Became Sally* begins by explaining the rise of transgender ideology, focusing especially on what has taken place at Johns Hopkins University over the past half-century. When a gender identity clinic was established there in 1965, a young professor of psychiatry at the school named Dr. Paul McHugh tried to dissuade his colleagues from treating gender dysphoria with transgender-affirming therapies, including "sex reassignment." In Anderson's words,

> After studying the evidence, McHugh decided that sex change surgery was bad medicine and was "fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness." Psychiatrists, he thought, could better help patients with gender dysphoria by "trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia." (17)

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=963.

2 See Rod Dreher, "The War on Religious Liberty," *The American Conservative* (March 17, 2021), https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/the-war-on-religious-liberty/.

3 Roger Kimball, "The 'World's Largest Bookstore Gets into the Censorship Business," *American Greatness* (Feb. 28, 2021), https://amgreatness.com/2021/02/27/the-worlds-largest-bookstore-gets-into-the-censorship-business/.

4 William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, eds. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin, 2002), III.2.226.

His efforts were successful for a few decades, but in 2016 the school's hospital once again began performing sex reassignment procedures. This move was not made in response to new scientific evidence that refuted McHugh's arguments but because of political pressure and shifting cultural attitudes. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated event. In our cultural climate, anyone who tries to help those suffering from gender dysphoria understand why they are the way they are is likely to be deemed a bigot. This only demonstrates how "medical practice is seriously compromised by an ideological agenda" (24).

In chapters 2 and 3, Anderson looks at transgenderism through the eyes of both its advocates and its casualties. He explains how the public policies called for by transgender activists grow out of a radical conception of the human person that says that a person's actual gender is rooted in their internal sense of gender identity, regardless of whether this corresponds to biological reality. This is reflected in the insistence that a person's biological sex be referred to as the sex that they were "assigned" at birth and that gender transition be construed not as "sex change" but as a matter of affirming and settling into one's true self. Activists zealously promote transgender educational efforts and public policies that police language, give transgender individuals access to facilities and activities reserved for the sex with which they identify, and provide gender transition therapy for children without parental consent. While these efforts have found a significant measure of success, the fact remains that "the core of the ideology is the radical claim that feelings determine reality" (48). As C. S. Lewis once observed, this is what happens when people reject the notion that nature has any given meaning or purpose: "All motives that claim any validity other than that of their felt emotional weight at a given moment have failed them. When all that says 'it is good' has been debunked, what says 'I want' remains."[5]

In addition to pointing out the contradictions and inconsistencies of this way of thinking, Anderson devotes an entire chapter to the stories of "detransitioners," people who found that gender transition did not solve their problems and eventually decided to pursue the course of learning to accept the reality of their biological sex. While such people are often attacked and silenced by trans activists, their stories provide valuable insight into why it is that suicide rates for those who have transitioned are nineteen times higher than those of the general population (73). These individuals attest to the fact that because transitioning fails to address the root problems, "it may actually deepen the alienation from one's body" (75).

Chapter 4 sets forth the biology of sexual differentiation, making it clear that there is no biological basis for the claim that a man can be born in the bodily form of a woman. Sex is determined at fertilization and, with the exception of rare instances involving disorders of sexual development (DSDs), is easily recognized at birth. As Anderson points out, "The fundamental conceptual distinction between a male and a female is the organism's organization for sexual reproduction" (79). There is also a wide array of secondary physical and cognitive sex differences between males and females that cannot be attributed to socialization. And as far as DSDs, these are not instances of a third sex but of people who are either male or female with a disorder in their development. In such cases, "The sound medical response is to identify the predominant underlying sex and then take measures to provide health and functioning, as far as possible, through hormones and possible surgery" (91). While transgender activists lobby for classifying these disorders as "*Differences* of Sexual Development," we do not speak this way of other bodily disorders. If a person's heart or digestive tract does not function the way it is supposed to function, it is not a matter of difference but a matter of disease. It is also important to note that "most people who have a DSD do not identify as transgender, and most people who do identify as transgender do not have a DSD" (92). In other words, DSDs cannot be used to support transgender ideology.

Chapter 5 begins by pointing out the alarm-

5 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 74.

ingly high rate of attempted suicides among people who identify as transgender, noting that the root problems behind those suicide attempts do not seem to be alleviated by sex reassignment procedures. And Anderson points out that these "poor outcomes can't be blamed on a hostile or bigoted society, since they are reported even in cultures most accepting of people who identify as transgender" (93). The essence of gender dysphoria (which used to be referred to as "gender identity disorder") is the delusion of thinking that one is the opposite of one's biological sex. This is similar to the faulty assumption held by those who suffer from anorexia nervosa, who see themselves as overweight when they are actually dangerously thin. In both instances, the person's feelings do not line up with reality. Instead of addressing gender dysphoria by focusing on treating the mind that is the source of the delusion, transgender ideology insists on changing the body to bring it in line with the person's feelings. The sad reality is that this does not actually change the person's sex. As Dr. McHugh explains, those who undergo transitioning treatment and procedures become "feminized men or masculinized women, counterfeits or impersonators of the sex with which they 'identify'" (101). That being the case, it is not surprising that studies have found strong evidence of poor psychological outcomes for those who have undergone surgical transitioning.

In chapter 6, Anderson focuses on the most contentious issue in the controversy over transgender ideology: the push to encourage gender transitioning among children. For children who identify as transgender, transgender-affirming therapy involves social transition as soon as the child begins to express a transgender identity, puberty blockers at the approach of puberty, cross-sex hormones around age sixteen, and sex reassignment surgery around age eighteen. Proponents of this approach disregard the fact that "the vast majority of children with gender dysphoria—80 to 95 percent—naturally grow out of it, if they aren't encouraged to transition" (119). Sadly, these chances are likely to be considerably diminished by transgender-affirming therapy, as "one would expect that the development of natural sex characteristics might contribute to the natural consolidation of one's gender identity" (122). Why encourage children to persist in identifying as transgender when transitioning involves considerable risks and when the alternate approach of helping children work through the potential causes of their dysphoria has seen significant success? While transgender activists dismiss such approaches as "conversion therapy," Anderson contends that it is "an Orwellian abuse of language to say that helping a child be comfortable in his own body is 'conversion therapy,' but transforming a boy into a 'girl' is simply allowing the child to be 'her' true self." (142)

The book's concluding chapters consider the cultural environment in which transgender ideology is gaining ascendancy and the effect this is having in the sphere of public policy. Anderson argues that the morphing of feminism into a movement that seeks to abolish sexual differences has fostered a misguided concept of gender in our culture, and this has opened the door to transgender ideology. While gender is not merely a social construct, it is socially shaped. In Anderson's words,

> Gender properly understood is a social manifestation of human nature, springing forth from biological realities, though shaped by rational and moral choice. Human beings are creatures of nature and of culture, but a healthy culture does not attempt to erase our nature as male and female embodied beings. Instead, it promotes the integrity of persons, in part by cultivating manifestations of sex differences that correspond to biological facts. (149)

As this way of thinking gives way to transgender ideology, attempts are being made to impose a radical transgender policy agenda. This agenda "entirely ignores competing interests and considerations" (181), most notably the privacy and safety of girls and women, and the natural advantages that biological males have over women in many sports. While this agenda is being implemented by reinterpreting "sex" in existing anti-discrimination legislation to include gender identity, Anderson shows how such a move is contrary to the original

intent of such legislation, is unsupported by science, and compels many people to endorse and facilitate ideas and behavior that they consider to be false and immoral.

While media outlets like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have attacked Anderson's book as hateful and bigoted,[6] it is actually a courageous, compassionate, and carefully researched effort to challenge a zealously promoted ideology that is bringing great harm to people's lives. Soon after the book's cancellation by Amazon, one individual who struggles with gender dysphoria published an article attesting that Anderson and his book have been of great help to him, saying,

> The arguments he makes are positioned within the compassionate and empathetic interest of a scientist trying to understand what is causing a person so much pain and what can truly be done to relieve it. Without ever dismissing the experience of the transgender person, he asks the important question, one I struggled with for years, of whether a medical transition is genuinely the best option to alleviate gender dysphoria and all the pain and suffering associated with it. . . . Anderson's book asks necessary questions that deserve to be given fair consideration and debated, not restricted from public view.[7]

Amazon's stated reason for banning the book from their platforms is that they have "chosen not to sell books that frame LGBTQ+ identity as a mental illness." However, as Anderson pointed out in response, "Gender dysphoria is listed in the APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which Amazon sells. So, the real deciding factor seems to be whether you endorse hormones and surgery as the proper treatment or counseling."[8] People are being helped by having access to well-reasoned arguments like Anderson's that expose the unscientific, metaphysical nature of the assumptions that underlie transgender ideology. The fact that this is so intolerable to trans activists suggests that their objective is not really to help those who suffer from gender dysphoria. If not, then what is their objective? To use identity politics to solidify their hold on the levers of cultural power? To create more consumers for the transitioning products and services on offer from the pharmaceutical and medical industries?

It is crucial for Christians to recognize what is going on here. As R. R. Reno points out, we have seen this strategy employed before:

> The game plan is simple. Begin with an unobjectionable affirmation of our duty to care for the weak and vulnerable. Then use it as a hook to compel affirmations of progressive cultural politics. I saw this strategy employed in the Episcopal Church in the 1990s. Gay youth are vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and need our support, we were told. That support cannot be fully effective unless one affirms "gay identity," which of course requires Christianity to "evolve." As this strategy moves forward, we reach the point at which, if you are not in favor of gay marriage, you are condemned as a "hater" who is in favor of teen suicide.[9]

The reason why LGBTQ identity is so fragile and requires universal affirmation is because it is located in feelings that are in conflict with the order that God has inscribed in nature. The loving response is not to affirm such feelings but to help people align their lives with external reality, the way God our Creator has made us, while at the same time recognizing the ways in which sin distorts our perception of that reality. "For you formed

6 Ryan T. Anderson, "A *New York Times* Writer's Reckless Hit Piece on My Transgender Book," *The Daily Signal* (February 27, 2018), https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/02/27/new-york-times-writers-reckless-hit-piece-transgender-book/.

7 Chad Felix Greene, "How Ryan Anderson's Banned Book, 'When Harry Became Sally' Helped Me with Gender Dysphoria," *The Federalist* (Mar. 1, 2021), https://thefederalist.com/2021/03/01/how-ryan-andersons-banned-book-when-harry-became-sally-helped-me-with-gender-dysphoria/.

8 Tim Pearce, "Amazon Bans Books Framing Transgenderism as 'Mental Illness,'" *The Daily Wire* (Mar. 12, 2021), https://www.dailywire.com/news/amazon-bans-books-framing-transgenderism-as-mental-illness.

9 R. R. Reno, "The Public Square," *First Things* (Apr. 2021): 65.

my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well" (Ps. 139:13–14). ☉

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# How the News and the Good News Shape Our Lives

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

*Reading the Times: A Literary and Theological Inquiry into the News*, by Jeffrey Bilbro. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021, xii + 187 pages, $24.00.

I was intrigued that Bilbro, an orthodox Christian, would begin a book on media with a lengthy section on Henry David Thoreau. In 2001 I quoted Thoreau for being unique in his mid-nineteenth-century era as a critic of the new electronic medium of the telegraph:

> Henry David Thoreau was one of the few intelligent critics to point out the most significant negative consequence of the new wonder. In the seclusion of Walden Pond (1845–47) he opined: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate. . . . We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the old world some weeks nearer to the new; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad flapping American ear will be that Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough." By decontextualizing information the new medium would change the nature of discourse, trivializing the profound and making the irrelevant relevant.[2]

While Thoreau was a Transcendentalist in a very Unitarian religious environment in Concord, Massachusetts, there still existed the culturally pervasive remnants of a once vibrant Trinitarian Christianity. Thoreau was a diligent student of the Bible along with many eastern religious texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. He rejected the institutional church and clearly did not side with a minority of Trinitarians who started their own church in reaction to the liberalizing of the town's First Parish Church in Concord, Massachusetts. On the other hand, Thoreau was a brilliant naturalist, an ardent abolitionist, and critically astute in observing man's inventions.[3] It is refreshing for Bilbro to appreciate these aspects of Thoreau's thought.

Bilbro divides his book into three sections of three chapters each, covering attention, time, and community.

He begins by analyzing Thoreau's essay "Life Without Principle" in Chapter 1, "Macadamized Mind" (11–32). The proliferation of printed news and then the speed of the telegraph fragments our attention, leaving us unable to properly assess what is really going on (11). Thoreau's warning about the dangers of contextless, and thus useless, information has proved prescient. He was deeply

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=965.

2 Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, R: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 140. The Thoreau quote came from Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 65–69.

3 For some of the content of this paragraph see Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau: A Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 47–49.

concerned that such news distracts from transcendent realities that he called "the Eternities" (12). Thoreau's essay poses the question, "How are you spending your life?" (14). The daily newspaper can become an idol that steals one's life. Thoreau warns "You cannot serve two masters." In quoting Scripture, I fear that he is substituting the God of Jesus's quote for the Unitarian or Transcendentalist God, who may be known and approached without a Mediator. However, as Bilbro asserts, "Thoreau claims that the news competes with his God, offering an alternative, secular ground of being" (15).

Thoreau used an industrial metaphor to make his point. "I believe that the mind can be permanently profaned by the habit of attending to trivial things, so that all our thoughts shall be tinged with triviality. Our very intellect shall be macadamized . . ." (17). Macadam covers nature completely. It is a brilliant metaphor to accent the point that the news tends to reduce everything to the horizontal, making us earthbound. Bilbro is reminded of Paul's instruction to the Colossians to "set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2). Thoreau's two-part remedy is simple but profound: "Read not the times. Read the Eternities" (19). Thoreau's borrowed Christian capital is vague enough to be easily applied by the Christian.

Changing metaphors, Thoreau likens the "indiscriminate consumption of news" to a cultivated craving for junk food. Bilbro sees Twitter as a heightened example of this (20). The ingredients in food and advertising alike are designed to addict (21). Worse, the addiction leaves us spiritually and intellectually malnourished. Moreover, the news tends to focus us on distant events with which we have nothing to do, rather than what is happening in our neighborhood (29). Neil Postman agreed with Thoreau's dislike of contextless information: "Only four years after Morse opened the first telegraph line on May 24, 1844, the Associated Press was founded, and news from nowhere, addressed to no one in particular, began to crisscross the nation" (30).[4] More information, but less meaning.

In Chapter 2 Bilbro analyses Jewish artist Marc Chagall's painting *Solitude*, painted during Hitler's rise in 1933 Germany. The heifer in the picture is a symbol of meditation as she chews her cud (34). Chagall's love of the Jewish Scripture depicts a seated figure beneath an angel in heaven, reminding the viewer that like David in Psalm 1, the person who delights most in heavenly realities will be most useful in this world of trouble (35–36). French mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal "recommends a profound sort of apathy, *sancta indifferentia*." Epistemic humility relies on God's sovereign workings of Providence (37). Being aware of what is going on in the world while rising above it by faith avoids being overwhelmed by current events. Both Thoreau and Pascal were deeply involved in the world around them, without being swallowed up with the news (41). True discernment of what is going on around one requires silence amidst the cacophony of the news (51). Bilbro concludes this chapter with sage advice:

> When we leave the outcome in God's hands, we receive the courage to do what is right regardless of the consequences. A contemplative response to the news, then, depends on eschatological hope, on fixing one's identity in a victory that lies outside the vicissitudes of daily news and politics. (54)

In the final chapter of this section, Bilbro focuses on the liturgies of attention—habitual patterns of thought and life that shape our theology (56). He suggests reading widely, serendipitously, old, and new works (59). Bilbro recommends the homely activities, like gardening and cooking, crafts that form an antidote to distraction (64).

Chapter 4 begins Part 2, on time, with a fascinating and important distinction between kairos and chronos. Kairos time is "rhythmic, cyclical, seasonal," whereas chronos time is "linear and sequential . . . of quantifiable duration" (67). Paul uses this idea in warning the Corinthians

4 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 67. See also Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 270.

(1 Cor. 7) that the time is not propitious for marriage (68). The modern idea of progress makes us focus on the news through the lens of chronos time. The Christian must seek to interpret the events in chronos time in light of the history of redemption. Bilbro warns the reader not to overvalue either kind of time. Kairos time alone makes history meaningless; chronos time alone makes daily events the sole locus of meaning. The technological environment concentrates on the temporal (81).

Appeals to being on the right side of history are rooted in the temporal. Metanarratives are no longer tenable (85). But, declares Bilbro,

> People long for such a narrative in order to make sense of the news and events of their time. And a Christian mode of keeping time provides exactly that, enabling us to value the news according to the horizon of divine redemption while steering clear of both the Scylla of kairos and the Charybdis of chronos. (87)

In Chapter 5, "Figural Imagination," Bilbro explores the implications of Galatians 4:4–5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Augustine and Dante located the temporal "events of chronos within the divine drama enacted in kairos time" (88). Such a configuration reorders secular time (89). "The trivia of our lives becomes caught up in the eternal significance of Christ's life" (98). Thus, great Christian thinkers like Dante and Jonathan Edwards have read the times "by an eschatological horizon" (104–5).

Chapter 6 enumerates the "Liturgies of Christian Time." The Mosaic feasts are recapitulated in the life of Christ (109). Bilbro suggests that "Calibrating ourselves—body, soul, and mind—to the liturgical calendar" will mold our lives and change our relationship to the news (111). He goes on to recommend some profound Christian classics that cultivate our figural imaginations as an antidote to the patterns cultivated by the news (112).

Bilbro begins Part 3, on community, with the lapidary statement, "What we attend to determines to whom we belong" (119). The danger of the daily news is it tends to bind us to communities created by "secular chronos time and the market" (121). Tradition is eliminated (125). "[W]here we get our news signals and shapes our identity" (126). Communities rooted in secular chronos are thin and lonely, whereas Christian community is "thick" because it is rooted in Christ's kairos (127). Christian community is embodied in places. Bilbro quotes Elizabeth Eisenstein to the effect that the reading public is dispersed and individualistic. But he overlooks the difference commitment to one transcendent text, the Bible—the ultimate metanarrative—makes in terms of community solidarity. It is rather the disembodied nature of the electronic media that makes us "alone together," as Sherry Turkle observes (130–31).[5]

Bilbro is well versed in the literature of media ecology. Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, and Lewis Mumford are among the constellation of sources he has gleaned. Bilbro counsels us to diversify our news feeds (138ff). Better still is to be part of communities that foster various points of view and cultivate nuanced understanding of complex issues. This can only be fostered in what the title of chapter 8 conveys: "Belonging Outside the Public Sphere" (143ff). "[W]e need to cultivate embodied forms of belonging and allow these commitments to foster . . . convivial modes of participating in the public sphere" (145). He wisely concludes, "In short, if we want to think well about the events of our day, we will first need to belong well to the body of Christ and to the neighbors with whom we share our places" (147). He commends the distinction elaborated by Daniel Kahneman in *Thinking Fast and Slow*[6] in which System 1 is "intuitive, fast, and relatively effortless, whereas System 2 is rational, slow, and requires hard work" (147). The electronic environment fosters System 1 thinking and con-

5 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2012).

6 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011).

nects us with invisible "communities." Bilbro gives examples of redemptive publishing and exemplary lives, concluding the book with chapter 9, "Liturgies of Christian Belonging" (165ff). In good Walden fashion, he recommends walking. Thoreau wrote an entire book on the subject.[7] Our own J. Gresham Machen wrote a fine essay, "The Benefits of Walking."[8] Bilbro provides some fine suggestions for "aspirational subscribing" (170–73).

The combination of Bilbro's excellent writing style and his finely tuned literary and theological sensibilities makes this book a very edifying delight to read. I highly recommend it. ©

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7 Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (Thomaston, ME: Tilbury, published posthumously in 1862).

8 J. Gresham Machen, "The Benefits of Walking," in D. G. Hart, ed., *Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 438–40.

# Dueling Methods

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**by T. David Gordon**

*Five Things Theologians Wish Biblical Scholars Knew* (with forward by Scot McKnight), by Hans Boersma. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021, xv + 152, $20.00, paper.

*Five Things Biblical Scholars Wish Theologians Knew* (with forward by Hans Boersma), by Scot McKnight. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021, xii + 161, $20.00, paper.

InterVarsity Press, Hans Boersma, and Scot McKnight should all be congratulated on this two-volume publication project, both in its conception and in its execution. Each author is well-credentialed in his respective field: Boersma has taught at Regent College and at (his current institution) Nashotah House Theological Seminary, has written several scholarly volumes, and is ordained in the Anglican Church in North America. McKnight has taught at North Park University, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and has written about fifty scholarly books. He is also ordained in the Anglican Church in North America, which nicely prevents inter-denominational squabbles from marring the project.

The publisher wisely decided not to assign particular questions or topics for each author to address but left it to the two authors to address the matter of what their own discipline wished for the practitioners of the other discipline. Note, then, that each author had his own wish-list of five matters, none of which I will attempt to unpack in this review (other than one brief explanation), encouraging readers either to hear the authors in their

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=980.

own voice or not at all:

| Boersma | McKnight |
|---|---|
| 1. No Christ, No Scripture | 1. Theology Needs a Constant Return to Scripture |
| 2. No Plato, No Scripture | 2. Theology Needs to Know Its Impact on Biblical Studies |
| 3. No Providence, No Scripture | 3. Theology Needs Historically Shaped Biblical Studies |
| 4. No Church, No Scripture | 4. Theology Needs More Narrative |
| 5. No Heaven, No Scripture | 5. Theology Needs to Be Lived Theology |

Note, then, that InterVarsity permitted each author the freedom to address the matter on his own terms. This makes the project far more interesting and engaging than it would have been had the publisher assigned topics as a debate panel might do at a university forensics competition. Readers will quickly recognize that the concerns of the two authors are sincere, heartfelt, and of an enduring nature. Though each author wrote the forward to the other's volume, this was the closest the project ever got to a debate. Neither author abused this privilege; each addressed the other thoughtfully and charitably.

Among the virtues of this two-volume project is the bibliographical material. Each volume has a nine-page (small font) bibliography in the back to direct readers into a fuller discussion of the general issues or into a fuller understanding of the authors cited throughout the two volumes. An interested pastor, elder, or deacon might wisely consult these bibliographies before planning one's vacation reading.

## Exemplars, Not Representatives

The two authors are *exemplars* of their respective disciplines but not necessarily *representatives* of their respective disciplines. Their credentials in their respective fields are typical of others in those respective fields; each has taught (at the graduate level) in his field and published in his field, and each is an ordained churchman. Each, therefore, is a solid exemplar of the discipline in which each labors. However, neither is necessarily *representative* of his respective discipline; if the publishers had polled twenty other theologians and twenty other biblical scholars, it might be that none of the twenty in each case would have an identical list of "five things" he wished. I would guess, however, that a significant majority would, at a minimum, have profound sympathies with each list. Wise readers of these volumes might find it helpful to make this distinction between exemplar and representative.

## Means and Ends

Each author recognizes his own discipline (and that of the other) to be a means to a greater end of knowing God, a recognition that is appropriately pious without being pietistic. Each laments that neither discipline—especially in its academic form—has recognized its instrumental role adequately. Their respective recommendations and observations about how scholarship could and should better serve the interests of genuine devotion to Christ and his church were and are especially noteworthy. This regard for Christian faith and life, and for the health of the Christian church, would probably not have been true had some other representatives of each respective discipline been selected; InterVarsity wisely selected two credentialed academics whose writings pulsate with vital Christian faith.

## "Christian Platonism"

One matter (the only specific one I will address more than summarily in this review) that arises in this two-volume project, that might not have arisen had other authors been chosen, is the matter of "Christian Platonism," the second of Boersma's five "wishes" and perhaps the only one expressly mentioned in McKnight's forward to Boersma's book. To put it mildly, not every systematic theolo-

gian would elect to identify himself as a proponent of "Christian Platonism," and Boersma does not do so without important caveats and qualifications. Permit an extended quotation:

> Christians should not treat Plato as a sheer villain, because a proper reading of Scripture depends in part on the traditional mode of reading it, which we may fairly label "Christian Platonist." . . . On my understanding, a Christian metaphysic is theological in character: we dare not impose the pagan philosophy of Plato (or of anyone else) on Holy Scripture. Christian metaphysics must take its starting point in the Christian confession of Christ as the incarnate Lord. Still, it is true that the early church typically read Scripture through the metaphysical lens of Christian Platonism, and I will argue that this approach safeguards rather than hampers biblical teaching. *The second thing that I, as a theologian, wish biblical scholars knew is that the Bible cannot be interpreted without prior metaphysical commitments and that we need Christian Platonism as an interpretive lens in order to uphold Scripture's teaching*. (39–40, emphasis and parenthesis Boersma's, and the emphasis appears in each chapter as the definition of each of his five wishes.)

Note three things here: First, Boersma places the expression "Christian Platonist" in quotation marks. Critics of this viewpoint often overlook that some of its protagonists appear to be quite conscious of the fact that the expression is intentionally oxymoronic. Boersma expressly warns that "we dare not" impose Plato's pagan philosophy on the Scriptures. A Christian metaphysic is not identical (of course) with any pagan or polytheistic metaphysic; rather, Boersma argues that the two metaphysics share some assumptions about the natural order, a super-natural order, and language. Second, Boersma affirms, with many philosophers and theologians, that "the Bible cannot be interpreted without prior metaphysical commitments." Third, he affirms that "we need Christian Platonism as an interpretive lens" and that the early church did so read Scripture. This third matter is the one where Boersma is more likely to encounter skeptics:

- regarding the necessity of "Christian Platonism" (even *if* qualified), and
- regarding whether the early church *did* adopt such Platonism, and
- regarding *whether* the early church's assumptions would be authoritative even if they *were* Platonic in some senses.

Some readers will likely underestimate Boersma's qualifications; others will likely exaggerate them; perhaps a few will find that they satisfy the Rev. Goldilocks's criterion of "just right."

## Historical-Critical vs. Grammatico-Historical

Criticisms by both authors of the weaknesses of biblical scholarship often refer to the historical-critical method but not to the grammatico-historical method. Nearly all scholars who have a high view of Scripture have recognized the severe limitations of the historical-critical method since its seventeenth-century emergence; indeed, since Brevard Childs's seminal work on canonical criticism, even scholars with a *low* view of Scripture have tended to recognize the limitations of the historical-critical method. The grammatico-historical method, by self-conscious contrast, has ordinarily been practiced, developed, and propagated by those who recognize divine inspiration and the methodological consequences thereof. To my knowledge, neither author expressly acknowledged the grammatico-historical method as an alternative to historical-critical methodology on the one hand, or an a-historical, proof-texting methodology on the other (though perhaps Boersma refers to the grammatico-historical method by denoting it as the "*sola scriptura*" approach, and perhaps McKnight does so implicitly by promoting what he calls "prima scriptura"). Perhaps each author just assumed knowledge of this alternative on the part of their readership, but I regard it as a mild defect in a two-volume project such as this that neither author expressed a "wish" for the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. Boersma, more so

than McKnight, is willing to resurrect some aspects of the *sensus plenior* method of the early church's allegorical exegesis (20–38), though with some qualifications. I believe this aspect of both books (rejecting historical-critical methodology but no clear commitment to grammatico-historical methodology) has been addressed more ably in several of Vern S. Poythress's works:

- *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (P&R, 1995).
- *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (P&R, 1999).
- "Edmund P. Clowney's Triangle of Typology in *Preaching and Biblical Theology*," *Unio cum Christo* 7/2 (Oct. 2021): 231–38.

Poythress's pertinent writings have always been sensitive to the proper limitations of "authorial intent," which he has deftly addressed by recognizing dual-authorship (divine and human) of Scripture, thereby evading "the intentional fallacy" by acknowledging, methodologically, both authors of Scripture.

## Interdisciplinary Conversations in the Body of Christ

Interdisciplinary conversations should be welcomed, though not canonized. In one sense, each of the theological disciplines is still a way of "doing theology." Whether systematic theology, biblical theology, exegetical theology, practical theology, polemical theology, historical theology, missionary theology, apologetic theology; all theologies attempt to think God's thoughts after him, and they do it in varying ways for varying purposes. Whenever the various sub-theologies (if we may call them that) are conversing with one another, iron will likely sharpen iron. Armed with a robust understanding of differing gifts in the body of Christ, these various sub-theologies may devote themselves fully to their respective tasks, while welcoming the contributions and insights of others. All human knowledge is partial (and not just in the eschatological sense of 1 Corinthians 13:12), so it is not a fault of any discipline that it is not doing what other disciplines do. Conversations such as these perhaps even contribute to the "hermeneutical circle" becoming a "hermeneutical spiral," in which each discipline leaves its own well-worn path temporarily in order to return to it more wisely.

Discussions such as those contained in these two volumes have the helpful effect of relativizing the respective enterprises of each discipline. Exposure to other disciplines that have equally devoted practitioners and equally erudite conversations may have the desirable result of deflating our respective disciplines' egos. Recognizing our substantial ignorance of how other disciplines function may relativize not only our own discipline's knowledge but our personal knowledge as well. Recognizing our own (disciplinary or personal) fallibility need not injure our confidence in the infallibility of Scripture; as David Wells often reminded us, one can believe in biblical inerrancy without affirming one's own inerrancy. Indeed, scriptural infallibility shines brighter when contrasted with all human fallibility.

The complexity of hermeneutical and/or epistemological discussion reminds us that human communication itself (and the language/s we craft to facilitate knowing and communicating) is, like love, a "many-splendored" thing. Knowing is one thing; justifying knowledge is another thing altogether. My first PhD dissertation proposal was to evaluate post-Bultmannian hermeneutics. My doctoral advisor, the late Paul Achtemeier, had written *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Westminster, 1969), so he was competent to direct the project. In my six months of provisional exploration (by reading Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, and their interpreters), I was almost eager for the proposal to be rejected by the department, as it eventually was, so I then pursued the comparatively easy matter of Paul's understanding of the Law (Biblical scholars may appreciate the irony of that last clause). Reading the concerns that these two individuals have about each other's respective discipline has the salutary effect of reminding us that there is a certain amount of mystery that surrounds every human effort to understand other humans or God himself.

Neither of these volumes is easy to read and should not be tackled without finding a decent amount of uninterrupted quiet. The difficulty is not due to either author's inability; the difficulty is due to the complexity of the matter of doing theology itself (in any of the various disciplines). Each author exposes failed assumptions and methods both within his own discipline and in other disciplines; in the process, they disabuse the reader of any hope for easy answers within disciplines or across them. But, after all, we are finite beings attempting to understand the Infinite God, and we are unholy beings striving to understand the Holy God, whose ways are inscrutable, who hides himself, and whose proper glory is, in part, to conceal things (Rom. 11:33; Isa. 45:15; Prov. 25:2).

### My Advice to Potential Readers

I rarely give advice when writing book reviews; this may be the only time I have done so. But the following three things either helped me by doing them, or would have helped me if I had done them, so I pass the three along to potential readers.

First, read both volumes or neither volume (and read them both with few interruptions in between). InterVarsity planned this as a two-part project, and the authors participated in it as such; to remove one part or the other is to miss part of the intended affect. Each volume is reasonably brief; the two together are just under 300 pages, so the potential reader should consider this as a 300-page read in two parts, not as two 150-page reads. For this reason, I also add the above qualifier that, if possible, they be read with few interruptions or disruptions between them. I found that the juxtaposition of the two was part of the benefit of the project; to separate them by a month or more would be like separating the first movement of a symphony from the second for a similar time.

Second, read them in reverse order of your present competence. Most churchmen—whether academics or not—have certain interests and competences that differ. One immerses himself in church history, another in biblical studies, yet another in systematic theology. I chose this method myself and benefited from reading the theologian before the biblical scholar; Boersma welcomed me into his conversational world, as it were, before McKnight continued a conversation in our shared world of biblical studies. I felt much more at home in McKnight's world, of course, but benefited profoundly by adjusting my hearing to attune itself to Boersma's *patois*.

Third, ask what you can learn from each, rather than "who won?" Before I attended college, my uncle said, "David, when you arrive at college, learn as much as you can from every professor. Of course, you will like some more than others and find some easier to follow than others, but each knows a good deal more than you know, and you should make it your aim to glean as much as you can from each." It was great advice (and literally avuncular!), and it would be good advice here. InterVarsity intentionally conceived this project to be an honest expression of wishes, not a debate; readers who attempt to make the project do something other than what it was intended to do will glean far less than will readers who let it do what it was designed to do. ©

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# Global Pillage: Stealing Our Data, Our Intelligence, and Our Souls

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

*Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media*, by Chris Martin. Nashville: B&H, 2022, xii + 212 pages, $17.99, paper.

The author of this important new book on social media, Chris Martin, is a digital native—born into or brought up in the internet world (Martin was born in 1990). This makes his serious critique of social media especially poignant, since most in his generation are uncritical users of the internet and social media, allowing the electronic media to form them. I have been warning people about the potentially deleterious nature and goals of social media for two decades. Myspace began in 2003, but the seeds of the dangers are inherent in the internet itself. I have avoided social media for both principial and practical reasons. Some would assert that that disqualifies me from critical analysis. However, having studied the nature and effects of media since 1990, my refusal to participate is based on careful consideration of the benefits and liabilities of social media as a powerful and pervasive manifestation of electronic media. Social media surreptitiously mine data from our internet participation for advertising—Facebook is the largest focus group in history, except most people are unaware of this. Martin is deeply involved with the internet and social media as a content marketing editor at Moody Publishers and as a social media, marketing, and communications consultant.

Starting with McLuhan's fish-in-the-water metaphor to illustrate our lack of awareness of our immediate and pervasive electronic environment, Martin asserts that the "social internet is brilliant and obscene" (2). The point of the book is to demonstrate that the water is toxic (3–4)—what purports to serve man ends up enslaving us (6).

The book is divided into three sections: 1) "How We Got Here," 2) "Five Ways the Social Internet Shapes Us," and 3) "Where Do We Go from Here?"

Part 1 traces the presence of the internet in our lives from its limited academic and military origins to its invasion of our homes and souls (13–18). Although internet 2.0 represented the full emergence of the social media, the social aspect of the internet was present from its inception; also present was the development of attention-getting methods, especially for commercial purposes (16). The greatest change occurring in this new phase of electronic media was its presence in everyone's pockets (22ff). The smartphone is often much smarter than its users.

Martin's analysis of how the present social networks function is most helpful. This is where the fish examines the water. What is discovered is "the fear of missing out" and "addiction" (35). Martin refers to Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* to point out the danger of being so obsessed with what is going on online that off-line life fades into the background (36). This obsession has all of the classic ingredients of addiction (37). But what is insidious about this is that the media themselves are designed to promote addiction (38ff). What people assume are neutral tools are making tools of us. Causing anger and disagreement is the most effective way of commanding attention (40).

The final chapter (3) of this first part explores the druglike effect of social media. It creates "virtual tribes" of like-minded people, not expanding our horizons as the early promoters claimed. This in turn undermines empathy (47), as one tribe develops intolerance for others. This isolation causes anxiety, and mental health problems arise in young and old alike.

Part 2 explores five ways that the social internet shapes us. First, we falsely believe that atten-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=988.

tion assigns value, and so what is popular, or trending, must be important, thus we must pay attention (63). This phenomenon has great cash value for advertising and sales. Our identities are at stake. At this point Martin makes a statement that I wish he had expanded upon: "As Christians, we are to find our identity in the finished work of Christ and our standing as image bearers of God" (65). We are being surreptitiously hijacked by the commercial interests of social media (66ff). "If socializing is the most valuable part of the internet for users, it's the most lucrative part for businesses" (69). It is not that advertising is inherently wrong, but social media act more like magicians than salesmen, addicting its viewers for commercial purposes.

Second, social media play on the ultimate high of attention, affection, and fame (72ff). When using a product is free, there is a hidden price—for social media it is our data, and thus we are the product (75). This invasion of privacy is serious, but many ask, "Why should I care? I have nothing to hide." All online activity, social internet and otherwise, is recorded. It is not only used to increase profit but to modify behavior as well (80–81). The freedom for personal expression we receive in return for data harvesting is actually "the gasoline that keeps the social internet running" (85). Even if you are not on Facebook, there are Facebook Pixels, little "pieces of code installed in countless websites that sends your web activity back to Facebook" (87). And in the terms of service, "which no one reads, users consent to this covert activity" (90). Martin advises turning location services off and limiting personal information but admits in the end that the best way to limit intrusion is to stay off social media (94).

The third way that social media shape us is by alluring us to pursue affirmation instead of truth (97). Thus, the proliferation of conspiracy theories is encouraged by the platforms' ability to connect the like-minded, thus narrowing our understanding of various issues. Martin observes that "a lot of falsehoods (or 'fake news') [are] built on an acorn of truth" (101). And we tend to trust like-minded people in the place of critical thinking. The pursuit of truth should be high on the Christian priority list; placing the affirmation of the like-minded ahead of pursuing truth tends to jettison that priority, or at least modify it.

The fourth way that the social internet shapes us is that it amplifies our sinful tendency to demonize people with whom we disagree. Martin warns: "In many corners of the social internet, a lie lingers that 'people who disagree with me cause me harm'" (113). Thus, the new progressive liberalism ingrained in the media-saturated Millennial generation has little room for considering contrary ideas (114). Christians are not immune from this tendency. Like muscles, "we do need to endure some measure of disagreements, conflicts, and social strife so that we may learn, adapt, and grow" (119). Martin counsels care in our use of language on the social internet and to practice the Christian ideal of giving others the benefit of the doubt (121). Martin notes that "microagressions" are impossible because aggression by definition is never unintentional (123).

The fifth and final way that social media shape us is that they tend to seek the destruction of the people who are demonized. A second commonly held lie is that the lives of harmful people must be dismantled (127). This is the logical conclusion of cancel culture. In answer to the question "Why are people nasty on the social internet?" Martin opines that the importance of attention in the design of social media means that nastiness gets the most attention (128). I would add that the lack of face-to-face presence undermines accountability. Martin goes on to take an in-depth look at cancel culture. Cancel culture is good when the immoral or illegal behavior of the rich and powerful is exposed and justice is served (133). However, often cancel culture looks more like vengeance than justice (136). The moral relativism of these digital vigilantes leads, for example, to canceling of Christians who hold to biblical sexual ethics (137). Reconciliation is impossible because the vigilantes want to punish, period. The anonymity of the internet makes follow-up impossible (139). Since Christians view every human as image bearers of God, we must seek real justice and true forgiveness, and treat those with whom we disagree with respect.

Part 3 provides six ways to counteract the worst tendencies of the social media, or put positively, "to provide . . . tools to more wisely engage the social internet" (147). Sixty pages of solution is unusual for social and media critics. Thus, Martin's effort is to be applauded, despite his being repetitious at points.

The first tool is "Study History." Martin quotes Ecclesiastes 1:9, "There is nothing new under the sun," to make the point that history shows us that people have faced what we face before. History also helps us formulate solutions to problems. History expands our view of other cultures' ideas and people, helping us to understand alternative perspectives. Like travel, history encourages empathy. Being situated in the stream of our heritage and traditions is severely lacking in most Millennials. The electronic environment has left them without context—no past, no future.

The second tool is "Admire Creation." Getting out and admiring the created world slows us down and tends to make us more thoughtful, as it removes electronic distractions (157)—that is if you remember to leave your phone at home. It involves all five senses (157) and reorients our sense of beauty (160), which has been corrupted by the daily barrage of photoshopped pictures of nature.

The third tool is "Value Silence." This is one of my favorite ideas. Before coming in to write this review, I was sitting in our garden hoping that the dogs would stop barking, the hedge trimmer would run out of gas, and the person playing a radio too loud would locate the volume button. But Martin is thinking of a different kind of silence—refraining from using the social internet as a digital soapbox. By not responding, we are quenching our natural sinful tendency to spout off. So, this kind of silence produces empathy and encourages wisdom and humility (166–72). The missing element here is the option of getting off all social media. While critics like Nicholas Carr helpfully suggest media sabbaths, I would like to recommend consideration of something akin to the eternal sabbath, of which our temporary weekly sabbaths are a foretaste.

The fourth tool is "Pursue Humility." Martin begins with a quote from Rick Warren, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less" (174). That may be cute, but a better quote comes from Paul:

> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:3–7)

"Pride is integral to so much of the disfunction we find online" (175). While Martin warns about several sins and recommends Christian virtues, his desire to reach a non-Christian audience blunts the vital connection between Christian virtues and Christ.

Humility makes us willing to admit when we are wrong, assume the best of others, and forgive others when they wrong us (176–80). Looking at the nature of the medium of the social network, Martin observes that "No algorithm is engineered to promote reconciliation and forgiveness. All algorithms are engineered to favor the spread of conflict argumentation" (180). The conclusion of this chapter left me wanting more. Martin's concluding section, "We Cannot Do It Alone," never mentions what Christians would expect: the most important person in our lives, our helper the Holy Spirit. The false impression is left that family, friends, colleagues, and self-discipline alone can cultivate biblical humility.

The fifth tool is "Establish Accountability." This chapter reminded me of *The New Yorker* cartoon showing a dog in a chair in front of a computer saying to another dog sitting on the floor, "On the internet nobody knows that you're a dog." Martin fails to drill down on the way that the internet alters social space and does an end run around traditional gatekeepers, invading our households and our hearts. When he properly observes that "mental health statistics are growing more discour-

aging as social media use is increasing," he fails to suggest that opting out of social media may be the best way to restore accountability and mental health (185).

The sixth and final tool is "Build Friendships." "The social internet has cheapened friendship. . . . Our screens mute the full range of friendship" (192). Again, "I think many of us have become so fused with our phones that we have forgotten the magic of real, embodied friendship" (193). But if embodied friendships are superior to online friendships, why take time pursuing the inferior? Martin's emphasis on sacrificial love cites Christ as an example, but this and other suggestions leave us with a semi-Pelagian view of human nature. The discerning Christian will add theologically what Martin leaves out, and probably believes himself, in the interests of appealing to a non-Christian audience. His many excellent insights make the book worthwhile.

No one likes the idea of being used, but under the guise of expressive individualism that is just what social media do. Like it or not, if you participate in social media, you are being used. The internet is not just a technology, it is a philosophy of life, a worldview. At its heart is the Baconian idea that reality can be analyzed and manipulated for our own ends. The Christian is in the unique epistemological position to stand outside of this way of thinking and living. Christians must not succumb to the chimera of Enlightenment dreams that reality is ultimately manipulable and that humans may take complete control. Social media not only tend to addict their users, but they also reorganize our social spaces and relationships. Romans 12:1–2 should lead us in the direction of leaving the lake whose water, as Martin begins and concludes the book, is toxic and enslaving. ©

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# First Things in Acts and Paul

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**by John W. Mahaffy**

*In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul*, by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 448 pages, $44.99.

Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has blessed the church with a most helpful fruit of his years in the classroom. He began teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1965 and became Professor Emeritus, Biblical and Systematic Theology, in 2008. *In the Fullness of Time* is based on the course "Acts and Paul," which he taught from 1977 to 2010.

Always the teacher, Gaffin has not disguised the source material of the book but rather aimed to "maintain the classroom level of its content" with the exception that the use of the original languages has been kept to a minimum. Gaffin targets not his academic peers (though they too will benefit from the book) but serious students who are "looking for an initial 'deep dive'" into Acts and the writings of Paul (20). This book is a "must read," especially for the audience of *Ordained Servant*, officers in the OPC. For many others, men and women holding the general office of believer and interested in serious study of God's Word, this book will also prove a rich blessing.

As Sinclair Ferguson states in his foreword, for those who have studied under Gaffin, "It certainly adds to a reading experience to be able to 'hear' the writer's accent" and to recognize familiar speech patterns (16). The far greater benefit, however, is that those who have not sat under his teaching are

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=989.

here exposed to his careful, even-handed treatment of the Word of God.

In the Introduction, Gaffin reminds us that "sound preaching presupposes and flows from solid exposition" (24). Interpretation, while intensely personal, is carried out in the context of the church of the risen, ascended Lord. His interest in the writings of Luke and Paul is

> for their revelatory character and function, as they are part of the revelation of the triune God that has its climactic focus in the person and work of Christ. We will be occupied with them as, in a single word that captures the essence of their content all told, they are *gospel*, and therefore as—a description applicable to all of them—they are "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). (27)

God's spoken or written verbal communication has come to us as a historical process, always "occasioned by and focused on God's activity in history. God's revelatory Word is oriented toward his action as Creator and Redeemer" (29). The opening words of the Letter to the Hebrews provide a biblical basis for this view of revelation, with its emphasis on the Son as God's "last days" speaking. Gaffin draws the important distinction between "redemptive or salvation history (*historia salutis*), the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation, and the ongoing application of that salvation (*ordo salutis*, the order of salvation)," (33) while reminding us that the two are always related because God is the author of the whole.

Following a *very* brief summary of the history of the development of biblical theology as a recognized discipline (with, of course, acknowledgment of the crucial role of Geerhardus Vos), Gaffin emphasizes that the New Testament, while the endpoint of Scriptural revelation, also describes the progression of events in the life and ministry of Christ:

> In fact, this historical progression is not only present but basic to the gospel. At the heart of the gospel is the historical progression experienced by Christ himself. He moves, pivotally by the cross and resurrection, from his state of humiliation to his state of exaltation—from bearing the just wrath and curse of God that his people deserve for their sins to being restored irreversibly, with that wrath propitiated and removed, to God's favor. The result is the permanent *transition from wrath to grace in history*, effected for the salvation of his people. The gospel stands or falls with the historical sequence of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. (41)

His contrasting this with the theology of Karl Barth illustrates Gaffin's concern that biblical theology assists in maintaining a sound, orthodox systematic theology.

Eschatology, or the teaching of Scripture concerning the last things, is not properly limited to dealing with events shortly before the return of Christ. Rather, "Biblical eschatology is to be defined in terms of the first as well as the second coming of Christ. New Testament eschatology has a dual focus. In that respect it is elliptical, defined by two foci, present and future, the proverbial already-not-yet" (67).

"The Theology of Acts" includes an overview of the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God as found in the Gospels. It then focuses on the Holy Spirit and the kingdom in Luke-Acts, tracing it from the annunciation through the baptism and temptation of Jesus, his teaching, and his miracles. Luke 24 and Acts 1 overlap, describing that unique, forty-day period in which the resurrected but not yet ascended Christ prepared his disciples for their upcoming apostolic work.

> What transpired, as it might be pictured, was a forty-day intersession in which Jesus gave a crash course on Old Testament hermeneutics, in how to interpret the Old Testament as a whole from a postresurrection perspective. . . . This interpretive activity consisted in showing that his earthly ministry, culminating in his death and resurrection, is the focus of Scripture, the sum and substance of the Old Testament . . . (88)

At the heart of the Book of Acts stands Pentecost, the baptism of the apostolic church by the risen, ascended Lord. Gaffin takes us back to Luke 3 and the promise of John the Baptizer that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Both blessing and judgment are implied. For the baptism at Pentecost to be one of blessing, it was necessary for the Messiah to undergo his own baptism with fire, the second Adam bearing the sins of his people in his suffering and death before being raised triumphantly. Jesus's own baptism by John was the occasion for the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the Messiah to equip him for his public ministry.

When the ascended Lord deluges (to use Gaffin's term) the church with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this is an epochal event. Those familiar with Gaffin's *Perspectives on Pentecost*[2] will recognize the biblical argument developed at some length here, that Pentecost is not the first in a series of repeatable events to be sought after by the church and by individual believers. Rather, it is foundational, as unique as the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The once-for-all character of Christ's accomplishment of salvation and of the outpouring of the Spirit in no way distances us from either Christ's work in our lives or the enlivening, empowering work of the Spirit. While carefully guarding against any confusion of the persons of the Trinity, Gaffin, looking at John 16, speaks of the "functional identity of Christ and the Spirit" as they work in the lives of believers and in the church (162). The involvement of the Father in Pentecost (Jesus speaks of the promise of his Father)

> . . . opens up the widest possible perspective on Pentecost, because it links Pentecost to the fulfillment of the promise that is at the core of Old Testament expectation. . . . the promise that is at the core of covenant history and has shaped its course and outcome from the beginning. That is the promise of Genesis 12:3 that in Abraham all the families or nations of the earth will be blessed. (163)

Gaffin brings out several underemphasized aspects of Pentecost (though this review does not have the space to summarize the biblical arguments he uses). Pentecost has a forensic or judicial aspect:

> Returning to Acts 2, when at Pentecost Christ comes to baptize his people—triumphant as he now is from his baptismal ordeal—for them the just wrath they deserve has been removed. For them, the church, the judicial fire of destruction has been exhausted, quenched by his death. (168)

It also has adoptive force. While guarding against the error of adoptionistic Christology, Gaffin anticipates the point he will make in discussing Romans 1:4, that "by his resurrection through the action of the Spirit, Christ, the preexisting divine Son" was appointed or declared "Son of God in power" (172).

Calvin is known as the theologian of the Holy Spirit. Gaffin outstandingly maintains that emphasis for our generation. His focus on the work of the Spirit is not confined to Pentecost or the Book of Acts—it is also prominent in his treatment of the theology of Paul.

In contrast with much contemporary Pauline scholarship, Gaffin takes seriously Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "when you receive the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God." God, not Paul, is the primary author (185). Yet it is at the same time fully Paul's teaching as well.

Chapter 7, "Paul and His Interpreters," provides a brief overview of the church's understanding of the apostle. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, Paul, though cited and commented on, seems to have had relatively little impact, with a notable exception of Augustine. That neglect was remedied by Luther and Calvin. Gaffin touches briefly on representative figures in the historical-

2 Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979.

critical school, who, given the rise of rationalism, denied or neglected the divine source and authority of Scripture. In a footnote, Gaffin, agreeing with Vos, explains his method: "I proceed in this largely descriptive manner convinced that for those who do not share its unbiblical commitments and rationalistic procedures, diagnosis of the true intent of criticism is the best prophylaxis" (204). He interacts more extensively with the New Perspective on Paul, concluding, contrary to that perspective, "that the Reformation is essentially correct in its understanding of Paul's opposition to Judaism" (217). The chapter ends with a brief note of appreciation for the work of Vos and Ridderbos.

Paul's letters are occasional and pastoral, not a doctrinal handbook, though they are rich in theological content and Paul is a profound theologian. Is there a center to his theology? "[T]he center of Paul's theology is the gospel, and at the center of that gospel are the death and resurrection of Christ." The death and resurrection for our sins are "nothing less than eschatological."

> At the center of Paul's theology, constituting that center as much as anything, are Christ's death and resurrection—or, more broadly, messianic suffering and glory, his humiliation and exaltation, in their saving and Scripture-fulfilling, eschatological significance. The center of Paul's theology is determined by the triangulation of his Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. (238)

Gaffin then explores Paul's Christology and soteriology in the light of his eschatology. He examines key texts that reference the present age and contrast it with the age to come (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:2; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:8–3:23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 1:2, 16:25–27; Col. 1:26–27; and others). Gaffin's theology is exegetical. The age to come arrives with the coming of the Messiah. For Judaism in Paul's day and orthodox Judaism today, "Messiah has not yet come. For Paul the Messiah has already come in the person of Christ. The end of this age has arrived, the age to come has been ushered in" (281). Yet the coming of the Messiah has two stages, epochs, or installments. His first coming with its saving events has ushered in the kingdom, but believers, still subject to a sin-cursed world, have a certain hope of his second coming. The Christian not only looks forward to the fulfillment of the age to come but, because the risen Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, also looks upwards, seeking the things that are above, for his life is hidden with Christ in God.

I dare say that most readers who have studied under Gaffin will recall him drawing on the chalkboard (or its more modern equivalent) the rectangular diagram from Vos's *The Pauline Eschatology*, illustrating the relationship between the present age and the age to come. That diagram, slightly modified with arrows pointing backward, forward, and upward, is reproduced as "Paul's Tridirectional Eschatology" (293). He comments, "The arrival of the age to come in its fullness at Christ's return will mean the disappearance not of the distinction but of the present disjunctive distance between heaven and earth."

Gaffin works through several Pauline passages that focus on the resurrection of Christ and its connection with believers. "On balance, for Paul, the resurrection of Christ is thoroughly messianic, just as much as are his sufferings and death" (320). That leads to exploring what his resurrection meant for Christ personally—crucially, the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. He spends nearly twenty pages unpacking 1 Corinthians 15:45, "The last Adam became the life-giving Spirit" (his translation). "What should not be missed, particularly prominent in this passage, is the large megapoint that keeps coming out as we consider Paul's theology: the way in which his eschatology both shapes and is shaped by his Christology, and with that, his soteriology" (341).

In his treatment of Paul's summary of his gospel in Romans 1:3–4 ("who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be [*or* appointed] the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead." Gaffin's translation), he carefully guards against any view that Paul is confusing the persons of the Trinity or has an adoptionistic Christology. "[B]y resurrection, the incarnate Son of

God was in his human nature transformed by the Holy Spirit and entered the eschatological order of the Spirit's working" (359). He discusses the Pauline contrast between flesh and Spirit, leading him to observe that the present situation of believers is "in the flesh, but not according to the flesh."

> The ongoing challenge to the church is to recognize and not lose sight of both of these dimensions and so to avoid falling into the extreme of some form of triumphalist thinking, on the one hand, or of no longer being able to distinguish itself from the present evil age on the other. (358)

He summarizes:

> The inseverable bond between Christ and the Holy Spirit in the experience of believers (in the *ordo salutis*), expressed in Romans 8:9–10, exists because, prior to their experience (in the *historia salutis*), Christ has become "the life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45), and the Spirit is "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9; cf. Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19). (365)

Because believers have been raised with Christ and their lives are hidden with Christ in God (indicative statements of fact), they are commanded (imperative) to set their minds on things above, rather than on earthly things.

> The covenant bond established by God with his people at the beginning of redemptive history has been given its final, eschatological form in Spirit-worked union between the exalted Christ and believers. Union with Christ is the climactic realization of the covenant relationship structured by the promise, "I will be their God, / and they shall be my people." (373)

Romans 6 provides a crucial perspective on sanctification. Given Paul's emphasis on the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection, the important, ongoing, progressive work of sanctification (which is not merely our work, but, no less than other aspects of our salvation, is God working in us) has undergirding it a definitive break with the enslaving power of sin. Following John Murray, Gaffin argues that Romans 6 tells us the believers *are* dead to sin and have been made alive to God (385). Even in Reformed circles, that definitive break with sin is too often overlooked. Describing the debated relationship between justification and sanctification, Gaffin argues,

> The reason that justification and sanctification are inseparable is because of Christ, because of who he is as our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). His is the righteousness that is the final, eschatological answer to any and every charge against God's elect, the justifying and intercessory righteousness of God reckoned as ours (cf. Rom. 8:33–34). (395)

But our sanctification cannot be separated, because "the Christ of our concern is Christ who is what he now is in the fullness of his exaltation glory and redemptive triumph and because we have been united with this Christ." (396) He cites Calvin's emphasis that we cannot receive a partial or a half Christ.

Readers unfamiliar with Gaffin's other writings may be surprised that the final chapter, "The Resurrection and the Christian Life (Part 2)," is subtitled, "Christian Suffering." Gaffin writes, "My thesis, as paradoxical as it might at first sound, is that for Paul, suffering is an essential mark of the believer's present experience of resurrection. Suffering specifies as fundamental a dimension as any of the Christian life, precisely as that life is sharing in the life of the resurrected Christ" (399). Gaffin deals at some length with 1 Corinthians 4:7–12 and Philippians 3:10–11: "The sequence is not, as might be expected suffering-death-resurrection, but resurrection-suffering-death" (407). The age to come has dawned, but believers, though united to Christ, still live in the present age, with the resultant tension and suffering: "For Paul, Christ's resurrection power is to have cruciform effect. The impact of Christ's resurrection life in the church, the impression or imprint that the resurrection ought to leave in the life of the believer, is, as much as anything, the cross" (408).

Gaffin is not a pessimist. He considers himself,

like Paul, an "optimistic amil" (298). The church is filling up the afflictions of Christ pending his return, when it will enter its exaltation.

> But while in this way the church is one large step behind its Lord, he has not left it behind. The church is not on its own or abandoned. For in its state of humiliation its exalted Lord is present in the power of his Spirit. Already, not just in the future, he become [sic] the life-giving Spirit, is active as "head over everything for the church" (Eph. 1:22 NIV), And in its suffering, his resurrection life and power are being perfected. This is why, we may say, Christ's present eschatological victory is for the church an eschatology of suffering. (418)

If the church evades sharing in the sufferings of Christ, it risks losing its identity and fails to be faithful to its Lord.[3] On that note, Gaffin concludes this book.

Why read *In the Fullness of Time*? Read it because when Gaffin deals with a passage, as he does repeatedly in this book, one is left with the indelible impression that he has examined it thoroughly and with transparent clarity. The quotes in this review illustrate his careful exegetical work. Read because, even though this book is written on a level not too academic for the ordinary saint, Gaffin models careful, respectful scholarship at its best. He presents opposing views correctly, avoiding unsubstantiated generalizations. He writes with a readable and refreshing humility. Read because this book, although self-described as an introduction, provides a sweeping framework of biblical thought, an explication of the structure of biblical theology, that will assist the reader in understanding all of Scripture. John Murray's *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*,[4] reprinted multiple times, has been a profound influence on the church for more than seventy years. *In the Fullness of Time* has the potential to have a similar impact on our understanding of the Scriptures for at least the next seventy to one hundred years.

If the book has a weakness, it is that, even at more than 400 pages including exceedingly helpful Scripture and subject indices, it is only an introduction. At times the reader is left wishing that space and time had allowed Gaffin to deal with additional passages of Scripture or to have explored issues further. (One can hope that chapters in other books and internet articles referenced in footnotes could be gathered into a *Collected Writings of Richard Gaffin*.) Yet his explication of the text manifests the depth and the height of the Word. His introduction has an astounding grasp of the passages he considers. One cannot put it better than Sinclair Ferguson does in the Preface:

A hallmark of *In the Fullness of Time* is its penetration into the deep structures of Paul's thought. There are many pages here where I suspect readers will want to slow down, perhaps reread, meditate, and, best of all, worship. (16) ⓢ

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3 That evasion appears in some circles in which an emphasis on exercising dominion downplays the humiliation of Christ and jumps to him as the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19. While that may be cited as justification for the aggressive instincts of males (for instance in Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant, *It's Good to Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity* (Moscow, ID: Cannon Press, 2021), 301), such a view flattens the eschatology of the New Testament.

4 John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

# Dumb and Dangerous

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**by T. David Gordon**

*The Dumbest Generation Grows Up: From Stupefied Youth to Dangerous Adults*, by Mark Bauerlein. Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2022.

When I saw a notice of Mark Bauerlein's new book, I saw the title (not the subtitle) and wondered if Dr. Bauerlein had changed his opinion since he wrote *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*.[2] When I read the subtitle, I realized he had not; if anything, the circumstance he describes in the recent volume is more dire than the circumstance that prompted his writing of the earlier volume, because the rootless, screen-lobotomized teens who dwelt in what he called an "adolescent cocoon" in the earlier volume are now adults (at least by a chronological definition), who enjoy voting rights. They were "stupified" in 2008; they are "dangerous" now.

Retirement has some advantages, and I am happy that Bauerlein's recent book appeared shortly after I retired, so I do not need to require it, as I did his earlier book, in my introductory course on media ecology. The students did not universally like the earlier volume, and I suspect they would not like the present one. In each, Bauerlein stoutly resists describing the digital generation with the usual congratulatory adulation many others have employed; to the contrary, the evidence is stronger than ever that many/most of that generation have been mis-educated, rather than educated.[3] Neil Postman had earlier observed that cultures have two curricula: the formal curriculum of the academy and the informal curriculum of their dominant cultural media; and Postman believed the former should question the latter. The academy should promote and facilitate an informed, critical perspective on the dominant media in one's culture. Since television was the dominant medium of Postman's day, he said, "Viewed in this way, television is not only a curriculum but *constitutes the major educational enterprise now being undertaken in the United States*."[4] The dominant medium now is the cluster of digital devices (and the social media they purvey), and Bauerlein regrets that the two curricula—both the dominant cultural medium and its educational curriculum—reinforce each other in their messianic expectations of digital media.

Bauerlein is as wary of what the digital media *replace* (reading itself as a neurological activity, literature as reflection on the conflicted nature of the human condition, and history as reflection on human imperfection[5]) as he is of what they actually *do*, and some sense of his perspective can be gleaned by observing his five chapter titles: Making Unhappy—and Dangerous—Adults; They Have a Dream; An Anti-Formation; The Psychological Novel; Multiculturalism or Malcolm X?

Were Bauerlein's voice the only one crying in the wilderness, we might conveniently dismiss it as idiosyncratic; but his voice is one in a chorus, joined to those of Christian Smith,[6] Maryanne

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=990.

2 Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under Thirty)* (New York: Tarcher, 2008).

3 A claim that is substantiated by interviews and the General Social Survey by Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—And What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria, 2018).

4 Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* (New York: Delacourte, 1979), 50, emphasis his.

5 Let us not forget that one of America's better-known popular historians, Barbara Tuchman, entitled her last book *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1985).

6 Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford: University Press, 2011).

Wolf,[7] Sherry Turkle,[8] Nellie Bowles,[9] Jaron Lanier,[10] Nicholas Carr,[11] Tim Challies,[12] Chris Hedges,[13] William Powers,[14] Tony Reinke,[15] Mari K. Swingle,[16] et al.

### Chapter One: Making Unhappy—and Dangerous—Adults

One of Bauerlein's repeated theses is that the Millennials did not make themselves who and what they are: parents, educators, and other adults failed to pass along to them any sense of cultural heritage. Parents allowed Instagram to shape their children; educators permitted Wikipedia to educate them; adults allowed digital devices and social media, informed by the natural interests of children and teenagers, to "shape" them shapelessly. Assuming the neutrality of the digital world, many adults thought what Chris Anderson (former editor of *Wired* magazine) did: "We thought we could control it. And this is beyond our power to control. This is going straight to the pleasure centers of the developing brain. This is beyond our capacity as parents to understand" (11). Many news outlets featured stories indicating that the CEOs of many of the tech companies were unwilling to abandon their own children to unrestrained digital activity: "As public schools serving poor and minority kids were pushing one-to-one laptop programs, the reporter observed, executives in Palo Alto and Los Altos were sending their children to vigilantly low-tech private campuses such as the Waldorf Schools" (11). Many such leaders of the digital industries were already aware, especially, of the addictive properties of such media, and Bill Maher said this: "The tycoons of social media have to stop pretending that they are friendly nerd-Gods building a better world and admit that they're just tobacco farmers in T-shirts selling an addictive product to children" (12).

Bauerlein, as a professor of English literature, has been interested in the question of reading; he participated in the studies that led to the National Endowment for the Arts to produce their Research Division Report #46, "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America," published in 2004. Regarding cognitive development, Bauerlein referred to Maryanne Wolf: "'The act of learning to read added an entirely new circuit to our hominid brain's repertoire,' said cognitive scientist Maryanne Wolf, and when we shifted from print reading to screen reading, that circuit was modified (as we shall discuss later, Wolf believes the modification causes damage)" (16).

Bauerlein's emphasis in this chapter, and throughout the book, is that the adults who were responsible for rearing the Millennials largely failed in doing so:

> To cut the young off from a living past was to deprive them of a profound and stabilizing understanding of life, of themselves. . . . to neglect the masterpieces of art and ideas, epic events and larger-than-life personages, was to level their enjoyments to the mundane. To allow their religious impulses to flicker, not to expose them to the orderly ministrations of Sunday mornings, was to leave them among

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7 Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper, 2007); *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

8 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011); *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

9 Nellie Bowles, "A Dark Consensus about Screens and Kids Begins to Emerge in Silicon Valley," *New York Times* 26 (October 2018).

10 Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2010); *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (New York: Holt, 2018).

11 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010).

12 Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family and the Digital World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

13 Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation, 2009).

14 William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

15 Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

16 Mari K. Swingle, *i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming, and Social Media Are Changing Our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 2016).

the "Nones," a label with sad undertones. (29)

### Chapter Two: They Have a Dream

This disturbing chapter is titled ironically, because the Millennials do not, in fact, have a dream. Their dream is no dream at all; it is closer to a nightmare. Unlike Dr. King, who dreamt of a better possible future, they are hopeless Marxists, mired in the belief that the "privileged" wish to enjoy privilege exclusively, that therefore nothing but the entire eradication of the current "system" can provide any hope (yet they know that there are entirely too many people unwilling to permit it to be destroyed). As Bauerlein put it:

> So they attached themselves to something else: a religion of sorts, a pugnacious, illiberal demand, a twenty-first-century American-youth version of, precisely, Utopia. . . . Like every Eden, though, it had a dark aspect: a fury toward anyone or anything that threatened to ruin this sacred preserve. Utopian justice is the harshest. (46–47)

When Bauerlein asked a graduate teaching assistant what protestors at Emory were so angry about:

> "Well," she answered, "they believe that everyone . . . deserves . . . to be happy." (58)
>
> *Everyone deserves to be happy*—there you go; a new rule of human existence, a binding but odd expectation—and unrealistic, too, because never, not ever, will everyone actually be happy. That occurs only in a place called heaven. (59, emphases and ellipses his)

Their utopian "beliefs," however, are unsubstantiated parroting of their group-speak and are not intellectually serious:

> The clichés certainly betray an absence of thought, but this mindlessness only makes their accusations all the harder to answer: you can't debate with obtuse people utterly convinced of their own rectitude. They don't want to debate, and they're not going to. (72)
>
> To label Millennial activists "socialists" is a mistake. It grants them way too much intellectual heft. It overlooks the deepest sources of their activism, the emotional, even anti-intellectual, side of utopianism. . . . It's a mistake, then, to call one-third to one-half of Millennials "socialists" or to assume they have acquired real knowledge of socialism and weighed socialist ideas. No, they are utopians, and they are utopians precisely because they haven't acquired any political knowledge or weighed any political ideas. (82)

Since their "beliefs" are not rational, they are insusceptible to rational debate or refutation, and this belief/desire for an unattainable utopia is what makes them, in Bauerlein's language, dangerous:

> Ignorance plus self-righteousness is a dangerous mix. As avid and unbending utopian desires go unfulfilled, you know what will happen next: idealism will slide into frustration, the promised happy fellowship to come veering into a merciless search for enemies who must be obstructing it; the positive will turn negative. (84)

"Cancel" culture is the product of this unfulfilled utopian longing. The unhappiness of Millennials (and their unhappiness is well-documented by Jean Twenge) is perceived to be due to those evil people who must be preventing the longed-for utopia; and such people can only be cancelled. Citing the 2020 American Worldview Inventory, Bauerlein says:

> . . . findings show Millennials—by their own admission—as far less tolerant than other generations. In addition, they are more likely to want to exact revenge when wronged, are less likely to keep a promise, and overall have less respect for others and for human life in general. (95)

This Lamechian tendency toward vengeance is surely evidence of grave spiritual danger. Jesus only cited two things that were unpardonable: the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (apparently a refer-

ence to persistent resistant to his grace) and not forgiving others: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14–15). Indeed, perhaps one reason for Millennials being so notoriously unchurched is that they find the Christian teaching on forgiveness to be entirely inimical to their angry, cancelling, vindictive belief-system.

### Chapter Three: An Anti-Formation

I found this less interesting and more depressing than the others, because I was familiar with its topic and depressed by it; indeed, the evidence for the non-education of American adolescents has been observed even since before Bauerlein's earlier book in 2008. Here are some of the lowlights:

- As of 2010, 16-to-18-year-olds spent 3.5 hours per day in "educational activities" but five hours and forty minutes in "leisure and sports" (104–5).
- Kaiser study: 45 minutes/day talking on phone, an hour and 51 minutes texting, 2.5 hours watching television, 7 minutes/day reading (110).
- (citing Arum and Roksa in *Academically Adrift*): referring to college students: ". . . we find that students are not spending a great deal of time outside of the classroom on their coursework: on average, they report spending only 12 hours per week studying" (109).
- Observed that 86% of HS students spend less than 6 hours/week in leisure reading (110).

Much of the remainder of this chapter dealt with the issues raised by E. D. Hirsch's 1987 *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. It traces the movement from a cultural canon to teaching "critical thinking skills," so the student is trained to ask suspicious questions but not trained in discerning whether a text—ancient or modern—contains any wisdom, or any insight into human behavior.

### Chapter Four: The Psychological Novel

This was perhaps the most compelling (if depressing) chapter of the book for me, as an individual who has always enjoyed reading fiction. Bauerlein argues that the novel (and, perhaps especially, the modern novel) discloses the mixture of motives that constitutes the human experience, the way Harold Bloom described Shakespeare as the inventor of the human, because of the way Shakespeare represented humans as conflicted (not simple) beings. I therefore find and found Bauerlein's argument here to be convincing. Since Millennials have not been exposed to much literature at all, they have an immature, childish understanding of the duplicitous nature of the human psyche; people are either entirely good or entirely evil, and if you make them "feel" uncomfortable, you are entirely evil and suited only for destruction (which, in their case, ordinarily takes the form of cancelling, rather than murdering).

Bauerlein recounts an interesting 2020 conversation he had with an old friend (now deceased), in which Bauerlein asked why the rioters seemed so angry:

> "Why are they so emotional, Bob? Why does a joke set them off?" . . . "Well," he drawled, "they haven't read enough literature." (168)
>
> But that was Bob's point, and it was easy to follow. Literature helps you get to know what people are like. Novels get you out of your own thoughts and into other people's heads. The fiction needn't be terribly profound nor the experience of reading earthshaking. . . . Follow a lot of these characters, enter vicariously into their circumstances, do it consistently for a few years, and you find that you've received a psychological coaching. (172)

Each art-form has its distinct merits and demerits. Novel (and short story) naturally does something that is entirely un-natural to film; the narrator takes the reader into the inner workings of another human's mind; and skilled authors display

therein the conflicted nature of our present human condition, giving us insight to our own flaws and empathy for some of the flaws of others.

> Too many hours of their adolescence were spent on a screen and not enough hours with fiction—that's the genesis of our closed-minded Millennials. They haven't undergone the literary formation that teaches one to interpret people cautiously, to withhold judgment until all the facts are in, to understand personality as multifaceted, a mix of positive and negative. . . . Miss Betsey in *David Copperfield*, for example, appears at first to be a brusque, cold woman, but later she is revealed to be a staunch and loving aunt, though her manner doesn't really improve. Literary readers learn to expect such variation, and it carries over to their actual lives. The stories they read encourage a more hesitant and careful reading of real-life characters. The young adult who doesn't read is more impatient, likes the snap judgment, and arrives early at a full verdict with full confidence. (189)

In Bauerlein's words, many/most film characters are "flat," whereas novel easily presents "round" characters: "It's a problem of depth. To our nonreading Millennial, everyone is a 'flat character.' That's all the youth-oriented screen gives him, surface beings with overt designs and words with no resonance" (190).

### Chapter Five: Multiculturalism or Malcolm X?

The basic thesis of this chapter is that history and literature connect us to our predecessors and thereby connect us to them and define us *by* them. He mentioned Ezra Pound's statement about Walt Whitman, "He *is* America" (206). The consequences of no past are no future; the individual is not at a place in a flowing river that has both past and future; the individual is in a mere puddle, and a small, disconnected one at that.

The chapter includes an interesting mini-biography of Malcolm X, who learned to read while he was in prison (for burglary), who took correspondence courses, and even a course in Latin. He also copied in his own hand an entire dictionary. "'I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life, . . . As I see it today, the ability to read awoke some long dormant craving to be mentally alive'" (242).[17] Reading connected Malcolm to more than his immediate circle of fellow burglars and caused him to raise broader issues of culture and cultural justice.

This chapter is similar to the third chapter on anti-formation:

> You can't leave nineteen-year-olds with no anchors. They need aged things that stabilize and ennoble them, such as American youth used to find in *The Columbian Orator*, the collection of ancient and modern writing and speeches used in nineteenth-century classrooms and which served teenage slave Frederick Douglass as a treasured (and secret) intellectual roadmap to freedom. (238)

This "dangerous" group of young adults is so because it is unmoored, unanchored, and uninformed, doomed with Narcissus to attempt to know the self only self-referentially, exhibiting the traits anticipated in George W. S. Trow's 1980 *Within the Context of No Context*.

Bauerlein's readers will form varying opinions about just how "dangerous" this generation is; but few will escape reading him without both concern and compassion for a generation that expects a utopia that cannot be found here and now. In the penultimate paragraph of the book, Bauerlein says: "Social progress requires not just indictments of injustices, but positive inspirations as well—from the very past that utopians condemn in toto. Without them, young people lose their balance, fall sway to *ressentiment*" (252).

Neil Postman was right in observing that widespread cultural media are a curriculum in their own right, a shaper of humans that ought to

17 Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine, 2015), 182.

be critically inspected by the academic curriculum. It is unlikely that the financially entrenched digital industries will encourage (or even permit) such inspection of their activities by the academic curriculum; the best we can realistically hope for is insights from individuals such as Mark Bauerlein.©

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# Theoretical-Practical Theology

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**by Ryan M. McGraw**

*Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 3: The Works of God and the Fall of Man*, by Peter van Mastricht. Ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester, vol. 3, 7 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021, xlvi + 631 pages, $38.00.

Classic Reformed theology is often different in character, presentation, and, sometimes, even in content from contemporary expressions of Reformed thought. This does not so much mark the absence of continuity in the Reformed faith as it does the fact that older authors lived literally in a different world than we do. Their scholastic methods and categories are often as foreign to us as our modern questions over things like gender and sexuality would have been to them. While older voices like Peter van Mastricht cannot address every issue facing the church today, they often bring a razor-like precision and depth of piety to the table that cannot fail to help us as we engage the Scriptures in the context of our modern world.

Matters related to creation and providence are particularly pressing at the present time. In addition to gender ethics, virtually every topic related to creation, mankind, and sin is controversial today. This includes things like human identity and the image of God, the days of creation, the covenant of works, the historical Adam, and many more. While van Mastricht could not have had modern controversies in view, he treats most of these topics without being weighed down by the polemics that press themselves upon us. For this reason, his theological project continues to have great potential for the church today, making an old voice a fresh one and bringing "outside counsel" to bear on our questions and concerns. This review evaluates both the content of Mastricht's third volume as well as the translated and edited form of his work, illustrating both areas of value and room for improvement.

Mastricht's content includes a wide-ranging and satisfying treatment of God's decrees and his works of creation and providence, concluding with the doctrine of sin. Continuing his distinct format, each chapter opens with exegesis of a particular passage of Scripture, followed by dogmatic, elenctic, and practical sections. The first part of the volume, which is book three of part one, includes twelve chapters spanning God's decrees, predestination, election, reprobation, creation, the days of creation, good angels, bad angels, the image of God, providence in general, and the covenant of nature, or covenant of works. Book four directs readers' attention to "man's apostasy from God" through sin. Its four large chapters explore the violation of the covenant of nature, original sin, actual sin, and the penalties of sin.

In the preface, the translator and editor note four distinctive points of Mastricht's work: "his mediating lapsarian position," his rejection of Copernicanism, his views of demons and magic, and

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=995.

"his doctrine of the third heaven" (xxvii). Regarding the first, Mastricht sought to adopt elements of both supra and infralapsarianism, attempting to cut through divisions among Reformed authors regarding the logical order of God's decrees as they respect redemption in Christ. Whether or not he succeeded is up for debate, since he posited an initial decree of election and reprobation to display God's glory (supralapsarian), followed by a later decree to elect and reprobate particular created and fallen individuals (infralapsarian). Regarding Copernicanism, Mastricht rejected the idea that the earth revolved around the sun on theological rather than scientific grounds, since the earth was the central focus of God's works of creation and redemption. Even rejecting his scientific conclusions, readers should appreciate his theological concerns. Demons and magic were important to Mastricht due to his stress on genuine spiritual warfare, and while excluding the power of miracles from demons, magic existed as a real influence of natural demonic power above human ability. As far as the third heaven, Mastricht taught that it was both a real created place in which God dwelt with glorified saints and angels. The translator and editor rightly flag these areas as marking distinct points of contribution to Reformed orthodoxy with relevance to contemporary issues.

At least a couple of doctrinal issues stand out for their pervasiveness in this book. One outstanding feature of Mastricht's work, common to Reformed orthodoxy but largely absent from Reformed theology in the past two hundred years, is his persistent appeal to the Trinity (e.g., 1, 3, 5, 57, 102–3, 117, 124, 156, 175, 254, 299, 303, 306, 310, 353, 370, 497). One interesting example of his appeal to the Trinity is in relation to man as God's image: hinting at God's Triunity through the simplicity of his soul while having many faculties, and in the distinction between his faculties and his essence. Both point to unity and plurality in God (299). Unlike Augustine's famous treatment of vestiges of the Trinity in man, Mastricht refused to make such parallels overly specific or concrete. Unity and diversity in a human soul imply, point to the fact, that unity and diversity existed in his Creator. Through countless such examples Mastricht always gives the impression that the Triune God is the central theme of systematic theology. Since the Bible, the Trinity, and Jesus Christ have always stood at the heart of any genuinely Christian theology, this refreshing feature continuously reminds readers that theology is about glorifying and knowing the Triune God. The other pervasive doctrinal feature is Mastricht's constant assertion and defense of the idea that God is not the author of sin (e.g., 9, 47, 88, 96, 219, 283, 319, 333–34, 424, 460, 465, 472, 485, 512, 541). Sin in relation to God's goodness and sovereignty has always been at the heart of the so-called "problem of evil" in Christian theology, and Mastricht provides a consistent and persistent Reformed answer to this issue. While this volume is filled with other profound theological insights, these two stand out as emphases that Mastricht seems to have prioritized as worth special attention.

Also noteworthy is the fact that some aspects of this volume illustrate the intersection of science and biblical exegesis, with which the church has wrestled in every age. Readers may find it surprising that Mastricht argued emphatically that "the Reformed deny" the theory of Copernicus, and Descartes in Mastricht's view, that the earth revolves around the sun (160, 171). He drew this conclusion from exegesis rather than from science, on the grounds that Scripture refers to the earth as fixed and unmoved. Though he regarded versions of the Copernican theory as "philosophical conjectures" (161), he referred to the alternative theory of the famous scientist, Tycho Brahe, as better fitting the phenomena in Scripture. Christians should conclude that Mastricht's principle that Scripture and exegesis take priority over science is sound. However, the issue is whether or not his interpretation of Scripture was sound in rejecting the revolution of the earth around the sun. As fixed and permanent, the earth is established and sure, yet this fact says nothing about the relationship between the earth and the sun in scientific terms. Proper use of Scripture often limits the range of conclusions we can accept through scientific investigation, but we must remember that Scripture

is not a scientific textbook. Instead, it aims to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ, equipping us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15–17). While we must decide other matters, such as the days of creation, on exegetical rather than scientific grounds, we must be wary of making Scripture say more than it does as well. Mastricht was right that the certain Scriptures always trump merely probable science, but his teaching on Copernicanism should chasten us into caution regarding how much scientific knowledge Scripture supplies us with. In the end, however, Mastricht rightly asserted that the earth, as man's dwelling place with God, is the central focus of the biblical narrative.

Finally in relation to content, the practical part of this work will likely always stand out to most readers, since this feature has been largely absent from most systematic theology in the past hundred years plus at least. Mastricht does not disappoint in this regard, furnishing us with imaginative and interesting uses of various doctrines. For instance, he concluded from God's decree that we should follow God's example by acting with wise counsel because "in this also we bear the image of God" (22). Even something incommunicable in God, like an eternal immutable decree, thus finds dim reflection in practical Christian living. Likewise, he noted that God's elect should imitate him in that we should choose for our companions in love those whom God has elected (75). Similarly, regarding providence, we should imitate God's attributes displayed in his providence as far as we are able in a creaturely way (340). However, Mastricht's practical application was not forced, but natural, and sometimes indirect for that reason. For example, in applying the covenant of works, he noted that it is "not so much practical, as it is the basis and foundation of all the practice which belongs to the states that succeed it, namely those of sin and grace, inasmuch as that practice cannot, apart from a knowledge of the covenant of nature, set any roots in our heart" (403). Even such indirect application could remind readers why various doctrines were important to them on a wider scale.

Turning to the translated and edited form of the work, the translation and organization of the material is solid and easy to follow, with a few critical caveats. In some places editorial comments would have made this seventeenth-century work more accessible to modern readers. For instance, Mastricht ascribed vegetative and sensitive souls to animals in his discussion of the days of creation (167–68, 173, 181, 257). Flowing from Aristotelian categories, familiar at the time, vegetative souls referred to a mere principle of life, while sensitive souls distinguished animal life from plant life. Mankind alone among physical living things possessed rational souls, which lay at the heart of being God's image. In modern terms, Mastricht was not teaching that animals had "souls" like human beings do. He merely followed the customary categories current in his time for distinguishing various classes of living things, which are no longer familiar to most of us. Explaining such facts would make better sense out of Mastricht's inclusion of plants under "ensouled things" (288). The same comment applies to antiquated or technical or historical terms like "genethliacs" (172), "microcosm" (254), "positive law" (359–60), "ambrosia" (385), and "the fabulous revelations of Brigitta" (471). Mastricht lived in a very different philosophical, scientific, and historical world than we do, which requires some explanation.

In a few places, translating Latin terms more literally would have conveyed a clearer meaning. The example that comes to mind is Mastricht's assertion, "the Decalogue as the substance [*materiam*] of the covenant of works" (396). "Material" would likely be a better translation here, since Mastricht believed that the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of grace, though the epitome of the law under this covenant was identical to the law under the covenant of works. "Substance" could lead some modern readers to assume that he meant that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works. Instead, he believed that the law and terms of the covenant of works were published under Moses, only to a different end than they were under Adam (389). "Material" in the first reference is likely opposed to "form," indicating that the components of the covenant of works were present without formally placing Israel under that

covenant. Admittedly, this is a thorny question in historical theology related to seventeenth-century covenant theology, with many modern readers missing the nuances of older Reformed views on this point. This point simply illustrates the difficulty inherent in translating theological Latin into English.

Lastly, with respect to form, readers should learn what to expect from Mastricht in order to know how to use his work. The dust jacket to this set of books famously cites Jonathan Edwards as saying that Mastricht is "better than Turretin." Yet this statement can be potentially misleading because these two authors had very different aims in their theological works. Mastricht is better than Turretin but, for modern readers, likely only after reading Turretin. Mastricht is often less explicit than Turretin in his explanations, but fuller than Turretin in his exposition and application. For example, while Mastricht stated that second or subordinate causes are both necessary and contingent in different respects (331), Turretin added that they are contingent in production (divided sense) but necessary in the event (composite sense). Mastricht hinted at this common distinction by appealing to the "divided" and "composite" sense of an action elsewhere (e.g., 334, 425, 527). However, where Mastricht stated a fact using and assuming the meaning of technical terms, Turretin often gave the explanation of the fact as well as of the terms. This is true also where Mastricht assumes ideas like habitual and actual sin, without providing precise definitions for them or distinct explanations of them (492). In short, Mastricht is less systematic and precise than Turretin, while he is fuller in the scope of the material he treats. Turretin can help readers understand Mastricht better, while Mastricht can supply elements muted by the narrow scope of Turretin's work.

Volume 3 of Mastricht's theological magnum opus will spur readers simultaneously to deep contemplation of the Reformed faith and to heart-felt devotion to the Triune God. He will not answer every question that a modern audience has, but he will promote theological maturity and Christian piety among readers who live in a different world but under the same Lord of all. ☉

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# One More Time: If Presbyterians Are Evangelical, Why Aren't Evangelicals Presbyterian?

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**by Darryl G. Hart**

*Reformed & Evangelical Across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America*, by Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson, III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022, xix + 364 pages, $29.99, paper.

Presbyterian history does not come packaged in tidy, dispensable containers, like the processed meals that David Bowman (played by Keir Dullea) ate on the spaceship in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Historians generally start by locating a given Presbyterian communion's ties, first, to Scotland. For American Presbyterians, only the Seceders (ARPC) and the Covenanters (RPCNA) still take historical cues directly from Scottish church history, though

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=994.

in each of these instances Seceders and Covenanters do not identify with the Church of Scotland but with groups that ministered outside the Kirk. American Presbyterians—the PCUSA and its descendants, the OPC and the PCA—evolved more or less as melting pot churches with leaders from Scottish, Ulster, and English backgrounds (along with the French, German, Hungarian, Armenian, and other ethnic groups that would find a home among the American branches of Presbyterianism). Canadian Presbyterianism is decidedly different from the American article in this respect. The communions that united to form the Presbyterian Church of Canada in 1875 were all of distinctly Scottish background (Kirk, Seceder, Free) and had to overcome rivalries inherited from the Old World. Attachment to Scotland persists in some way for any denomination in Canada or the United States. Most histories of Presbyterianism in the New World imagine and, in some cases, draw direct connections to the original Presbyterian churches of sixteenth-century Scotland along with inspiration supplied by John Calvin's church polity for Geneva's churches.

The fly in the ointment of Presbyterian history, already unkempt in its own right thanks to the tribulations of religious establishment, is Presbyterianism's relationship to evangelicalism. If someone wants to understand the Reformation simply as evangelical—an interpretation that will struggle to make sense of Anglicanism and Lutheranism—then the difficulties disappear. But if evangelicalism is a form of pietism, and if it took shape in the awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and if it came into its own after World War II in the work of Billy Graham (who was baptized as a Presbyterian infant), then the overlap between evangelicalism and Presbyterianism is anything but simple. Throw into the mix American Presbyterians splitting over the awakenings inspired both by George Whitefield (Old vs. New Side, 1741) and Charles Finney (Old vs. New School, 1837), and the picture begins to look like something painted by Picasso in the Cubist period. Evangelicalism is its own thing in the history of Christianity, just as Presbyterianism. To be sure, many Presbyterians identify as evangelical. Many of those same Presbyterians may be surprised how many evangelicals reject Presbyterianism.

Such a lengthy introduction to a review of *Reformed and Evangelical* is necessary if only to capture how breathtaking the narrative of this book is. Instead of a rocky path that negotiates hill and dale, this book presents a chronology that runs smoothly, never far from a rest-stop, from John Knox to Harold John Ockenga (first president of Fuller Seminary and the National Association of Evangelicals). Along the way, the PCUSA supplies much of the institutional coherence.

To underscore how gobsmacking this argument is, consider that J. Gresham Machen receives barely a mention while his student, Ockenga, is a prominent figure. In a chapter on the fundamentalist controversy, that runs from debates about inerrancy (Charles Briggs versus B. B. Warfield) to the Scopes Trial, Machen shows up on two pages, once in connection with the founding of the League of Evangelical Students, the other in a sentence about the creation of Westminster Seminary. Nowhere do the authors discuss Machen's book *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), which Sydney Ahlstrom called the "chief theological ornament" of fundamentalism. Machen makes one more appearance as a passing comment about the 1930 missions controversy that led to the OPC. In contrast, Ockenga, who studied with Machen at Princeton and Westminster and drew inspiration from Old Princeton's commitment to a scholarly defense of Protestant orthodoxy for Fuller Seminary, receives more attention as part of the authors' coverage of the neo-evangelical movement and its various institutions—the National Association of Evangelicals (Ockenga was its first president); Fuller Seminary (the founding president), and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (the first president of the merged Gordon and Conwell divinity schools). Machen was a Presbyterian his entire life. Ockenga was Presbyterian for a brief period, 1931–1936, before ministering as a Congregationalist for the better part of his life. A reader could well receive the impression that Ockenga was more "Reformed and evangelical"

than Machen.

That the book does not include the history of Puritanism and Congregationalism under the umbrella of "Reformed and evangelical," but devotes more attention to post–World War II evangelicalism than to sideline Presbyterians (such as the OPC and PCA), is indicative of the authors' outlook. Although their purpose is to provide an up-to-date history of Presbyterianism, one that would "help students and Christian leaders grasp the thread" of such a difficult plot, their title is likely more indicative of a desire to tell the history of American Presbyterianism in a way that accents evangelicalism's ecumenical side more than Presbyterian cussedness. That move also helps the authors to avoid a narrative of declension—Presbyterianism was once great (the Scottish Reformation of Knox) but then fell on hard times (the squishiness of mainline Presbyterianism). But if post–World War II evangelicalism is the culmination of Reformed and evangelical convictions, then this book is what such a perspective might yield.

That latter approach, ironically, makes the first four chapters (on Scotland and England) a bit of a non-sequitur for the American part of the story (from page 100 on). Those early chapters document well the recalcitrant side of Presbyterianism as it emerged in Scotland, England, and Ireland as an effort to carry out further reforms in those respective national churches. In the process, Presbyterians were hard to please. They took issue with any notion that a monarch could be the head of the church (they reserved that status for Christ). Presbyterians were also constantly complaining about the dangers of episcopacy and pointed out frequently the defects of specific bishops (especially if they imposed prayer books). Meanwhile, Presbyterians did not agree among themselves and by 1750 had produced dissenting communions such as the Covenanters (Reformed Presbyterian), Seceders (Associate Reformed), and the Relief church. Behind those divisions were often elaborate and thoughtful arguments for maintaining the integrity of Presbyterian witness.

From here the authors switch course dramatically and bring into the Presbyterian narrative the awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (even as they switch to the United States to the exclusion of Canadian Presbyterianism). One thread that connects revivals to Presbyterianism is the Scottish communion season. That tie is much less evident in the revivals associated with Finney a century later. The authors do acknowledge that these so-called "Great" awakenings split Presbyterians for a time (New Side vs. Old Side; New School vs. Old School). But the book does little to explain why some Presbyterians, on grounds supplied by their own doctrine and practice, might contend that the categories, Reformed and evangelical, are at odds in important respects.

After the Civil War, a section of the book that allows the authors to cover debates about slavery, the book reads more like the history of the United States and her Presbyterian churches. The authors let national politics set the categories—war, immigration, urbanization, industrialization, feminism, civil rights—for understanding how Presbyterians ministered during this period. At the same time, the book chronicles the ways in which mainline Presbyterians and evangelicals cooperated after World War II to forge a conservative Protestant voice within American Christianity.

By the end of the book, the authors provide readers with the "continuities, shared passions, and underlying similarities" that tie Presbyterians and evangelicals together. These themes provide the rationale for calling Presbyterianism evangelical and why so many Presbyterians identify as evangelical: biblical authority, support for spiritual renewal, missions, theological seriousness, and cultural transformation. Had these topics set the agenda for the book from the start, the authors' story would have more coherence than it does. But because some of them—spiritual renewal, missions, and cultural transformation—were late comers to Presbyterianism, their explanatory power is limited. This is especially so since cultural transformation itself was a weak version of the ideal of Christendom that informed Presbyterianism originally embodied. It was the creation of twentieth-century (non-evangelical) authors, such as Abraham Kuyper and H. Richard Niebuhr, partly to com-

pensate for the absence of an established church. Cultural transformation was the best Presbyterians and Reformed could do outside the political establishment.

The authors' conclusion is instructive for assessing the book more generally. As commendable as their efforts to juggle the many balls of Presbyterian history, their finished product reads in a Whiggish manner, as if a broad Presbyterianism is what sixteenth-century reformers originally had in mind. Just as notable is the authors' approval of the post–World War II neo-evangelical movement that attempted to bridge gaps among mainline and sideline Presbyterians through a series of large interdenominational institutions. That era of evangelicalism may well be on its last legs as flagship neo-evangelical seminaries such as Fuller, Gordon-Conwell, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity face economic challenges perhaps as dire as theological incoherence. The recent decision by the Presbyterian Church in America to leave the NAE is another sign that the "Reformed-and-Evangelical" momentum of the second half of the twentieth century has run out of steam. If so, if evangelicalism no longer adds vigor and purpose to Presbyterianism, then the authors of *Reformed and Evangelical* have not prepared readers well for the next chapter of American Presbyterian history. Ⓢ

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# Theology in a Time of Persecution

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**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

*The Theology of the Huguenot Refuge: From the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to the Edict of Versailles*. Reformed Historical-Theological Studies, edited by Martin I. Klauber. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2020, viii + 334 pages, $25.00, paper.

In 1988, New Rochelle, New York, celebrated the tercentenary of the Huguenot founding of the city, based on the immigration of refugees from La Rochelle, France, in 1688.[2] I was asked to present lectures at the public library, which I did in four parts: "The Huguenot Christian," "The Huguenot Family and Education," "The Huguenot Citizen," and "The Huguenot Craftsman." The research for these lectures was done largely at the libraries of Huguenot Society of America and the Huguenot–Thomas Paine Historical Association of New Rochelle. The background of the refugees in France was not the focus of the lectures since I was investigating the refugees in New Rochelle, New York. So the present volume under review has refreshed and expanded my knowledge and appreciation of the situation in France during the long period of persecution from 1685 to 1787. It is easy to forget that although the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 represented the end of religious wars in Europe, persecution by various governments did not cease.

The Huguenot theology developed in France, and by the exiles, is located in what Richard Muller calls the second phase of high orthodoxy

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=996.

2 This review was originally published in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Volume 31 (2020): 227–33.

(1685–1725) when post-Reformation orthodoxy was losing intellectual dominance in the church (142).[3] Even though the period of persecution went all the way to 1787, the theologians cited in this volume wrote during this period of high orthodoxy.

The title of the book is a bit misleading. There is much more history than theology in this fascinating volume. Five very informative chapters look at the history of the Huguenot refuge from various perspectives; they are followed by seven chapters that explore the theology and activity of the exiled French Reformed churches through the lens of the individual lives of prominent theologians and preachers. The book is really a chronicle of many dimensions, highlighting theological themes appropriate to the Huguenot situation.

The importance of the volume lies in the ways in which aspects of Reformed theology were accentuated and amplified by the experience of the Huguenots who remained in France, and the refugees. Thus, the theology of comfort in persecution, the doctrines of religious tolerance, and the relationship between church and state feature prominently in the stories of the seven prominent preachers and theologians. The final chapter examines the first sermon of the fiery preacher Antoine Court.

## A Brief Sketch of the History of the Huguenot Refuge

A few odd terms that are unique to the French Huguenot church of the seventeenth century appear in the book. Temple, for example, is the name for a church building. The volume is meticulously researched and footnoted with an excellent selected bibliography. Footnotes are at the bottom of the page for easy access.

The Edict of Nantes (1598), its revocation, the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685), and the Edict of Versailles or Tolerance (1787) mark the boundaries of this history. In 1598, "the best-loved king of France, Henry IV," proclaimed the Edict of Nantes (9). The edict granted French Reformed Christians, known as Huguenots, the freedom to worship, establish educational institutions, and hold colloquies and synods in certain places. Some cities were allowed to be armed, and Huguenot judges were appointed to some courts (9). Rather than religious toleration, the edict was a peace settlement that ended a decades-long war (10). However, this did not end the controversies or the conflicts between the Reformed and Roman Catholic factions in France.

For example, La Rochelle resisted the return of Roman Catholicism until its surrender in 1628. From 1629 on, the Huguenots throughout France were "shorn of their military power" (19–20). After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Huguenots experienced a period of peace. However, after 1661, Louis XIV eroded the liberties of the Edict of Nantes, enticing converts from Protestantism to Catholicism, closing Reformed churches (temples), and forcing some Reformed pastors to leave the country (24–25). In 1681, French soldiers, known as the *dragonnades*, began persecuting Huguenots by entering and living in their homes and pillaging and abusing their inhabitants (25, 39–40).

Finally, in 1685 the king revoked the Edict of Nantes. Reformed pastors were given two weeks to leave or deny their faith; a minority of Huguenots chose to convert to Roman Catholicism, and a few chose imprisonment. Pastors who refused to leave or convert were executed; ordinary Christians were made galley slaves. Church (temple) and school buildings were destroyed. Huguenots began to emigrate to the Netherlands, Switzerland, Brandenburg-Prussia, Hesse, the Palatinate, England, Ireland, and the American colonies of Virginia, New York, Massachusetts, and North Carolina (40–44), thus dividing them between the exiles and those who chose to remain in France (26–27). From peasants to craftsmen and professionals, the Huguenots proved a blessing to most of the places of their exile (44–46).

Chapter 3 explores the Camisard rebellion, the rebellion of the peasants of the mountains of

3 See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume One, Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 30–32.

Languedoc (coastal region in southern France, extending from Provence to the Pyrenees Mountains and the border with Spain). They were Reformed Protestants without pastors of ecclesiastical structure who ambushed royal patrols and burned Roman Catholic churches (51). Under the influence of the apocalyptic views of Rotterdam exile Pierre Jurieu, itinerant preachers, known as *prédicants*, like Claude Brousson, preached that the persecuted Huguenots, known as the "desert church," were represented in the Book of Revelation as part of end-times events (54). His charismatic, prophetic preaching spawned a generation of self-proclaimed prophets, many of whom were women and children, versed in apocalyptic biblical vocabulary (56). In the end, these beleaguered, unorganized Protestants surrendered, but they formed the "base on which Antoine Court and the pastors 'of the Desert' would attempt to rebuild the shattered Reformed church in France" (68–69).

Apart from those who converted to Catholicism, the remnant, known as the "Church of the Desert," worshipped and held Bible studies clandestinely (28–30). Chapter 4 focuses on this church, whose existence was entirely denied by the French throne (71). Despite 130,000 Protestants being "officially" converted in the September after the revocation (1685), the church went underground and survived for over a century (72). Pauline Duley-Haour helpfully divides the period of persecution into three eras: 1) 1685–1715, thirty years of the "relative absence and silence for the exiled pastors," a time of "isolation and sometimes despair for French Protestantism"; 2) 1715–44, a period in which several pastors restored the discipline of the French Reformed churches, along with the support of the exiled churches and the Protestant churches of Europe; 3) 1744 to the French Revolution, the church was emboldened to make their presence more public and seek legal status (72).

Several important preachers led in the preservation of the church during its desert period. Pierre Jurieu, exiled refugee pastor in Rotterdam, published letters of pastoral encouragement to the desert church. In France, preachers such as Claude Brousson risked their lives to minister to the persecuted church (73–77). During the period of reconstruction, Antoine Court initiated reform of the French Reformed church at the Synod of the Desert (1715). The "reinstitutionalization was one of the strongest factors in preserving Protestantism in France" (89). From 1744 until the French Revolution, the desert church made a broad appeal for support to the exiled Huguenot churches and the Protestant churches of Europe.

Chapter 5 completes the historical section by exploring the conclusion of the desert church history with the Edict of Versailles or Tolerance of 1787. Marjan Blok makes a very important point: "the use of the word *tolerance* already implies a superior position of some sort, assuming the power to allow others a measure of existence. The word *pluralism* may hence be more accurate in general. For the study at hand, *tolerance* is likely the more appropriate term" (91, fn. 2).

The king's desire to have a unified religion in his realm had proved untenable, and thus, over time, he was forced to move toward pluralism (92). Blok traces the origins of the idea of religious tolerance and notes that the invention of the printing press played a crucial role in the movement toward pluralism (94). Enlightenment thought exemplified in Voltaire was a major component in this transformation, but Huguenot theology also made a significant contribution. While the Edict of Versailles failed to grant full citizenship to Huguenots, it was a move in the right direction.

### The Theology of Eight Huguenots

In chapter 6, Martin Klauber describes the ministry of Pierre Jurieu (1637–1713) as a preacher of apocalypticism and "one of the most prominent voices of the exiled Huguenots" (114). Jurieu wanted the Reformed church to be the official church of France. He ardently believed that the pope was the antichrist (119). He interpreted parts of the Book of Revelation as a prophecy of the Huguenot situation (120). Unlike most of his peers, he supported the miraculous events connected with the prophets of the Cévennes of Languedoc.

In chapter 7, David Martin (1639–1721) is presented by Richard Muller as typical of the Reformed Huguenot exiled pastors, who ministered at a distance via the written and printed word. In true Post-Reformation orthodox form, he was first and foremost an exegete of the biblical text in the context of the biblical languages, commentaries, and church fathers (129). Muller has been a most persuasive apologist for the biblical orthodoxy of the so-called Scholastic theologians of the Post-Reformation era. With his keen insight into hermeneutical concerns, he is alert to Martin's opposition to the "historical-critical exegesis" (136). Thus, "Martin sought to oppose the attraction of rationalist argumentation against Christian doctrine and piety" (140). Muller's chapter is among the most theologically oriented in the book. Martin's theology "bears witness to the philosophical transformation of Reformed orthodoxy in the waning years of Protestant scholasticism" (142). The challenge of Cartesian rationalism (of René Descartes) was coordinated by Martin, as is seen in his assertion that "'Divine Revelation' offers 'doctrines infinitely higher than natural Reason'" (143). "The presence of both a priori and a posteriori patterns of argument in Martin's *Traité de la religion naturelle* (*Treatise on Natural Religion*) is quite characteristic of the Cartesian Reformed theologies of the era" (146). Martin sought to overcome the doubts of the persecuted Huguenots by using proofs of the existence of God (145).

Claude Brousson (1647–98) was the "bellicose dove" in Bryan Strayer's account in chapter 8. He risked his life as a lawyer turned preacher in a way that few others did during this era. He sought, as an ardent Calvinist, to help reorganize the church of the desert (153). As a gifted lawyer, he successfully resisted very attractive bribes to convert to Roman Catholicism (156). He advocated obedience to the government, except where it demanded what was contrary to the Word of God (159). But he launched a powerful campaign against revocation of the Edict of Nantes, citing the perpetuity of the edict stated in the document itself (160). He eventually personally renounced the use of force in defying the king, while enlisting the help of other armed Huguenots to fight his battles (167–68). He advocated a "carefully reasoned . . . plain-speaking, hard-hitting, prophecy-laden style of preaching" (172). He was martyred in 1698 (181).

In chapter 9, another of the three chapters written by Klauber, Jacques Basnage (1653–1723) is described as heir to "distinguished lawyers and Huguenot pastors" (183). He was educated at the Reformed Academy of Saumur and the Academy of Geneva, which exposed him to the debates surrounding the adoption of the Helvetic Formula Consensus, in which Pierre du Moulin opposed the hypothetical universalism of Moïse Amyraut (184). As a pastor, Basnage also refuted subtle arguments luring Huguenots into the Roman Catholic fold as *nouveaux convertis* (188, 191). He advocated trusting God in the worst circumstances of the persecuted French Protestant church (189). He did allow that one could be a *nouveaux convertis* as long as one "professed one's true faith in public and refused to participate in the Mass" (193). The Mass, Basnage insisted, was idolatrous (194) and insulted the perfect efficacy of the cross of Christ (199). In his effort to comfort Huguenots who remained in France, he also "advised them to flee rather than remain subject to such enormous pressure to abjure their beliefs" (200).

In chapter 10, John Roney shows the influence of three major works of Jacques Abbadie (1654–1727) that influenced the progress of religious freedom in Europe. Remarkably, his writing had a "wide appeal among both Protestants and roan Catholics" (201). The first volume, *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (*Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion*), was a work of apologetics written during Abbadie's pastorate in Berlin and published in 1684.

His second volume, *L'Art de se connoître soiméme; ou, la recherche des sources de la morale* (*The Art of Knowing Yourself; or, The Search for the Sources of Morality*), was composed during his ministry in England and Ireland and published in 1692. "Abbadie reflected traditional Reformed theology and also engaged the currents of contemporary intellectual thought" (201). He interacted with the rationalism and "more radical ideas" of

René Descartes (1596–1650) and especially the pantheism of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) (206). He responded brilliantly to the challenges of the early Enlightenment presented by "a small but vocal group of atheists . . . , Deists, and Socinians who had employed the methods of Stoicism and Epicureanism to establish an understanding of a viable social system" (208). Abbadie also defended the inspiration of Scripture and the deity of Christ.

The third volume, *Défense de la Nation Britannique ou les droits de 'Dieu, de la nature, & de la societé clairement établis au sujet de la revolution d'Angleterre, contre l'auteur de l'avis important aux Refugiés* (*Defense of the British Nation or the clearly established rights of God, Nature, & Society regarding the Revolution of England, against the author of the Important Notice to Refugees*), was also written during this same period in England and Ireland and published in 1693. This work "became one of the most important arguments in support of William of Orange and Mary Stuart's accession to the throne in England's Glorious Revolution" (201).

Roney presents an interesting discussion of the influence and presence of Aristotelian categories in Post-Reformation dogmatics (211–12). He rightly refuses to condemn the Reformed scholastics as rationalistic, concluding: "Abbadie's appropriation of Aristotelian logic offered a common field of argument in which he could engage skeptics in his day" (212). This chapter is on a par with Muller's in terms of theological analysis, demonstrating the important legacy of Abbadie in defending historic Christianity and promoting religious freedom.

Daniel de Superville (1657–1728) spent most of his career as an exile in Rotterdam, according to Martin Klauber in chapter 11 (225), but he had been educated initially at the Reformed school in Saumur, where he was born. The school was made famous by "its illustrious and controversial faculty, led by Moise Amyraut" (225). Superville then studied at the Academy of Geneva in the midst of the controversial adoption of the Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675). This confession condemned some of the errors taught in Saumur, including Amyraut's hypothetical universalism, mentioned in chapter 9 (226). Having escaped the persecution that eventually came to Saumur, he generally avoided controversy and focused on consoling the exiles in the large church in Rotterdam and the persecuted Huguenots in France (228). This was done through publishing sermons and letters under three major titles: *On the Duties of the Afflicted Church* (1691), *The Truths and Duties of Religion* (1706), and *The True Communicant* (1718) (229). Thus, he developed a theology of consolation, exploring themes such as God's providence, the vanity of the world, and devotion to Christ.

This chapter, in a pointed way, shows how history shapes theological concerns. For Superville, these concerns expressed in his sermons "displayed an amazing degree of empathy for the displaced French Huguenots" (240).

Michael Haykin describes "extraordinary pulpit oratory" of Jacques Saurin (1677–1730) in chapter 12. After fleeing France with his parents at age nine, he studied in Calvin's Academy, graduated with high honors, and ended up taking a call to the ministry in London. He went on to become the chaplain in the royal palace of the House of Orange (245). The religious tolerance of the Netherlands also provided fertile soil for the rejection of religious authority (247–48). Saurin sought to replace autonomous reason with reason subordinated to the authority of the Bible.

Saurin's preaching emphasized the love of God, especially as it has been revealed through the person Jesus Christ and his work on the cross. He asserts that the mystery of God's love for sinners demonstrated by the cross could never be discovered by the reasoning of the greatest philosophers (250).

The final chapter (13), by Otto Selles, explores the preaching of Antoine Court (1695–1760) through Court's first sermon. While he begins by declaring that "Court was no theologian," he describes Court at age ten being known in his town as "Calvin's eldest son" (257). At age twenty, the autodidact "turned a meeting of fellow preachers into what has become known as the 'first synod' of the Church of the Desert" (258). Court "effectively pivoted the Desert churches away from both

armed rebellion and worship based on extemporaneous prophetic preaching" (260). He almost single-handedly, along with Claude Brousson of chapter 8, restored order to the Desert church, demonstrating that the church that abandons the means of grace and the basic ecclesiastical structure of the New Testament will not survive.

Court's first sermon is given in full, based on the text of Hebrews 10:25: "Let us not abandon our mutual assemblies, as some have the habit" (266–82). Court's knowledge of Scripture (learned initially at the knee of his mother) is extensive, and his quotations from the Reformers and the Fathers (no doubt due to two years spent in exile in Geneva) show what a quick study this zealous young man was. He understood the mode of the church's existence as one of pilgrimage. This serves as an inspiration to every pastor who preaches from week to week in an increasingly hostile environment.

This volume reminds us of the special importance of Reformed orthodoxy to God's people in extremely difficult times. The presence of the French Confession of Faith (1559), trained pastor-preachers, and the means of grace in an organized church—these are what sustain the church at all times, but especially in hard times. The seven pastor-theologians portrayed in this book were also, and really foremost, preachers who desired to bring strength and comfort to Christians in France as well as the exiles to whom they directly ministered. Brousson and Court, of course, were exceptions, since they risked their lives by ministering to the Church of the Desert in France.

Evil powers during the Huguenot refuge sought to cancel the truth of God's Word through political force, similar to the soft persecution of contemporary forces like cancel-culture in America today. We may apply the same robust theology to ourselves as we endure the hardship our Savior told us we would inevitably face in every culture and under even the most benevolent governments. Biblically, the church of Jesus Christ is always the church of "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). This volume simply amplifies the importance of the means God has provided for his church in this present evil age. I highly recommend this fascinating, inspiring, and detailed exploration of the French Huguenots of the refuge. ⓢ

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# Avoiding the Tyranny of the Attention Racket

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**by T. David Gordon**

*Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place*, by Felicia Wu Song. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021, xii + 216 pages, $24.00, paper.

In my almost-twenty years of teaching an introductory college course on Media Ecology, among the most delightful aspects of the discipline is how interdisciplinary it actually is. It is hardly recognized at all in many universities and/or exists only at the graduate level, which has allowed it to avoid and evade being pigeon-holed into either the humanities or STEM, and then more so into its own (isolated) department. My most recent syllabus for the course contains a twenty-page bibliog-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1002.

raphy that includes authors from fields as disparate as neurobiology and theology, English literature and economics, sociology and history, communications studies and psychology. For polymaths, the field is an absolute delight, because it appears to attract from all fields those who are interested in human behavior and how that behavior is cultivated differently by different media environments or ecologies. One of the "principles" media ecologists discover is that all media change is environmental or total (not additive), that we shape media and they shape us. Its corollary is that all changes in human media create winners and losers.

Felicia Wu Song, a professor of sociology at Westmont College, is well-qualified to write this book. Her professional training in sociology (University of Virginia, previous degrees at Yale and Northwestern) has not only cultivated an interest in human behavior, but it has also refined her ability to evaluate the environments or ecologies that cultivate such human behavior. Additionally, she has two decades of experience teaching on Internet and Society, which I would call "Media Ecology," especially since her personal biography mentions her indebtedness to Marshall McLuhan, whose *The Medium Is the Massage* she "stumbled upon" in 1995.

In addition to her academic competence, Song is widely read in several areas that pertain to this important book, including:

- familiarity with important contemporary or recently deceased observers of American culture, such as Charles Murray, Peter Berger, James Davison Hunter, James K. A. Smith, et al.;
- familiarity with the significant contributors to the field of Media Ecology, such as Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, Jacques Ellul, Walter Ong, Sherry Turkle, et al.;
- familiarity with the growing literature sharply critical of the digital industry (of which many were once a part, such as Jaron Lanier, Susan Moeller, Catherine Price, David Greenfield, Matt Richtel, et al.);
- familiarity with significant observers of the human condition, such as Aristotle, Augustine, Pascal, Henry David Thoreau, Hannah Arendt, et al.;
- and familiarity with a broad range of writers about Christian spirituality, such as C. S. Lewis, Carl Rahner, Jürgen Habermas, James H. Cone, Richard Foster, Tish Harrison Warren, et al.

While her obviously broad range of understanding is impressive, more so perhaps is that the book is not at all "academic" in tone; many readers will not even notice how well-read Song is, and the uncluttered, neologism-free nature of her writing style made me doubt momentarily that she was/is a sociologist.

The book is divided into two parts: Part I consists of three chapters describing the present digital situation (and the commercial motivations behind it), and Part II containing a Christian assessment of the situation and how to live Christianly in the situation. Her chapter titles (with their sub-titles) are both engaging and instructive:

PART I

1. Being at Altitude: Understanding the Digital Ecology
2. The Terms of Agreement: What Digital Media Companies Have Known All Along
3. The Industrialization of You and Me: How Social Media Makes Relationships a Business

PART II

4. The Good News
5. Created for Communion, Settling for Connection: A Theological Anthropology
6. Digital Practices as (Secular) Liturgy
7. Reimagining Time and Attention: Soul Formation in a Culture of Productivity
8. Embodied and Embedded: Transforming Sites of Faithful Presence and Sacred Spaces
9. The Church as Counterliturgy: Alternative Futures of Faith Communities

Many chapters are followed by what she calls "The Freedom Project: Experiments in Praxis," which grew out of her twenty years of teaching and contain a page or two of thoughtful questions and/

or suggested experiments for her students, either to aid in understanding how addictive, narcissistic, and totalitarian the digital culture/"liturgy" is or in finding ways of replacing or augmenting digital culture with a more distinctively Christian one. I especially resonated with these, because in my eighteen consecutive years of teaching "Christ and the Media," I assigned similar "experiments" that I labeled as such, especially things like weekend "fasts" or "sabbaticals" from any digital connections or even two-month fasts from one form of digital entertainment (streaming films, computer games, et al.) and one form of social media (SnapChat, Facebook, Instagram, et al.), with concise reflections on the experiments.

For those who have not yet read the growing critical and/or cautionary literature about the digital culture, the third chapter ("The Industrialization of You and Me") will be the most informative and the most disturbing. What we once called "The Information Superhighway" does not buy and sell information; it buys and sells our *attention* and competes for it with the aid of neurobiologists, sociologists, and other experts in human behavior. The industry does not spy on us (extracting information from nearly every touch we make) for the purpose of bribing us; it does not spy on us in order to convict us in a court of law; it spies on us in order to know what digital messages and advertisements would likely cause us to spend money, and then it sells this information to those who desire to have our money. Even when their algorithms "miss," as it were, and we stoutly resist several links and ads, the industry has still won, because it normalizes its intrusions into our lives. Even when we decline the offer or resist clicking a link, the industry, for that moment, still has attention that otherwise might have been directed to a book, a symphony, a loved one, or anything else. Even when a friend or family member chooses not to answer the phone, its alarm has disrupted the conversation, even for the several seconds it takes to notice that the call is not emergent, and often the thread of the conversation is lost and cannot be recovered. Every decision about posting a photo to some social media platform consumes some of our time, some of our attention, and some of our intellectual energy, each of which could have been (and would have been) expended otherwise.

In one of the most remarkable examples ever of the emperor's new clothes, many people blithely submit to such monopolizing of our attention, and yet then deny that they have done so. As Song points out, emerging adults spend (on average) one-third of each waking day (five hours) doing something with their smartphones, yet when they are polled about the matter, they routinely report that they were doing substantially less than half of that amount. Students of human addictive behavior call this "denial." They similarly deny that they send, on average, a hundred texts daily and that they check their phones over two thousand times daily.

Some critics of the industry recommend an entire, cold-turkey break from it. Jaron Lanier, who once worked in the industry, at one point thought individuals could control their use of social media and provided advice in his 2010 book *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*. His tone soured more recently (2018), writing *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. Tony Reinke came very close to doing the same in his 2017 volume *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*,[2] in which he said that he had not *yet* discarded his smartphone, but I suspect he did after the book was published. Song's voice is distinctive, possibly unique, in this regard. She recognizes the destructive dimensions of the industry as others have, yet she expresses a little more hope that Christian wisdom, encouraging fellowship, and both formal and informal disciplines, practices, and liturgies may make it possible for individuals, families, and other groups to be more intentional about what and to whom they attend, and how.

It appears that Song's reading of the pertinent literature and of her students' reflections on their

2 Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (New York: Henry Holt, 2018); Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017).

experiments for twenty years has provided her with a distinctive voice about how Christians think about and *manage* the digital industry's environment. She is certainly not optimistic, but she is not fatalistic either; she appears to have a genuine measure of Christian hope that the Holy Spirit may very well assist some of her fellow believers in finding their narrow way in the twenty-first century (especially chapters 7–9). I have read more than a hundred books (and many articles) in the field of Media Ecology over the last few decades, and I am not sure there is a book I would recommend to Christians over this. It would be very well to read this in a group; those who are accustomed to such reading circles/fellowships would be well advised to put this volume on their menu.

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# The Trinity's Biblical Foundation

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**by Andrew J. Miller**

*The Trinity and the Bible: On Theological Interpretation*, by Scott R. Swain. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021, 144 pages, $19.99.

We simply do not think about the Trinity enough. Too many of us do not understand how the doctrine of the Trinity can be practical. Nor do we really understand *how* the Bible reveals the Trinity—some think that only the New Testament features the Trinity! Experience shows that candidates for ministry come to presbytery with a decent understanding of soteriology but a weak doctrine of God. Seminaries have a difficult task in inculcating a rich and orthodox doctrine of God in students over a relatively brief period.

Is it too much to say that we have put the cart before the horse? If we do not understand the Trinity, how can we understand soteriology, the work of the Triune God wherein the Father sends the Son to accomplish a salvation applied by the Holy Spirit? As John Webster writes, "in an important sense there is only one Christian doctrine, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in its inward and outward movements. Whatever other topics are treated derive from the doctrine of God . . ."[2]

It is this spirit that Scott Swain's *The Trinity and the Bible* comes in service of the church. Swain shows us how the Bible teaches the Trinity, giving a masterclass in how theology and exegesis relate in practice—hence the subtitle, *Theological Interpretation*. Just as years ago I marveled at how Calvin's *Institutes* reasoned from Scripture for the *filioque* (The Spirit proceeding from the Father "and the Son"), Swain's method left me likewise thinking, "of course, why did I not see that before?" This book explains the *way* in which the Bible teaches what would later be articulated as Nicene orthodoxy.

Brief but powerful, *The Trinity and the Bible* brings together Swain's previous essays on biblical reasoning and the Trinity (3). After laying out recent approaches to drawing the doctrine of the Trinity from the Bible, Swain reflects on B. B. Warfield's explanation, then follows this with several chapters wherein he expounds the Trinity from key texts: Mark 12:35–37, Galatians 4:4–7, and Revelation 4–5. Swain's final chapter gives "Seven Axioms: On the Trinity, the Bible, and Theological Interpretation."

Swain's first page thunders with Scripture on the Trinity and practical implications. For ex-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1000.

2 John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 145, cf. 27.

ample,

> The Bible . . . promises a Triune reward to its faithful readers: "The river of the water of life . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1) is our promised inheritance (Rev 21:6–7). Holy Scripture mandates baptism in God's Triune name (Matt 28:19), calls us to bless God's Triune name (Eph. 1:3–14), and blesses us in God's Triune name: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). The Trinity is the foundation of typological reasoning: God's agency through Christ and the Spirit connects Israel's exodus and Christian baptism because in both events both parties 'drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:13; see also 10:1–4). And the Trinity is the foundation of moral reasoning: Paul urges the Ephesians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3) because "there is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4–6). (7–8)

This selection of passages provides a taste of how the Scriptures speak the language of the Trinity. Clearly, as the early church formalized its understanding of the Trinity with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, technical language like *homoousia* was used to express what the Scripture said. Swain suggests theology as a "grammar of the language of Holy Scripture" (15). The Scripture speaks the language of the Trinity, and the church's doctrine of the Trinity explains the grammar of that language. The development of the doctrine can be compared to children learning about nouns and verbs—it helps them to understand the language they already speak. This protects us from thinking that our theological formulations improve or refine Scripture (16, cf. 98).

While there is much to appreciate from B. B. Warfield, Swain takes issue in his second chapter with Warfield's rejection of the designations Son and Spirit expressing their relation to the Father (34, 38). Traditionally, God's "modes of operation outside of himself *(ad extra)* follow God's ordered modes of subsistence inside himself *(ad intra)*" (37, cf. 52). Yet, Warfield's doctrine of the Trinity was one of "'principled non-affirmation' of the doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit" (40). This was a "not unnatural development within a Princeton theological traditional already characterized by what we might call a 'tepid affirmation' of the doctrine" of eternal generation (41). Swain asserts that this even follows a trajectory begun by Calvin, but unnecessary—as Turretin and others recognized, "it is precisely the Son's *distinct mode of being* as one eternally begotten that accounts for his *being consubstantial* with the Father" (43). Not accounting for these principles emasculates passages like John 5:26, Heb. 1:3, and Col. 1:15–16 that feature the affirmations of both the equality of the Son with the Father and the Father as begetting the Son.

Swain's third chapter explicates the Trinitarian implications of Mark 12:35–37, where Jesus affirms that God is one and asserts himself as David's divine Lord. Here Swain shows his work—focusing on the particulars of a biblical text and deriving theological implications. Theological interpretation not only reminds us of the dance between exegesis and theology, but it also reminds us of the goal of exegesis: exegesis is "the act of loving attention we give to the historical and literary shape of scriptural texts in order to discern the singular identity and activity of the Triune God who presents himself therein" (1, cf. 61). One of the hallmarks of Swain's idea of theological interpretation is the belief that God still speaks through his Word and Spirit. "Reading is . . . a living *conversation* between an eloquent Lord and his attentive servants," Swain writes, "a conversation in which the reader is summoned to hear what the Spirit of Christ *says* to the churches (Rev. 2:7)" (62).

Chapter four covers Galatians 4:4–7, which clearly teaches Trinitarianism: "God sent forth his Son . . . God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Swain's argument is that

> The distinction between God, his Son, and the Spirit of his Son in carrying out God's redemptive purpose is not a distinction between God and other creaturely agents. It is rather a distinction within God's monotheistic agency. In other words, God's singular saving agency is intrinsically threefold. (88)

In the context of Galatians, Paul combats the Judaizers by showing that God saves by his own agency—salvation belongs to the Lord (92; cf. Ps. 3:8; Rom. 8:3). In this text the internal relations between the persons (one who sends and two who are sent) are naturally extended toward our redemption (94).

Our language about the Triune God must recognize God's utter uniqueness, and Swain's chapter on Revelation 4–5 argues "When Revelation 4–5 evaluates God's worth, it does not locate his worth on a larger scale of meaning and value. Revelation 4–5 takes up the ordinary grammar of naming to convey God's transcendent oneness" (104). "The One who sits on the throne is the transcendent Lord above all" (107). He is "the One who was and is and is to come" (Rev. 4:8), recalling Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 6. This same transcendent God is the Lamb who was slain, yet the persons are also distinguished and both praised: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13). Nor is the Spirit left out: "The Spirit *before* the throne is the Spirit *of* the two who are *on* the throne. The Spirit *before* the throne is the Spirit who proceeds '*from* the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Rev. 22:1)" (114). Clearly, Revelation 4–5 "envisions the worship of one God in three persons," who alone creates and redeems (117).

Swain's final chapter, "Seven Axioms," emphasizes key principles of theological interpretation. In summary, we are utterly dependent on God; knowing the Triune God is the gift of the Triune God.

*The Trinity and the Bible* is one of several solid new books on the Trinity. It helpfully clarifies several important issues. While academic, this book will help most readers cherish how the Bible speaks of the Triune God. It will certainly equip readers to defend the Trinity as biblical. I hope it finds wide readership, to the doxology of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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# What Is Essential to the Doctrine of the Church?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2022[1]

**by Ryan M. McGraw**

*The Loveliest Place: The Beauty and Glory of the Church*, by Dustin W. Benge, Union series. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 198 pages, $19.59, paper.

As Christ promised, the church has stood firm through the centuries, and the "gates of hell" have not prevailed against her (Matt. 16:18). While Christians have fluctuated in their esteem of the church, the Triune God has not, always preserving the church as the sphere of the application of redemption in Christ. While there are many views about the nature and function of the church, it is important to grasp how and why the church is precious in God's sight and why it should be so in ours. Such facts demand a "catholic" understanding of the church, which pulls in all believers regardless of denominational differences and convictions. Aiming to "awaken [our] affections" for the church, Dustin Benge notes, "This book is about the beauty and loveliness of the church"

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1007.

(14). Grounding this aim in the glory and beauty of the Triune God, the author lays a good foundation for pressing all Christians to value the church highly, seeing her beauty in light of the beauty of God. Though, as this review shows, this book does not fully achieve a catholic doctrine of the church pulling in all believers, it remains a helpful introduction to the topic in that it presents a doctrine of the church that is a bit off the well-worn path.

In fourteen chapters Benge unfolds the doctrine of the church under the theme of her beauty. Since her beauty lies in the beauty of the Triune God, he devotes more than half of the book to the glory and beauty of God and the persons of the Trinity, often treating divine persons in more than one chapter. Additionally, he highlights the officers and teaching ministry of the church in a way that attempts to avoid denominational distinctives. Finally, pressing believers toward the sacraments as exemplifying the unity of the church in the Triune God, he concludes his material by way of summary and exhortation, directing readers to see God's beauty revealed in the church. Revolving the doctrine of the church around the theme of "beauty" is distinctive to this book, providing readers with an interesting and helpful perspective aimed to lead them to delight in the church and to look forward to her perfection in glory.

The questions to pose to this work are whether the material adequately promotes a catholic understanding of the church that can pull in all Christians and whether this depiction of the church is sufficient to foster delight in the visible and local congregations that believers belong to (or should belong to). Several ideological and exegetical points illustrate why this material needs augmentation and adjustment.

First, Benge asserts that we cannot define the church in institutional terms, "for the church belongs exclusively to God" (30). Yet, this point leads to some potential difficulties in fostering love for the church. Traditionally, the church has defined herself in terms of both institution, or organization, as well as organism. The church as a living organism results in the church as an outward institution. We can define the church both in terms of her internal life and in terms of her outward characteristics and organization. Like the relationship between body and soul, the church has internal and external marks, which are both invisible and visible to human beings. While the mode of church government should never rise to the being of the church, we need institutional as well as organic terms to describe her nature. Later, appealing to Ephesians 1:3–13, Benge defines the church purely in terms of election, effectual calling, and the sealing of the Spirit (33). One is left wondering whether room is left for the distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the church. Ultimately, this point may reflect a distinction between Congregational and Presbyterian (though not only Presbyterian) definitions of the church, since Congregationalism traditionally defined the church in terms of elect believers covenanting with God and one another to the practical neglect of the external catholic organization of the church, consisting both of true believers and of people whose unbelief God alone knows. If the goal is to love the church, then the question is whether pitting the church as living organism against its outward organization can mean anything more than loving the invisible church. Readers could legitimately conclude from these pages that they love and belong to the invisible church without seeing the need for membership in the visible church. While countering the author's intent, this all-too-common practice often results from pitting the church as organism against organization rather than holding them as two aspects of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church.

Second, the author too easily dismisses standard Christian interpretations and applications of key Scripture texts. For example, citing the much-debated Matthew 16:18, he states that it is "quite clear" that "Christ is the rock upon which the church is founded" (32). This assertion is too dismissive of the volumes of historical reflection on this text, which makes the proper view of the text less than clear on the surface. While it is true that Christ is the foundation of the church and that he alone builds and defends his church, the church rests on an apostolic foundation flowing from

Christ as well (Eph. 2:20). Doubtless this apostolic foundation is at least partly, if not primarily, in view in Matthew 16:18, since Christ builds his church on apostolic revelation. The primary question throughout church history has always revolved around how Christ is the foundation of the church and how this related to Peter, the apostles, and the ongoing ministry of the church. Benge's off-hand dismissal of such debates is both simplistic and bypasses the scope of Scripture regarding the church. We must grapple with the fact that as important as this text is about the church's foundation and the "keys of the kingdom," Jesus did not here define his central terms and ideas. Determining what the "rock" is on which Christ founded his church and how this relates to the "keys of the kingdom," necessarily involves both exegesis and drawing from the rest of the New Testament. The resulting picture is that Christ founded his church on the inspired teaching of the apostles and prophets, with himself as the focal point, and that he continues to work through the "keys" in the uninspired ministry of the Word and sacraments. Though this is not the place here to establish these ideas clearly, this summary illustrates why it is inappropriate simply to dismiss alternatives that necessarily relate to "big-picture" New Testament issues.

A related example occurs with 1 Timothy 3:15. While Benge quotes 1 Timothy 3:15 to the effect that the church is "the pillar and buttress of the truth" (75), he eventually shifts to saying that "Scripture is the pillar and buttress of the church" (84). While this is true theologically, it is not true textually. The church is founded on the apostles and prophets, and thus on Scripture (Eph. 2:20), yet the epistle to Timothy addresses a different question. Christ as the truth, who communicates divine truth, founds the church, but the church also supports the truth by retaining, promoting, and proclaiming it. The church is born from Christ's word in Scripture, but the church is also the Spirit's means of sustaining Christ's truth in the world. Both ideas are necessary for a balanced view of the church's nature. This point illustrates the risk we all face of explaining away a passage rather than explaining it.

Ignoring classic readings of biblical texts occurs elsewhere as well, hindering the catholicity of the author's doctrine of the church. A good example is his citing John 4:24 to the effect that we must worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; he simply dismisses the idea that John has worship through the Spirit and the Son in mind, stressing sincerity of heart in worship instead (90). Yet, John consistently made "truth" personal, revolving around Christ. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and he is "full of grace and truth" (1:14). Likewise, the Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (16:13) because, as "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9), he takes what belongs to Christ and declares it to the church (John 16:14–15). Believers must be born of water and Spirit (John 3:5), and when Jesus asked the Father to sanctify believers by his word, which is truth (17:17), this was an applicatory prayer for the Spirit's work detailed in chapters 14–16. The burden of proof from the gospel of John is that "Spirit" is the "Holy Spirit" and "Truth" is Jesus Christ, which we cannot detach from the Spirit's work in believers' hearts or from Christ's revealing the Father in Word and in deed. This is why, historically, the early and medieval church asserted a reference to the Trinity in this passage. Like the example of Matthew 16:18, Benge dismisses classical Christian readings of key biblical texts too easily, hindering the catholic scope of his work.

Third, some theological issues arise with respect to the sacraments. In pursuing a broad-based Christian rather than denominationally specific theology of the church, one should stress what is common both to Scripture and to Christianity. Yet, the author misplaces the emphasis of baptism. Without substantiating his claim, he assumes that "baptism" means immersion (133), which raises both theological and exegetical problems. Theologically, defining baptism as immersion confuses mode with meaning. Baptism means "to wash" rather than "to immerse." Washing provides the theological key to baptism in relation to washing in Christ's blood and in the renewing power of the Spirit. One exegetical example highlights the importance of this point. In Mark 7 the Pharisees

complained that Jesus's disciples ate with "unwashed hands" (Mark 7:5). Yet, the word used for "washing" hands, "cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches" in verse four is "to baptize." Whether or not believers agree that immersion is the proper mode of baptism, we should all agree that baptism indicates washing and identification. Additionally, he assumes that baptism "demonstrates that you love Christ and are willing to obey him" (135). However, if sacraments are, as the church has often said, "the visible Word of God," then, as with a sermon, the accent of baptism falls on what God says rather than what the church says in response. Likewise, on page 173, Benge adds that baptism is "a testimony that salvation has already taken place." Yet, what if salvation has not taken place? Then is baptism not baptism, objectively speaking? If it is not, then what is it? If we define baptism by invisible spiritual realities, then how can the church ever be certain that she has baptized anyone? While it is the author's right to hold and promote Baptist views of baptism, the wide scope of this book seems to demand focusing on what the church holds in common on baptism in relation to its function in telling us that God washes sinners through Christ's blood by the Spirit's power. Combined with most of the above examples, the result is that believers are left with the beauty of the invisible aspect of the church, loving and delighting in an organism consisting of elect regenerate people, without a clear and easy way of integrating the organization of the church in visible form. In other words, the author provides ample grounds for loving the soul of the church, but it is not clear how this necessarily includes loving her body as well.

In spite of these criticisms, Benge's creative approach to presenting the doctrine of the church in light of her beauty as flowing from the Triune God is valuable in its own right. Yet, the church today needs something more. We should love the church as a living organism, as God's family, united to Christ and indwelt by the Spirit. Yet, we should also love her organization, without going so far as to define her in terms of her government. Whether Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational, believers should love the church in both her visible and invisible aspects. In order to do this, the church's visible aspects must be integral to the definition of the church. Though the internal saving aspects of the church are primary and essential, her outward catholic form is not incidental or non-essential. The form of governing the church does not affect the church's being, but taking outward form is part of her being. The church is a lovely place, reflecting the beauty of the Triune God, but God shows his glory in the church through her organization in light of her foundation and through her worship and sacraments, all of which tell us more about God's work and words than about the character and profession of those within her walls. In short, this book is a good place to start considering the loveliness of the church in order to foster love for the church, but readers will need more than this to foster a broad-based biblical view of the church.

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# Profound Devotion

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2022[1]

**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

*The Heart in Pilgrimage: A Treasury of Classic Devotionals on the Christian Life*, by Leland Ryken, editor. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 188 pages, $34.99.

*Fount of Heaven: Prayers of the Early Church*, by Robert Elmer, editor. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022, 346 pages, $24.99.

Christian publishers seem to have discovered a market for devotional anthologies. No doubt in the midst of the frenetic environment of modernity, serious Christians hunger for the change of spiritual and mental pace that only heaven can bring. Here are two wisely constructed devotional anthologies that will help modulate the Christian walk and act as an antidote to the constant and pervasive electronic demand for our attention—usually to the trivial.

Robert Elmer is a former Baptist pastor, reporter, and ad copywriter who has written over fifty inspirational books of historical fiction and science fiction for adults and young people. He lives in Idaho.

His latest devotional is *Fount of Heaven: Prayers of the Early Church*. He also anthologized *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans* (2020), which I reviewed in January 2020. His devotional focus is the life of prayer. He also has a version of *Piercing Heaven* formatted for journaling and meditation.

His choice of authors for *Fount of Heaven* covers the first six centuries of the church's history. The earliest of the thirty-four authors are Clement of Rome (35–101 AD) and the Didache (first century). The latest is Venantius (530–609). Some authors are familiar, like Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, Eusebius, and Tertullian, but almost half are new to me. Elmer concludes the book with almost thirty pages of "Biographies and Sources" and an author index. Not all the authors are Christian leaders. Decimus Magnus Ausonius (310–95) "offers us an inside look at the last days of the Roman Empire, as well as a feel for his approach to living and working as a professing lay Christian in a secular society" (319). Under the rubric "Send Us Peace, Grace, and Healing," Ausonius prays, "You are our hope O God, and you provide our endless home! Amen" (155).

The prayers are logically arranged under thirty-four headings with anywhere from three to eighteen prayers in each, beginning with "Help Us to Praise" and concluding with "Prayers for Days of the Christian Year," five of which are Christmas and three for Palm Sunday and Easter. The topics are wide-ranging, covering creation, the Trinity, the attributes of God, faith, repentance, grace and forgiveness, worship and the sabbath, the church and its unity, and much more.

As Elmer points out, many sacrificed wealth and status to become Christians, and many gave their lives during times of persecution, prior to Constantine. Their prayers are uniformly God-centered. "[P]ersonal issues seemed to take a back seat to the all-consuming glory of their three-in-one God. . . . They seemed to have little time for self-centered drama" (2). These Christians put a premium on the truth, biblical doctrine and theology, as the ultimate reality connecting them with the living and true God.

Elmer's ardent hope is that we will imitate the intelligent ardor of these ancient believers. "They wrote about their faith with effusive, mystery-filled joy that is rare today" (2). It is not an accident that Elmer accents the God-centered nature of these prayers by beginning with praise—focusing on the wonders of God's nature and grace. The first and last prayers of this opening section are by Augustine of Hippo, with one by Clement of Rome in the middle, believed to be the earliest recorded Christian prayer outside of the Bible.

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=1009.

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Leland Ryken has done it again with *The Heart in Pilgrimage: A Treasury of Classic Devotionals on the Christian Life*. His anthology of classic devotional poetry, *The Soul in Paraphrase: A Treasury of Classic Devotional Poems* (2018) was reviewed by me in January 2019. This present volume is meant to be a companion to *The Soul in Paraphrase*. Both are devotional, but each is a different medium, the former poetry and the latter prose. He is a master anthologist with an encyclopedic knowledge of devotional poetry and literature. In this volume, Ryken gathers fifty classic devotionals. Each devotional is accompanied by a brief biographical sketch of the author, concluding with an explanatory note and a related Scripture verse. Ryken is ever the professor of English literature.

The only author unfamiliar to me is Lilias Trotter (1853–1928), a missionary who wrote two well-known devotional books interspersed with drawings of plants: *Parables of the Cross* and *Parables of the Christ-Life* (144). The authors are as diverse as nurse Florence Nightingale, literary critic Samuel Johnson, novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, playwright William Shakespeare, and medieval mystic Julian of Norwich. From the ancient church to the twentieth century, the book is strewn with poets, Puritans, and preachers. Five of the devotionals come from creeds and one from the preface to the Geneva Bible. The range of writers is extraordinary. Forty-six authors over a span of seventeen centuries from a wide range of denominations and traditions make for a fascinating variety of devotional material.

Ryken's choices were very intentional. In his "Editor's Introduction" he defines devotional literature as first taking personal religious and spiritual experience as its subject and second aiming to affect godliness in daily life. Meeting these criteria, they become classics due to superior technique and beauty of form. "The verbal beauty and rhetorical skill are part of the total effect of a passage" (15). There must also be an element of surprise in the work to make it rise above the expected, Ryken insists—not in doctrine but in the way the truth is expressed. This is a superb volume in every aspect. I highly recommend it.

Both Crossway and Lexham have produced books whose physical properties suit the profundity of the subject matter. This craftsmanship, along with the prayers themselves, invites the reader away from screen reading, demanding our undivided attention. They each have subtly colored buckram hardcovers with gilt lettering on the spines and front covers, a ribbon bookmark, and bound in signature to last through many years of reading. Crossway has a slight edge in terms of paper and print quality, cover design, and typography.

The combination of arresting devotions and heaven-storming prayers in these volumes should enrich the reader's Christian experience.

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## EDITORIAL POLICIES

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

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.

3. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stance, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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