



Ordained Servant

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education
Thanksgiving

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From the Editor

Having raised the question of education several issues ago, I thought it would be helpful to explore J. Gresham Machen's views on scholarship and education. Dariusz Bryćko applies his own excellent scholarship to shed light on this topic that Machen cared deeply about, and thankfully, on which he wrote extensively. Part two will be published next month.

In light of our national day of thanksgiving taking place this month, it seems appropriate to explore the place of thanksgiving in our regular worship and devotional lives. Pastor Jeff Wilson challenges us to comb church history in order to cultivate more thanksgiving in our churches in "Giving Thanks—the Neglected Prayer." On this subject we have two poems; "When Bradford and Company Landed" explores the background of the first American Thanksgiving, and an inspired—divinely that is—poem, Psalm 136, which makes excellent reading before Thanksgiving dinner.

We have three interesting reviews this month. Ross W. Graham reviews *A Vision for the Aging Church*, a subject for young and old alike, especially as we baby boomers cross the threshold from middle age. Darryl Hart, reviews Covenant College professor Ken Stewart's new book *Ten Myths about Calvinism*. Finally Pastor Andy Wilson presents a review article on the popular book by Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

ServantHistory

Steering a Course between Fundamentalism and Transformationalism: J. Gresham Machen's View of Christian Scholarship¹ Part 1

Dariusz M. Bryćko

Christian religion flourishes not in the darkness but in the light. Intellectual slothfulness is but a quack remedy for unbelief; the true remedy is consecration of intellectual powers to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.²

Machen did not present his views on Christian scholarship in a systematic manner, and therefore analyzing his philosophy of education can at times be challenging—yet it is not impossible. Machen extensively addressed education, and his opinions on scholarship are spread throughout his speeches, essays, books, and book reviews. We also possess a transcript of Machen's testimony before the U.S. Congress against the act proposed to form the U.S. Department of Education.³ In the midst of the current discussion about the nature of Christian scholarship and education, and on the seventy-fifth anniversary of Machen's death, I would like to reflect on his educational writings and what I have come to call his “militant view of Christian scholarship,” which may perhaps serve as a middle way between those who question the idea of Christian education and those who see a direct biblical imperative for it.⁴ Further, Machen has been credited with fostering a renaissance of academic pursuits among fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals in America (both free and confessional) from his day until the advent of Dutch Neo-Kuyperianism (sometime in the 1960s), and it seems worthwhile to revisit his writings in

¹ The research for this essay was made possible thanks to generous support from the Center for Christian Thought at Biola University, where I spent the spring semester of 2012.

² J. Gresham Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Defense of Faith,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 152.

³ For a complete bibliography of Machen's writings, please see Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble, eds., *Pressing toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986). My appreciation goes to D. G. Hart and John Muether, who pointed me to some helpful sources.

⁴ I am referring here to the recent exchange in *Ordained Servant* between David C. Noe and Benjamin W. Miller as well as to the current debate between the Two-Kingdoms and Kuyperian camps. See also: William D. Dennison, “Is Classical Christian Education Truly Christian? Cornelius Van Til and Classical Christian Education” in *Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, eds. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011), 101–25.

light of the current spiritual and academic identity crisis of American Christian scholarship.⁵

George Marsden, in his book *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, argues that most early opponents of liberalism who became leaders in the fundamentalist and (later) evangelical movements were in some way connected to Machen.⁶ The list of familiar people and institutions Machen directly influenced is long, so let us mention just a few, such as Harold Ockenga, the founder of Fuller and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminaries, *Christianity Today* magazine, and pastor of the historic Park Street Church in downtown Boston; Carl McIntire, the popular broadcaster and founder of the Bible Presbyterian Church; Francis Schaeffer, the well-known Christian intellectual whose L'Abri community in the Swiss Alps became an intellectual refuge for European evangelicals;⁷ and Samuel Sutherland, the president of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, under whom the institute founded and accredited Talbot Seminary.⁸ Further, Cedarville and Bryan Colleges both offered their presidencies to Machen, Columbia Theological Seminary and Southern Presbyterian Seminary offered him New Testament professorships, and Canada's Knox College asked him to be its principal.⁹ Also, Machen was one of the main founders of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which came into existence not only due to his initiative but also his family fortune. Finally, if we add that the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Moody Bible Institute asked Machen to speak at public events and zealously sought his support, it seems safe to say that the renaissance of academic pursuits among conservative evangelicals through the 1960s could, in large measure, be credited to Machen.

When it comes to the secondary literature, we have a few biographies of Machen and other helpful sources dealing with his theology. However, Machen's philosophy of education has received only minimal treatment and is a topic that deserves further attention.¹⁰

⁵ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 149.

⁶ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 149.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁸ Biola in its early days hired conservative Presbyterians (such as Paul Aijjian, Dean Nauman, and Vernon McGee) who taught at Talbot and who in the mid-1950s were challenged by the Los Angeles Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA to dissolve their relationship with the school as "the spirit, doctrinal position and program of the church" were different from the Presbyterian stance. In response to this Samuel Sutherland wrote an article in which he quotes extensively from the Westminster Confession, showing how the Bible Institute of Los Angeles was more faithful to historic Presbyterianism than the mainline Presbyterians were. He writes, "Shades of John Calvin, John Knox, John Witherspoon, and a great host of other theological spiritual giants of former generations! These men held the same doctrines which were enunciated in the great Westminster Confession of Faith and which has stood as a mighty confession of faith through the centuries as it bred and fed spiritual giants!" See Samuel Sutherland, "Modernism and Los Angeles Presbytery" in *King's Business* 45, no. 9. (Sept. 1954): 14–17. I am thankful to Dr. Fred Sanders of Biola's Torrey Institute for his assistance in finding these materials.

⁹ D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 105.

¹⁰ Carl Trueman, foreword to J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), ix–xv; Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004); Terry Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism 1881–1915* (Fearn Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2001); Coray W. Henry, *J. Gresham Machen* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981); Allyn C. Russell, *Voices of Fundamentalism: Seven*

Perhaps the most insightful analysis of Machen's views of science can be found in D. G. Hart's book *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*, which we will later bring into our discussion. We also will find George Marsden's earlier analysis helpful, as he offers insights on Machen's Southern influences and his use of common sense realism. Marsden traces the decline of Machen's popularity among evangelicals to two causes. The first was the early 1960s critique made by the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, Edward J. Carnell, that Machen lacked vision and greater involvement with non-Presbyterians. The second cause Marsden gives for Machen's declining popularity was the growing influence of the nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed perspective embodied in the writings of Abraham Kuyper.¹¹

What Makes Scholarship Intellectual?

Machen has often been labeled a fundamentalist—and in many ways he was, as he shared the majority of his doctrinal convictions with those who, early on, represented the fundamentalist camp and expressed their views in the *Fundamentals of Faith*, a set of ninety essays that the Bible Institute of Los Angeles published in twelve volumes between 1910 and 1915.¹² Machen also was a major source of inspiration and intellectual ammunition for the fundamentalist and later neo-evangelical camp in its struggle against liberal efforts to redefine the historic Christian faith.¹³

However, there were some differences between Machen and the fundamentalists. First of all, Machen had had an elite education. A graduate of Johns Hopkins University, the University of Chicago, and Princeton, Machen also pursued foreign studies at Marburg, Germany, under Wilhelm Herrmann, with whom Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann also trained.¹⁴ Politically, Machen was a Democrat with a strong libertarian

Biographical Studies (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); Paul Woolley, *The Significance of J. Gresham Machen Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1977). See also: George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹¹ "Yet Machen remained controversial, and even many evangelical scholars repudiated his heritage. The most notorious example came in 1959 when Edward J. Carnell, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, devoted a chapter in his volume *The Case for Orthodox Theology* to the 'cultic mentality' of Machen. Repudiations of Machen's narrowness have been frequent since then. Almost all evangelical scholars who are not strictly Reformed have found his Presbyterian confessionalism too narrow, and even many of the strictly Reformed have rejected his Princetonian apologetics for Kuyperian models, or have been unhappy with his insistence on ecclesiastical separatism." Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 184. For more see: George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and The New Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 188–192.

¹² See also Annette G. Aubert, "J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 337–62. Aubert carefully argues that Machen's critical yet careful response to Barth set him apart from the anti-intellectual fundamentalist response. She writes: "The basic point for Machen was that one needs to possess knowledge about a subject in order to point to its errors. This was a general principle that Machen applied in his own approach to liberal scholarship," 341.

¹³ Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* became one of main tools of defense against liberal attacks on fundamentalists. See Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2001), 193. However, as Hart notes, the book was written mostly for a Presbyterian (not fundamentalist) audience and thus its fullest application could never be realized among non-Reformed ecclesiastical bodies. Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 65.

¹⁴ Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 32–33.

bent. He stood against the religious mainstream of his day by opposing prohibition, opposing prayer and Bible teaching in public schools, and even openly promoting the rights of non-Protestant religious minorities and sects.¹⁵ Culturally, Machen was a Southern gentleman, coming from the upper Baltimore elites with high family connections, including the president of the United States, a close friend of the Machen family.¹⁶

However, Machen's Ivy League education, almost aristocratic background, and uncommon political views were *not* what set him apart most from the fundamentalists. It was rather the growing anti-intellectualism and non-confessionalism of the fundamentalist camp that kept him from fully identifying with the movement. This is well illustrated by the fact that in 1927 Machen politely declined to become the president of the nondenominational university named for William Jennings Bryan, the prosecutor in the famous Scopes "monkey trial." In his letter declining the offer, Machen wrote:

I never call myself a "fundamentalist." There is indeed, no inherent objection to the term; and if the disjunction is between Fundamentalism and Modernism, then I am willing to call myself a fundamentalist of the most pronounced type. But after all, what I prefer to call myself is not a "fundamentalist" but a "Calvinist"—that is, an adherent of the Reformed Faith.¹⁷

There are numerous reasons why Machen declined this particular offer, and these are better understood in the context of the entire letter. But it is apparent from the quoted text that, when asked to lead a nondenominational, fundamentalist university, Machen preferred to be identified with *a particular Protestant confession*. We should not underestimate this point when seeking to understand Machen's approach; however, for the purpose of this presentation, we will not delve into Machen's ecclesiological and confessional stands, as they are less essential to his views on Christian education (which go beyond Presbyterian and Reformed identity). Here we would like to emphasize that Machen turned down a chance to preside over an institution so closely associated with the Scopes trial.

Machen knew William Jennings Bryan, and Bryan personally asked him to testify in the trial, but Machen withheld his support from a cause that did not seem essential in the battle against liberalism. Hart argues that this act showed Machen to be committed to the university world and confirmed his stand against anyone who would separate Christianity

¹⁵ For the scope of this discussion we will concentrate only on some of those differences; however, it is worth mentioning the following: Machen refuted the church's direct involvement in politics, did not join the Prohibition movement or the anti-evolution crusade, felt uneasy with the emotion-driven religion of the revivalists, argued against teaching Bible and prayer in public secular schools, supported the rights (free speech) of Mormons, Jews, and other religions for the full exercise of their religion, and was sympathetic to the fundamentalists in their common goal to preserve orthodox Christianity. He was a libertarian who opposed child labor legislation, national parks (but not preservation of nature), and Philadelphia's ordinance against jaywalking. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 184.

¹⁶ Katherine Lynn Tan Vandrunen "The Foothills of the Matterhorn: Familial Antecedents of J. Gresham Machen" (PhD diss., Loyola University, 2006).

¹⁷ "Dr. Machen Declines the Presidency of Bryan University," repr. in *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* 28 (Sept. 1927): 16.

from science, even fellow believers. For Machen, the dialogue about faith and science was essential to refuting the liberals and thus to preserving the historic Christian faith, because science has the ability to verify that the Christian faith is based on historical facts, confirming the truthfulness of Christianity. In Machen's view, the "trueness" of the Christian religion was deeply rooted in actual, historically verifiable events, and in this sense theology as a science was not different from any other scientific inquiry; after all, both theology and chemistry are concerned with the "acquisition and orderly arrangement of truth."¹⁸ Thus using biblical interpretation to disqualify the claims of science was, to Machen, unacceptable. That being said, we note here that Machen was not arguing that true faith in God could be acquired and/or limited simply to an intellectual argument or assent. For Machen as for other conservative Presbyterians, faith ultimately comes only by the mysterious and creative power of the Holy Spirit enabling one to trust in Christ's atoning work and follow his commands.¹⁹

It was the fundamentalists' insistence on literal six-day creation that alarmed Machen the most—not because they held to this interpretation personally, but rather because they turned it into the litmus test for proving one's Christian orthodoxy. In Machen's view, this position hurt the Christian cause because it minimized the significance of the Fundamentals of Faith, which included Christ's divinity, the Second Coming, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the infallibility of the Bible, and the historical reality of miracles. Machen felt that fundamentalists had a low view of natural revelation, and left no room for academic discussion about the findings of science and how they could relate to biblical interpretation. To be sure, Machen saw the dangers of naturalistic evolutionism, but he also believed that science must have an important voice in the discussion even if it cannot be treated on an equal basis with biblical revelation.²⁰

The anti-intellectualism of fundamentalists also became evident for Machen by their stress on a personal experience of salvation, suggesting that spiritual intimacy and subjective experience somehow carried superior value to the knowledge acquired through toilsome study of Bible, original languages, and theology. He was convinced that religion without science would lead to superstition or false religion based on feelings and emotions—the very definition of religion that liberals tried to advocate. Against revivalism and pietism, Machen argued that education and knowledge were necessary for effective preaching because religion is primarily doctrine oriented, and experience must follow—never the other way around. He wrote:

Men are not saved by the exhibition of our glorious Christian virtues; they are not saved by the contagion of our experiences. We cannot be the instruments of God in saving them if we preach to them thus only ourselves. No, we must preach to them the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only through the gospel which sets him forth that they can be saved.²¹

¹⁸ J. Gresham Machen, "What Fundamentalism Stands for Now," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 118.

¹⁹ Machen, "Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 144.

²⁰ Hart, *Defending the Faith*, "Machen tried to construct a mediating position that subordinated the naturalism of liberal Protestantism to the supernaturalism of fundamentalism but still kept the two ideas together," 104–105.

²¹ Machen, "Christian Scholarship and Evangelism," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 141.

Because faith consists of trust, Machen rejected the so-called “simple faith” proclaimed by some revivalist preachers, for it is impossible to *trust* someone unless we first determine whether he is even trustworthy. In Machen’s view, we must possess knowledge to have true faith in Christ. He wrote, “What these advocates of a ‘simple faith’ which involves no knowledge of Christ really mean by ‘simple faith’ is faith, perhaps; but it is not faith in Christ. It is faith in the practitioners of the method.”²² Machen worried that many conversions that take place upon so called “simple faith” are nothing else but a psychological manipulation. He contrasted these false conversions to biblical examples of true conversions, which always contain a doctrinal element. He recalled Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, which included facts about Christ and not just an account of Peter’s own personal experience; the conversion of the jailer in Philippi where Paul and Silas preached to him the “word of the Lord”; and the words of Jesus when he addressed the theological inquiry of the Samaritan woman about the proper place of worship.

We ought to note here that although Machen was a proponent of highly educated clergy, he did *not* argue that all evangelists must necessarily be scholars. However, at the same time, he maintained that “evangelists who are not scholars are dependent upon scholars to help them get their message straight”²³ and that the most powerful evangelism in the history of the church has been done by scholars.

Machen refused to overlook the anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalists with whom he shared so much in common because he was convinced that it would hurt the movement, leading to the decline of theology and the spread of populism in Christian faith and practice.²⁴ Moreover, as surprising as it may at first sound, anti-intellectualism was one of his main critiques of *liberalism* as well, so to tolerate it among fundamentalists would not be fair. Granted, the liberal expression of anti-intellectualism was different; nevertheless, Machen could not ignore that fact that both the fundamentalists and the liberals were guilty of it.

Machen criticized liberal theologians for abandoning the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation, allowing the Bible to become an ineffectual and useless book, a collection of inspirational stories describing various human emotions. For Machen, Christianity was either based on historical facts or it was philosophically bankrupt, perhaps able to sustain morality for a while but not the gospel.²⁵ He once wrote that “a gospel independent of history is simply a contradiction of terms”²⁶ and that “the foundation of the church is either inexplicable, or else it is to be explained by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But if the resurrection is accepted, then the lofty claims of Jesus are substantiated; Jesus was then no mere man, but God and man, God come in the flesh.”²⁷

Further, Machen argued that modernists degraded science by excluding from it the sphere of religion. This separation of reason from faith led to decadence in the academic

²² Ibid., 138.

²³ Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 141.

²⁴ Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 95.

²⁵ Aubert, “J. Gresham Machen and Theology of Crisis,” 346.

²⁶ Machen, “History and Faith,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 105.

²⁷ Ibid.

community, producing a “horrible Frankenstein”²⁸ whose knowledge and skill hurts humanity. Machen wrote:

I think we can say that science alone, unless something else goes with science, is bound by an inexorable logic to result just exactly in that decadence which so distresses. . . . In fact, science has served to improve enormously the technique of tyranny in our days as over against the cruder tyrannies of fire and sword which reigned in the past. It is in accordance with an inexorable logic that Hitler is practicing fiendish wickedness in Germany today in the name of science. . . . The fact ought to be perfectly clear to every thoughtful observer that humanity is standing over an abyss. When I say humanity, I include America; indeed I am thinking particularly of America. Russia and Germany are already in the abyss. But how shall it be with our country?²⁹

If we consider that Machen wrote these words before the Second World War, we have reason to stand astonished by his prophetic voice.

The anti-intellectualism of the liberals also became evident to Machen by their widespread acceptance of the modern pedagogical method. Machen observed that liberals were preoccupied with the “method of study” and emphasized practical rather than theoretical knowledge. This issue surfaced during his disputes with Charles Erdman, professor of practical theology at Princeton Seminary. Erdman, supported by the new president of Princeton, J. Ross Stevenson, advocated a curriculum that downplayed the study of biblical languages and reduced core biblical and theological courses for the sake of practical electives, with strong emphasis on pastoral care and spiritual formation. This reform Machen strongly opposed, lamenting that the seminary would not produce “specialists in the Bible” but rather congregational CEOs (if we were to use the contemporary term).³⁰

For Machen, the modern pedagogical obsession with the method of acquiring knowledge instead of the knowledge itself was defeating the very purpose of education. He wrote: “The modern conception of the purpose of education is that education is merely intended to enable a man to live, but not to give him those things that make life worth living.”³¹ Also, the main role of the academic instructor had been reduced to the “developing of the faculty of the mind” and no longer with transmitting knowledge. All of this, Machen ironically concluded, led modern educators to a great discovery: that it is “possible to think with a completely empty mind.”³² This pursuit would lead American education to complete disaster, Machen argued, where shameful superficiality and ignorance of the most basic facts about the world would become a new norm. He wrote:

We shall never have a true revival of learning until teachers turn their attention away from the mere mental processes of the child, out into

²⁸ Machen, “The Necessity of the Christian School” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 168.

²⁹ Machen, “The Christian School: Hope of America,” in *Education, Christianity and the State*, ed. John W. Robbins (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1994), 135–136.

³⁰ Machen, “The Minister and His Greek Testament,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 211.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 135.

marvelous richness and variety of the universe and of human life. Not teachers who have studied the methodology of teaching but teachers who are on fire with a love of the subjects that they are going to teach, are the real torchbearers of the intellectual advance.³³

Unfortunately, this pedagogical anti-intellectualism is something Machen also observed among fundamentalists, whose Bible colleges and institutes often sought after quick and practical education for the sake of evangelism and mission work or spiritual formation, rather than training reflective and critically thinking graduates. This deeper training was something he desired to achieve with the newly founded Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

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³³ Machen, "Christian Scholarship and Evangelism," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 137.

Servant Truth

Giving Thanks—The Neglected Prayer

Jeffrey B. Wilson

On the popular television show *Antiques Roadshow* collectors and the otherwise curious are able to present articles bearing some sign of age for appraisals. Inevitably, there are pieces found by someone in a retail shop, or at a garage sale, valued to be worth thousands of dollars. Equally fascinating is the item kept by a family for generations and brought to the show just because the owner thought it might be worth something. Often the story is told about how the piece came into the family and then was put on a shelf or set in a corner for many years without much thought. Carefully, the appraiser inspects the object and then announces its value at auction. Every now and then someone has something that has been sitting around the house worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Likewise, in the church there are also many beautiful gifts passed on to us by those who have carefully listened to God's Word. One of these gifts is a prayer called the Prayer of Thanksgiving, or Eucharistic Prayer, often overlooked, yet of inestimable value.

I do not know when I first discovered the Eucharistic Prayer. It was not used in the Presbyterian churches I attended in my youth. There were other prayers, especially related to the sermon, and some prayers that generally gave thanks to God, but no specific Prayer of Thanksgiving. After college I attended seminary where it might be expected that various prayers of worship would be part of the required curriculum in preparation for the ministry. However, the one or two classes on worship were electives. I believe my discovery of the Eucharistic Prayer began in a theology class taught by Professor John H. Leith. He did not specifically mention this prayer, but what he did was require us to create a notebook with different kinds of prayers in it, including prayers of invocation, prayers of confession, prayers for illumination, and general prayers of thanksgiving. The result for me was a realization that there are different prayers used in worship. The ensuing years of being a pastor, continuing study, and leading congregations in worship have led to my growing appreciation of the Eucharistic Prayer and its indispensable place in worship.

In considering the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the place to begin is the Lord's Supper, because in Scripture this prayer is attached to the meal instituted by Jesus for the church. Each of the synoptic Gospels includes Jesus's words at the Supper, and they each mention Jesus's prayer of thanksgiving when he gave the bread and the cup to his disciples. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark indicate two prayers, one before the bread and the other before the cup. Mark tells us:

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them. (Mark 14:22–25)

In Matthew's Gospel the parallelism between Jesus's blessing and thanksgiving is stressed: Jesus took the bread, blessed, and gave. He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave (Matt. 26:26–27).

Some have argued the blessing is for the bread, but a stronger argument can be made that the blessing is to God.¹ What we find in Luke 22:17 is the word εὐχαριστήσας (eucharistēsās, *when he had given thanks*) used when Jesus took the cup before he took the bread, so that it reads, “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said . . .” Jesus also in the Gospel of Luke gave thanks when he took the bread (v. 22:19). Paul's tradition of the institution of the Lord's Supper, that he delivered to the church, has the words “and when he [Jesus] had given thanks” before the distribution of the bread and the cup (1 Cor. 11:23–26). Clearly, according to Scripture, our Lord himself offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

In time the church began to give specific form to the Prayer of Thanksgiving, filled in with the teaching and words of Scripture. All prayers have a form, even spontaneous, extemporaneous prayers, because it is impossible to have a prayer without structure and shape. Prayers have a certain form of address to God, a conclusion, order of the parts, style, and cadence, as we can see with the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught to his disciples. In the twentieth century, when there was a renaissance of interest in the rich history of Christian worship, the ancient prayer of Hippolytus was used by many as a model form of the Eucharistic Prayer.² In response to controversies in the church Hippolytus drafted a carefully ordered Eucharistic Prayer to serve as a model for churches. It is one of the earliest prayers extant. However, this does not mean it was the first Eucharistic Prayer.³ Prayers of Thanksgiving were common in the Eastern and Western regions of the early church. Also, there are too many layers of revision over the centuries and uncertainty about dates to assert one Eucharistic Prayer as the model form. What this means is that we have a variety of examples of Eucharistic Prayers at our disposal. The following is the Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus:

We render thanks to you, O God, through your beloved child Jesus Christ, whom in the last times you sent to us as a savior and redeemer and angel of your will; who is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all things, and in whom you were

¹ Davies and Allison make this comment on the text in the Gospel of Matthew, “It is natural to think of blessing, that is, thanking God, in part because of the use of εὐχαριστήσας in the parallel v. 27 and I Cor. 11:24.” See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, eds. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 470. The same point is made by France, “Blessed refers of course, to blessing God, not blessing the bread.” See R. T. France, *Matthew, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 368.

² Hippolytus was a theologian in the church at Rome who lived in the 3rd century. See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 13.

³ For example, the *Didache*, a Christian manual of the 2nd century that includes instruction about eucharistic prayer, was written earlier than Hippolytus. For a translation of the *Didache* see Cyril C. Richardson trans. and ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970). Bradshaw cautions against the tendency to make one form of the Eucharistic Prayer a proto-type of all the others. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 131–60.

well pleased. You sent him from heaven into a virgin's womb; and conceived in the womb, he was made flesh and was manifested as your Son, being born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands when he should suffer, that he might release from suffering those who have believed in you.

And when he was betrayed to voluntary suffering that he might destroy death, and break the bonds of the devil, and tread down hell, and shine upon the righteous, and fix a term, and manifest the resurrection, he took bread and gave thanks to you, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body, which shall be broken for you." Likewise also the cup, saying, "This is my blood, which is shed for you; when you do this, you make my remembrance." Remembering therefore his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the cup, giving you thanks because you have held us worthy to stand before you and minister to you.

And we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit upon the offering of your holy Church; that, gathering her into one, you would grant to all who receive the holy things (to receive) for the fullness of the Holy Spirit for the strengthening of faith in truth; that we may praise and glorify you through your child Jesus Christ; through whom be glory and honor to you, to the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and to the ages of ages. Amen.⁴

A brief consideration of the main parts of the prayer will emphasize the distinctiveness of eucharistic prayer. At its center is thanksgiving to God for our redemption through Jesus Christ. Hippolytus's prayer thanks God for sending to us "a savior and redeemer" as Scripture designates him. The Prayer of Thanksgiving specifically focuses on the gift of Jesus Christ as our redeemer. Two things may be observed here: creation and redemption are held together by Christ, and God's redemption in Christ has a larger scope than just the saving of individuals. This is how Scripture teaches us to think about God's redemption, such as in Colossians, "For by him all things were created in heaven and earth . . . and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross" (Col. 1:16, 20).

Beginning with reference to God's creation of us and his general goodness to us, the prayer quickly moves to remembering what Jesus Christ did; his life, death, and resurrection. This part of the prayer is called the *Anamnesis* (remembrance). Remembrance here means much more than mental recall. It is remembrance in the biblical sense, such as in the celebration of the Passover meal. Israel was instructed to remember the mighty acts of God's deliverance from Egypt as participants in the same act of deliverance (see Exod. 12:21–27). Jesus's institution of the Lord's Supper requires this kind of remembering in the church's celebration of the Lord's Supper; he says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). As Hughes Oliphant Old has noted, "That God acts in history is fundamental to our theology; that we rejoice in these mighty acts is fundamental to our worship."⁵ Actively remembering in the prayer of thanksgiving we take our place alongside the people God has blessed in Christ.

⁴ R. C. D. Jasper and Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 35.

⁵ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 237.

After the *Anamnesis* many of the classic eucharistic prayers include the *Sanctus*, which begins with the words, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God almighty; heaven and earth are full of your glory,” although it is absent from Hippolytus’s prayer.⁶ It is fitting to include it after remembering God’s mighty act of redemption in Jesus Christ because that event rightly evokes the biblical response of awe and praise to God. Also, with the *Sanctus* the church joins its thanksgiving with the heavenly worship of God for his redemption. Thanksgiving for Christ is given to God by the universal church in heaven and on earth. The *Sanctus* has been sung or spoken in the eucharistic prayers, but either way is a most appropriate biblical acclamation to God.

Hippolytus’s prayer moves from the *Anamnesis* to Jesus’s words of institution and then, towards the end of the prayer, is the *Epiclesis* (call upon). The prayer of Hippolytus says, “And we ask that you send the Holy Spirit upon . . .” With the *Epiclesis* there is the understanding that the Holy Spirit is the one who makes the sacrament of communion effective. Without the Holy Spirit it becomes an empty sign, but with the Holy Spirit Christ is present with us, we are united together in Christ, and we are fed and nourished by him. This is in accordance with the Apostle Paul who teaches, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). Calvin makes just this point about the Holy Spirit and the Lord’s Supper, “The sacraments profit not a whit without the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁷ The *Epiclesis* recognizes that God continues to bless us with the benefits of Christ’s salvation. So, the main elements of the Eucharistic Prayer, the *Anamnesis*, *Sanctus*, institution narrative, and the *Epiclesis* focus on the act of God’s redemption in Christ.

One final observation needs to be made concerning the language in Hippolytus’s prayer about the church’s offering of the bread and the cup to God. Reformed theology rightly teaches that the Lord’s Supper is not about our offering the gifts of bread and wine to God, but about what God has given to us. So, for Reformed churches the *Epiclesis* in Hippolytus’s prayer may be amended using the words from another Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer of St. Basil, to say, “Send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts that we have set forth before you, your own from your own gifts.”⁸ This amendment clarifies the divine source of the gift.

The form of the Eucharistic Prayer contributes to the specific theme of the prayer, which is giving thanks to God for our redemption in Christ. God has certainly lavished his benevolence upon us. Calvin referred to God as the fountain of every good. He is the creator and sustainer of his creation, and “no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause.”⁹ For Calvin, God is the source of all good.¹⁰

⁶ The *Sanctus* is based on Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.16.9.

⁸ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 71. Another possible form is, “And we most humbly beseech Thee, O merciful Father, to bless and sanctify with Thy Holy Spirit both us and these Thy gifts of bread and wine.” Or this phrase could be used, “these elements of bread and wine, to be set apart from all common uses to this holy use.” See *The Book of Common Worship* (Philadelphia: United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1946), 160–62.

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.2.1.

All the good things we generally receive, like food, employment, music, and friendships, come from God. As Psalm 36:8–9 says:

How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

The bounty of God’s goodness to us and to all people is beyond measure. However, there is one gift God has given to us that stands out from all the rest—the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. John’s Gospel (3:16) uses the language of gift when it says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.” And the Apostle Paul, in Romans 5:15, calls Jesus Christ the “free gift.” God’s gift of Jesus Christ for our salvation outshines all the other gifts we receive from his hand, because Jesus joins us in our human condition and gives himself to rescue us and cleanse us from our sin in order to reconcile us to God. Nor does God’s gift of his Son stop there, but Christ continues to give himself to us by the Holy Spirit for the constant preservation and nourishment of our new life in him. Truly he is the greatest gift we could ever receive from our heavenly Father.

Given God’s benevolence to us and the extraordinary gift of his Son, it is right to thank him. Historically speaking, the church has considered giving thanks to God a fundamental part of worship. The church assembled together in worship was inconceivable without giving thanks for Christ. In point of fact, every other element of the church’s worship depends on Christ’s sacrificial offering of himself for us. Invoking God’s presence, confessing our sin, praying for the Spirit to illumine the reading and preaching of Scripture, petition to God for what we and others need—all of these depend on Christ’s gracious giving of himself (not to mention the other parts of worship such as singing praise to God). And so, thanksgiving is central to Christian worship. Among the reasons Calvin gives for the necessity of prayer is this, “that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand.”¹¹ How much more ought we to receive the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice, like the Lord’s Supper, with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving to God for the gift of Christ should not be assumed in worship but intentionally expressed. Yet, I have been in some worship services that never once said thank you to God. The question always is worth asking, what is Christian worship all about? When we begin to learn the answer, we discover the ineluctable place of the Eucharistic Prayer in worship. Used historically in the church, including Reformed worship, this prayer is full of gratitude. There is more to it than just expressing thanksgiving to God, but its hallmark is thanksgiving for the gift of Christ.

For all these reasons I have come to the conviction that some form of Eucharistic Prayer belongs in worship. Since thanksgiving for Jesus Christ is an essential part of worship, the Eucharistic Prayer should be prayed every time the church meets for worship. Of course, other expressions of thanksgiving exist in Christian worship, particularly psalms, hymns, and general prayers that give thanks to God. But these are

¹⁰ B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 26.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.3.

used occasionally, without a fixed place in the worship service. Is it possible that our reliance on hymns and general prayers alone to give thanks to God gives the impression that thanksgiving is incidental to our worship? Historically, the church has made the Prayer of Thanksgiving a fundamental part of worship attached to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Churches that celebrate the Supper each week can easily give thanks to God with the Eucharistic Prayer and make this prayer a set part of their worship. However, this prayer can still have a place even in churches where the Lord's Supper is not celebrated every week. A modified form of the Eucharistic Prayer could be a set feature of worship in churches without the Lord's Supper in their service. Some parts of the prayer would have to be omitted, or radically reworded, like the *Epiclesis*, because they only make sense with the sacrament. Allowing for these modifications, a Prayer of Thanksgiving focused on the gift of Jesus Christ can be used. It may take some work to craft the prayer, but it would secure the church's thanksgiving to God in worship rather than make it occasional.

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ServantReading

A Vision for the Aging Church

by Ross W. Graham

A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors, by James M. Houston and Michael Parker. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011, 265 pages, \$24.00, paper.

The fastest-growing segment of the population of the United States is the oldest old, those over the age of eighty-five. As baby boomers age in a period of escalating health and longevity, we will soon see a four-generational family structure as the norm. Caregiving will become the twenty-first century's greatest test of character, and fifth commandment issues will require the church to take parent care readiness seriously.

These are some of the demographic and ecclesiastical observations offered in a provocative and forward-looking examination of the impact the increasing population of seniors will have on the American church. But *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* is much more than an inventory of problems that will be faced by the church because of the increasing number of seniors within her ranks.

James M. Houston, founding principal and emeritus professor of spiritual theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and a senior fellow of the C. S. Lewis Institute, at age eighty-eight, writes from personal experience of the subject matter. Michael W. Parker, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Retired [AMEDD], brings a physician's perspective to the book. And his post-retirement concentrations on gerontology, mental health and aging, and academic research make for a confident march through such complicated issues as exploring the myths and realities of aging successfully, and facing Alzheimer's disease.

The book unfolds in a sometimes-tedious address of a wide range of theological interests within evangelicalism that will not be of great use for the readers of this review. But four themes emerge from these pages that make the book worth digesting for pastors and other ordained servants.

A Biblical Perspective on Aging

“Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father and he will show you, your elders and they will tell you” (Deut. 32:7). This verse unfolds for the authors both how the church is to understand and value her seniors and how those seniors are to play a vital role in ministry to the whole body of Christ. The example of those who are living close to their lifespan should infect others with a joyous way of life. While seniors often tell young people that the best times of their lives will be their school years, how much better if Christians can tell them from experience that life rightly lived

goes on getting better. Writing a friend just a month before he died, C. S. Lewis said, “Autumn is the best of seasons, and I’m not sure that old age isn’t the best part of life” (183).¹

The Need for a Vigilant and Caring Church in the Future

The twenty-first century will see elder caregiving as the single most important human resource issue in the church as well as in the workplace. As American society becomes increasingly secular, churches must be vigilant to strive against the rising social and medical unacceptability of dealing with an aging population and against attempts to conserve economic and medical resources at the expense of seniors.

But aging seniors are unwilling to talk about end-of-life care plans or discuss their final wishes with their children. They see themselves as healthy and so do their children. So just as the current generation of pastors has insisted on premarital counseling to address life-long marriage issues, this same moral authority may need to be employed by future generations of pastors to equip families with future parent care plans.

Facing the Problem of Dementia

One in two people over the age of eighty suffers from some form of dementia. And given the exponential increase in the number of seniors who will be in that category as baby boomers continue to age, issues related to the care and well-being of those diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia will be matters with which churches must prepare to deal.

But Christians in a state of advanced dementia, having lost mental memory, can remain secure in the Father’s everlasting arms. God’s memory of us qualifies us as persons, even if we are in an advanced state of dementia. God and others now hold our memory instead, as loving recorders of our own past. But pastors will need to work hard to develop the necessary skills and plans to enable families to prepare for this coming crisis in care for their family members.

Late Life Significant Living

Aging seniors are a resource and should be looked to for providing ministry rather than only being the recipients of it. Most seniors are experiencing less disability than ever before, and disease and functional decline are now compressed into a brief period of three to five years before death. With this in mind, churches will do well to point this mature workforce toward the significant roles God has planned for them to play among his people. Seniors are needed as mentors and examples to the young, encouraging, nurturing, and being lovingly involved in their inner lives. Seniors are also needed to serve as examples of what it means to finish well. Staring death in the face reveals its powerlessness over eternity. And allowing others to experience the death of a Christian friend has the capacity to make the faith of the living stronger than it was before.

¹ Lewis quote is from Armand Nicholi, *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 232.

We read in the Bible countless examples of late-life contributors to God's purpose, such as Moses, Joshua, and John. Old age does not mean we are sick and frail. The old can continue to learn, to change bad habits, and to contribute in meaningful, eternal ways to God's kingdom.

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ServantReading

Ten Myths about Calvinism by Kenneth J. Stewart

by D. G. Hart

Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition, by Kenneth J. Stewart. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011, 301 pages, \$24.00, paper.

Orthodox Presbyterians (along with other conservative Calvinists) get nervous when they see the word *broad* applied to Reformed Protestantism. After all, the existence of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, not to mention other conservative Reformed communions, is tethered to resisting the increasing breadth of the historic Protestant church. Lefferts Loetscher's book, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (1954), for instance, documents the doctrinal latitude that prevailed within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and employs the word *broad* to characterize the very developments that led conservatives to oppose liberalism and found a new Presbyterian communion. Orthodox Presbyterians might not draw the line that narrowly, as if that is the best way to describe a Reformed church. But breadth has always connoted unacceptable latitude for conservatives.

Kenneth J. Stewart's use of the word in his subtitle, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*, is both odd and telling given the record of conservative Presbyterians' opposition (both OPC and PCA) to theological liberalism. Potential readers should not dismiss the book because Stewart approves of breadth—he does, after all, want to recover Reformed Protestantism's breadth. Still, the author's word choice is indicative of his purpose. “Extremists” (12) have had too much sway within contemporary Calvinism for Stewart's taste. His book is designed to walk Calvinists away from the cliff of self-destruction back to the safety of moderation. The word he uses to describe this better place is “mainstream.” Stewart believes he has found this valuable moderate understanding of Calvinism and by clearing away the ten myths in which both Calvinists and non-Calvinists traffic he provides Reformed Protestants with a healthier understanding of their tradition.

Of the book's ten myths, four are ones of which Calvinists are guilty and six are common among non-Calvinists. This uncanny resemblance to the Decalogue begins with an inversion of the first commandment—if people are to have only one God, Calvinists, according to Stewart, are wrong to have only one founder of Calvinism. The Covenant College professor argues correctly that Calvin was only one of many Reformed Protestant churchmen so that appeals to the Geneva pastor to settle debates miss the Reformed tradition's variety and breadth. The next two myths more or less follow from this. Calvin's view of predestination is not the standard for Calvinism (#2) any more than

TULIP (Stewart does not attribute this to Calvin) should be the measure (#3). Rounding out the myths that Calvinists tell about themselves is one that says Calvinism is skeptical of revival and pietism (#4). Myth four is one case where Stewart gives evidence—most of the others he attributes to the mythological “some,” “many,” and “most,” such that a reader wonders who exactly these extremists are. Stewart apparently knows.

The other six myths involve complaints about Calvinism by outsiders. These include: hostility to missions (#5), indifference to moral living (#6), support for theocratic governments (#7), opposition to the arts (#8), advocacy of male chauvinism (#9), and encouragement of racism (#10).

The net effect of Stewart’s demythologization is not simply to present a more complicated view of Calvinism but also a less conservative and more progressive Reformed tradition. In his chapter on gender Stewart, for instance, describes Calvin as “progressive” for his time on women’s roles (229). This gives the book a feel of doing for the history of Calvinism what John Frame did for the regulative principle of worship—namely, redefine it so that the definer is now in the mainstream of the new definition. First, Stewart reconceives Calvinism by taking better account of Reformed Protestantism’s various streams of historical development. Then, he presents a different view of Calvinism on a variety of modern topics like politics, race, and gender. The result is a Calvinism that is not combative in the church and appealing to its cultured despisers. Stewart’s breadth, then, is twofold—first, a broader historical account and second, a more inclusive version of contemporary Calvinism.

This leaves Stewart’s reconstruction in a major bind because his call for inclusion winds up being divorced from historical recovery. Instead of going back to the sources, Stewart wants to point out the breadth of early Reformed Protestantism apparently to argue for contemporary broadness. Whether the diversity of older Reformed voices will support contemporary progressivism is a question that generally haunts proponents of breadth.

Stewart’s appeal to diversity has its moments. For instance, in his historical recovery he is right to remind Calvinists and others that John Calvin was only a convert to Protestantism some twelve years after Ulrich Zwingli’s initial reforms in Zurich, which were technically the beginning of Reformed Protestantism. Meanwhile, Geneva was relatively late to the Reformed world, after other Swiss cities such as Basle and Bern. In other words, Calvin did not found Calvinism and his writings are not the ur-text for the Reformed tradition. At the same time, in Stewart’s haste to back away from the full-throttled Calvinism of the Five Points, he shows a remarkable disdain for Dutch Calvinism and the Synod of Dordt. He writes that Presbyterians owe “no explicit loyalty to the Canons of Dordt” except to the extent that Reformed teaching is embodied in the Westminster Standards (90). He adds that lots of participants in the new Calvinist movement—Southern Baptists, charismatics, Anglicans—also have no obligations to acknowledge Dordt, as if any of these Protestants are tied to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (91). To be sure, Dordt was a response to real diversity within the Dutch churches about predestination and its implications. But Dordt itself was an international synod that gained the approval of Reformed churches throughout Europe (and it was hardly at variance with the Westminster Assembly). Stewart’s appeal to diversity, in other words, is selective and betrays an attempt to fashion a Calvinism friendly to the broader evangelical world.

The Calvinist history which Stewart seems most interested to recover is not Calvin's teaching on predestination or seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy reflected in Dordt and Westminster but the Calvinist renewal movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here the book's conclusion is telling. Stewart describes five movements of Calvinist resurgence, few of which were based in the Reformed churches or held to the Reformed confessions but often took shape in parachurch agencies highly beholden to the revivalist side of experimental Calvinism. The first and most recent is Martin Lloyd Jones and James Montgomery Boice. In the second, Stewart lumps together the Sovereign Grace Union and isolated Reformed leaders like Machen, Arthur W. Pink, and Louis Berkhof. The third example of Calvinist resurgence was Abraham Kuyper and neo-Calvinism. The fourth was the early nineteenth-century *reveil* (revival) associated in part with Robert Haldane but that took root across Europe and helped in part to bring Calvin's works back into circulation. The last instance of resurgence was the Great Awakening of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. These movements yielded a Calvinism that was "new-old . . . a fusion of elements from long ago with contemporary developments" (288). They also represent the kind of Calvinism Stewart thinks "we" need—"fewer angular, sharp-elbowed Calvinists who glory in what distinguishes their stance from that of others and a lot more supporters of the Reformed faith who rejoice in what they hold in common with others" (289).

Whether Stewart's historical revisionism will yield the kind of smooth and generous Calvinism for which he hopes is questionable since the very distinction he makes between the good and bad kinds of Calvinism rests on doing exactly what he forbids—namely distinguishing one kind from another. It is also not clear whether Stewart himself is up to the challenge of Calvinist diversity since he ends his brief for a kinder, gentler Calvinism with Calvin having the last word. "Calvin, after all, insisted he would if necessary 'cross ten seas,'" Stewart writes, "if he could promote agreement in the central doctrines of the faith with fellow believers" (290). The book that precedes this last sentence is well worth the read because it is filled with important historical material. Whether the evidence permits a breadth of interpretations is not something that Stewart admits.

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ServantReading

Is This “a Holy Experience” or a Common One? Review Article

by Andy Wilson

One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are, by Ann Voskamp.
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011, 240 pages, \$16.99.

Recently, during a period in which my wife underwent surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation for cancer, several friends recommended that we take a look at the writings of Ann Voskamp, author of the popular blog “A Holy Experience” and the New York Times bestselling book *One Thousand Gifts*. I only had to read the first two pages of her book to understand why her writings connect with people who are suffering. The book begins with Voskamp recounting the tragic death of her little sister when Voskamp herself was only a little girl. In the pages that follow, she writes about the effect that this and other tragedies had upon her faith, and she explains how she eventually opened herself up to God’s grace. The “dare” in the book’s subtitle refers to a challenge she issued to herself, prompted by a friend’s suggestion, to deal with her discontentment by making a list of a thousand things for which she is thankful. As she begins to write this “gratitude journal,” she discovers that *eucharisteo* (Greek for “I give thanks”) is the “holy grail” (34) to finding fullness and joy in life. In her own words, she came to see that “I would never experience the fullness of my salvation until I expressed the fullness of my thanks every day, and *eucharisteo* is elemental to living the saved life” (40).

Voskamp’s emphasis upon being thankful is something of which we all need to be reminded. Gratitude is indeed at the heart of the Christian life. That being said, I have concerns about how she makes gratitude into a means by which she can enrich her experience of salvation. She sees *eucharisteo* (does she use the Greek because it sounds more mysterious?) as a mystical ladder by which she can ascend to a more profound experience of God’s grace. Gratitude is treated as the magic key that unlocks each moment so she can see God’s presence in it and live more fully. For example, she ponders a soap bubble in her kitchen sink and writes:

This is where God is. . . . It’s not the gifts that fulfill, but the holiness of the space. The God in it. Far curvature of the bubble eddies, violet sliding down. This is supreme gift, time, God Himself framed in moment . . . Thanks makes now a sanctuary. (69, 70)

Another concern has to do with the way Voskamp discusses God’s agency in relation to our suffering. She refers to the trials and tragedies that befall her and her loved ones as “this moment’s bread” (80), gifts that are to be received with thanksgiving. Of course,

Scripture does tell us that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). But Voskamp tends to blur the distinction between God’s direct and indirect government of what takes place in this world. She talks about the evils that befall us as good gifts from God that only *feel* bad to us (95). At some points, it even sounds as though she is denying the reality of evil. She writes:

The God of the Mount of Transfiguration cannot cease His work of transfiguring moments—making all that is dark, evil, empty into that which is all light, grace, *full*. . . . Is there *anything* in this world that is truly ugly? That is curse? (99)

Well, yes, there is. Affirming God’s providential control over all that takes place in the world does not require that we say that nothing truly bad ever happens. Christians believe that evil has a real existence because we affirm both divine sovereignty and creaturely responsibility. In the words of Louis Berkhof:

Second causes are real, and not to be regarded simply as the operative power of God. It is only on condition that second causes are real, that we can properly speak of a concurrence or co-operation of the First Cause with secondary causes. This should be stressed over against the pantheistic idea that God is the only agent working in the world.¹

While God causes all things to work together for the ultimate good for those who belong to Christ, it is not accurate to say that “*All is grace*” (100). As we see so clearly in the story of Joseph and his brothers, God is not the author of evil, but he is able to use it to bring about his good purposes for his children (see Gen. 45:48; 50:20).

Voskamp’s confusion in this area sometimes causes her to interpret her experiences and the Scriptures in some rather odd ways. In one section, she describes a fight between two of her children at the breakfast table (it involved toast being thrown into someone’s face) and concludes that the real problem is her inability to see the situation as a gift from God (125). In another section, she writes that

eucharisteo is how Jesus, at the Last Supper, showed us to transfigure all things—take the pain that is given, give thanks for it, and transform it into a joy that fulfills all emptiness. I have glimpsed it: *This, the hard eucharisteo*. The *hard* discipline to lean into the ugly and whisper thanks to transfigure it into beauty. (100)

Really? The Lord’s Supper teaches us to transfigure ugliness into beauty? Where is that imperative in the New Testament accounts of the institution of this sacrament? The only imperative that I see is the one that instructs us to do this in remembrance of the unique redemptive work that Christ accomplished on the cross. The Lord’s Supper is about proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes. It is not a picture of how we can use thanksgiving to transform our trials into things of beauty.

I suspect that one of the things that appeals to many of Voskamp’s readers is her unconventional writing style. While *One Thousand Gifts* is prose, it often reads like poetry. Her husband is the Farmer; her children are the Tall-Girl, Little-One, Tall-Son,

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1939), 172.

Boy-Man, Small-Son, and Hope-Girl. Her writing is impressionistic, employing a descriptive style that evokes subjective and sensory impressions in the minds of her readers. She comes across as authentic and open, qualities that twenty-first-century Americans hold in high regard. That being said, some readers might find it a little pretentious when the act of making a pizza is described with a sentence like this:

I roll out the dough, sprinkle the ring cheese on round pizza thin. I feel how the sun lies down warm across hands and how thanks soaks through the pores. I think how God-glory in a cheese ring might seem trifling. (58)

That's just it. It does seem trifling. And this is not just a matter of Voskamp having a deep appreciation for good pizza (who doesn't?). This is how she writes about everything, because she is looking for God in everything. The problem, however, is that while God is indeed omnipresent, there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that he uses the material world as the vehicle through which he delivers saving knowledge of himself. As Michael Horton points out, "The question is not where God is present (by itself relatively uninteresting when we are talking about an omnipresent deity), but where God is present *for us*, in peace and safety rather than condemnation and destruction."² It is the gospel, not nature, that is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

Voskamp sees writing, along with photography (one of her other pursuits), as among "the most sacred acts conceivable" (61). But is this true? Are writing and photography really *sacred* pursuits? The Bible certainly calls us to glorify God in our vocations and avocations, but this does not mean that all of life is sacred. The fall of man resulted in a separation of the cultic and cultural aspects of life into the distinct categories of the sacred and the common (or profane). Meredith Kline explains:

Though man's total life and labor, his cultural and his cultic functioning, are religious, the distinction between the cultural and cultic dimensions, present from the beginning, did provide a formal groundwork for the sacred-profane distinction that afterwards emerged in the fractured postlapsarian world. With the exception of one or two notable situations, God's servants find themselves after the Fall in a common grace situation where their cultural functions are not holy but profane. Nevertheless, they recognize that even these profane functions are to be carried out under God's mandate as service to him for his glory and thus are thoroughly religious.³

I realize that Voskamp would disagree with this, holding instead to the view expressed in the quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that stands at the head of one of her chapters: "Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see" (122). But does this really square with the teaching of Scripture? The apostle Paul said that "we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). He also wrote, "Set

² Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know, 2008), 109.

³ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 67.

your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2). Jesus said that his “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). And the book of Revelation tells us that it will not be until Christ’s second coming that this declaration will be made: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev. 11:15). There is a distinction between Christ’s kingdom and this present world, between the holy and the common. Of course, as Christians we are called to perform both our religious duties and our common functions for the sake of God’s glory. But the category of the sacred should be reserved for the church’s worship and ministry, because these are the things through which God delivers saving grace and sets his people apart as holy.

Undoubtedly, the most shocking part of *One Thousand Gifts* is the chapter in which Voskamp describes her relationship with God by employing sexual language, telling her readers of her discovery (on a trip to Paris, of course) of “how to make love to God” (201). Now, it is true that Ephesians 5 teaches that marriage is a typological picture of Christ’s relationship with his church. It is also true that some interpreters have taken the sensuous poetry of the Song of Solomon as an allegory of Christ’s love for the church. But Voskamp’s search for intimacy with God owes more to medieval mysticism than it does the Bible. Hers is a quest for a vision of what Martin Luther described as *Deus nudus* (God naked), God as he is in his own nature and majesty. This stands in sharp contrast to the Scriptural teaching that God “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16) and that we are to be content with the fact that “the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever” (Deut. 29:29). The mystical quest for God is doomed because, as Herman Bavinck explains:

The distance between the Creator and the creature is much too great for human beings to perceive God directly. The finite is not capable of containing the infinite . . . all revelation is mediate. No creature can see or understand God as he is and as he speaks in himself.⁴

Voskamp’s mysticism is very evident in her approach to the material world, which she sees “as the means to communion with God” (16). One example of this is seen in her description of gazing up at a harvest moon one night: “Has His love lured me out here to really save me? I sit up in the wheat stubble, drawn. That He would care to save. Moon face glows. We are head to head. I am bare; He is bare. All Eye sees me” (115). This goes well beyond the biblical declaration that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). For Voskamp, the common experiences of daily life are the key to enjoying communion with God. As a result, her version of eucharistic piety looks more like an attempt to ascend to God through her experiences than a grateful embrace of the good news that “‘the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)” (Rom. 10:8). To her credit, she never goes to the extreme of pursuing an entirely churchless approach to the Christian life, but by making her subjective experience of God the main thing, she follows the path of pietism and its dissatisfaction with the outward, ordinary, and objective means of grace.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 309–10.

The basic problem with Voskamp's book is the fact that her "holy experience" is not really holy but common. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the things that belong to the common sphere. I'm certainly not saying that we shouldn't be thankful for them. I'm a big fan of the common, whether we are talking about pizza or a full moon or a beautiful city. The common sphere provides mankind with innumerable subjects for creative exploration and countless reasons to give thanks. But Voskamp approaches the material world, and all that she experiences in it, as the means to communion with God rather than the context in which that communion is enjoyed. This is a point of significant confusion. The common sphere does a great job at being common, but it is seriously miscast when it is forced into the role of the holy.

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ServantReading

Correction

Robert Letham

In his review of my book, *Union with Christ*, in the October edition, John Fesko, among a number of points, raises one issue that is particularly germane to the theme of the book.

He indicates that I spend twenty-four pages seeking to establish the compatibility of union with Christ with “the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification or theosis.” This is partly the case. The most common view of theosis in the East stems from Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), deriving from earlier formulations of Maximus the Confessor (580–662). My focus is on the Alexandrians, Athanasius (295–373) and Cyril (378–444), who had a distinctively different approach—largely sidelined—treating the process as transformation by the Spirit, liberation from sin and death, adoption as sons, renewal by participating in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and entry into the eternal kingdom in the likeness of Christ. Recent scholarly discussion has centered on how far Calvin appropriated this tradition, bearing in mind that both Augustine and Aquinas resonated with it. In that context, Fesko, in legitimately distinguishing the Reformed from the East, cites one Eastern secondary source to the effect that the East has no doctrine of justification and then goes on to say that “what a tradition affirms . . . is equally important as what it denies.” This, he argues, sets the two positions at loggerheads.

It is true that the East has neglected the forensic dimension of salvation, seen particularly in its defective view of sin. Notwithstanding, in Fesko’s citation, John Meyendorff writes, “Byzantine theology did not produce *any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification*” (my italics). This lack is explicable on a number of grounds. Insofar as the East has doctrinal foundations, they are the seven ecumenical Councils, not lengthy confessions as in the West; it is not centered on logic but on a living dynamic relation to God focused especially in the liturgy. Due to historical isolation, and the depredations of Islam, the justification controversies of the Reformation passed the East by. Hence, as Meyendorff states, there was no significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine in the East. “No significant elaboration” is not the same as denial. There are many statements in the *Philokalia* that are not only compatible with justification by faith but positively demand it. Aspects of the piety of the Heyschasts come to mind too. Elsewhere I have cited Chrysostom, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Mark the Ascetic, and Nicholas Cabasilas as prime examples. Thomas Oden has produced a range of support from others. As Theodore Stylianopoulos indicates:

The “justification theology” focusing on the issue of faith and works is no less traditional simply because a Protestant declares it “biblical.” Nor is the “theosis theology” focusing on union with Christ in the Spirit unbiblical simply because an Orthodox declares it “traditional.” An exegetical approach may well find that both the “participatory” and “forensic” views of salvation are part of the larger biblical witness, and that deeper appreciation of both may be achieved precisely by seeing

them in positive comparative light.¹

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¹ T. G. Stylianopoulos. *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective: Volume One: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997), 209–10.

ServantPoetry

G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

When Bradford and Company Landed Thanksgiving, Cape Cod, 2011

When Bradford and company landed
it was like today: not frigid, but not warm.
The century of souls banded
together against the native swarm.

The gray beauty persists to remind me
they found liberty in Leiden
having been chased from Scrooby,
but soon were on the run again.

Slowed by the Speedwell's leak
they sailed their isolated odyssey,
tossed by westerlies and tempest's peak,
missed Manhattan's Hudson mouth at sea.

Halted by the Pollack Rip, and trapped
between Nantucket and the Cape,
their feet touched sand with a Compact
in a place for food to scrape.

From P-town they saw the Mayflower leave
a shallop behind to explore the coast,
slid Indian corn from a grave up their sleeve
and almost died themselves to roast.

To Plymouth Bay they retreated
in the graveyard of abandoned Patuxet,
with cannon on Fort Hill undefeated,
building on Cole's Hill without debt.

The grim land took half a century of souls away
before that first thanksgiving day.

Psalm 136

KJV

- 1 ¶ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.
- 2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.
- 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 4 ¶ to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 5 to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 7 to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 8 the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 9 the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 10 ¶ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 11 and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 12 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 13 to him who divided the Red Sea in two, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 14 and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 15 but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 16 to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 17 ¶ to him who struck down great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 18 and killed mighty kings, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 19 Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 20 and Og, king of Bashan, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 21 and gave their land as a heritage, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 22 a heritage to Israel his servant, for his steadfast love endures forever.
- 23 ¶ It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 24 and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever;
- 25 he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever.
- 26 ¶ Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.