



October 2015

Ordained  
Servant

The Marrow

# *Ordained Servant Online*

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**CURRENT ISSUE: THE MARROW**

**October 2015**

### *From the Editor*

The Reformation represents a revival of Christian learning, and thus touches on every aspect of the theological curricula. So in this issue we look at the theology of justification by faith in its relationship to Christian obedience, apologetics, the relationship between the church and the culture in which it is embedded, the way to speak with Roman Catholics about the faith, and a biblical commentary on the Song of Solomon. We begin by looking at the theological importance of the Marrow Controversy in Andy Wilson's article "A Righteousness Apart from the Law That Is Not against the Law: The Story and Message of the Marrow of Modern Divinity."

Darryl G. Hart's review article, "Do We Need a Better Country Now More Than Ever?" a review of Steven Miller's *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years*, deals with the perennial question of the relationships between Christ and culture, and church and state. This reminded me of a letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* that I wrote this past summer in response to "The Benedict Option." It is titled "The Jeremiah 29 Option."

Speaking of culture, James D. Baird reviews a recent book of apologetics, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* by Alvin Plantinga, comparing it with the method of Cornelius Van Til.

An important part of what is presently happening in the world is the new leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Francis's visit to the United States has elicited positive responses from many quarters, exemplified by a new book titled *The Tweetable Pope: A Spiritual Revolution in 140 Characters*. Viewed as a herald of a new openness, his pontificate raises important questions about the church's future and its relationship to world politics. Is this the logical culmination of the theology of Vatican II? And how should Reformed Christians speak with Catholics about biblical faith? Camden Bucey reviews a book that will help answer the latter question: *Talking with Catholics about the Gospel* by Chris Castaldo.

Sherif Gendy presents us with another insightful review of a new commentary on the Song of Solomon by Iain M. Duguid, *The Song of Songs*.

Our poem this month was suggested by Kurt Oliver: "The Convert" by G. K. Chesterton. Please feel free to suggest poetry for OS.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

# ServantHistory

## A Righteousness Apart from the Law that Is Not against the Law: The Story and Message of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*

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by Andy Wilson

### **The Story of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity***

*The Marrow of Modern Divinity* is a book with an interesting history and an important message. The title is indicative of the book's content: it is filled with choice quotations from key Reformers, including Luther, Calvin, Bullinger, Ursinus, and Ames. First published in 1645 by an English bookseller/barber/surgeon named Edward Fisher, it was also at the heart of a controversy in the eighteenth-century Scottish church. In the midst of that controversy, a minister named Thomas Boston published an edition of *The Marrow* that contained extensive explanatory notes on Fisher's text. A 2009 edition published by Christian Focus presents Boston's helpful, but sometimes cumbersome, notes in a reader-friendly format.<sup>1</sup>

*The Marrow* is written as a dialogue among four characters: Evangelista (a minister of the gospel); Nomista (a legalist); Antinomista (an antinomian); and Neophytus (a young Christian). Fisher uses the dialogue among these characters to distinguish the biblical gospel from the errors of antinomianism and legalism. Antinomianism says that God's moral law has no abiding validity for the Christian. Legalism says that a person's obedience is a contributing factor in his justification. But the gospel says that God counts his people as righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ alone, which is imputed to them by faith alone, and good works flow forth as the fruit of saving faith.

*The Marrow* is organized in three sections, the names of which are derived from phrases found in the Pauline epistles: the Law of Works, the Law of Faith, and the Law of Christ (see Rom. 3:27–28; 1 Cor. 9:21).<sup>2</sup> Boston explains these names as follows:

All men by nature are under the law of works; but taking the benefit of the law of faith, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are set free from the law of works, and brought under the law of Christ. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden—take my yoke upon you" (Matt. 11:28–29). (Boston, 50)

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2009). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this article are taken from this edition. When the quote is from Boston's notes on Fisher's text, Boston's name is cited before the page number(s).

<sup>2</sup> In a 1649 edition Fisher added a second part to *The Marrow*, in which he expounded and applied the Ten Commandments and set forth the difference between the law and the gospel.

To use the terminology of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Law of Works is the covenant of works (WCF 7.2), the Law of Faith is the covenant of grace (WCF 7.3), and the Law of Christ is the moral law as a rule of life for believers (WCF 19.6). The distinction among these three “laws” is so central to the Christian faith that Fisher argues that “so far as any man comes short of the true knowledge of this threefold law, so far he comes short both of the true knowledge of God and of himself” (47).

The Marrow Controversy has been described as “one of the most significant controversies the Church of Scotland has ever known.”<sup>3</sup> It began when the Presbytery of Auchterarder required ministerial candidates to affirm that “it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ.” While poorly worded, this statement was formulated in response to a hyper-Calvinist idea that said a person needed to demonstrate their election by showing sufficient evidence of repentance before they could know that they were eligible to receive the salvation offered in the gospel. The Presbytery of Auchterarder confronted this distortion of Calvinism by insisting that repentance does not qualify a person for God’s grace but is the fruit of God’s gracious work in a person’s life. In other words, while repentance is necessary for salvation in an *evidentiary* sense, it is not necessary for salvation in an *instrumental* sense.

In 1717 the general assembly condemned the so-called Auchterarder Creed as “unsound and detestable doctrine.” Thomas Boston, who was present at that meeting, agreed with the Presbytery of Auchterarder and responded to the church’s ruling by recommending *The Marrow* to some of the other ministers who were present. This resulted in *The Marrow* being reprinted in Scotland the following year, which then led to the general assembly’s 1720 condemnation of *The Marrow* itself as antinomian, prohibiting ministers from commending the book and instructing them to warn their people not to read it. Boston and eleven other ministers, who came to be known as the “Marrow Men,” lodged a protest against this ruling but were rebuked by the assembly in 1722. While they also protested against that action, their final protest was never dealt with by the assembly.

The Auchterarder Creed and *The Marrow* exposed the legalistic mindset that had come to dominate the Church of Scotland in the early eighteenth century. The ensuing controversy served as a prime example of what John Newton meant when he would later write that “ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes.”<sup>4</sup> As the Marrow Men explained, by condemning the Auchterarder Creed and *The Marrow*, the Church of Scotland was saying that “men ought only to come to Christ, the alone Saviour from sins, after they have got rid of them by repentance” (345). The Marrow Men were not denying the necessity of repentance but were insisting that repentance cannot be set forth as a condition that needs to be met before a person is entitled to lay hold of the gospel promises. Because repentance is an “evangelical grace” (WCF 15.1), a gift that is given by God (see Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25), it is wrong to say that God forgives our sins on the basis of our repentance. A man will never find peace if he seeks it by reforming his life, for the simple reason that his conscience will always be accusing him of his failures.

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<sup>3</sup> J.D. Douglas, “The Marrow Controversy,” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 635.

<sup>4</sup> John Newton, *Letters of John Newton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 40.

Repentance is necessary, but it cannot be the qualification for receiving God's grace because it is a fruit of that grace.

The Marrow Men understood that while the law shows us what righteousness looks like, it cannot empower us to live righteous lives. The law can only command and evaluate. The law is good, but it is weakened by the flesh (see Rom. 8:3). It is grace, not law, that produces the fruit of righteous living in a believer's life (see Titus 2:11–12). In Fisher's words, "There is nothing that doth truly and unfeignedly root wickedness out of the heart of man, but only the true tranquility of the mind, or the rest of the soul in God" (262). The Marrow Controversy helped clarify that a Christian's good works (including his initial and ongoing repentance) do not qualify him to receive God's grace but serve as evidence of that grace at work in his life.

## **The Message of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity***

### **The Law of Works**

The message of *The Marrow* consists in its differentiation among the Law of Works, the Law of Faith, and the Law of Christ. The distinguishing feature of the Law of Works is that it sets forth God's moral law as the way to life. The basic principle of the Law of Works is "Do this, and you shall live." Apart from Christ, all men are under the Law of Works, which explains why we are all naturally "wired for law" when it comes to how to find favor with God. In Boston's words, "In all views which fallen man has towards the means of his own recovery, the natural bent is to the way of the covenant of works" (Boston, 35). Even Christians have a natural bent towards the Law of Works. As Evangelista explains:

Nay, where is the man or woman, that is truly in Christ, that findeth not in themselves an aptness to withdraw their hearts from Christ, and to put some confidence in their own works and doings? . . . I was a professor of religion at least a dozen of years before I knew any other way to eternal life, than to be sorry for my sins, and ask forgiveness, and strive and endeavor to fulfil the law, and keep the commandments." (41)

This legal tendency remains within us for as long as we live in this world. This is why we must always go to Christ, the fountain that can never be drained dry, instead of the hole-ridden cisterns of our own works (see Jer. 2:13).

Christians have been set free from the Law of Works by virtue of Christ's finished work on our behalf (see Rom. 6:14; 7:4–6). By putting himself under the law as a Law of Works and perfectly doing all that the law requires, Christ satisfied the demands of the law in its commanding power. By offering himself as the perfect sacrifice for sinners, Christ satisfied the demands of the law in its condemning power. Fisher explains:

God did, as it were, say to Christ, what they owe me I require all at thy hands. Then said Christ, "Lo, I come to do thy will! in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God! yea, thy law is in my heart" (Ps. 40:7–8) . . . And thus did our Lord Jesus Christ enter into the same covenant of works that Adam did to deliver believers from it. (964–65)

This is why Paul declares that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). The believer is no longer under the law as a Law of Works (though he remains under it as the Law of Christ). He has been set free from both the commanding and condemning power of the law insofar as it stands as a works covenant.

## **The Law of Faith**

The difference between the Law of Works and the Law of Faith is that in the latter the believer obtains life “not as an agent but as a patient, not by doing but by receiving” (132). Fisher sets a clear distinction between the law and the gospel in this section of *The Marrow*, explaining that the moral law was delivered at Sinai to drive the Israelites outside of themselves and away from all confidence in the Law of Works so that they would see their need for Christ. At Sinai “there is no confounding of the two covenants of grace and works; but the latter was added to the former as subservient unto it, to turn their eyes towards the promise, or covenant of grace” (Boston, 77). For Fisher and Boston, there was a sense in which the covenant of works was republished in the Sinai covenant, even though they ultimately see Sinai as an administration of the covenant of grace.

The Law of Faith allows for no blending of Christ’s works with our works when it comes to the basis of our acceptance by God. Most legalists admit that they fall short of perfection, but they assume that God will reckon them righteous if they try their best and trust in Jesus to make up the difference. In Nomista’s words, “God will accept the will for the deed; and wherein you come short, Christ will help you out” (110). But if Christ’s obedience and our obedience have to be put together in order for us to obtain salvation, this would mean that both are imperfect. As Evangelista explains to Nomista:

If you desire to be justified before God, you must either bring to him a perfect obedience of your own, and wholly renounce Christ; or else you must bring the perfect righteousness of Christ, and wholly renounce your own . . . Christ Jesus will either be a whole Saviour, or no Saviour; he will either save you alone, or not save you at all. (111–12)

If our obedience were to be taken into account with regard to our justification, we would have no hope of being justified. While it is true that God is pleased to accept the good works of believers for Christ’s sake (see WCF 16.6), our obedience is never good enough to merit God’s approval.

This section of *The Marrow* explains that repentance cannot precede our coming to Christ because we have to go to Christ to receive the gift of repentance. In Boston’s words, “Sinners not only may, but ought to go to [Christ] for true repentance; and not stand far off from him until they get it to bring along with them; especially since repentance, as well as remission of sin, is a part of that salvation” (Boston, 159). While it is true that both John the Baptist and Jesus summoned people to “repent and believe,” they did not say this because repentance precedes faith but only because repentance is seen and evidenced before faith. Christ came to save sinners, not those who have already gotten rid of their sins through repentance. This is why Evangelista says, “Your sins should rather drive you to Christ than keep you from him” (151).

This relates to another aspect of the Marrow Controversy. Fisher and Boston insisted that in the gospel God has made a “deed of gift and grant” (144) to all of lost mankind,

which means that the gospel is to be offered to all people as something that they have a right to embrace by faith. As Evangelista puts it, “Wherefore, I beseech you, do not you say, It may be I am not elected, and therefore I will not believe in Christ; but rather say, I do believe in Christ, and therefore I am sure I am elected” (145). We are called to preach the gospel indiscriminately to all people, assuring them that the salvation that it offers belongs to everyone who will lay hold of Christ by faith.

## The Law of Christ

In the section on the Law of Christ, Fisher explains that believers remain under the law as a rule of life. The Law of Christ agrees with the Law of Works in its substance, which is the moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments. But while the Law of Works says, “Do this, and you shall live,” the Law of Christ says, “Live, and you shall do this.” At conversion, the Christian receives the moral law from the hand of Christ the Mediator to be his rule of life, but this moral law does not have the power to justify or condemn. In Boston’s words:

How can it do either the one or the other as such, since to be under it, as it is the law of Christ, is the peculiar privilege of believers, already justified by grace, and set beyond the reach of condemnation; according to that of the apostle . . .  
“There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”  
(Rom. 8:1). (Boston, 192)

The Law of Christ instructs believers to do good works, but in doing those good works they do not act *for* life, but *from* life.

Under the Law of Christ, believers have been set free from a legal spirit. That is, they are no longer constrained to obey God out of fear of punishment and hope of reward but out of faith, gratitude, love, and filial fear (see Ps. 130:3–4; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 5:4, 20; 1 John 4:19). As Fisher points out, “it is impossible for any man to love God, till by faith he know himself beloved of God” (205). By way of contrast, a legal disposition reigns among both antinomians and legalists. While the antinomian rejects the law because he sees no point in keeping it when there is no fear of punishment or hope of reward, the legalist treats the law as a covenant of works because of his fear of punishment and hope of reward.

Fisher also deals with the connection between a Christian’s good works and his assurance of salvation. While good works are necessary for salvation in an evidentiary sense, they are not necessary in an instrumental sense. Fisher develops this by noting the distinction between the direct act of faith and the reflex act of faith. The direct act of faith is the outward and objective component of assurance. It involves looking to Christ as the source of our justification and therefore belongs to the essence of faith. In Fisher’s words, “There is an assurance which rises from the exercise of faith by a direct act, and that is, when a man, by faith, directly lays hold upon Christ, and concludes assurance from thence” (243). The reflex act of faith is the inward and subjective component of assurance. It involves examining our hearts, with the help of the Spirit, to discern the fruits of faith that serve as the evidence of our justification. The reflex act of faith is not of the essence of faith, because it has to do with discerning the evidences of faith, and faith has to exist before its evidences can be seen. This approach to the topic of assurance is helpful because

it is consistent with the fact that the believer's acceptance by God is not in any sense dependent upon his works. As Fisher puts it, "For this is certain truth, that as no good either in you, or done by you, did move [God] to justify you, and give you eternal life, so no evil in you, or done by you, can move him to take it away from you, being once given" (237).

### Conclusion

The law-gospel distinction that is set forth in *The Marrow* is by no means antinomian. Every true Christian is being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, and every true Christian desires to be holy. In Boston's words, "There can be no walking in Christ, without a true receiving of him; and there cannot be a true receiving of him without walking in him" (Boston, 43). That being said, the process of sanctification is not the process that we intuitively think that it would be. There is a significant degree of mystery here. Consider these thoughts from two other writers who emphasized the law-gospel distinction:

I think we may certainly conclude, that [God] would not suffer sin to remain in [his people], if he did not purpose to over-rule it, for the fuller manifestation of the glory of his grace and wisdom, and the making his salvation more precious to their souls. . . . there are times when he is pleased to withdraw, and to permit Satan's approach, that we may feel how vile we are in ourselves. We are prone to spiritual pride, to self-dependence, to vain confidence, to creature attachments, and a train of evils. The Lord often discovers to us one sinful disposition by exposing us to another.<sup>5</sup>

There is a mystery in God's method, in that he often increases grace by our sense and sight of our infirmities; God's children never hate their corruption more than when they have been overcome by it. Then they know that there is some hidden corruption that they did not discern before and that they had better take notice of. . . . We must be justified and stand righteous before God by Christ's absolute righteousness, having experience of our imperfect righteousness.<sup>6</sup>

*The Marrow* helps us to see that while the Christian is obligated to obey the Law of Christ, he is never any less dependent upon Christ for righteousness than he was when he first believed. In John Newton's words, the mature Christian is one who, "having found again and again the vanity of all other helps, he is now taught to go to the Lord *at once* for 'grace to help in every time of need.' Thus he is strong, not in himself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."<sup>7</sup>

**Andy Wilson** is the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Laconia, NH.

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<sup>5</sup> Newton, 19–20, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Sibbes, *Glorious Freedom: The Excellency of the Gospel above the Law* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 159, 160.

<sup>7</sup> Newton, 24.

# ServantReading

## Knowledge and Christian Belief *by Alvin Plantinga*

A Review Article

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by James D. Baird

*Knowledge and Christian Belief*, by Alvin Plantinga. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015, xii + 129 pages, \$16.00, paper.

The recent rise in the perceived respectability of Christianity in American philosophical circles is astounding. Not sixty years ago, the title “Christian philosopher” seemed like an oxymoron. Back then, organizations now thriving, like the Society of Christian Philosophers and the Evangelical Philosophical Society, never would have gotten off the ground. We have many great Christian philosophers to thank for this contemporary tolerance of Christian belief, not the least of which is Alvin Plantinga.

*Knowledge and Christian Belief* is a synopsis of Plantinga’s magnum opus, *Warranted Christian Belief*<sup>1</sup> and is 387 pages shorter. Consequently, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* reads like an entirely new book, and will undoubtedly appeal to a new, more popular audience.

In *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, Plantinga’s chief topic is the “question of the rationality, or sensibleness, or justification, of Christian belief” (vii). Plantinga wants to investigate the claim made by the New Atheists (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens) that Christian belief is irrational, insensible, or unjustified, whether or not it is true. In short, Plantinga argues that this claim is simply mistaken.

In chapter 1 Plantinga clears the way for the rest of the book by showing that the Kantian objection that we cannot speak or think about God because he is a member of the unapproachable noumenal realm is self-defeating. In chapter 2 he seeks to tease out what else might be wrong with Christian belief. Plantinga notes that a belief can be false (*de facto*) or it can be otherwise inappropriate (*de jure*). Plantinga then attempts to find a *de jure* objection against Christian belief “that really does apply to Christian belief, and isn’t trivially easy to answer” and “is independent of the *de facto* objection—that is, is such that one can sensibly offer the objection without presupposing or assuming that Christian belief is false” (9). Plantinga concludes that the best candidate to meet these criteria is the

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<sup>1</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

objection that Christian belief is irrational or unwarranted—more precisely, that Christian belief is not formed by properly functioning mental faculties.

In chapter 3 Plantinga proposes what he calls the A/C model. This model is centered on the idea (present, in one form or another, in the writings of Aquinas and Calvin) that all human beings have a natural capacity to form properly basic beliefs about God—that is, beliefs that are rationally formed in us without any evidential basis. Plantinga further contends that if Christianity is true, then the A/C model is highly probable.

In chapters 4 through 6 Plantinga extends the A/C model to include Christian belief. He contends that if Christianity is true, then it is highly likely that God instituted a “three-tiered cognitive process” (53) for informing us about his great plan of redemption: Scripture, the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, and faith. Brought together, these three elements constitute the way we form properly basic beliefs about the gospel.

If Christianity is true, therefore, the objection that Christian belief is irrational or unwarranted falls flat. The only cogent way to sustain this objection is to take for granted that Christian belief is false. In other words, one cannot criticize Christian belief for being irrational or unwarranted without first showing it to be false. As Plantinga puts the issue, “What you take to be rational or warranted depends upon what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt” (40).

In chapter 7 Plantinga skillfully responds to some possible objections to his formulation of the extended A/C model. The remainder of the book is an engagement of three types of defeaters for Christian belief. According to Plantinga, defeaters are “reasons for giving up a belief” (90). In chapter 8 Plantinga examines whether historical biblical criticism is a viable defeater, in chapter 9 he examines pluralism, and in chapter 10 he examines the Achilles Heel of Christian belief: the problem of evil. With erudite precision, Plantinga shows that each of these alleged defeaters fail to rebut or undercut Christian belief.

*Knowledge and Christian Belief* is an excellent book. Plantinga masterfully sets forth his A/C model and its extensions with clarity and philosophical rigor. Pastors needing an aid responding to the kind of objections to Christian belief permeating the modern-day intelligentsia would do well to turn to this resource. It would be helpful in this respect to most philosophically minded Christians as well. However, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* does have some concerning elements along with some serious methodological flaws.

Overall, the kind of Christian belief Plantinga defends is Christian belief taken broadly, not the rich Christian belief taught in the Reformed confessions. Moreover, Plantinga’s construal of the *sensus divinitatis* in the A/C model is as a *capacity* for the knowledge of God, not as *actual* knowledge of God like what Paul argues for in Romans 1. One might also question whether Plantinga’s modal logic is consistent with traditional Christian theism.<sup>2</sup>

The most disappointing feature of *Knowledge and Christian Belief* is its lack of a positive philosophical case for Christianity. Says Plantinga in the book’s closing paragraph:

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<sup>2</sup> See James Douglas Baird, “God, Propositions, and Necessary Existence,” *Reformed Forum* (April 13, 2015), <http://reformedforum.org/god-propositions-necessary-existence/>.

But *is* [Christian belief] true? This is the really important question. And here we pass beyond the competence of philosophy. . . . Speaking for myself and not in the name of philosophy, I can say only that it does, indeed, seem to me to be true, and to be the maximally important truth. (126)

Notice, it is Plantinga's conception of the bounds and limits of the discipline of philosophy that explains his pseudo-fideism. We as Reformed Christians should wholeheartedly disagree with Plantinga at this point. If we let the New Testament shape our understanding, as we always should, we will view the nature of philosophy and philosophical proof in quite a different manner.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from the writings and ministry of Paul that the greatest philosophical proof available is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected (Acts 17:22–31; 1 Cor. 2; 2 Cor. 4:5–6; Eph. 3:8–10; Col. 2:2–4, 8). Preaching the gospel of Christ imparts eschatological light, knowledge, assurance, wisdom, and truth. What more could the Christian philosopher desire? Surely, when God speaks to us, whether in nature or in the good news of his Son's death and resurrection, that divine speech is more than enough philosophical proof.

Plantinga has made many wonderful contributions to Christian philosophy, and he has fought many battles under its banner. We as Calvinists, however, should not shy away from setting Calvin's model in stark contradistinction to the model of philosophy assumed and implemented by Plantinga. As Cornelius Van Til points out, "Calvin's theological effort was to set the biblical view of man and God squarely over against every form of man-centered philosophy."<sup>4</sup> Plantinga has unsuccessfully distinguished between God-centered philosophy and man-centered philosophy. He has decidedly failed to follow Calvin in setting forth a philosophy that is "a conceptual expression of what Christ, in Scripture, has told him about the past, the present, and the future"<sup>5</sup> because he has let what "everyone or nearly everyone" agrees upon define what philosophy can and cannot prove (126).

We should not settle for a philosophical method that seeks to accommodate the blind opinions of natural man. Indeed, we should accept our brothers espousing philosophies similar to Plantinga's with appropriate Christian warmth and fellowship. But, we should oppose their philosophy, despite whatever respectability it may gain us in the academy; for, to use the words of Paul, it is according to human tradition and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8).

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<sup>3</sup> See Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R, 1980), 20: "Above all, [the Bible] contains, if I may so call it, a divine philosophy of the history of redemption and of revelation in general outlines. And whosoever is convinced in his heart of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and reads his Bible as the Word of God, cannot, as a student of Biblical Theology, allow himself to reject this divine philosophy and substitute for it another of his own making."

<sup>4</sup> Cornelius Van Til, "Calvin as a Controversialist," in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology: Festschrift for John H. Gerstner*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1976), 6. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 1.5.12.

<sup>5</sup> Van Til, "Calvin," 6.

In *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, Alvin Plantinga offers much to the Reformed Christian by way of philosophically astute responses to the modern-day challenges to Christianity. Plantinga is a man with stout Christian convictions, and he should be respected as such. Nevertheless, his philosophical method falls short of the biblical imperative. His new book will subsequently leave the Reformed Christian longing for a more robust case for the full-orbed truth of Christianity. For such a robust case, I would gladly point the Reformed Christian to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's most esteemed apologist, Cornelius Van Til. In the writings of Van Til, the Reformed Christian will find the happy marriage between defense and offense—between philosophical critique and gospel proclamation—that is painfully lacking in many of Plantinga's writings.

**James D. Baird** *is a member of Grace Presbyterian Church of Lookout Mountain (PCA) in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and a student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

# Talking with Catholics about the Gospel

## *by Chris Castaldo*

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by **Camden Bucey**

*Talking with Catholics about the Gospel: A Guide for Evangelicals*, by Chris Castaldo. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 192 pages, \$16.99, paper.

Two Roman Catholic churches are located within three miles of where my congregation assembles for worship. Many of my sheep frequently encounter Catholics in the community, and others have Catholic family members or neighbors. Often I am asked for resources designed to help people gain a better grasp of contemporary Catholicism so they might know how to dialogue and evangelize intelligently. A little over a year ago, I was unaware of anything suitable for the task. The few resources that were initially promising missed the essence of post-Vatican II Catholicism. They failed to grasp the contours of contemporary Catholicism—often treating Catholicism as a monolithic whole rather than the variegated community it has become.

That all changed with the publication of Gregg Allison's *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Crossway, 2014), followed soon after by Chris Castaldo's *Talking with Catholics about the Gospel: A Guide for Evangelicals* (Zondervan, 2015). Although these books are similar, I encourage you to read both of them. Rather than being competitors, they serve as excellent complements that may be used in tandem to help our understanding of and outreach to Catholics. I suggest reading the introductions to both books, and then proceeding to read the remainder of Castaldo's volume before turning to Allison's.

Chris Castaldo serves as lead pastor of New Covenant Church in Naperville, Illinois. Raised an Italian Catholic in Long Island, his personal history helps him understand Catholics better than most do. His theological research combined with his ongoing ministry to Catholics affords him great depth in reflecting upon Catholic theology and developing strategies for interacting with Catholics.

In *Talking with Catholics about the Gospel*, Castaldo aims to speak the truth in love to Catholics, successfully proclaiming Christ while avoiding unnecessary strife. He emphasizes an approach of grace and truth (John 1:14), looking to the ministry of our incarnate Lord, who “responded with the utmost charity and discernment, refusing to allow a humanly engineered wedge to separate these virtues” (13). This important lesson underscores our understanding of gospel truth and the appropriate manner of communicating it. While we may assent to this idea at the conceptual level, it nonetheless may prove difficult to know what specific form these interactions might take. Castaldo helps us immensely with practical examples and helpful suggestions based on years of first-hand experience.

In his chapter “Understanding Catholics,” Castaldo demonstrates a sensitivity to the diversity of Catholicism by offering a helpful taxonomy of different types of Catholics in America: traditional, evangelical, and cultural. This is the book's unique value and the

author's greatest service to evangelical readers. Castaldo offers strategies for speaking with and reaching each type.

Toward the end of the book Castaldo addresses the top ten questions about Catholicism. In this section he treats several theological issues including common misconceptions of the Mass and the relationship of the Protestant doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone to official Catholic teaching. He also addresses several important practical questions, such as whether Protestants and Catholics should marry and how evangelicals may be more welcoming of Catholics and former Catholics in worship.

Many of these sections are organized and formatted for quick perusal, which allows the book to be used as a handbook or field guide. Readers may return to applicable sections in times of need. Even so, the book is not reducible to such use. Castaldo provides a developed explanation of contemporary Catholicism, not merely a list of talking points.

Readers will benefit from chapters that treat Catholic history since the sixteenth century and the similarities and differences between Catholics and Protestants. In order to encourage fruitful conversations, we must understand how we have arrived at our present context. Catholic and Protestant relations have a storied history. Rehearsing this history will help us to affirm our shared concerns and beliefs, while also acknowledging our profound differences. This is requisite to the development of strong relationships through which the gospel may be embodied and more effectively proclaimed.

Our churches will be served well by reading *Talking with Catholics about the Gospel*, especially if they act upon it. Castaldo is not concerned merely with transmitting information. He desires for us to put our newly gained knowledge to use for the sake of the kingdom. We must develop the relationships that communicate the grace and truth of our Savior, who is the cornerstone and head of his body, the church.

**Camden Bucey** is pastor of Hope Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Grayslake, Illinois.

# ServantReading

## The Song of Songs *by Iain M. Duguid*

A Review Article

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by **Sherif Gendy**

*The Song of Songs: An Introduction and Commentary*, by Iain M. Duguid. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015, 160 pages, \$18.00, paper.

This volume is number nineteen in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series. Iain M. Duguid offers a general introduction to the book of Song of Songs with discussion of its title, authorship, date, approaches of interpretation, canonicity, themes and message, and structure and unity. This introduction is then followed by an analysis, translation, and commentary on the text.

Duguid touches on issues related to arguments for and against Solomonic authorship, which correspond to early and late dates respectively. He concludes that a date after the exile may be regarded as more likely, and that Solomonic authorship is not necessary. For Duguid, it seems more plausible that the authorship is unknown.

Duguid spends some time laying out the variant hermeneutical approaches to the Song. Taking the book as a love song, Duguid briefly discusses the allegorical, natural, typological, and the three-character interpretations. He does not, however, mention the Song's history of interpretation and how it was understood in Jewish tradition and through the early church fathers. Duguid adopts as his hermeneutical approach the twofold interpretation, combining natural and spiritual meanings. He argues that the book should be read against the backdrop of wisdom literature, and as such, it is designed to show us an idealized picture of married love in the context of a fallen and broken world. Yet at the same time, Duguid regards the book as "parabolic," in that it speaks of our imperfection as humans and as lovers and thus it drives us into the arms of our heavenly husband, Jesus Christ.

While Duguid does not rule out the typological reading of the book, he prefers to couple it with the allegorical interpretation where both comprise the spiritual meaning. He then wishes to divorce this spiritual interpretation from the book's literal meaning—what Duguid calls "natural" reading. One is left wondering, to what extent can we divorce the spiritual and natural readings? Is it even possible to separate the two at all? And what constitutes the "natural" reading of any Scripture if it does not include any typological or spiritual sense?

A more helpful hermeneutical approach is the analogical and canonical reading, which seriously takes into consideration the book's immediate context and literary genre

as wisdom literature. According to this reading, the book is read following Proverbs and Ruth in the Hebrew canon. Proverbs 31:10 speaks of אִשֶׁת־חַיִל ('*eshet-hayil*) “virtuous woman” (cf. Prov. 12:4), and then comes Ruth as an example and embodiment of this virtuous woman, thus she was called אִשֶׁת חַיִל ('*eshet hayil*) (Ruth 3:11). The Song of Songs follows this motif as it presents the celebration of the virtuous woman’s love with her lover. Proverbs describes the ideal wife, which Ruth is. Song of Songs describes the bliss of love and applies to Boaz and Ruth by its canonical proximity. This canonical consideration sets the stage for the analogical reading, once we consider the wider canonical context. In this context, we learn that Yahweh’s relationship with his people is often couched in the language of the covenant of marriage. This is one of the primary ways this relationship is portrayed in the Scripture. Thus, when the Song is taken canonically, and by analogy, it speaks of this divine-human marriage relationship. This relationship finds its ultimate expression through the covenant mediator’s work on the cross.

Duguid summarizes the main themes and message of the book, which are centered on love and sex within a committed marriage. The Song also speaks against asceticism. Once the book’s message is identified through natural or literal reading, Duguid wishes to see a message beyond marriage that looks to the heavenly bridegroom through the work of Christ.

Although not arguing for a strict narrative behind the Song or a chiasmic structure, Duguid sees a broad development and logical flow where there is a movement that leads up to and away from the marriage. Duguid rightly observes that the Song leaves the couple (and us) at the end longing for something more complete.

The second major part of this book has an analysis (in which Duguid outlines the book), Duguid’s own translation of the book, and then a commentary. The commentary discusses the *context* of each passage at hand, then Duguid offers *comment* on the passage, highlighting some key phrases and words, and finally there is the *meaning* that explains the passage from a practical perspective with spiritual life applications.

Duguid offers some helpful considerations from the Song’s title. The compound form “Song of Songs” is best understood as a superlative title, like “King of kings” or “Holy of Holies.” The title introduces and guides interpretation, identifies the book, and provides a frame of reference that orients the reader to the material that follows. The singular form, שִׁיר (*shiyr*) “song,” suggests that this book comprises a single song, rather than being a diverse collection of disparate materials. It also focuses our attention on the unity and the genre of the book. It tells us that what follows is a song rather than some other genre of writing, such as a proverb, a prophetic vision, or a historical narrative. Although the book is a poetic song in its genre, this does not negate the possibility that it might reflect a story that took place in history. In other words, it could be a historical account written poetically in the form of a song, in the same way Genesis 1, for example, is written in a poetic style but communicates history.

An important discussion on the poetic style of the text is missing in Duguid’s treatment. One expects Duguid to spend some time analyzing the poetic features of the Hebrew terse utterances, cola, which are generally grouped in pairs (bicola) or triplets (tricola). These in turn form larger constellations: the strophe and the stanza. This kind of Hebrew textual analysis highlights the main message of a given passage and explains its function within the whole book.

Another genre fallacy that Duguid seems to have fallen into is his assumption that poetry does not communicate doctrine and does not have logical connections. This is shown in Duguid's quotation of C. S. Lewis's comment about the Psalms (72).<sup>1</sup> If the Song of Songs is taken as Scripture, then it must communicate theological truths. As Scripture, the Song cannot simply be devoted to the joys of physical love with no theological significance. As Christians, we do not approach the Song of Songs as "a code to be cracked," or with the belief that its imagery needs to be subordinated to a general interest. Rather, we approach the Song with the presumption that it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). To come away with the idea that the Song is a poem about human sexuality appears rather to shortchange the interpreter of Scripture.

Duguid takes the approach that the man in the poem is an idealized figure, a poetic persona rather than a historical individual. For Duguid, the focus of the Song is not on the specific identity of the lovers so much as it is on the nature of their love. He understands *אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמוֹה* (*'asher lishlomoh*) "which is Solomon's" (1:1) not as designated authorship, rather as possession. Thus, according to Duguid, the Song's title suggests that this book is in some general sense about "that which belongs to Solomon."

Duguid's book is good for pastors and preachers. It is not academically technical as one might expect, rather it is practical and handy. It relies on many resources and ancient Near Eastern comparisons. Closing comment or a conclusion is missing in this book. It ends with a discussion on the last two verses of the Song (8:13–14).

While there are spiritual applications, this book lacks a coherent presentation of the Song's contribution to biblical theology. Since Duguid adopts the view that Solomon is neither the subject of the Song, nor its author, he sees the Song's primary significance as describing human relationships. He fails to read the Song canonically in its final shape and place within the canon. This canonical hermeneutic operates within a theologically articulate interpretive method that opens the door for reading the Song, which belongs to Solomon, in light of the Davidic covenant and the promise for David's son and everlasting throne (2 Sam. 7). The Song also has images borrowed from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2–3) that one cannot neglect if we are to understand it canonically. These images not only connect the Song to the first garden, but also look forward to the consummate garden in the new heavens and new earth.

Failing to read the Song canonically means failing to read it as Christian Scripture. Only the canonical reading would allow one to see the Song's messianic hope. This hope is rooted in the soil of the promise that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, watered by the expectation of a king from the seed of Abraham via Judah, and fertilized by anticipations of an eschatological return to the Garden of Eden.

**Sherif Gendy** is a licentiate in the Presbytery of the Midwest (OPC), a PhD student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and serving as Arabic Theological Editor for Third Millennium Ministries in Casselberry, Florida.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 3.

# Do We Need A Better Country Now More Than Ever?

## A Review Article

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

*The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born-Again Years*, by Steven P. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, viii + 221 pages, \$24.95.

When did Christian America end? That is a question on the minds of many Christians in the United States since *Obergefell v. Hodges* (June 26, 2015). The court's decision to declare unconstitutional laws prohibiting marriage between persons of the same sex has not only provoked various degrees of discouragement but even prompted some commentators, like journalist Rod Dreher, to propose the Benedict Option. This refers to Benedict of Nursia's determination after the fall of the Roman Empire to form a monastic community, in other words, to withdraw from the decay of the larger society and preserve the distinct beliefs and patterns of life prescribed by Christianity. Dreher himself is not literally suggesting the formation of monasteries. But he believes that Christians need to recognize the impossibility of preserving Christians standards in the wider society and that this may require finding ways of being Christian that are intentionally in opposition to or isolated from the wider culture. This Benedict Option looks increasingly plausible now that the United States' highest court has opened the Pandora's Box of marriage and family life.

Steven P. Miller argues in *The Age of Evangelicalism* that the recent period of American history has witnessed the end of one version of Christian America and that it was happening even before the debates over same-sex marriage. Between roughly 1975 and 2008 the United States experienced what Miller calls its "Born-Again Years." From the Jesus People who offered a sanctified alternative to drugs, sex, and rock 'n roll, to George W. Bush's presidency, evangelicalism was the lens through which pollsters, scholars, journalists, and political operatives evaluated religion in the United States. *The Age of Evangelicalism* as a history of born-again Protestantism from the 1970s on offers very little new material. Miller assembles the usual suspects—Billy Graham, Hal Lindsey, Jimmy Carter, Jerry Falwell, Rick Warren, Pat Robertson, Jim Wallis, and Ralph Reed—not so much to add to a subject that has arguably received more attention than any other aspect of American Christianity. Instead, Miller's point is subtler than that. He uses the standard evangelical narrative to demonstrate how born-again Protestantism, even though its adherents thought of themselves as a minority fighting against the secular majority, dominated discussions of religion in the United States during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Miller's point is worth pondering, and it makes sense of the Red-State–Blue-State divide of recent electoral politics. But the book also leaves out what makes evangelicalism tick as a religious faith. Born-again Protestantism did have a large influence on American politics and that in turn transformed evangelicalism into a partisan faith. But Miller's account almost completely ignores evangelicalism's religion—debates about inerrancy, the rise of the megachurch and its effects on worship, the decline of dispensationalism. In fact, readers may well wonder if evangelicalism would have received all the attention it has if it were primarily a means of evangelizing and cultivating a desire for holiness in converts.

Curiously enough, Miller observes that evangelicalism rose to prominence precisely at a time when American civil religion experienced a crisis of faith. Billy Graham was, of course, the icon of evangelicalism. At the beginning of the 1970s he was a reliable supporter of American patriotism and regularly appeared with and counseled President Richard M. Nixon. But the Watergate scandal tarnished Nixon's overt brand of civil religion. (Does any American remember worship services in the White House?) Still, Graham escaped the cynicism that fed the efforts to impeach Nixon, and evangelicalism emerged as the vehicle that transported America's Cold War civil religion past the troubles of Vietnam and objections to the arms race into the Reagan and Bush years. Miller himself does not connect the dots between the 1950s mainline Protestant project of sustaining an America "under God" and the later evangelical effort to defend and maintain a Christian nation. Still, the book supplies important evidence for understanding where the God-and-country enthusiasm of the 1950s went—an enthusiasm which put "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" on coins. The Christian nationalism that mainline Protestant leadership abandoned during the 1960s over discomforts about race, gender, and sex found a home in 1970s evangelicalism, of course, with help from Republican Party operatives. Born-again Protestantism may have infused the GOP with electoral vigor, but after three decades it came to an end with the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Miller interprets the Democratic president's victory as a rejection of the "excesses of the Christian Right and the Republican Party that seemed bound to do its bidding," as well as an indication of the evangelical left's resurgence (154). Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo, thought to be the future of evangelical political engagement in the 1970s, had finally come into their own after three decades of the Moral Majority and family values. Whether the Obama administration is what the evangelical left had in mind is another matter. Campolo may applaud the legalization of same-sex marriage, but Wallis is decidedly uncomfortable with federal funding for Planned Parenthood after the recent release of videos about the agency's trafficking in fetal body parts.

Aside from Miller's intriguing proposal to name the period between 1975 and 2005 as "the evangelical age," the book repeats the highlights of recent evangelical history that is well known to most people who either follow the news or US religious history. Even so, Miller's book is also provocative for considering the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's relationship to the wider evangelical world. Prior to the 1970s the OPC was ambivalent about evangelical leaders and institutions. The church refused to join the newly formed National Association of Evangelicals in the 1940s and continued to find ecumenical outlets that were intentionally Reformed. In less institutional ways, Orthodox Presbyterians also expressed caution about the new evangelicalism. Think of E. J. Young's refusal to serve on the editorial board of *Christianity Today* because the magazine included mainline Presbyterians. Consider also Westminster Seminary's determination in 1961 not to cooperate with Billy Graham's Philadelphia crusade. Then there is Cornelius Van Til's critique of neo-evangelicalism in a small manuscript from 1964. Evidence like this suggests that the OPC's founding generation saw itself as maintaining and defending a form of Protestantism—Reformed—that was distinct and in some ways opposed to the born-again Protestantism that became popular after World War II.

But that ambivalence about evangelicalism changed in the 1970s when the OPC experienced a crisis of identity. There at the beginning of Miller's "evangelical age" the second generation of Orthodox Presbyterians began to think that militancy was no longer the best stance for the church. Instead, the OPC needed to be positive, reach out, and implement new ways of worship and evangelism. The New Life churches were one example of this, but so was the OPC's desire to join other denominations, first the RPCES and then the PCA. In

effect, the old reasons for being Orthodox Presbyterian were obsolete. New times called for new reasons. And with the rise of the Religious Right, some Orthodox Presbyterians felt even more compelled to identify with evangelicalism. Here was an opportunity to belong to something bigger than the small communion the OPC represented. It was also a chance to do something that could affect the health of the nation.

Nevertheless, the appeal of evangelicalism, still there in some ways, did not overwhelm the OPC. As the church recovered a sense of its own history, as New Life congregations realigned with the PCA after the failure of Joining & Receiving in 1986, the OPC recovered some of the older militancy that had characterized the founding generation. The church is still not part of the NAE, is still ambivalent about cooperative endeavors that would compromise its Calvinist theology, and is still wary of identifying the gospel or church with partisan politics. A useful reminder of the OPC's self-awareness as a distinctly Reformed communion was its General Assembly's 1956 report on the Boy Scouts of America. Here was an institution as wholesome and as American as apple pie. Yet the advice the committee report gave to sessions and presbyteries was to avoid sponsoring troops within OPC congregations. The reasons were a defective understanding of God, an attitude of tolerance that discouraged maintaining and defending doctrinal truth, a fusion of patriotism and piety, and a belief that boys (and people more generally) were capable of keeping God's moral law apart from regeneration. Well before evangelicals carried on the old civil religion that had infused mainline Protestantism in different versions going back to the Second Great Awakening, Orthodox Presbyterians understood that a healthy nation was different from a faithful church and that to preserve the latter, loyalty to the former needed to be qualified.

Now that America has entered its post-Christian stage of life, or as Miller would put it, the nation's post-evangelical years, Orthodox Presbyterians have good reasons for not being surprised or despondent. Since its founding in 1936, the OPC (along with a number of other Protestant communions) has known existentially the meaning, in Peter's words, of being "aliens" and "strangers" (1 Pet. 2:11). This understanding emerged in the context of the first generation's leaving behind tall-steeple churches and well-appointed manses to hold services in schools, store fronts, and homes. It grew stronger from the biblical exposition of Geerhardus Vos and John Murray, whose biblical theology recognized that Christians in this age between the advents of Christ, in the words of the writer to the Hebrews, "seek a better country." This outlook avoided both the despair of dispensationalism and the over-confidence of postmillennialism. Now that the United States national government has rejected certain Christian norms, some pundits are calling for different strategies—like the so-called Benedict Option—for believers to regroup and create enclaves where they can cultivate and pass on their faith to the next generation. Orthodox Presbyterians should not need disappointing rulings by the federal courts to consider Christian existence and witness on the cultural margins. Since its founding, the OPC has been aware of the discrepancy between Christian faithfulness and broader trends in American society. Steven Miller's book is yet one more reminder of the ambivalent relationship between the gospel and the United States—an ambivalence that has long been familiar to Orthodox Presbyterians.

**Darryl G. Hart** is distinguished visiting assistant professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, and an elder in Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan.

# ServantPoetry

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by G. K. Chesterton (1884–1936)

## The Convert

After one moment when I bowed my head  
And the whole world turned over and came upright,  
And I came out where the old road shone white.  
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,  
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,  
Being not unlovable but strange and light;  
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite  
But softly, as men smile about the dead.

The sages have a hundred maps to give  
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,  
They rattle reason out through many a sieve  
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:  
And all these things are less than dust to me  
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.