



Ecumenism 3

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From the Editor

At the dawn of a new year we plan new endeavors, new ways to serve our Lord. So the mandate to be united in various ways with those of like precious faith should always be a fresh enterprise of the church. So, our Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations represents the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's efforts in this important arena. Toward that end Alan Strange gave a lecture at the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) Classis Eastern US, "Semper Reformanda Conference" on October 14, 2014. In his article, "The Barriers to Ecumenicity," he explores areas, mostly in polity, in which the URCNA and the OPC need to work as we seek unity.

Danny Olinger continues offering chapters from his biography of Geerhardus Vos. This month he explores Vos's involvement in the great early twentieth-century conflict between liberalism and orthodox Christianity in the Presbyterian Church. Don't miss this important part of our history in "Geerhardus Vos: Presbyterian Unrest."

John Fesko reviews John Frame's *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* in "(Dis)Engaging our Reformed Fathers (?)," in which he applauds the scope of the work, while questioning some of the methods and challenging Frame's critique of post-Reformation dogmatics. Both the review and the book should prove intellectually stimulating.

D. Scott Meadows reviews a new work of systematic theology contributed to and edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain: *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation*. It is encouraging to see a renewed interest in Reformed dogmatics, the benefit of which to the church has been underappreciated for the better part of a century.

John Muether reviews Senator Ben Sasse's *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis – and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance*. "[T]his book serves as a helpful primer on civic engagement for politically-charged Christians." Sasse reveals that he is a citizen of two kingdoms and offers positive ways to recover mature adulthood.

Along similar lines is Jean M. Twenge's latest book: *iGen*. It provides detailed sociological analysis of the youngest generation to enter early adulthood. While trying to refrain from judgments, Twenge's assessment is not optimistic in light of the smart phone's unique dominance in the life of this latest generation.

A word about reviews. There are many different kinds of reviews. My review articles purposely summarize the chapters seriatim. Having less of my own opinion differs from many review articles. My goal is to give the gist of a good book that busy church officers may not have time to read. I also do not ordinarily have books reviewed in *Ordained Servant* that I cannot recommend, unless there is a popular book that I think officers may need a warning about.

Finally, our poem this month goes with our cover, “God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

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.

ServantChurch

Barriers to Ecumenicity

by Alan D. Strange

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!

² It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!

³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

Perhaps we should say that, first of all, in response to the ecumenical imperative of Scripture, we cannot fail to achieve unity, ultimately. Psalm 133 extols the unity of the brethren, and our Lord in John 17 prays that we be one. We have in view at this conference¹ the practical outworking of that in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Can these two bodies thus fail to be one, at least spiritually and essentially (if not in outward organization)? Even though we may be divided into different denominations, all of those who have been born again of God's Spirit and who partake of the appointed means of grace are by such united in heart and purpose, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism (as Paul says in the beginning of his great unity chapter—Ephesians 4). So in one very real sense the OPC and the URCNA are one and cannot fail to be one.

That we are, in some sense, already one, does not mean that we ought not to strive to be one, doing all that we can to achieve such oneness even in outward organization. In other words, God calls us in everything to be who we already are in Christ. When our Lord prays (again in John 17) that we be sanctified, we may rightly ask: Can we fail to be sanctified, at least in a measure? Surely, we ought to strive to be sanctified with all that is within us, but in the midst of our struggles, it is encouraging to know that, though we routinely experience much failure, we will be sanctified. Even so, as a part of that, it is truly encouraging to know that what we lack in unity will one day be remedied. We will be perfected, in our unity with

¹ This article is based on a lecture given at the United Reformed Churches in North America Classis Eastern US, "Semper Reformanda Conference" on October 14, 2014.

Christ and each other, even as we will be made perfectly holy in our sanctification when we are glorified.

The church, though she may be frustrated in her ecumenical efforts, shall be one outwardly (visibly), in glory, and is one already with respect to the invisible church. True ecumenicity is not a foreign work to Christianity but the essence of who we are: all true believers are one in him across all denominational lines. That such denominational lines exist often *discourages* us, but that there is a unity of all true believers in spite of and across these lines should *encourage* us to continue to labor together to come outwardly to a greater realization of what is true of us all inwardly: we belong to Jesus Christ and are in union with him and with each other as members of his mystical body.

I am tasked to talk about barriers to ecumenicity between the OPC and URCNA (and thus thrown into the unenviable role of being an ecclesiastical bad cop to the good cop of other speakers here!), looking first at things that keep us apart, both illegitimately and legitimately. And then, secondly, we will briefly examine how to overcome these barriers.

There are, we must admit, things that keep the URCNA and OPC apart. I think that it's helpful to conceive of what keeps us apart under the rubric of illegitimate and legitimate barriers: the former stemming from our sin, and the latter from our sincerely different understandings of matters ecclesiastical. Let's start with the illegitimate barriers to our relationship with each other. Simply put, both the OPC and the URCNA fail to love God and each other as we ought: we both suffer the effects of remaining sin, personally and corporately. Remaining sin contributes to our ongoing struggle with failing to love God and each other. We fail to love God personally—sad to say, but who among us loves him as we ought? Is it any wonder, then, that we fail to love each other as we ought? This failure, as just noted, is not only personal but has a larger dimension as well. There is a corporate failure to love each other at the local, regional, and denominational/federational levels.

Here's the remedy. We need to repent. We have in view here not only John 17, but the whole epistle of 1 John, which challenges us: how can we love God whom we don't see when we don't love our brother whom we do see? Failure to love our brother (we are to love our neighbor, even our enemy; think of the parable of the good Samaritan), especially those who are our fellow Reformed and Presbyterian brothers (the nearest to us, next to our own communions), is a sad and singular failure. We should love all fellow Christians and those most particularly with whom we share the same biblical and theological convictions.

We fail in this when we are apathetic or even hostile to our brothers and sisters in fellow Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Perhaps this manifests itself by us simply not caring to reach out beyond our own communions (why should I love or care for Christians outside my congregation or federation/denomination?) or by having a party spirit (the OPC is simply the best and the rest of you are seriously lacking). In short, pride, complacency, or even sometimes envy, cause us to lack in love toward each other.

We often simply fail to take seriously the ecumenical imperative of John 17. Things are fine, and we need not strive for more unity than we already have as believers in Christ. This is especially true as to the visible church—it's easy to downplay the significance of such visible unity. But we witness to the world that we love Jesus and each other as we have more and more unity in the visible church. One of the great strengths of the early church was its clear witness to a watching world: "see how they love one another," was the common refrain of unbelievers observing Christians. Should we not strive for this in our own times?

Over the course of decades, that witness of the ancient church so impressed the pagan world that when the Decian persecution came in AD 250, the old canard going back to Nero's time that the Christians were "haters of mankind" received no credence. This is because

everyone saw how loving the Christians were, even to non-Christians, whether helping them in need or saving exposed babies (the call for such being seen in the Didache and elsewhere). What a witness true ecumenicity can be when we show that we love each other with a love that spills over into all the population about us. The more that we are one, the more loving we are to one another as well as to the strangers among us. Hearts of love for each other manifest good to the household of faith and to all with whom we have to do.

Visible unity glorifies God and edifies us. Think about this: how long can we afford to remain apart in the current cultural climate? Because we have unity in the invisible church, as I mentioned above, perhaps we are complacent about it in the visible church. But we should be no more complacent about this than we are about our sanctification. Our Lord's call to sanctification merits our serious regular attention. So does his call to unity in the body: it merits our most strenuous efforts. Even as we need to strive more to love those within our own communions, we must strive to love each other across denominational and federational lines. This reflects more properly what Christ's body in this world is. If we choose not to concern ourselves with organizational unity, we fail to take seriously our Lord's imperative to manifest the unity that we truly have in him.

There are also legitimate barriers to our full visible unity in the body of Christ. These are ones that arise from biblical convictions that necessitate our working in separate organizational structures. For example, Baptists have different sacramental and polity views than us that, even though they may be soteriological Calvinists, necessitate our working in different denominations. Do we in the URCNA and OPC have such doctrinal and polity differences? Well, we don't have the same doctrinal standards: the URCNA has the Three Forms of Unity (TFU): the Belgic Confession (BC), Heidelberg Catechism (HC), and Canons of Dort; the OPC has the Westminster Standards (WS): the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (WLC, WSC). Additionally, we have different church orders that have some strikingly different features.

Any doctrinal differences among us then would stem primarily from confessional divergences. Do we have such differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards? The URCNA adopted the following back in 1997:

That synod appoint a committee to study the Confessional Standards, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory of Worship of the OPC with regard to the similarities and differences between them and the Confessional Standards and Church Order of the URCNA in order to work toward ecclesiastical unity with the OPC. . . .
(*Minutes of Synod 1997*, 10–11).

Such a study was done, and here is what was concluded with respect to doctrinal differences, perceived and real:

1. Covenant of Works (WCF 7.2, 19.1; WLC 30 and 97).
2. Regenerated Infants (WCF 10.3).
3. Assurance and Faith (WCF 14.3, 18.1–4 / WLC 80–81 / HC LD 7).
4. The Fourth Commandment (WCF 21.7–8 / WLC 117 / HC LD 38).
5. Marriage and Permissible Divorce (WCF 24.1–6).

6. Visible and Invisible Church (WCF 25.1–4).
7. Power to Depose (WCF 31.1–4).
8. Prayer as a Means of Grace (WLC 154 / WSC 88).
9. True and False Churches Easily Distinguished (BC 29).

With respect to item 1, the Westminster Standards speak of the covenant made with man in his innocency as a covenant of works. The TFU have no such comparable designation, as this was a subsequent development in covenant theology. The question here is one of continuity between Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While some, like Karl Barth, have seen a great discontinuity between Calvin and the Calvinists (a popular way of putting this perceived disjunction), many others, like Richard Muller, have argued that while there are different emphases that develop in covenant theology, there is essential continuity between the TFU and the WS.

With respect to items 4 and 8 (the Fourth Commandment and Prayer as a Means of Grace), there is likely more accord in practice here than in precept (as is true with respect to liturgy and catechizing). While it is true that the Westminster Standards have a more robust doctrine of the Sabbath than do the Three Forms of Unity, it is the case, observationally, that the churches in the URCNA have functionally at least as high if not a higher history of practice with respect to the Lord's Day. The OPC, in general, would be happy to have 50 percent of those in morning service return for the evening service. It is customary in the URCNA to have a higher percentage than half of those who worshiped in the morning service returning for the evening service. Similarly, in terms of practice, it is not the case that prayer, ordinarily, plays a lesser part in secret, private, and public worship in the URCNA than in the OPC. Members of the URCNA, as well as churches in the URCNA, appear to be as prayerful as those in the OPC; all could use improvement here, but it is not the case that the URCNA is demonstrably less prayerful than the OPC.

With respect to the other items, they can all be handily addressed. Several of these—points 1, 2, 5, and 6—simply are not addressed in the Three Forms of Unity. It is not that the Westminster Standards contradict the Three Forms of Unity at these points; the TFU have no specific treatment of “elect infants dying in infancy” (something arguably a bit different than what Dort 1.17 affirms); divorce; the visible and invisible church distinction; or the covenant of works. With respect to point 3, different matters are in view in the two traditions. The assurance of which the Three Forms of Unity speak is a contention made over against Rome's assertion that assurance is an extraordinary work; Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism sees assurance as that which ordinarily accompanies faith. The Westminster Standards treatment of assurance distinguishes faith and assurance, seeing the latter as a reflective act on the former and not of the essence of saving faith itself. The TFU then is speaking of assurance as the conviction accompanying assent and trust, whereas Westminster sees assurance as a reflection on the activity of faith, a believing that one believes.

Point 7 (on the power to depose) points to what will ultimately play out as a polity difference between the OPC and the URC and thus is a real difference, but more of a polity than doctrinal nature. Point 9 (on the true and false church) in the Belgic Confession is written at a point in time when the differences between true and false churches was plainer and a matter of kind not degree. After the proliferation of Protestant groups in the seventeenth century, the matter is less clear: Westminster Confession of Faith 25 is written after the

development of Protestantism when it has become the case that the issue is no longer as clearly true or false church *simpliciter* but a matter of degree among a greater number of churches—“more or less pure.”

Even the historic difference with respect to confessional adherence (the OPC permitting scruples and the URCNA maintaining a “stricter” *quia* subscription) is not often what some have made of it (stricter vs. looser subscription is not the same debate as the *quia/quotenus* debate)² and reflects a lack of discernment regarding the fuller nature of the WS over against the TFU. What I mean is this: the Westminster Standards contain a more developed doctrinal statement than do the continental standards, with the former addressing matters like lawful oaths and vows (chapter 22) and marriage and divorce (chapter 24).

Permitting scruples about such wide-ranging confessional statements is not the same as permitting such with respect to documents that are more narrowly focused on soteriology and ecclesiology, as are the Three Forms of Unity. There is little that one could conceive of taking exception to in the continental standards, given their narrower explication of soteriological and ecclesiological Calvinism. All this is to say, that our continental brothers need not be nervous over the OPC permitting a few scruples, usually in areas in which their documents are silent or sparse (one thinks particularly here of matters related to the Sabbath as well as those addressed immediately above).

The differences, then, between the OPC and the URCNA, while doctrinal in some measure, are not thought to be chiefly such: the doctrinal differences tend to be matters of emphasis and the OPC coming from a more developed doctrinal statement in the Westminster Standards of the mid-seventeenth century than the earlier Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and Canons of Dort (1618). It is agreed that the most significant differences between the two churches lie in the area of polity. Polity differences are not of the same order as doctrinal differences—we Presbyterians reflect this sometimes in referring to our doctrinal statements as secondary and our polity documents as tertiary (with the Scriptures being irreformable and thus primary). Consequently, one might surmise that where such differences obtain among the OPC and URC, it is better that they are only polity and not doctrinal differences.

And this is true: differences that can be more readily composed (as one might assume with tertiary rather than secondary differences), should present less of a barrier to union between the two bodies than divergences of a more substantive sort. Such polity differences as there are, however, must not be pooh-poohed as if they are unimportant and don’t really matter. As important as one’s doctrinal standards are, one’s polity rules are also important, because they function on the level of day-to-day operations of the organization, arguably more so than the doctrinal standards do, strictly speaking. Polity differences (between the two church orders), then, form the more significant barrier between the two bodies at the level of routine functioning. They are not as daunting as doctrinal differences; they are, however, given their regular role in the life of the bodies, important. If the two bodies are to grow closer, polity differences will need to be honestly admitted and carefully engaged in seeking to make ecumenical progress.

² Some Reformed churches made a similar distinction as the Lutherans between those who subscribed to the confessions “because” (*quia*) they were expressive of the Word of God and those who subscribed “insofar as” (*quotenus*) they were expressive of the Word of God, cf. Peter Lillback, “Confessional Subscription Among the Sixteenth Century Reformers,” in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, David W. Hall, ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 33–66.

The URCNA Committee that examined all the differences between the URCNA and OPC looked, as I've noted, not only at the doctrinal differences but also polity differences. They looked at the polity differences under the rubrics provided for in the URCNA *Church Order*.³ The URCNA *Church Order* is considerably thinner than the OPC *Book of Church Order*. The former contains all the matters pertaining to government, worship, and discipline in the sixty-six articles of its *Church Order*, whereas in the OPC such matters are spread across three distinct books: the Form of Government, the Directory for the Public Worship of God, and the Book of Discipline. Since I am basing this talk in no small measure on that report, here is the organization of the URCNA *Church Order* articles and the order of treatment by the committee of the polity differences:

1. Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1–15)
2. Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 16–36)
3. Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 37–50)
4. Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 51–66)

With respect to the first section on Ecclesiastical Offices, both the URCNA and the OPC conceive of three offices: minister, (ruling) elder, and deacon, though the two bodies understand them somewhat differently. Both churches see ministers as those who pastor, chiefly, and who administer the Word and sacraments. Additionally, the OPC (in keeping with historic Presbyterianism) views the office of minister as also comprehending that of ruling elder and deacon. In other words, ministers are elders and deacons as well, elders are also deacons, and deacons are deacons. The URCNA conceives of the offices rather more distinctly, so that a minister is not also a church governor (elder). Additionally, in the URCNA the local consistory, of which the minister is a member, has jurisdiction over him, instead of the presbytery, in which body a minister has his membership in the OPC. In the URCNA, the consistory examines and qualifies men (with the assistance of the classis); in the OPC, the presbytery is the examining and qualifying body for ministers and ministerial candidates.

It may also be noted, with respect to the ministerial office, that the OPC, as does historic Presbyterianism and other continental Reformed churches, sees the office of minister as expressing itself not only in the pastorate but in other ways. The OPC church order explicitly describes the teacher and the evangelist, with the former having warrant to teach in the local congregation, as well as in the theological seminary and other educational institutions, and the latter operating in the mission context, including publishing, editing and the like. Formally speaking, it is unclear that the URCNA Church Order provides for any exercise of the office of minister other than that which is carried out in the specific office of pastor of a local church.

With respect to the second section on Ecclesiastical Assemblies, it is also noted that both bodies recognize three assemblies: local (consistory and session), regional (classis and presbytery), and national (synod and general assembly). Here, too, however, there is a somewhat different conception of the matter. The URCNA believes that the consistory is the

³ *Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America*, Seventh Edition, AD 2016.

only continuing judicatory, whereas the OPC believes that the presbytery is an ongoing judicatory as well and that the “broader” judicatories are not merely functional in securing the peace, purity, and unity of the church but are necessary for good order. The comparison of these first thirty-six articles are made with the OPC Form of Government.

With respect to the third section on Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks, the committee particularly rejoiced in the similarity (especially with the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God):

Your committee gratefully acknowledges the striking uniformity between the OPC and the URCNA in their common desire to promote God-glorifying, Word-centered worship, to administer the sacraments in an understandable and edifying manner according to the teaching of Scripture, and to conduct the affairs of the local church decently and in good order.⁴

This commendation notwithstanding, the committee did note some differences with the OPC, chiefly: the URCNA mandates catechetical preaching; when the sacraments are observed in the URCNA, one of the provided liturgical forms must be used; and all mission work takes place under the oversight of a local consistory. One might also interpret the URCNA church order to require that the singing of psalms predominate in public worship.

With respect to the fourth section on Ecclesiastical Discipline, the URCNA is sparse when compared with the OPC’s more robust Book of Discipline. That is the main difference between the two: while both require due process (because it is equitable and God’s Word requires it), the OPC spells out in considerably more detail what comprises and protects that process. There are also more matters treated in the OPC Book of Discipline than in these Church Order Articles of the URNCA. The main difference between the two bodies continues to be the membership and jurisdiction of the minister, which is in the consistory for the URCNA and the presbytery for the OPC.

How to overcome these perceived and real barriers is the challenge that now confronts us. Most of the real differences between the URCNA and OPC, as we’ve noted, are polity differences, not doctrinal differences. This is a judgment that not a few share, and it is reflected in the cited report.

This is quite ecumenically encouraging. Granted the polity differences are nothing to sneeze at as they impact daily operations. But it’s far harder to amend our secondary doctrinal standards than it is our tertiary polity standards. And rightly so. We only need simple majorities to amend our polity standards where we need (multiple) super majorities to amend our doctrinal ones. We should thus think hard about how we can move closer toward one another in terms of polity.

As we turn our attention to composing our polity differences, we need to determine that we will not die on every polity hill. We need to take a long hard look at our differences and see how we could each benefit from the other. Perhaps there’s a lot to learn from each other, e.g., Presbyterians could do with having every minister tied to some church (whatever he’s doing; in addition to being a member of presbytery) and the Reformed might acknowledge that there is a real church in addition to and beyond the local congregation (classis being seen more like

⁴ URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report, referred to the churches by Synod Escondido of the United Reformed Churches in North America, 2001.

presbytery; for this latter, I especially refer you to my paper to this classis in October 2010 on what a healthy classis looks like and how it operates).

In short, it's going to take compromise. We will need to make a candid assessment of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Let the denominational/federational committees and each presbytery/classis assess their own strengths and weaknesses relative to the other. And the strengths and weaknesses of the other. In other words, let's look at ourselves and each other and say, "What can I learn?" "What are we doing better than you, and what are you doing better than we are?" If we don't think that can properly be done, how are we heeding Philippians 2:1–4?

And let's value the ecumenical imperative enough to sit down and see if we can hash out our differences, building off some already remarkable examples of doing so, namely, the Psalter-Hymnal Committee. In our work together on that project, it is broadly accurate to say that the OPC yielded to the URC a lot on the Psalms (and learned a great deal from our Psalm-singing brethren in the URC; such Psalm-singing was very much a part of historic Presbyterianism but lost to us in more recent times); and that the URC yielded to the OPC a lot on the hymns (particularly in the rich hymnody that has developed among us in the post-Reformation era).

May the Lord unite us ever in closer fellowship and working relationship, even to the point of union, as the OPC and the CRC came close to doing in the mid-1960s. What kept us from coming together back then was doctrinal, namely, liberalism in the CRC with respect to several matters. Can't we pick up there, now that we've gotten rid of the real differences—the doctrinal differences that kept the OPC and CRC apart? Even then, it wasn't that the CRC had confessional doctrinal differences with the OPC, having the same confessions and catechism that the URCNA now has. Rather, because of its embrace of liberalism, the CRC was moving in a different direction and away from confessional fidelity.

Those old issues don't exist in that same way with the URC (you're not pursuing women in office, lacking clarity on homosexuality, denying the historicity of Genesis 1–11, etc.). The URC really represents all the folk in the CRC that we were so wanting to unite with back then. Why can't we work together *now* toward what ultimately eluded us *then*? Need it continue always to elude us? I don't think so. It will take a lot of work, but so does everything worth doing (like sanctification).

The Christian life, rightly lived, involves much hard work, not done in our own strength, however, but as enabled by the Spirit, who empowers us to work out, even in fear and trembling, that which God has worked in us to will and to do his good pleasure. I challenge us all—URCNA and OPC—to think of what this sanctification on a corporate level might mean. Surely, no small part of such corporate sanctification would include a greater realization among us all of the ecumenical imperative. Yes, there are barriers to it, as there are to personal sanctification, and it will not happen automatically and without much prayer and labor. *Sic ora et labor* ("so pray and work"). Let us commit to working out together the unity that we already enjoy as believers in Christ, for our edification and his glorification. Amen.

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ServantHistory

Geerhardus Vos: Presbyterian Unrest

by Danny E. Olinger

When Geerhardus Vos returned to Princeton after his sabbatical in September 1923, the Presbyterian Church was in a state of unrest. Theological liberals were angered by the 1923 General Assembly's declaration that the inerrancy of Scripture, Christ's virgin birth, his substitutionary death to satisfy divine justice, his bodily resurrection, and the showing of his power and love by working miracles were each an essential doctrine of the Word of God. In opposition to these declarations, they gathered in Auburn, New York, in December to draft what would become known as the Auburn Affirmation.¹ The Affirmation, eventually signed by 1,274 ministers in the Presbyterian Church,² denied the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, and declared that the doctrines of Christ's incarnation, atonement, resurrection and power to perform miracles were mere theories and non-essential to the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture.³ It further asserted that the general assembly had no right to elevate these doctrines as special tests for ordination to the gospel ministry.

After the Affirmation's wide distribution, the question became whether the 1924 General Assembly would discipline the signers. Consequently, the election of the moderator of the assembly, which would go a long way in determining what the assembly's response would be, held special importance. The candidates were conservative leader Clarence Macartney, pastor of Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and Princeton Seminary's Charles Erdman, who although personally evangelical, was the liberal choice as moderator due to his desire to keep the peace in the Presbyterian Church.⁴ Princeton Seminary president J. Ross Stevenson championed Erdman's candidacy.⁵ Princeton Seminary professor J. Gresham Machen backed Macartney's candidacy.⁶ The assembly elected Macartney, which brought joy to the conservatives, but by the end of the assembly Machen lamented that the doctrinal issues had been largely bypassed.⁷

¹ In taking the action that it did, the 1923 General Assembly affirmed the similar declarations of the 1910 and 1916 General Assemblies.

² This represented approximately 13 percent of the ministerial members of the Presbyterian Church. D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994), 116.

³ Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1957).

⁴ Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992), 43. Machen commented, "Dr. Erdman does not indeed reject the doctrinal system of our church, but he is perfectly willing to make common cause with those who reject it, and he is perfectly willing on many occasions to keep it in the background." See, Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2004), 325.

⁵ Report of the Special Committee to Visit Princeton Theological Seminary to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., San Francisco, California, May, 1927 (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1927), 62.

⁶ Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 318.

⁷ D. G. Hart explains, "The distinction between fact and theory was an argument that Machen opposed vehemently. From his perspective, the *Affirmation* revealed the telltale flaw of liberalism, that of making theology independent of and secondary to religious experience. The redemptive events mentioned in the document were not theories, he believed, but facts whose meaning the Bible supplied. By asking for tolerance in

The next year Erdman's name was nominated again in the Presbytery of New Brunswick for the presbytery to recommend as a candidate for moderator of the 1925 assembly. Thirty-nine members of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, including Vos and Machen, opposed the nomination and signed a protest.⁸ Forty-two members of the presbytery, however, voted to have the stated clerk of the presbytery recommend Erdman for moderator of the assembly.

Although it was well known at the seminary that Vos sided with Machen during the controversy, signing the protest against Erdman was one of the few times that Vos publicly took a stand. Bernardus Vos explained his father's position during the controversy.

The President of the Seminary, J. Ross Stevenson, favored allowing the Seminary to fall into the hands of those liberal in their theological outlook and who favored operating the Seminary as an institution catering to all the factions of the Presbyterian Church, liberal and otherwise. The policy was vigorously fought against by Drs. Machen, Allis, Robert Dick Wilson, Van Til, and others. With these my father agreed, although he himself took no active part in the controversy.⁹

Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History

While Vos did not play an active part in the controversy, he did play a small part with his teaching in the classroom and in print. In his judgment, liberal theology was based on philosophical speculation and not on presuppositions that flowed from the Bible. During Machen's first year on the faculty at Princeton Seminary in 1906, Vos had forcefully argued in his *Princeton Theological Review* article, "Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History," against the liberal belief that Christian faith had little or nothing to do with historical fact. In maintaining that Christianity was a life and not a doctrine, liberal theologians had knowingly separated Christian faith and history. Distrusting the historical truthfulness of the Bible, they answered that Christianity is too inward and ideal to be dependent in its essence on this or that occurrence in history. "They protest that their own faith lives far superior to the level where such questions are discussed and decided, as to whether Christ was supernaturally conceived by the virgin birth or rose bodily from the grave on the third day."¹⁰ Their own subjective faith then becomes the standard for what is possible in Christianity.

Vos countered that this was a wrongheaded approach. "In revelation and redemption naturally not the human, subjective side, not the religious views and sentiments of men, stand

interpreting these doctrines, Machen thought the *Affirmation* reversed the 'plain meaning' of both scripture and the confession and, in effect, left the church without a theological foundation." D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 116.

⁸ *A Statement concerning a Pamphlet Entitled "The Presbytery of New Brunswick to the Church at Large,"* April 25, 1925. Hart observes that Erdman had solid evangelical credentials as he had served as editor of *The Fundamentals*, a series of pamphlets that opposed liberal biblical scholarship. His overarching desire, however, was to maintain the unity of the Presbyterian Church. Machen and the other conservatives "believed that liberal and conservative views were irreconcilable. When [Machen] complained publicly that Erdman was merely a puppet for liberals and asked conservatives not to vote for his colleague, Erdman took offense." Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 117.

⁹ Letter, Bernardus Vos to Roger Nicole, July 3, 1967. Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

¹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, "Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 458.

in the foreground, but the great objective acts and interpositions of God, the history as it is in itself, not as it reflected itself in the mind of man.”¹¹

Redemption was bound to historical events. The doctrines of Scripture gave meaning to those events. Vos wrote, “It is safe to say that a Christianity which plants itself squarely upon the foundation of the supernatural history will always be a doctrinal Christianity and vice versa.”¹²

This rupture of faith and history, Vos contended, was the byproduct of the conflict between naturalism and supernaturalism. The modernist question in the previous age had been, “Is the supernatural conceivable on the general principle of reason?” Now, the question was, “Is the supernatural necessary according to the empirical data of history?”¹³

Vos answered that the historical and the supernatural were not mutually exclusive. “To us the history of Christ, and therefore the historical Christ, means the entire life of the Saviour with all its eternal issues included, replete with supernatural elements, involving the incarnation, the miracles, the resurrection.”¹⁴ These historical and supernatural events make Christ the revelation of God to us, not the religious trust or perfect ethical conduct he displayed. In proto-Machen fashion, he argued:

The difference between those who think they can do without the facts and us who feel that we must have the facts, does not lie on the periphery of the Christian faith: it touches what to us is the center. It relates to nothing less than the claim of our holy religion to be a supernatural religion, and a religion which objectively saves from sin. It would be easy to show that a Christianity which can dispense with the facts of Bible history must, from the nature of the case, be a religion confined by the horizon of the present life and the present world, lacking the supernaturalistic eschatological outlook which is so characteristic of the biblical religion as a whole, and of historical Christianity as well.¹⁵

There was not a fact which the Bible summons us to believe that was not the exponent of a great principle meant to stir our religious life. The most blessed times in the history of the church have been “when the belief in Bible history and the religion of the heart went hand in hand and kept equal pace, when people were ready to lay down their lives for facts and doctrines, because facts and doctrines formed the daily spiritual nourishment of their souls.”¹⁶

The Messianic Consciousness

Another place where Vos aggressively disagreed with liberalism was its contention that Jesus did not understand himself to be Messiah prior to his death. Vos argued that Jesus not only understood himself to be the Messiah, but also that the Christian religion stands or falls on whether Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah.

For decades at Princeton, Vos argued this point in an elective course on the Messianic consciousness. Drawing on his notes for the course, Vos published two articles in 1916 in *Biblical Review*, “Modern Dislike of the Messianic Consciousness in Jesus” and “The

¹¹ Ibid., 460.

¹² Ibid., 462.

¹³ Ibid., 461.

¹⁴ Ibid., 464.

¹⁵ Ibid., 466.

¹⁶ Ibid., 471.

Ubiquity of the Messiahship in the Gospels.”¹⁷ In 1920 and 1922 he published two more articles in the *Biblical Review*, “The Messiahship: Formal or Essential to the Mind of Jesus?” and “The Name ‘Lord’ As Used of Jesus in the Gospels.”¹⁸

By 1926 he had expanded both his class notes and his articles into a full manuscript entitled *The Messianic Consciousness of Jesus*. What he could not find, however, was a publisher. Machen, who agreed with Vos’s argument that liberalism had distorted biblical teaching concerning Jesus, was enthusiastic about the book. He told Vos that he eagerly “would do everything that I possibly can to help secure the advantageous publication of what I know is a magnificent book.”¹⁹ Machen then wrote William H. Leach of the George H. Doran Company.

In view of my acquaintance with you, and of our recent correspondence, I am venturing to introduce to you my honored teacher and colleague, the Rev. Geerhardus Vos, D.D., Professor of Biblical Theology in Princeton Theological Seminary, who has prepared a manuscript on the Messianic Consciousness of Jesus. It is possible that the wording of the title may be somewhat changed. I scarcely know of any book that I have been so eager to see appear as a book on this subject by Dr. Vos. His lectures on the subject when I was a student at the Seminary have been to me one of the few really basic things in my preparation for life and in my guidance in everything that I have tried to do; and I feel sure that my experience is similar to the experience of many others. I cannot imagine anything more vitally important, and more clarifying, than his treatment of the subject. That was true of his lectures as I heard them, and I should think that it would be even more clearly true of the present book, which is the result of many years of magnificent scholarly work. No one commands the whole literature of his subject better than this author, and no one is more capable of reducing the material to admirable order and of combining a genuine originality with wide scholarship. And the particular topic that he has chosen for this book is one that he has made peculiarly his own, and is also perhaps the most important topic and the most timely one in the whole field of New Testament study.

If you should publish this book, I feel sure that you would be publishing one of the most notable contributions to theology that has appeared in many years.²⁰

George Doran himself responded that he would be eager to publish the book. He did request that Vos change the title *The Messianic Consciousness of Jesus*. Doran wrote, “If the title could be somewhat more inviting to popular reading and study than the one you have chosen I think it would serve the double purpose of extending the usefulness of your message and enable us to dispose of a larger number of copies.”²¹ Doran then suggested that the

¹⁷ Geerhardus Vos, “Modern Dislike of the Messianic Consciousness in Jesus,” *Biblical Review* 1 (1916): 170–85, and, “The Ubiquity of the Messiahship in the Gospels,” *Biblical Review* 1 (1916): 490–506.

¹⁸ Geerhardus Vos, “The Messiahship: Formal or Essential to the Mind of Jesus?” *Biblical Review* 5 (1920): 196–208, and, “The Name ‘Lord’ As Used of Jesus in the Gospels,” *Biblical Review* 7 (1922): 515–36.

¹⁹ Letter, J. Gresham Machen to Geerhardus Vos, May 25, 1926. J. Gresham Machen Archives in Westminster Theological Seminary.

²⁰ Letter, J. Gresham Machen to William H. Leach, May 25, 1926. Machen wrote a nearly identical letter to W. H. Murray of the Macmillan Company on the same day. J. Gresham Machen Archives in Westminster Theological Seminary.

²¹ Letter, G. H. Doran to Geerhardus Vos, June 22, 1926. J. Gresham Machen Archives in Westminster Theological Seminary.

subtitle, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, carried more popular appeal and should be used. Thankful for Doran's willingness to publish the book, Vos changed the title.

The Self-Disclosure of Jesus

In the preface to *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, Vos put forth the seriousness of the theological controversy in the church. "What the cross was in the days of the Apostle, the Messiahship is to the modern advanced 'Christian' mind, the great rock of offense."²² But, Vos added, this rock was not easy to remove without a retreat into "plain liberal Judaism."²³

Vos knew that some might conclude that the controversy was simply a theological difference of opinion, but, he maintained that doctrinal indifferentism on this question was not an option. The way that one views the Messiahship of Jesus determines the character of one's piety. Vos declared, "Let no one delude himself with the soothing comfort that the controversy is all about scraps of external belief and does not touch the core of practical devotion. With its decision the Christian religion stands or falls. *Tua res, pia anima, agitur!*"²⁴ Vos then stated that the book was written to make this argument clearer.

Epigraph

After the preface and before the opening chapter, "The Strategic Importance of the Messianic Consciousness," Vos included an epigraph on a single page. It read, "His visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Below the verse was "Isaiah III, 14." The epigraph, typographical error aside as the verse quoted was Isaiah 52:14, was important because it revealed what Vos thought was at stake in the debate about the Messianic consciousness of Jesus.²⁵ Would the church embrace the biblical self-disclosure concerning Jesus, the Savior who went to the cross, or would it recreate a Jesus of its own liking?

The Strategic Importance of the Messianic Consciousness²⁶

Vos opened the first chapter, "The Strategic Importance of the Messianic Consciousness," by stating that the question of the Messianic consciousness deals with whether Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah. Those who sought to answer the question in the negative, that Jesus did not understand himself to be the Messiah, were inclined to deny the supernatural Jesus. "From the religious point of view Jesus is not valuable to them in the capacity of Messiah, but under some other aspect, variously defined, be it as a religious genius, or an ethical teacher, or a social reformer."²⁷

One's view of Jesus's understanding of himself was not merely a theoretical issue. It also affected one's practice. If at the heart of Christianity was the fellowship that takes place

²² Geerhardus Vos, *Self-Disclosure of Jesus* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), v.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. "Your concern, devout soul, is at stake." Thanks to Richard B. Gaffin Jr. for this translation.

²⁵ Sadly, in the 1953 second edition edited by Johannes Vos, and the 1978 and 2002 versions produced by P&R, the epigraph is not included.

²⁶ For the opening chapter, "The Strategic Importance of the Messianic Consciousness," Vos reworked his 1916 article in the *Biblical Review*, "The Modern Dislike of the Messianic Consciousness in Jesus." See, Geerhardus Vos, "The Modern Dislike of the Messianic Consciousness of Jesus," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980): 324–32.

²⁷ Vos, *Self-Disclosure*, 11–12.

between God and man, how Jesus viewed himself was all-important for the believer. Vos said, “No one can take a Savior to his heart in that absolute, unqualified sense which constitutes the glory of religious trust, if there persists in the background of his mind the thought that this Savior failed to understand Himself.”²⁸

Vos further questioned how so many modern minds could adopt the position that Jesus failed to understand himself. This view, inherently perverse in a field where everything ought to be straightforward, was one of the strangest riddles of the pathology of religion. Vos said, “It would be difficult to find a case where two ways of thinking appear to be so pointedly at variance and have so little in common as the Messianic way of thinking on the one hand and the thought form of ‘liberal’ Christianity on the other hand.”²⁹

Vos then detailed the reasons why liberalism rejected the Messianic self-consciousness of Jesus. One reason was an opposition to biblical authority. “The Messiah is the incarnate representation of that divine authoritativeness which is so characteristic of Biblical religion.”³⁰

A second reason was liberalism’s antagonism to biblical religion being an eschatological religion. But, Vos argued that the goal set before humanity cannot be attained by the natural course of events as liberalism assumed. Rather, the goal will be brought about catastrophically through a divine interposition, which once attained bears the stamp of eternity. At the center of this eschatology-complex, the closing of the present world order and the start of the new world order, stands the Messiah. “That we do not more clearly realize this is due to the fact that for us the Messiah has come and accomplished a part of his task, and yet what we call the ‘eschatological’ crisis is still outstanding.”³¹

A third reason for opposition to the view that Jesus possessed a Messianic consciousness was the connection with the supernatural. Liberalism attempted to make Jesus a person whose center of thought rested in the natural relation between God and man. A supernaturalized Jesus, who “lived and moved and had his being in the world of the

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁹ Ibid. In his book *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*, Robert B. Strimple appeals to Vos at this point to explain the critical attempt to reject the historicity of the biblical witness regarding Jesus and yet not reject Jesus himself. Strimple writes, “Modern, post-Enlightenment readers of the Gospel have not been willing to accept and follow the supernatural Jesus presented there. On the other hand, however, they often have not been ready simply to reject Jesus and do without him altogether. They find the religious role claimed for Jesus by Jesus himself, and by the writers of the New Testament, uncongenial to their naturalistic mind-set, and yet they find it hard to cut off all religious relationship with Jesus. Therefore, they seek to find a new one, one compatible with their unbiblical worldview. As Geerhardus Vos has pointed out, however, such an accommodation is impossible.” Strimple then quotes Vos from this portion of the *Self-Disclosure of Jesus*. “No one who prizes the name of Christian can dismiss Jesus absolutely from his field of religious vision; there is always some category of pre-eminence of leadership under which He is classified . . . [But if] it be once established that Jesus meant to be that specific kind of spiritual helper which by historical right we designate as “the Messiah,” then how can one refuse his help in that very capacity, and force upon Him a role of religious helpfulness which He was not conscious of sustaining?” (Vos, *Self-Disclosure*, 12, 14). Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 11.

³⁰ Vos, *Self-Disclosure*, 16.

³¹ Ibid., 18. Later in the chapter, p. 32 to 34, Vos acknowledged the work of the “hyper-eschatologist” school that showed how liberalism had failed to account for the eschatology of Jesus. The main proponents of the school that Vos had in view were Johannes Weiss (1863–1914) and Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). Although Vos praised Schweitzer’s acumen, he believed that Schweitzer had separated the historical Jesus from the church just as much as liberalism had done. Schweitzer failed to distinguish between eschatology as a theological obsession, and eschatology as the finest flower of religion cultivated for the glory of God as Jesus did. Jesus did not become an eschatologist for the sake of eschatology as Schweitzer maintained. Jesus was an eschatologist for the sake of God.

supernatural,” would “not fit into the humanitarian idealism of which the ‘liberal’ theology would make Jesus the exponent.”³²

Vos did not deny that there were humanitarian aspects of the work of Jesus as Messiah, but they cannot explain his purpose. Jesus came to rescue sinners from judgment and to introduce them into the blessedness of the world to come. But, Vos noted, “this old solid idea of salvation, the basis of all ‘evangelical’ religion, has become an offense to the modern mind in many quarters.”³³ The modern Jesus was no longer the Savior of sinners, but an evangelist of uplift.

The view of Jesus as moral uplifter, however, depended upon stripping him of his Messianic consciousness. “The moment this falls from off Him, the distasteful soteric notions of atonement, regeneration, and whatever belongs to this circle of ideas, disappear with it one and all. They are enucleated in their Messianic root.”³⁴

According to Vos, in order to achieve their goal of stripping Jesus of his Messianic self-consciousness, the liberal critics applied the same method to Jesus as they applied to the Old Testament Scriptures.

Among the motives that have led to the denial of the genuineness of some of the greatest eschatological prophecies has been the feeling that the ideas of free grace and supernatural transformation, so prominent in them, are out of keeping with the intensely ethical spirit of the prophets.³⁵

Vos concluded that liberal theology was “nothing else but the Pelagian view of religion seeking to dislodge the Augustinian view from its double stronghold in prophecy and Gospel.”³⁶

Liberal theology also believed that Jesus should suffice as an example, a teacher, a leader, a point of departure in religion. Vos believed that this view had multiple difficulties. It created an awkward interpretative situation in biblical texts in which the plain reading is that Jesus offered himself at an infinitely higher value. Further, if you eliminate Jesus’s Messianic self-consciousness, you eliminate his claim to be the object of faith, prayer, and worship. Vos judged that this liberal solution of eliminating Jesus’s Messianic self-consciousness was Arian and a rejection ultimately of Jesus himself.

Vos understood that for the Presbyterian Church to move in this direction was to embrace a change so radical for Christianity that it becomes an entirely different religion. “Practically all this anti-soteric effort can have but one result. It is bound to raise an unsurmountable barrier between the historical Jesus and the refusers of his supreme gift.”³⁷ If Jesus were desupernaturalized and his consciousness of Messiahship removed, then the Jesus that remained would be unfit for being the recipient of any truly religious approach from man. In other words, if the communion that Jesus sought to impart, the giving of himself entirely and at every moment, operated apart from his atoning work in history on a non-soteric basis, it would be a pseudo-communion.

Modern Liberal Christianity’s Opposition to the Messianic Consciousness

³² Ibid., 23.

³³ Ibid., 26.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 26.

In the next six chapters, Vos outlined five different objections to the Messianic consciousness put forth by “modern liberal Christianity” and its critical relatives. The five views were 1) outright denial of the historicity of the Messianic consciousness in Jesus; 2) agnostic position; 3) theory of consciousness of prospective Messiahship; 4) theory of a gradually developing consciousness of Messiahship in the mind of Jesus; and 5) theory that the Messiahship was for Jesus no more than a formal thing.³⁸ What each view shared was “a departure from Christ and addressing itself to the world, rather than a movement seeking the Person of Christ in order to occupy itself with Him.”³⁹

Proponents of the first view, the outright denial of the Messianic consciousness in Jesus, believed that the Messianic consciousness was at odds with the ethico-religious character of Jesus. When they attempted to establish their position from Scripture, however, their methodology lacked an objectively verifiable procedure. The solution was not to proclaim that the supernatural Jesus was historical, but to proclaim the texts unhistorical. The Messianic element is ruled out not because the passages criticized offer just ground for suspicion, but the passages are suspected because the Messianic idea appears in them.

The deniers further believe that the Messianic consciousness in Scripture was the result of the subsequent dogmatizing of the disciples. The alleged dogmatizing was supposedly seen in Jesus’s break with Israel and the association of the cross and suffering with the Messiahship.

Vos countered that the first step in answering these criticisms was to discern how Jesus regarded his Messiahship and how the Judaistic mindset regarded the Messiahship. Jesus believed the Messiahship existed for the sake of God. The Judaistic mindset believed that the office existed for man. “Not God but Israel was in it the chief figure of the world to come, and the Messiah appeared as the agent who would raise Israel to this greatness.”⁴⁰ This is why Jesus charged Israel with sin, declared them unfit for entrance into the eschatological inheritance, and summoned them to repentance.

For Vos, the liberal view of Messiahship matched that of the Judaistic Messianic concept that Jesus opposed. “The modern reconstruction of his figure and mind has made it difficult to ascribe any other principle to Him in any course of action than that of the most one-sided humanitarianism, excluding all but the most superficial and indirect concern for the interests of God.”⁴¹

What applied to the break between Israel and Jesus applied in equal measure to the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah on the cross. Liberals believed that the cross discredited the Messianic consciousness. “So long as regard was had to what man would get out of the

³⁸ Ibid., 35–36.

³⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 58. The antagonism to God found in the Judaistic spirit is a theme that appeared in Vos’s writings. In his 1903 article, “The Alleged Legalism in Paul’s Doctrine of Justification,” Vos wrote that “the Judaistic spirit made itself the end and God the means, gave to itself the glory and to God the part of subserving the interests of this human glory by His moral government; that it led the creature to regard itself as active and God as a merely passive factor in the determination of eternal destiny.” Geerhardus Vos, “The Alleged Legalism in Paul’s Doctrine of Justification,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 391. In the *Self-Disclosure*, Vos inferred that liberalism shared the same spirit and reversed the creator-creature distinction. The result was a mindset that believed that if God exists, he exists to serve me.

⁴¹ Vos, *Self-Disclosure*, 58.

Messiahship, the cross could not but appear preposterous. But Jesus sought the cross from the love of God. In dying, as in all else he did, He hallowed God's name."⁴²

Liberalism believed that Jesus came as a great thinker expounding a new system of ethics. Jesus, however, was the Savior who spoke out of a great redemptive movement where he was the central and controlling factor.⁴³ "In this profound sense the Messianic idea underlies all the high idealism of his ethics, and alone renders it historically intelligible."⁴⁴

Rather than the church attempting to make Jesus fit the times, the church should fit the times to his teaching. His ethics were deeply rooted in his God-centered, other-worldly frame of mind. "Our Lord was interested in these things, because from the highest religious viewpoint the coming world, the state of eternity, meant for Him the only possible religious consummation."⁴⁵

Messianic Names

In chapters 8–13 Vos examined the titles Jesus called himself and the titles that others called him. These titles were "the Christ," the Lord," "the Son of God," and "the Son of Man." Jesus's favorite self-designation was Son of Man.⁴⁶ The name speaks prospectively of his coming to judge with the glory of his Father, but this glorious one also undergoes humiliation for the sake of his people. "Not, *because* He is the Son-of-Man must He undergo humiliation and suffering and death, but *although* He is the Son-of-Man is such a destiny, paradoxically, in store for Him."⁴⁷

In his explanation of the "Son of God" designation for Jesus, Vos engaged Adolf von Harnack's understanding of the title.⁴⁸ Harnack believed that Jesus used the forms of his day, but was far advanced in his thinking. What was necessary, according to Harnack, was separating the substance of what Jesus taught from the form he used. Jesus might have used "Son of God" as a self-designation, but he was not claiming that he was divine. It was a form used to express the religious experience that all believers share when they put their trust in the Father.

In direct opposition to Harnack's teaching, Vos maintained that the Son of God title shows how the Messiahship, though existing in time, rests solidly upon the eternal things of the Godhead.

⁴² Ibid., 60.

⁴³ Arguing in the same manner, J. Gresham Machen said, "Here is the fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative; liberalism appeals to man's will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God." J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 47.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 62. Regarding Vos's point, Charles Dennison commented, "The Jesus of Scripture has no interest in being a moralist, social reformer, or earth-day advocate. His concern is the glory of God and seeking and saving those who were lost by bringing them into covenant fellowship with him." Comments to author, April 22, 1996.

⁴⁵ Vos, *Self-Disclosure*, 64.

⁴⁶ Earlier in the book, on p. 37, Vos stated, "This is the favorite self-designation of Jesus; indeed, it is never put by the writers upon the lips of others concerning Jesus."

⁴⁷ Ibid., 238.

⁴⁸ Vos references Harnack (1851–1930), the famous liberal theologian who taught at the University of Berlin, more than any other theologian in the *Self-Disclosure*. Vos dealt with Harnack's methodological attempt to neutralize the importance of the Messianic consciousness of Jesus in chapter 7, "The Theory of Formal Significance of the Messianic Consciousness." He then examined Harnack's usage of the "Son of God" title in chapters 10.

Our Lord's eternal sonship qualifies Him for filling the office of Messiah. This office . . . implies such a relation of close affiliation with God, such an acting as the absolute representative of God, that only a Son in the highest sense can adequately fill the office.⁴⁹

The Messianic sonship is the eternal sonship brought into history, but Messiahship also involves the Messiah's assumption of human nature and living a human life. The title Son of God holds the two aspects of Jesus's life, the eternal and the temporal, together in a common designation.

The Messianic Task—To Save

Vos turned next to the Messianic tasks. The one comprehensive term that described Jesus's mission was "to save." Salvation is the translation from the sphere of death to the sphere of life.

Liberals designated Jesus "as the Uplifter and Benefactor, bent mainly upon relieving all manner of distress and abnormality upon men."⁵⁰ The trouble with such an understanding is that it has no Scriptural support. Consequently, Vos registered his complaint against liberal exegesis. It created a conflict in the text rather than receiving the conflict from the text. He wrote:

In this respect the half century of toil of the "liberal" theology, instead of rehabilitating the historical Jesus, has only resulted in the construction of a far different figure—a figure which is now being felt to be unhistorical after all. And at no other point, perhaps, has the disillusionment attending this result proved so poignant as here.⁵¹

Jesus gave his life as a ransom for others. "Christ died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us near unto God. The death of Jesus negatively takes away the disqualifications and positively bestows the qualifications necessary for the worship-service of God in the heavenly sanctuary."⁵² Jesus's supreme desire is that where he is, there his disciples shall be also. He sanctifies himself for them so that they also may be sanctified.

Princeton Seminary

Around the same time that Machen was helping Vos find a publisher for the *Self-Disclosure*, Machen found himself embroiled in controversy once again. At the 1926 General Assembly, Machen had been put forth by the faculty of Princeton to fill the chair of apologetics.⁵³ Stevenson spoke on the floor of the assembly against the approval of Machen and requested the erection of a special committee to study the situation at Princeton Seminary and report back to the next assembly. The assembly agreed and appointed the moderator, William O. Thompson, who had just retired as president of the Ohio State University, to chair the committee.

⁴⁹ Vos, *Self-Disclosure*, 190.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵³ The vacancy in the chair of apologetics and Christian ethics was due to the pending retirement of William B. Greene. The faculty voted on May 10, 1926, to nominate Machen. See, Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 45.

The Thompson-led committee met the faculty on November 23, 1926. Vos, Armstrong Hodge, Wilson, Allis, and Greene made it clear that they sided with Machen. Machen, appreciative of their support, told the special committee, “Five members of the majority group in the Faculty were my teachers when I was a student at the Seminary; and the relationship of pupil to master, into which I entered with them, has never been broken but has only been deepened in the passing years.”⁵⁴

In attempting to make their case, the six-man group appointed Armstrong as their spokesman. He contended that Stevenson and Erdman represented a doctrinal indifferentism that was contrary to the seminary’s stated purpose. Their advocacy of change had led to the disruption at the seminary.

Given their turn, Stevenson and Erdman blamed Machen for the troubles at the seminary. In response, Vos asked Erdman two questions. The first question was whether Machen had ever called Erdman a modernist. The other question was which faculty members Erdman believed were editors of the *Presbyterian*, about which Erdman had made a claim in print.⁵⁵ The report recorded the following exchange:

Dr. Erdman: With reference to the statement that Dr. Machen called me a modernist, I think Dr. Machen has never called me a modernist. I have no such memory of having made such a statement, and if I have said it, I withdraw it and apologize now.

Dr. Thompson: Does that satisfy Dr. Vos?

Dr. Vos: Yes.

Dr. Erdman: In reference to my changing an article which I had written. My change was to delete the sentence where the phrase “editors” was used. The word “editors” was not made “editor” but it was deleted before the article reached Dr. Kennedy.

Dr. Luddock: I think you said that you had no reference to him.

Dr. Erdman: I had no reference to Dr. Vos.

Dr. Vos: I would like him to reply, whether he had another member of the faculty in mind. I would like him to say who it was, if he feels like it, or it was not this or that one.

Dr. Erdman: I had supposed that the article emanated from a certain editor of the *Presbyterian*, but I afterwards found that I was mistaken in such a suspicion.⁵⁶

Thompson stated that he agreed with Machen that “the great issues before the Church are the fact and character of God, the fact and character of Christ, the fact and character of the Scriptures, all leading up to the great fact of supernaturalism and the proclaiming of the Gospel.”⁵⁷ Thompson believed that Machen put forth the issues for which the seminary stood accurately. Still, Thompson believed that the reconciliation between Erdman and Machen was paramount.

⁵⁴ Report of the Special Committee to Visit Princeton Theological Seminary to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., San Francisco, California, May 1927 (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly), 110. The “five members” were Vos, Wilson, Hodge, Armstrong, and Greene. Allis had been a student at Princeton with Machen.

⁵⁵ In response to an editorial that appeared in the *Presbyterian*, Erdman replied in the January 22, 1925, issue of the *Presbyterian Advocate*, “This division would be of no consequence were it not for the unkindness, suspicion, bitterness and intolerance of those members of the faculty who are also editors of the *Presbyterian*.” Machen was the only member of the faculty who served as an editor of the *Presbyterian*. See, Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 325.

⁵⁶ Report of the Special Committee, 134.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

Erdman responded, “It does seem to me the whole trouble is a past difference between Dr. Machen and myself.” Erdman continued that if the committee could persuade Machen that he (Erdman) was sincere in his desire to defend the evangelical faith, then he believed that Machen would forgive him for what was past.

Vos interjected at this point. He said that Erdman had written “there is bitterness in the faculty, that it is not confined to one person, it is a disease spread through the whole faculty.” Vos then said, “If that is to be resolved, I wish to shake hands with Dr. Erdman.”⁵⁸

Erdman then presented an affirmation that he said he hoped that the other faculty members would sign also. It read, “We the members of the Faculty of Princeton Seminary do hereby affirm that to the best of our knowledge, no member of this Faculty desires to alter the historic position of the Seminary in its absolute loyalty to the standards of our Church.”⁵⁹

Thompson reported that the Special Committee members were hopeful that the Faculty could affirm the resolution. Vos, the first faculty member to respond, was not favorable. He said:

This pledge is not nearly as explicit as the pledge I subscribed to when I was inducted into my professorship. There is great ambiguity in maintaining loyalty to the Standards of the Presbyterian Church. In what sense does the average Presbyterian maintain it? We know very well that as a matter of fact there are differences tolerated in the Presbyterian Church, there are Presbyters who subscribe to the Confession of Faith, and do it with an attitude that is sub-evangelical, I call it. I don’t mean Dr. Erdman has any such thought in his mind. The word historical is very flexible.⁶⁰

Hodge immediately followed Vos and stated that he felt Erdman’s affirmation was no answer at all. He said, “It seems to me that everybody asserts that they desire to maintain the historic position of Princeton Seminary, but the point is really the attitude of the institution toward the latitude of interpretation which Dr. Vos has spoken of.”⁶¹

Machen supported Vos and Hodge’s contention. He maintained that the inability for the faculty to agree on a definition of Princeton’s historic position had troubled the faculty for quite some time. Machen said, “I do hold there is a very great difference of opinion as to what the historic position of Princeton Seminary is, and what course must be adopted to exclude modernism from the seminary.”⁶² Vos agreed with Machen and expanded on his precise fear.

I have dread of this word “historical position.” I have the same dread of it that I have of “system of doctrine” which opens a wide door for the slipping in of all kinds of heresy. I would be willing to vote for that if it were defined or qualified. The “historical position as it is outlined in the Plan of the Seminary and acknowledged by all the teachers in it at their induction into office.”⁶³

In the end, the faculty did not support the resolution.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 174.

⁶³ Ibid., 175.

When the Special Committee reported to the 1927 General Assembly, it put forth Stevenson's recommendation that the board of directors, who favored the historic position of the seminary, and the board of trustees, who favored broadening the seminary's outlook, be merged into one board. The 1927 Assembly appointed a Committee of Eleven to propose amendments to the constitution of the seminary to establish a single overseeing board. The Committee of Eleven presented their recommendation of a single board with thirty-three members to the 1928 General Assembly. The 1929 General Assembly approved the changes and made official the single board.

Machen, Wilson, Allis, and Cornelius Van Til, who had served as an instructor in apologetics during the 1928–1929 school year, resigned from Princeton after the assembly action. In September 1929, the four men joined together with Princeton graduates Ned B. Stonehouse, Allen MacRae, Paul Woolley, and R. B. Kuiper to form Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.⁶⁴ Vos, Armstrong, and Hodge did not resign from Princeton. The question to many became why these supporters of Machen and his cause did not leave for Westminster.

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⁶⁴ John Murray would leave the next year from Princeton for Westminster. For accounts of the reorganization of Princeton Theological Seminary and the formation of Westminster Theological Seminary, see Rian's *Presbyterian Conflict*, 37–71; Stonehouse's *J. Gresham Machen*, 377–413; Hart's *Defending the Faith*, 108–32.

ServantReading

(Dis)Engaging our Reformed Fathers (?): A Review of John Frame's *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*

A Review Article

by John V. Fesko

A History of Western Philosophy and Theology, by John M. Frame. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015, xxix + 875 pages, \$59.99.

Introduction

John Frame has been a popular fixture in Reformed and Evangelical theological discussions for the last forty years. He has concluded his formal academic career and has published a number of works. Among Frame's books is his recent *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, which he wrote over decades of teaching. Frame's work is a massive survey that spans from the peripatetic philosophers to the present day and thus covers roughly two thousand years of the interaction between philosophy and theology. He explores philosophy and theology from his own peculiar triperspectivalism. While some may find this as a constraining feature, readers can still profit from his analysis even if they do not agree with his approach. Frame has thirteen chapters on the Greek philosophers, patristic, medieval, early modern, enlightenment, and modern periods. Frame writes for a seminary-level audience given that the book originated as his lectures for a course titled "History of Philosophy and Christian Thought" (xxv). I believe, however, that laymen who are willing to invest the time can profit from the book, as Frame's style is easy to follow, and he breaks most of his chapters into smaller sub-sections. This division of his subject matter facilitates briefly exploring the thought of an individual theologian or philosopher without being overwhelmed.

Strengths

Frame's book has a number of positive qualities. First, one of the biggest holes in a seminarian's education is his lack of philosophical knowledge. Many are unaware of the connections between philosophy and theology and thus come ill-prepared for the serious study of theology. Frame's book, therefore, helpfully identifies key figures, ideas, and texts that equip students with an overview so they can get their bearings when first introduced to various theological ideas. How important is Aristotle to Aquinas or Kierkegaard to Barth, for example? Frame's work addresses such questions in a useful manner.

Second, Frame's work has important pedagogical aids that assist the uninitiated reader. Each chapter has a running outline, which enables readers to know where they are in Frame's exposition. He also provides a list of key terms, study questions, and a bibliography of print

and online primary and secondary sources. Professors who want to form discussion questions or exams will find these features useful, and students who want to learn more about a philosopher or theologian will benefit from the bibliographic information at the conclusion of each chapter.

A third positive aspect of the book is the breadth of Frame's survey. Students have a resource where they can begin to investigate large periods of history or get their bearings for one particular theologian or philosopher.

Weaknesses

At the same time, a book's greatest strength can also carry weaknesses. In a book that covers such a large swath of history, theology, and philosophy, there are bound to be gaps and limitations.

Methodology

The first weakness pertains to methodology and the others relate to substantive historical-theological issues. On matters related to methodology, I question the routine use of Internet sources. Granted, with the advent of the information superhighway a number of academic discussions and publications have migrated to the Internet. Many of the sources to which Frame points are therefore legitimate. Identifying webs sites, for example, that provide previously published books in pdf format are useful to budget-constrained seminarians. At the same time, there are citations to websites where one has to wonder exactly how long they will last. I discovered, for example, two links that no longer exist (517n18; 528n49). How many of Frame's cited sources will evaporate over the years and unnecessarily hobble the book's accuracy? Cambridge University Press, for example, places a disclaimer on the publication information page warning its readers that it does not guarantee the accuracy or permanency of cited URL's. What does this say about the long-term viability of a book that relies so heavily on Internet sources?

My greatest concern, however, pertains to how students will use Frame's cited Internet sources. When students see primary sources alongside websites like Wikiquote, which one will the student choose? Does the presentation of one beside the other legitimize both? My fear is that the frequent use of Internet sources unintentionally sets a bad example that students will follow, which will possibly harm the scholarship and knowledge of future seminarians. Why slog through Gadamer when you can go to Wikiquote to get what you need for a research paper? In some cases, Frame cites Wikipedia as a source (e.g., 449n135). Since anyone can edit a Wikipedia page, how can students and the uninitiated ensure that the cited page is accurate and thus reliable? Why not cite a published version of the Auburn Affirmation, for example, rather than the Wikipedia summary of it (309–10)? The use of Wikipedia sources for an academic book is a deficiency that could have been easily avoided by citing reputable published sources.

Historical Theology

The remaining weaknesses in Frame's book relate to his uncritical use of the concept of *worldview*, and his treatment of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology. Frame acknowledges that he writes from a Van Tilian perspective, and one of the hallmarks of Van Tilian thought is to subject to biblical critique the underlying presuppositions behind a system

of thought. What unbiblical assumptions do theologians bring to their enterprise? Yet, on the very first page of his book *Frame* immediately uses the concept of *worldview*: “I define *philosophy* as ‘the disciplined attempt to articulate and defend a worldview.’ A *worldview* is a general conception of the universe” (1). *Frame* then employs the concept and term throughout his book. What is problematic about employing the concept of *worldview* in his assessment of the history of philosophy and theology? Prior to the Enlightenment theologians and philosophers did not think in terms of systems and worldviews. James Orr (1844–1913) was one of the first, if not the first, theologian to use the term, and he noted its German Idealist origins.¹ Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) then picked it up from Orr and promoted the concept in his famous Stone Lectures (1898) at Princeton Seminary.² But few have asked questions such as, What are the origins of the term? What does the concept entail? And, if its origins lie in Kantian philosophy, would anyone prior to the eighteenth century approve of the application of the concept to their theological or philosophical claims?³ Worldviews are systems of thought, yet such a manner of evaluating the history of philosophy has been brought into question and subject to trenchant critique.⁴ One might employ the concept of worldview, but he should first subject it to careful examination to ensure that in his efforts to explain pre-Enlightenment philosophical or theological ideas he does not press them into a foreign mold.

The second historical-theological weakness in *Frame*’s book pertains to elements of his treatment of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology. *Frame* makes a number of unsupported claims, such as the reason medieval theologians employed Greek philosophy was because they sought academic respectability, and that this quest for respect lead to the creation of scholasticism (140–41). Yet when one consults medieval works, *Frame*’s claim does not match the evidence. Theologians like Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) did not employ Aristotelian philosophy out of a desire to seek academic respectability but because they sought a means by which they could dialogue with and evangelize Muslim philosophers.⁵ In his efforts to explain medieval and Protestant scholasticism, *Frame* does not cite or interact with established authorities in the field, such as Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, Richard Muller, and Willem Van Asselt. *Frame* writes as if these scholars never existed. *Frame* instead relies on the questionable analysis of Peter Leithart, who claims that medieval theologians such as Peter Abelard (1079–1142) organized their theology around topics rather than following the course of the biblical text (142–43). The implication of Leithart’s claim is that medieval theology was not truly biblical and imposed concepts on the text rather than directly engaged it. Mishandling the Bible might be true of some but certainly not all medieval theologians. The overall structure of medieval theological works such as Aquinas’s *Summa* or Peter Lombard’s (1096–1160) *Sentences*, for example, follow a chronological pattern—they move from God, to man, Christ, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology.⁶ *Frame* also accuses Aquinas of

¹ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (1893; Edinburgh, Andrew Elliot, 1907).

² Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 11n1.

³ For the history of the origins of the concept, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁴ Leo Catana, *The Historiographical Concept ‘System of Philosophy’: Its Origin, Nature, Influence, and Legitimacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–10, 283–329.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 5 vols., trans. Anton Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), I.ii.3 (vol. I, p. 62).

⁶ Karl Rahner, ed., “Scholasticism,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, 6 vols. (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), VI:26.

developing his doctrine of God from natural reason because he supposedly followed Aristotle and was thus incapable of insulating his theology from autonomous thought (146). Such an opinion is common among contemporary Protestants, but there is a sea of literature that makes the opposite case based on a close primary-source reading of Thomas.⁷ All one has to do is consult Aquinas's opening arguments of his *Summa Theologica* and his numerous biblical commentaries to see that Frame's claim does not square with the evidence.⁸ Frame instead paints Aquinas as a rationalist (154). One may certainly make such claims, but not apart from evidence.

The same type of pattern unfolds in his analysis of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. Repeating the canard that the Reformation was a nearly total break with the medieval past, Frame claims that Calvin's epistemology was a "sharp departure from the patterns of medieval and Renaissance philosophy," and that he makes "no accommodation to Greek philosophical views, or to intellectual autonomy" (174). Frame ignores the rather large body of secondary literature that notes Calvin's use of Cicero's (106–143 BC) arguments from his *De Natura Deorum* in the opening pages of his *Institutes*, for example.⁹ How is Calvin's use of Cicero different than Aquinas's use of Aristotle? Moreover, scholars have noted the continuities (and discontinuities) between Aquinas and Calvin on a host of issues.¹⁰ Calvin was more indebted to Thomism than Frame admits. Frame believes that Calvin and Luther completely broke with the medieval past and "admitted no obligation to Greek philosophy and were able to set forth in relative purity the biblical metaphysic, epistemology, and ethic" (206). Such a claim is very popular but has little basis in fact. How does such a claim square with Calvin's explicit positive appeal to Plato (ca. 428–347 BC), for example?¹¹

Frame's analysis is equally inadequate when he addresses post-Reformation developments. He acknowledges that the supposed discontinuities between Calvin and his successors have been extremely overblown, but he nevertheless makes three questionable claims. First, he describes the relationship between the Reformation and post-Reformation as one between Calvin and his successors (175). This is inaccurate because Calvin, unlike Luther, was never designated as the fountainhead of the Reformed tradition.¹² Calvin was undoubtedly a bright star in the Reformed galaxy, but one brilliant light among a sparkling host.

⁷ See, e.g., Richard A. Muller, "The Dogmatic Function of St. Thomas' 'Proofs': A Protestant Appreciation," *Fides et Historia* 24 (1992): 15–29. W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas's Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 36–37; Lawrence Dewan, "Faith and Reason from St. Thomas Aquinas's Perspective," *Science et Esprit* 58/2 (2006): 113–23; Christopher T. Baglow, "Sacred Scripture and Sacred Doctrine in Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, John Yocum (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 1–24.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (rep.; Allen: Christian Classics, 1948), Ia q. 1.

⁹ See, e.g., Egil Grislis, "Calvin's Use of Cicero in Institutes 1:1-5, A Case Study in Theological Method," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 62/1 (1971): 5–37; Peter J. Leithart, "That Eminent Pagan: Calvin's Use of Cicero in Institutes 1:1–5," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52, no.1 (1990): 1–12.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 363–64, 367–78; Stephen Grabill, *Rediscovering Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 70–97; David VanDrunen, "Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2006): 77–98, esp. 81–90.

¹¹ E.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), I.iii.3. In general, consult Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1977).

¹² Carl Trueman, "Calvin and Calvinism," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 239.

Second, Frame makes the puzzling statement: “But the *feeling* one gets from the post-Reformation literature is very different from the atmosphere generated by the original Reformers” (175; emphasis original). He claims:

The writings of Luther and Calvin are highly personal, existential responses to the theological and ecclesiastical crises they faced. The post-Reformation theology is more academic, more detailed, more argumentative. It makes more use of philosophy and therefore is often described by the phrase *Protestant Scholasticism*. (175)

Frame’s analysis is a mile wide and an inch deep. Calvin’s *Institutes* is as argumentative as any Reformed scholastic work and even more bombastic at times. Nevertheless, Frame never raises the issue of genre in his assessment of the supposed felt discontinuities between Reformation and post-Reformation Reformed works. Assuming Calvin’s normative status for the sake of argument, how do Calvin’s sermons compare with Francis Turretin’s (1623–87)? Turretin was a Reformed scholastic theologian and a pastor.¹³ Moreover, Calvin’s *Institutes* is an introductory theological text whereas Turretin’s *Institutes* is geared towards technical disputation with Roman Catholics, Arminian, and Socinian theologians. These two works were written towards different ends. One might say, for example, that Frame’s book is overly technical and dry compared with the warm and personal sermons of John Piper. But is such a comparison useful or fair? Should a historian ignore audience and genre and evaluate works in terms of subjective feelings?

Third, Frame makes the unsubstantiated assertion that Protestant scholasticism was possibly to blame for the rise of liberalism: “The reader will have to decide whether the later declension of the churches into liberalism is to some extent the result of this academic movement” (175). From the vantage point of historiography, to suggest that one movement created a complex theological movement hundreds of years later is exceedingly problematic. There are seldom silver-bullet theories that explain the rise of multifaceted historical phenomena. Liberalism arose from many different causes such as climate change, which produced famine, religious wars, economics, politics, theology, as well as unbelief. Frame does not explain how disputing a topic in a precise manner within the context of a university leads to the rejection of biblical authority. In four hundred years will a Frame-minded historian claim the same about Frame’s book? Will his academically oriented treatment of the history of philosophy and theology lead to the rise of a new form of liberalism? Such historiography is neither responsible nor helpful to theological students. If Frame wants to argue that Protestant scholasticism contributed to or was responsible for the rise of liberalism, then he should present objective evidence, not float uncorroborated opinions.

Frame is certainly within his rights to advocate his views regarding medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology, but in these areas, he sets a bad example for seminary students. He hardly cites any evidence to support his assertions regarding the aforementioned weaknesses. Moreover, when I reached the end of the chapter on early modern thought, I expected at least to find suggested primary and secondary-source readings so students could investigate matters for themselves, but I found none. Among the scores of contemporary sources that Frame provides, Calvin is the only early modern name that appears.

¹³ See, e.g., Francis Turretin, *Sermons sur Divers Passages de L’Ecriture Sainte Par Francois Turretin Ministre du Saint Evangile, & Professeur en Theologie* (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1676); cf. J. Mark Beach, “Preaching Predestination—an Examination of Francis Turretin’s Sermon *De l’Affermissement de la Vocation et de l’Election du Fidele*,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 21 (2010): 133–47.

He also does not list a single secondary source that originates from the Oberman-Steinmetz revolution that produced a massive body of literature that has overturned much of the popular mythology that Frame continues to perpetuate. To that end, readers who want a fuller and evidence-based assessment of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology should consult key primary and secondary sources to form their own opinions. Why does Frame commend the works of Hobbes, Spinoza, or Descartes but ignores Junius, Turretin, Owen, à Brakel, Goodwin, and the like? Ignoring these theologians is troubling because, many of them speak to the very issues that Frame discusses in his book—the relationship between philosophy and theology. Junius and Turretin have excellent treatments on theological prolegomena, as does Richard Muller in his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*; his first volume on prolegomena and the Reformed scholastic use of philosophy is especially relevant.¹⁴ Theological students would greatly benefit from the wealth of primary-source research that Muller presents. The same is true about Willem Van Asselt's *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*.¹⁵ But more importantly, these works showcase the incredibly erudite early modern Reformed treatments of the relationship between philosophy and theology. If students ignore these works, they do so to their theological impoverishment.

Conclusion

John Frame has provided students with a good survey of the history of philosophy and theology, one that seminarians can undoubtedly use to great benefit, the aforementioned weaknesses notwithstanding. I am grateful for what this book represents—decades of teaching students to think critically about these weighty matters. But readers should be aware of Frame's uncritical use of modern categories such as *worldview* and that they will have to go elsewhere to find accurate coverage of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation philosophy and theology. The need to supplement Frame's engagement of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology is not about an academic shortcoming but should be of vital interest to those who profess the Reformed faith. Presbyterian and Reformed churches look to our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fathers in the faith for guidance. These fathers in the faith wrote our doctrinal confessions, the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. We should therefore carefully engage their theological works so we do not become sectarians and create a theology that becomes divorced from the catholic witness of the church. Scripture is always the first and last word in matters of faith and life, but we do not come to the Bible alone. We read the Bible within the context of the church from every age, and thus, when we carefully engage the past, we learn from Christ's gifts to the church (Eph. 4:11–13). We can definitely learn from John Frame's lifetime of labors, but we should do so with equal interest in medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology.

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¹⁴ Francis Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, trans. David Noe (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992–97), I.viii–xi; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

¹⁵ Willem Van Asselt, et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

ServantReading

Reformed Catholicity by *Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain*

by D. Scott Meadows

Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation, by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, vii + 168 pages, \$19.99, paper.

The fiercest proponents of *sola Scriptura* must ever guard against disdain for the Church's fallible tradition, as well as the concomitant sin of neglecting it. Allen and Swain sound a clarion call to repent of historical isolationism and to work toward healing what ails us, both doctrinally and ecclesiastically, by self-critical engagement with the best of our forefathers' theological legacy.

It is ironic that the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* has been twisted beyond historical recognition by violating it as conceived and expressed in the Protestant Reformation. *Reformed Catholicity* provides the nuance concerning tradition that we need in order to recover the vitality of this important slogan in our own time. This book is recommended especially for believers inclined to a "no creed but Christ" mentality, or, "all I need is the Bible and the Holy Spirit." No, we properly interpret Scripture in fellowship with Christ's church of all ages. Even Reformed readers will find their appreciation intensified for the indispensable contribution of dogmatic theology to modern biblical interpretation and theological reflection.

Chapter one admirably surveys recent attempts of renewal by retrieval, each with its own distinctive theological orientation and agenda. This book argues that Reformed principles, growing out of Scripture, require us to seek unity among Christians with the help of the doctrines that have been most assuredly believed by Christ's church through the centuries. Chapters two and three address the historic sense of *sola Scriptura* as it pertained to ecclesiastical fellowship and tradition going back to the apostles and church fathers. Chapter four very astutely defends a confessionally-informed reading and interpretation of Scripture. This chapter is the most excellent of all in my judgment. Chapter five argues for responsible "proof-texting" which has fallen into disrepute, demonstrating the venerable and sophisticated interplay of Scripture and theology in the examples of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, both careful exegetes and towering theological figures. J. Todd Billings wrote the afterword, which is an appeal for today's Christian teachers to implement these perspectives.

The authors are clearly well informed and articulate in making their case. The tone is winsome and the arguments generally persuasive. The topic is rarely addressed to this degree of detail, and it is an important one. One fault marring an otherwise excellent book is seen in a couple passing suggestions, one explicit and the other implicit, for

including practicing homosexuals within the church (74, n4 and p. 156 where a commendation of City Church of San Francisco is found). This “welcoming and affirming” proposal is strangely incongruent with the book’s major thesis, since it runs afoul of the church’s long-established position on the matter. With that caveat in mind, readers may profit immensely from this well-argued plea. It is a welcome antidote to the prevalent “chronological snobbery” (C. S. Lewis) of today’s evangelicalism.

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ServantReading

The Vanishing American Adult *by Ben Sasse*

by John R. Muether

The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis—and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance, by Ben Sasse. New York: St. Martin's, 2017, 306 pages, \$27.99.

Benjamin Sasse may be a familiar name to some *Ordained Servant* readers from his days on the editorial staff of *Modern Reformation*, 1997–2004, during the time when CURE (Citizens United for Reformation) morphed into ACE (the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals). No doubt Sasse remains committed to recovering the Reformation, but as the junior Senator from Nebraska he devotes himself to recovering America in this bestselling book.

The Vanishing American Adult describes a generation of Americans who have not grown up. Victims of “soft parenting,” millennials are generally missing the coming-of-age opportunities that give shape to adult life. Addicted to technology and medicated for behavioral ailments, they are staying home and marrying less and later. The result is not merely families in crisis. The lost appreciation for hard work and failure to achieve economic independence are crippling the political order, because our fraying democracy represents these family dysfunctions writ large.

This argument is hardly new, so what is unique about Sasse’s approach? For one, despite the subtitle, this is not merely a “how to” instructional guide. Several chapters are sustained reflections on vocation, suffering, death and dying, media ecology, and the dangers of overconsumption. He urges countervailing practices such as greater intergenerational connectivity, and preparation for dying well, and observing the difference between the adventure of travel and the passive sightseeing of tourism. While each chapter ends with a list of “stepping stones”—a starter set of practices—Sasse avoids simple prescriptions. At times Sasse employs flyover-country means for reviving American adulthood, such as commending farm life. (Here he includes his teenage daughter’s hilarious dispatches on Nebraska farm life that rendered her an internet sensation). But altogether this is less a nostalgic call for Thoreauian self-reliance than a commendation for simple and deliberate living.

“The purpose of this book,” Sasse makes clear, “is not to persuade you of any theological points” (28). Much of his argument focuses on the social effects of America’s increasingly irreligious age. (For example, we have lost the significance of religious rites of passages from childhood to adulthood, in first communions and bar mitzvahs.) This book is not about how Christians transform the culture. He seeks to avoid the “battlefields of the culture wars” (104), and true to that aim, neither abortion nor

homosexuality finds an entry in the index. Sasse seeks to restore an American Creed—not a civil religion, but a reminder that America is still premised on a creed, a set of values enshrined in the Constitution. So there are reasons for Christians and non-Christians to unite to serve the common good, not to make America great again but to make America an idea again.

The last chapter, “Build a Bookshelf,” is a creatively constructed bibliographical essay where Sasse describes his sixty favorite books that he returns to again and again. He encourages readers to construct their own collections, urging care to cover several categories and genres. His own categories begin with God and continue to anthropology, markets, tyrants, a humanistic perspective on science, and fiction. He commends J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*, even for those “who hate the core argument” because it demonstrates “how polemics tackle something important head-on,” thus encouraging thoughtful intellectual engagement (231).

Reading this book prompted me to wonder: might this become Sasse’s version of *Profiles in Courage*? John F. Kennedy published his bestseller three years before his successful 1960 presidential campaign. But there are at least two differences: there is strong reason to think Sasse actually wrote this book, and Sasse’s father, a retired high school wrestling coach, will not likely influence voters to grant his son a Pulitzer Prize. Still there is a sense of a manifesto to this book that at least suggests aspirations for the 2020 election season.

Beyond whatever political ambitions Sasse harbors, this book serves as a helpful primer on civic engagement for politically charged Christians. In a recent speech on Islamic terrorism on the floor of the Senate, Sasse described his dual citizenship in this way: “I am a Christian. . . . But I am also in this life an American, and I have taken an oath of office to the Constitution.” *The Vanishing American Adult* is a tangible demonstration of a “two kingdom” approach to political discourse. Politics do not matter most. But Christians must strive with non-Christians to preserve conditions that will enable all Americans to devote themselves to (and even to debate peacefully about) things that do matter most.

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ServantReading

Kids These Days: A Review Article on iGen

by *Jean M. Twenge*

by Gregory E. Reynolds

iGen: Why Today's Super-connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood, by Jean M. Twenge. New York: Atria, 2017, 342 pages, \$27.00.

Here they come! Boomers think of ourselves as a dominant generation, but iGen'ers (born from 1995 to 2012) make up the largest percentage of the US population.

Dr. Jean M. Twenge's is a detailed sociological analysis of the youngest generation to enter early adulthood with the smartphone a ubiquitous presence in their lives. This, her latest book: *iGen*, is an eye-opening read. While trying to refrain from value judgments—a staple conviction of her profession—she is troubled by some of the effects of the smart phone's unique dominance in the life of this latest generation.

Just as iGen'ers began to enter the adult world in 2012, Twenge “started seeing large, abrupt shifts in teens' behaviors and emotional states” (4). She reminds us that the first iGen'ers were born the year the Internet was born, and in 2006 Facebook opened its social network to anyone over age 13, so anyone born since 1993 has been able to spend their entire adolescence on social networking sites (5). Twenge uses “large, over-time surveys” to enable generational comparisons (8). Her explanations of the methods and assumptions of her research are very useful. She bases her research on her own extensive interviews and four important databases. The text is laced with charts, which lend credibility to her conclusions, but are not always easy to interpret.

Chapter 1 deals with the slower progress of iGen'ers toward adulthood than any previous generation. Christine Rosen aptly titled her *Wall Street Journal* review of *iGen* “An Aversion to Adulthood.”¹ Not much dating, not wanting their licenses as soon as they are eligible, not working summer jobs, and not socializing or studying, all prolong the adjustment to adulthood. On the other hand not having much sex, not drinking or smoking much due to the dangers of these activities are good on the surface but are often rooted in a more intense self-orientation (42). Most importantly, “iGen doesn't rebel against their parents' overprotection—instead, they embrace it.” Thus, it is no surprise that this generation demands “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces” (47). Twenge segues into chapter 2: “If teens are working less, spending less time on homework, going out less, and drinking less, what *are* they doing? For a generation called iGen, the answer is obvious: look no further than the smartphones in their hands” (47).

“They talk about their phones the way an addict would talk about crack: ‘I know I shouldn't, but I just can't help it,’ one said about looking at her phone while in bed” (50).

¹ Christine Rosen, “An Aversion to Adulthood,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 23, 2017.

Since nearly all leisure hours are spent with new media this is their main environment (51). Tremendous psychological pressure is put on teens to present a positive self on social media. Seeking affirmation is addictive and also unrealistic in terms of what is actually going on in the lives of teens (55–57). Absorption with new media also means that reading for pleasure is almost non-existent among iGen'ers. Twenge astutely points out that statistics that show iGen'ers reading more than older people are skewed by the fact that the majority of the reading of iGen'ers is for school assignments (60). She may be too pessimistic about the demise of the book, but the trend is not encouraging. And the results of this decline with this particular generation are disturbing:

Apparently, texting and posting on social media instead of reading books, magazines, and newspapers are not a boon for reading comprehension or academic writing. That might partially be due to the short attention span that new media seem to encourage. (64)

Consequently, SAT scores are dramatically declining (63).

Chapter 3 explores another negative effect of the new media on iGen'ers: a dramatic decline in personal presence. The subtitle to Twenge's chapter tells it all: "I'm with you, but only virtually" (69). She notes that the recent severe drop in teen socialization is coincident with the rise of the smartphone (72–73). One of the darkest consequences is that "teens who spend more time on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy" (77). This result coincides with an ironic reversal: "The astonishing, though tentative, possibility is that the rise of the smartphone has caused both the decline in homicide and the increase in suicide" (87).

The impossibility of eliminating value judgments by sociologists—something Peter Berger pointed out a generation ago in *A Rumor of Angels*²—reveals itself in Twenge's observation: "All in all, in-person social interaction is much better for mental health than electronic communication" (88). This is, of course, not a novel observation in light of the discipline of media ecology. Twenge mentions no media critics in her index. So the value of her comments on electronic media lies in the empirical and statistical research that confirms what media ecologists like Marshal McLuhan and Neil Postman, among a host of others, have been saying for a generation.

In chapter 4 Twenge expands on the mental health effects of the lack of face-to-face communication among iGen'ers; but now she calls it a crisis (95). Loneliness and depression are on the rise. The deception of the online happy persona exacerbates the problem. Again she links the sharp rise in mental health problems with the advent of smartphones: they "became ubiquitous and in-person interaction plummeted" (104). Depression is also a primary factor in suicide, which is on the rise among high school and college teens.

Between 2009 and 2015 the number of high school girls who seriously considered suicide in the past year increased 34%, and the number who attempted suicide increased 43%. The number of college students who seriously considered suicide jumped 60% between 2011 and 2016. (110)

While other causes may be part of this "heartbreaking" increase, Twenge is highly suspicious of the coincident appearance of the smartphone with the doubling of teenage suicide (110).

² Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

New media screen time seems to be the “worm at the core of the apple” (112). Smartphones also appear to be harming sleep for iGen’ers (113–17).

Chapter 5 on the religion of iGen’ers is no more encouraging. Fewer young people are affiliating with any religion: “iGen’ers came of age in an era when disavowing religious beliefs became strikingly more socially acceptable” (122). Many more are now raised in nonreligious homes. By 2016 one in three 18- to 24-year-olds said they did not believe in God, and one in four said that they did not believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (126–27). “Overall, iGen is, with near certainty, the least religious generation in US history” (128). Even in non-institutional beliefs, like prayer or the existence of God, iGen is less religious (132).

Twenge correctly observes that the rise of individualism is in lock step with the decline in religion. She refers to Christian sociologist Christian Smith’s observation that even religious teens have a more individualistic conception of their faith (138). They often do not share their church’s views on science, pop culture, and sexuality (139). She notes that few youth pastors address these issues (139). She then recommends that:

Religious organizations should focus on active discussions with iGen’ers that address the “big questions” they have about life, love, God, and meaning. Kinnaman found that 36% of young adults from a Christian background said that they didn’t feel they could “ask my most pressing life questions in church.” (141)

Needless to say, this should never be a problem in Reformed churches with our rich theological heritage. Interestingly Twenge concludes this chapter:

Evangelical churches have not lost as many members over the last few decades as other Christian denominations have. That might be because they’ve recognized that iGen’ers and Millennials want religion to complete them—to strengthen their relationships and give them a sense of purpose. (142)

She believes that even these churches will loosen their views on premarital sex, same-sex marriage, and transgender individuals (142).

Chapter 6 is safety first. This is the first generation of teens who are not risk takers. Physical safety is just the beginning of the concern; reputation, intellectual, and emotional risks come a close second. It seems that their fragility warrants the name “Generation Snowflake” (154). They are the ultimate victim generation (159). As it turns out this may not be good for their mental health (162). Extending childhood is not a good idea. Because then the security of money becomes more important than meaning (167). The high living of the advertising world becomes a goal.

Chapter 7 explores the importance of income security to iGen. Their work ethic is a high priority, not because of the intrinsic meaningfulness of the work, but because of the security of income. Money, not meaning, is the goal (196).

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with family, sex, gender, and race. For iGen’ers growing up more slowly means relationships come much later. Sexual activity is down. Commitment threatens safety. Pornography is stealing the importance of a lifelong relationship. Relationships are stressful. Digital is much easier (215). The new media make intimacy fearful. The individualism cultivated by the smartphone undermines traditional marriage and family in

radical ways. So singleness has become a way of life for a large number of iGen'ers (221). Twenge concludes that with fewer young adults having sex or committed relationships, "The United States will increasingly resemble Europe" (226).

iGen'ers assume that all races and gender identities are created equal and are appalled when they encounter views to the contrary (227). The decision to be what you wish is deeply rooted in iGen'ers' individualism (230). "Even religious teens embrace same-sex marriage" (231). Psychology classes in the public system implant the idea that gender choices hurt no one (235). This, of course, is not true, when the larger picture of relationships is taken into account. Twenge assumes that gender equality and fluidity is a positive development, betraying her value-neutral position as a sociologist (238).

Racially iGen'ers think of integration as acceptable instead of desirable. She concludes, however, that this is due to their assumption of racial diversity, rather than opposition to it (245–46). This tolerance, however, has a downside: "40% of Millennials and iGen'ers agreed that the government should be able to prevent people from making offensive statements about minority groups" (250). Hence the trend toward disinviting campus speakers that offend the sensibilities of students. Twenge once again steps outside of the sociological neutral stance by disapproving of these speech restrictions.

Chapter 10 is a fascinating exploration of why iGen'ers voted for both socialist Sanders and nationalist Trump: radical individualism. iGen'ers have stepped outside party lines. Government "should stay out of people's private business" (266). The iGen'ers "take the individualist mindset for granted" (275). But for all their Libertarian instincts they do not believe that political involvement, including voting, makes a difference (284).

In her conclusion, "Understanding and Saving—iGen," Twenge encourages more face-to-face interaction and less smartphone use. "Life is better offline, and even iGen'ers know it" (294). She counsels more parental involvement (297–98) and exercise (300). Facing adult realities before leaving home is an obvious piece of advice. Learning how to evaluate evidence is also sage counsel. In the end Twenge fails to point to transcendent reality to ground her advice, much of which is worthwhile. The triune God and his revelation in Scripture is the ultimate grounding for navigating modernity.

Whatever iGen'ers think about gender, race, vocation, or religion, God is in control of history and they are made in his image; no amount of genetic engineering or propaganda can change that. Furthermore, I know many Christian and a few non-Christian iGen'ers, who simply do not fit the profile of Twenge's research conclusions.

While we need to be careful not to pigeon-hole iGen'ers with Twenge's conclusions, there is enough evidence to cause great concern for the rising generation of young people. Christian parents and church officers have a great responsibility to educate young people on the reasons why we believe certain things and reject other ideas, like evolution and same-sex marriage. Along with this, genuine love for our unbelieving neighbors needs to replace the often judgmental spirit with which we communicate our faith. Or as David Kinnaman says, "We have become famous for what we oppose rather than what we are for" (140). God's amazing grace in the true man Jesus Christ must, therefore, take center stage.

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Servant Poetry

God's Grandeur

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.