

To Revise or Not to Revise



Ordained
Servant
June-July 2019

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: TO REVISE OR NOT TO REVISE

June-July 2019

From the Editor

The idea of revising our secondary standards (The Confession of Faith and Catechisms) is one that should, by its very nature, stimulate debate. Full disclosure: I am a member of the Committee on Christian Education (CCE) and have thus participated in the discussions that have resulted in the documents produced by the CCE and published in last year's *Minutes of the Eighty-Fifth General Assembly* (2018). I am publishing this portion of the CCE's report this month, which is a response to an overture at the Eighty-Third (2016) General Assembly.

As a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America Dr. T. David Gordon has a vested interest in our proposed revision of our standards since the PCA uses our version of those standards. He offers a cogent argument against revision, "Why We Should Not Revise the Standards: Three Reasonable Reasons (And a Proposed Alternative)."

Musicologist Timothy Shafer reviews Leland Ryken's *40 Favorite Hymns on the Christian Life: A Closer Look at their Spiritual and Poetic Meaning*. In this fine little book Leland Ryken brings all of his poetic experience as a master teacher to bear on the subject of hymnody. It should serve as a salutary antidote to the thinning content of much of what passes for worship song today. Shafer also reviews a fascinating history of the hymnal, Christopher Phillips's *The Hymnal: A Reading History*.

William Edgar reviews Os Guinness's latest offering, *Last Call for Liberty: How America's Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat* in which Guinness warns of the dire consequences of losing our God-given civic freedoms as a culture.

Wallace King reviews *The War Outside My Window: The Civil War Diary of LeRoy Wiley Gresham, 1860–1865*. This diary provides a unique glimpse of the American Civil War through the eyes of a bed-ridden young man, raised in a Southern Presbyterian home and church. LeRoy Gresham is an older brother of Mary "Minnie" Gresham, mother of J. Gresham Machen.

Finally, don't miss Gerard Manley Hopkins's delightful and profound poem "Spring." This Italian sonnet exemplifies the poetic movement from the natural (the octave) to the spiritual (the sestet) order—a skill perfected by Hopkins. It reminds us that whether or not we perceive it, we live in God's wonderful world.

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.

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

by T. David Gordon

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The Shorter Catechism is, perhaps, not very easy to learn. And very certainly it will not teach itself. Its framers were *less careful to make it easy than to make it good*. As one of them, Lazarus Seaman, explained, they sought to set down in it not the knowledge the child has, but the knowledge the child *ought* to have. And they did not *dream* that anyone could expect it to teach itself. (emphases mine)¹

This quote is as enlightening as it is refreshing (He may have been the last human to admit that sometimes people purposefully make something that isn't easy...). Twice in that brief statement Warfield expressly stated that the catechism's instruction would *not* be self-evident, but would require instruction (“*certainly* it will not teach itself . . . did not *dream* that anyone could expect it to teach itself”). If, a century and a half before our day, Warfield believed that the catechism would require instruction, would it require too much of such instruction that it explain the occasional word that might be archaic or unconventional (even in Warfield's day)? If, in other words, the necessary instructors (because it could not “teach itself”) could explain *theological* words like “justification” or “sanctification,” could they not also explain words or expressions that are mildly archaic (e.g., “any *want* of conformity . . . keeping of *stews*”)? Surely any instructor capable of explaining the technical theological vocabulary in our standards would be able to read the *Oxford English Dictionary* to determine the range of meaning of English words in the mid-seventeenth century.²

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

² If I were asked by the moderator of the general assembly if I had any advice regarding how to debate the matter, I would suggest that he rule out of order any speaker who says the current standards are “too difficult to understand,” because such a public acknowledgment would constitute *prima facie* evidence that the speaker had taken his ordination vows insincerely: If he could not understand them, how could he vow to teach in accord with them? Of course, any moderator who did this (I would) should certainly expect the following motion: “Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?”

2. Synonyms Are Rarely Purely Synonymous

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

1 Corinthians 7:1 “It is good for a man not to marry.” (Later version: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” This is still not very good, but it is an improvement, and it is not a mere synonym).

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

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

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

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

3. Pan-generational Fellowship

Our grandson Tripp is only 19 months old, and his parents have not yet begun catechizing him (nor do I intend to offer any unsolicited advice on the matter). But if they

do catechize him, and if they select the Westminster Shorter Catechism, I would like to think that Tripp and his Papa might have the occasional conversation through the years about the meaning of the catechism; Papa might even ask Tripp the occasional catechism question, to reinforce his parents' instruction. If I do so, I don't wish to "correct" his memory work when he has memorized a different *version* than I have; this would just confuse him. And while I put this example in a personal form, it would be true of all younger and older followers of Christ within the Westminster tradition. Would the ostensible gain in intelligibility compensate for the reinforcing gain of all Westminster catechists being able to join one another in reciting and discussing a common document?

A Tertium Quid

I am actually sympathetic with the concern that our confessional standards be intelligible (though I may have a higher regard for the intelligence of the average adult than the proponents of the revisions have), but I think we can address the matter with a few strategic marginal notes. We already publish some editions of the standards with proof-texts, how difficult would it be to put in the occasional marginal note at the bottom of a page, explaining older terms, the way Bible translations often put alternative translations at the bottom of the page?

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

For nearly a century now, published editions of the complete works of Shakespeare have had marginal annotations, to assist readers in understanding genuinely archaic forms of speech. Such annotations, I suggest, are the proper middle ground between retaining or revising the original language of an original text. Our confessional standards may have reached the moment in the development of the English language where some well-considered annotations would prove beneficial. I propose, therefore, that those who regard the standards as borderline unintelligible (I am not there yet, but I am told that others are) consider annotating them with marginal explanations. Such annotations might very well serve adequately for several generations before revised language becomes as necessary as it is for Old English and Middle English.

Not all decisions in life are irrevocable. If a couple tries a new restaurant, and doesn't have an especially pleasant evening, they may simply determine not to return. The decision to try the restaurant once does not make the decision irrevocable. Other decisions, however, are practically irrevocable: giving a child his first piece of chocolate, for instance. Once an alternate form of the Shorter Catechism is "out there," it cannot be returned to Pandora's

Box. The confusion will enter the language of our Reformed traditions, and the damage will not be undone. Recall how this happened just a couple decades ago with the decision to “revise” the Apostles’ Creed in the Revised Trinity Hymnal. The several stylistic changes introduced there meant that congregants can no longer recite the Creed in worship from memory, because there are at least two versions out there. So now, the assembled saints have to ruffle through their hymnals, looking for the right page to find a copy of the revised Creed, a creed they had previously cited for many years from memory. The same confusion will now attend the Shorter Catechism; people discussing it will not know whether their conversation partner memorized it incorrectly, or simply memorized another version, and their conversation will likely turn from the catechism’s meaning to discussing whose memory was “right.”

And now for the elephant in the room: If the standards are revised, they will be worsened. When the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals met initially in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the early 1990s, there was some informal conversation about framing a new creed, free from some of the differences about sacraments or church government that characterized the existing creeds. My friend (and then-colleague) David Wells made an insightful comment: “While I appreciate the sentiment, I am afraid we must face the reality that ours is not a creed-making generation. We have neither the linguistic nor theological training that previous generations had, and anything we produced would likely be inferior to the existing confessional standards” (this is my paraphrase, from memory, so don’t hold David to the exact language). I agreed with him then, and nearly three decades and a billion Tweets have not persuaded me that the situation has improved since then. What David said about *creed-making* would also be true about *creed-revising*, because the sensibilities and abilities needed for the one are needed for the other.

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

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

Third, the virile, forceful language of the current standards will become effeminate; Westminster’s granite will become smoothed. In short, it will be (for some) a tad easier to *understand* (at a superficial reading), but for everyone much more difficult to *memorize*, which is the purpose for which a catechism exists. If the current standards are like traditional hymns; the revised standards will be like contemporary worship choruses: easy, sentimental, wordy, and vapid (though they will not be nearly as bad as contemporary worship choruses, they will *lean* in that direction).

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

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

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

As a closing consideration, I would recommend that when the time comes to revise the language itself (rather than simply provide annotations), the revision begin with the Confession of Faith, then proceed to the Larger Catechism, and only as a final stage revise the Shorter Catechism. The Shorter Catechism is the most memorized of the three standards, the one most likely to be discussed, whether in formal or informal settings, and therefore the very last one to revise, because such revision would diminish the reinforcing effect (so important in a memorized document) of rehearsing and discussing a common text.³ Listen to Martin Luther on this subject:

First, the pastor should most carefully avoid teaching the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the sacraments, etc., according to various texts and differing forms. Let him adopt one version, stay with it, and from one year to the next keep using it unchanged. Young and inexperienced persons must be taught a single fixed form or they will easily become confused, and the result will be that all previous effort and labor will be lost. There should be no change, even though one may wish to improve the text.⁴

T. David Gordon *is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and serves as professor of religion and Greek at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

³ If I am even partly right, the OPC should either abandon the revision project or restrict it severely, to this: Instruct the committee to study the standards, creating a list of demonstrably archaic (i.e., the dictionaries say “archaic” as part of their entry) words, phrases, or clauses, with a proposal for change in each case; and then to present these seriatim to the general assembly, for each to receive a vote of “approve,” “disapprove,” or “remand to committee for further revision.” This would have the likely result of the committee producing a shorter list of proposed revisions than if they are turned loose to make as many as they deem needed. If they are so turned loose, by the time they report their work to general assembly it will have many changes, some more needed than others (none, by my estimation). Then what will the assembly do? Go through the entirety of all three documents, debating every proposed change? Instruct the committee to propose their revisions seriatim, arguing in each case for the necessity of a revision, and for the propriety of the particular proposal.

⁴ Martin Luther, preface to the Small Catechism, Concordia, <http://catechism.cph.org/>; a printed version of an older translation: Joseph Stump, *An Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1935), xi–xii.

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

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

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

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

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

The CCE considered the preparation of a “Modern English Study Version” of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (MESV) and presented the following recommendation to the Eighty-fourth (2017) General Assembly:

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

Grounds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. Observations

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

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

Member Churches and, when appropriate, to make recommendations to the Council with respect to such matters (bearing in mind the nature and extent of the Council's authority, *Constitution*, V)" (Bylaws, V.2). This suggestion would seem to put NAPARC in the position of recommending something to one of its member churches that said member has not even decided to undertake.

2. What is in view here is not doctrinal modification of the Westminster Standards but linguistic updating. This is a work that the OPC can, and should, do if it is to be done. To look to an outside body to give us its suggestions before the General Assembly even decides to undertake linguistic modifications is unprecedented and unwarranted.

3. We do believe that consultation with NAPARC should occur if the OPC determines that it should modify its standards as proposed. If the GA erects a committee to update the language of its doctrinal standards, then it should, at that point, notify the members of NAPARC as to its actions and invite any input that they care to offer. Such a procedure (especially the invitation for members' input) would more than fill the NAPARC mandate in this regard and would be the appropriate interaction with NAPARC (as opposed to what CEIR proposes).

E. Conclusions

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

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

Thus, the Special Committee has concluded that it would be better to clarify the principal issues in such an undertaking (see attached summary), rather than provide an example of a finished product, and bring to the 85th General Assembly the recommendation that we brought to the 84th General Assembly, with this change: we

have come to believe that a committee whose members are all elected by the General Assembly would be preferable to undertake such work (rather than giving it to an already extant committee). Electing a committee to do this work would give the GA maximal control over its membership as well as its mandate and best serve the Church.

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

F. Recommendations

1. The CCE recommends that the Eighty-fifth (2018) General Assembly, in accordance with *Form of Government* XXXII.3, elect a committee of seven members, with two alternates, to propose specific linguistic changes to the doctrinal standards of the OPC (The Confession of Faith and Catechisms). The committee is authorized to propose only such changes as do not change the doctrine or meaning of the standards. The kinds of changes that the Assembly authorizes the special committee to consider are limited to the following:
 - a. Morphological changes, such as "executeth" to "executes" and "hath" to "has."
 - b. Replacing archaic pronouns, e.g., "thou" to "you."
 - c. Replacing obsolete and/or archaic words, e.g., "stews" in LC 139. This includes, as in the example just given, replacing words that are still current in the language but are used in obsolete or archaic senses in the standards.
 - d. Substituting a modern translation of the Scriptures for the text of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.

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

Grounds:

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

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

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

ServantReading

40 Favorite Hymns on the Christian Life *by Leland Ryken*

by Timothy P. Shafer

40 Favorite Hymns on the Christian Life: A Closer Look at their Spiritual and Poetic Meaning, by Leland Ryken. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019, 156 pages, \$15.99.

What a pleasure it is to read through the most recent book of prodigious author Leland Ryken (professor emeritus of English at Wheaton College). In *40 Favorite Hymns*, Ryken takes the reader on a literary and theological tour of the poetry of some of the most cherished hymns of the Christian faith. Ryken, of course, is well regarded for his literary analyses of some of the most well-known Christian literature, including *Paradise Lost*, C. S. Lewis's Narnia series, and the Bible itself.

Ryken has, in this current volume, turned his considerable literary analytical skills specifically to hymnic poetry, consciously omitting references to the musical settings of the poems. In the introduction of the volume, he describes his rationale for this musical omission as three fold: 1) until the late nineteenth century the format of hymnals was that of a small book containing only words; 2) every hymn is a poem first, and; 3) there are gains that can be had by reading the poems in linear fashion, as a poem, as opposed to the strophic design in which they are found in modern hymnals (11–12).

One of the interesting advantages of linear reading that Ryken points out is that the gaze of the reader continues to move forward (as opposed to returning to the top of the page, as in a modern hymnal), making clear the sequential progression of thought and feeling found in the poetry. Another is the ability to slow down and take in the words at one's own pace, rather than being pushed forward by the pace of the musical setting. Yet a third advantage that he explores is that of shifting the spotlight of beauty from the musical setting to the text itself, which beauty is often overshadowed by the musical elements during sung renderings (12).

With the above, Ryken makes a strong case to consider the texts of our hymns separately from the music. Approaching our hymns in this manner will no doubt deepen and enrich the worshiper's experience of corporate sung praise on a given Lord's Day when the text is once again partnered with its given tune. Doing this work in advance of corporate worship could easily be considered an element of bringing a "sacrifice of praise" as commanded by the author of Hebrews in 13:15, or a part of "singing with understanding" that the Apostle Paul exhorts in 1 Corinthians 14:15. While Ryken's book serves as an aide to our corporate worship for only forty specific hymns, it is nevertheless a model for us to follow for hymns not contained in the volume. Mr. Ryken is in effect teaching us how to understand the texts we sing, and as such is making a wonderfully edifying contribution to our faith in practice. Each local congregation would do well to consider using the book for a Sunday school term as a resource to encourage and teach individuals and/or families to study their sung praise in advance of each Lord's Day service.

Ryken himself describes the format of every entry in his anthology as consisting of three elements—a hymnic poem, an explication of the poem, and a passage from the Bible that ties into the hymn and its explication. He further states that the Bible passages are intended to contribute to the reader's use of the book for devotional purposes (12).

Within these three categories, Ryken offers the reader an amazing variety of information and insight. The first category, the poetic text of the hymn itself, is self-consciously printed in a linear format so that readers might experience what Ryken speaks of when he describes the advantages of reading the text as poetry.

In the second category—explication of the poem—the reader can find all manner of information related to the hymn. As appropriate for each poem, Ryken covers such diverse topics as the historical circumstances surrounding its origins, its influence after having been written, history of its use, personal circumstances of the author that inspired the creation of the poem, the form of the poem, poetic/literary devices contained in the poem, the genre of the poem, biblical references within the poem, the principal imagery of the poem, and much more. Each entry averages two to three pages, but Ryken’s writing is vigorous, not wasting words, making for rich content as he proceeds.

Without giving away too much of the surprising information to be found in the volume, some examples of the above diversity of information include: the use of “Holy, Holy, Holy” in nearly every English hymnbook; Charles Wesley’s composition of “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” to celebrate the anniversary of his own conversion; the astounding number “ten million” as the number of times “Amazing Grace” is estimated to be sung publicly each year; the nearly fifty biblical references to be found in “The Church’s One Foundation”; the rhetorical techniques found in “How Firm a Foundation”; the gang membership of the author of “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”; the Trinitarian structure of the prayer of petition in “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”; the literary archetypes that govern the composition of “Like a River Glorious”; the reason “Rock of Ages” was written on a playing card; the nature imagery that binds “How Great Thou Art,” “O Worship the King,” “Fairest Lord Jesus,” and “A Shelter in the Time of Storm”; the role of “Abide with Me” in the Rugby League Challenge Cup in England; and the rich metaphors of iron mines and bitter buds ripening in “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.”

Ryken frequently describes the specific ways in which each poem demonstrates beauty by being both unified and diverse — recalling Jonathan Edwards’s definition of beauty and excellence as that of “consent of being to being.”¹ With this emphasis, Ryken points a way forward for the hymn writers of our generation and beyond: far from the insipid and vain repetition found in so much modern worship music and lyrics, Ryken extols the layered beauty to be found in the time-tested poems of our most familiar and beloved hymns, all in the context of biblical beauty.

Equally, if not more importantly, is Ryken’s provision of numerous biblical allusions to which he points for each and every hymn text. Far from being “the imaginations and devices of men,” Ryken demonstrates that the poems of these authors are steeped in biblical language, imagery, genre, and theology. Meditating on the biblical sources and references provided by Ryken in this volume is solid preparation for letting “the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16) both privately, and in communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ each and every Lord’s Day.

Ryken’s volume will no doubt prove to be a blessing to individual believers as well as Christ’s church in the months and years to come before Christ’s return, should he tarry. I encourage my fellow laborers in Christ’s church to avail themselves and their congregations of this wonderful new resource.

Timothy P. Shafer is a ruling elder in Resurrection Orthodox Presbyterian Church in State College, Pennsylvania. He is a performing pianist and professor of piano at Penn State University School of Music.

¹ Jonathan Edwards, “The Mind,” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 22–34.

The Hymnal: A Reading History *by Christopher N. Phillips*

by Timothy P. Shafer

The Hymnal: A Reading History, by Christopher N. Phillips. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018, 272 pages, \$39.95.

When one considers a hymnal, it is likely that what most commonly comes to mind is the large, hardbound musical aid to worship. For many, hymnals are the repository of some of their most treasured devotional material (both musically and poetically), and for the regular church-goer, hymnals are often associated with some of the most spiritual and emotional moments of public worship. But as author Christopher N. Phillips, an associate professor of English at Lafayette College, demonstrates, hymnals have a vastly and surprisingly wider scope of meaning than most realize.

Phillips's book, *The Hymnal: A Reading History*, is an excellent historical compilation of the role of the hymnal in culture, education, economics, gift-giving, the home, courtship, literature, denominational distinction, personal devotion, and of course, church life. In addition to the interest piqued by many of these lesser-considered, but important, facets of the role of the hymnal in daily life, Phillips's writing style is warm, engagingly personal, and eminently readable, adding greatly to the enjoyment of discovering the hidden history and impact of the genre. He weaves tales—some documented, some surmised from scant evidence—with skill, engaging the reader

empathetically in the personal joys and sorrows of individuals from earlier generations. His ability to engage the reader's imagination in this manner is a great feature of his writing of what is, in essence, a history book.

Phillips's ecumenical approach to the topic is also admirable. While much of his discussions naturally center on the Protestant hymnbook, he also gives considerable attention to Catholic, Jewish, and Mormon use of hymnals. Of note is his poignant inclusion of the impact a hymnal had on a particular slave as she decoded the text that provided for her a “click of comprehension” (106). He describes her joy when she understood from the page the words of a Watts hymn: “When I can read my title clear to mansions in the skies, I bid farewell to every fear and wipe my weeping eyes” (106). She at once comprehended her assurance of salvation as it was linked to the written word and rejoiced in her ability to understand it.

Phillips devotes an entire chapter (ch. 6) to the use of the hymnal as a literacy tool for teaching the young. In a description of a common practice of early reading pedagogy in the American colonies, he outlines the joyless practice of the “ABC method” of learning to read, where the students would recite the letters from a word divided into syllables, and afterward speak the sound of each syllable, eventually joining the syllables together to form and recognize the word. He juxtaposes the description of this tedious process with Watts's stated goal of “using the pleasures of rhyme and image to motivate children to not only read, but memorize his texts” (107). Watts also encouraged parents to turn the duty

of children (that of learning to read) into a reward by offering them their own personal copies of the books of verse.

Many more aspects of the hymnal are discussed throughout the volume, including descriptions of various practices of learning new tunes before printed tunes and musical literacy were widely available. These included the “giving out” of a hymn by the preacher and the “lining out” of the hymn by a lay leader (called a precentor) (68). Also of particular interest are Phillips’s carefully researched descriptions of the evolution of common features of our modern hymnals, including various approaches to layout, bindings, and subject and first line indexes (ch. 5).

Having myself just spent the previous decade on the joint Psalter Hymnal Committee for the OPC-URC publication of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, I learned two important things from Phillips’ book. The first is that the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (2018), which is currently enjoying its first days of use in Reformed circles, is apparently the first major American Presbyterian Hymnbook to include a separate Psalm section since the 1843 production of *Psalms and Hymns Adapted to Social, Private, and Public Worship in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (49). For the re-emergence of sung psalms in combination with hymns in corporate Reformed worship, I give thanks to God, for I consider both to be biblical. Secondly, Phillips’s work is a humbling example of just how much there is to learn about the history of the worship of our Triune God by the communion of saints over the centuries. It is a thoroughly engrossing and highly informative volume, free from large doses of musical and poetic technical jargon, making it a great pleasure to read for anyone with even a cursory interest in hymns. I highly commend it.

Timothy P. Shafer is a ruling elder in Resurrection Orthodox Presbyterian Church in State College, Pennsylvania. He is a performing pianist and professor of piano at Penn State University School of Music.

Last Call for Liberty by Os Guinness

by William Edgar

Last Call for Liberty: How America's Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018, 336 pages, \$27.00.

For most of his career Os Guinness, who is British, has been a keen observer of the United States. He is convinced that no other country stands at the crossroads as does America. His first major study of the United States was *The American Hour*, published in 1993. It was a sweeping, detailed, historical look at the second half of the twentieth century. These succeeding decades illustrate a gradual loss of the genial vision of the Founding Fathers. Then, the hard-hitting question, can the country sustain the freedom of speech established by the Framers? More recently Guinness has written *A Free People's Suicide* (2012), in which the warnings become more pressing. Then, convinced of the need to be more constructive, he wrote *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (2014), followed by *Impossible People*, subtitled, *Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (2016). While each of these contains significant variations, the theme that unites them is something like this: freedom of speech, the respect for those with deep differences, the need for civil discourse, cannot be sustained without the other two great qualities, virtue and faith.

In this (final?) iteration, he repeats this call, and appeals to the notion of covenant as alone able to support this trilogy of merits. But the book carries a greater sense of urgency than the previous volumes, which is to say quite a lot. Guinness argues that the real and present danger is not from without but from within. Simply put, we Americans need to choose between the values proclaimed by two revolutions, the American and the French. We are rapidly forgetting the original, covenantal idea of freedom of 1776, and trading it in for the French revolutionary idea of 1789. According to the former, true freedom can only be undergirded where there is character, and character is only possible where there is religious faith.

Guinness structures the book with a series of questions, each of which call for a conversation. Among others, he asks how much Americans know about our history, how is freedom defined, how can the world be made safe for diversity, which institutions will carry the weight of the crucial qualities, and the like. As are all his works, this one is learned and original. In my opinion, Guinness has moved ahead from his former style, where names and quotes come at us like water from a fire hydrant, to a more flowing narrative, building an edifice that is logical and cogent.

Guinness writes as a Christian. Readers of this journal might have wished for more resolute appeals to biblical orthodoxy, though. In the chapter titled "Where Do You Ground Your Faith in Human Freedom?" he contrasts, as he has done in previous works, three families of faith, the Eastern, the secularist, and the Judeo-Christian, or, as he calls it, the Abrahamic. After brilliantly critiquing the first two, he then writes a section in defense of what he considers the most important biblical doctrine for our times, the image of God. The chapter stresses the freedom we have to receive or reject God, which, although right in itself, could have benefitted from some warnings against Arminianism, which in the end does not promote freedom, but (paradoxically) hinders it. That said, the book is "prophetic" and needs to be read by all who seriously desire freedom.

William Edgar is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and serves as professor of apologetics and ethics at Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, Pennsylvania.

The War Outside My Window, *Janet Elizabeth Croon, ed.*

by Wallace B. King

The War Outside My Window: The Civil War Diary of LeRoy Wiley Gresham, 1860-1865, edited by Janet Elizabeth Croon. El Dorado Hill, CA: Savas Beatie, 2018, xxxviii + 442 pages, \$34.95.

Last year saw the publication of this most unusual book that should appeal to many students of the American Civil War and of Southern Presbyterianism, but also to those who have an interest in the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is largely comprised of a diary written by LeRoy Wiley Gresham, beginning in 1860 when he was only twelve years old, and continuing up to a few days before his death at the age of seventeen in 1865. Included in the collection of the US Library of Congress, after being donated by the family in the 1980s, the diary has been edited by Janet Elizabeth Croon, who has provided copious notes that help the reader to keep track of the many persons mentioned and events recounted in the diary. Croon's footnotes assist the reader in making sense of diary entries that are often filled with inaccuracies stemming from the proverbial fog of war. In addition, the publisher has provided a helpful introduction, a medical forward and afterward, and LeRoy's obituary.

The Greshams were a prominent slave-owning family living in Macon, Georgia. LeRoy, no doubt being raised to one day assume the duties of a proper Southern gentleman, is an older brother of Mary "Minnie" Gresham, mother of J. Gresham Machen. At the age of eight, LeRoy's left leg is crushed when a chimney collapses on him. Shortly thereafter, he is apparently diagnosed as having pulmonary tuberculosis, which evolves into spinal tuberculosis, or Pott's Disease. The events chronicled in the book begin in June 1860 with LeRoy and his father, John Gresham, a ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church in Macon, traveling to Philadelphia to seek medical help. LeRoy's entry of Genesis 31:49 on the first page of his diary as he is about to begin his trip north elicits a footnote from editor Croon that "the Gresham family was very religious." Indeed.

LeRoy is a voracious reader of just about anything he can get his hands on: history, the classics, theology, forgettable novels, and newspapers. Books are his window on the world. LeRoy's own writing develops in sophistication and insight as he grows older, though from the beginning to the end he writes in a fairly matter-of-fact manner about the daily minutia he chronicles, an amusing mix of the mundane and trivial with matters of lasting national significance. One senses the increasing excitement in the diary entries as the expected outbreak of hostilities between North and South draws closer and LeRoy's optimism concerning the success of the Southern cause in the early years of the war, which finally turns to grudging acceptance that the secessionist project is doomed to failure.

LeRoy regularly writes about what is happening at the church: pastor visits, who is ill on a given Sunday and must stay home, sermon texts, pulpit swaps following meetings of

presbytery, and so on. Sadly, from the very beginning of the diary LeRoy is already unable to attend public worship due to his fragile health. In October of 1864, Minnie is received into communicant membership during the morning worship service, and the pastor and elders come to the Gresham home following evening worship to receive Leroy as well. There is no Lord's Supper given to him, however, as everyone was "too busy" to remember to bring the elements. Just two months before his death, Leroy writes that he hopes that one day he will be able to "go to church long enough to have [the] privilege" of receiving communion. Prayer meetings increase in frequency as the war turns increasingly against the Confederacy, with special services and days of fasting also noted. When the Northern army occupies Macon, LeRoy expresses regret that he had not "kept Sunday right" because he spent too much time watching the troops march past the Gresham home.

As the war drags on, Leroy becomes increasingly skeptical of the overly optimistic official pronouncements, and he does not hold back in his criticisms of various politicians and generals. His growing realization that the war is not going well roughly corresponds to despair over his inevitable physical deterioration. A warning to the gentle reader: Leroy is usually rather explicit when describing his symptoms. But it is his growing sense of hopelessness in his condition that makes for increasingly difficult reading. And none is more heart-rending than the letter from Leroy's mother to her sister shortly after Leroy's death. Her grief is simply overwhelming as she recounts Leroy's final moments, his quoting of Scripture, expression of confidence in his Savior, and exhortation of his older brother Thomas to "give himself to Christ."

This book is by no means a "feel good" read, but I can recommend it without reservation; fascinating in so many ways on multiple levels, it is the most engrossing book I've read in quite some time.

Wallace B. King *is a ruling elder at Geneva Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Marietta, Georgia, and serves on the Committee on Christian Education.*

ServantPoetry

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Spring

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring—

When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?

A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden.—Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.