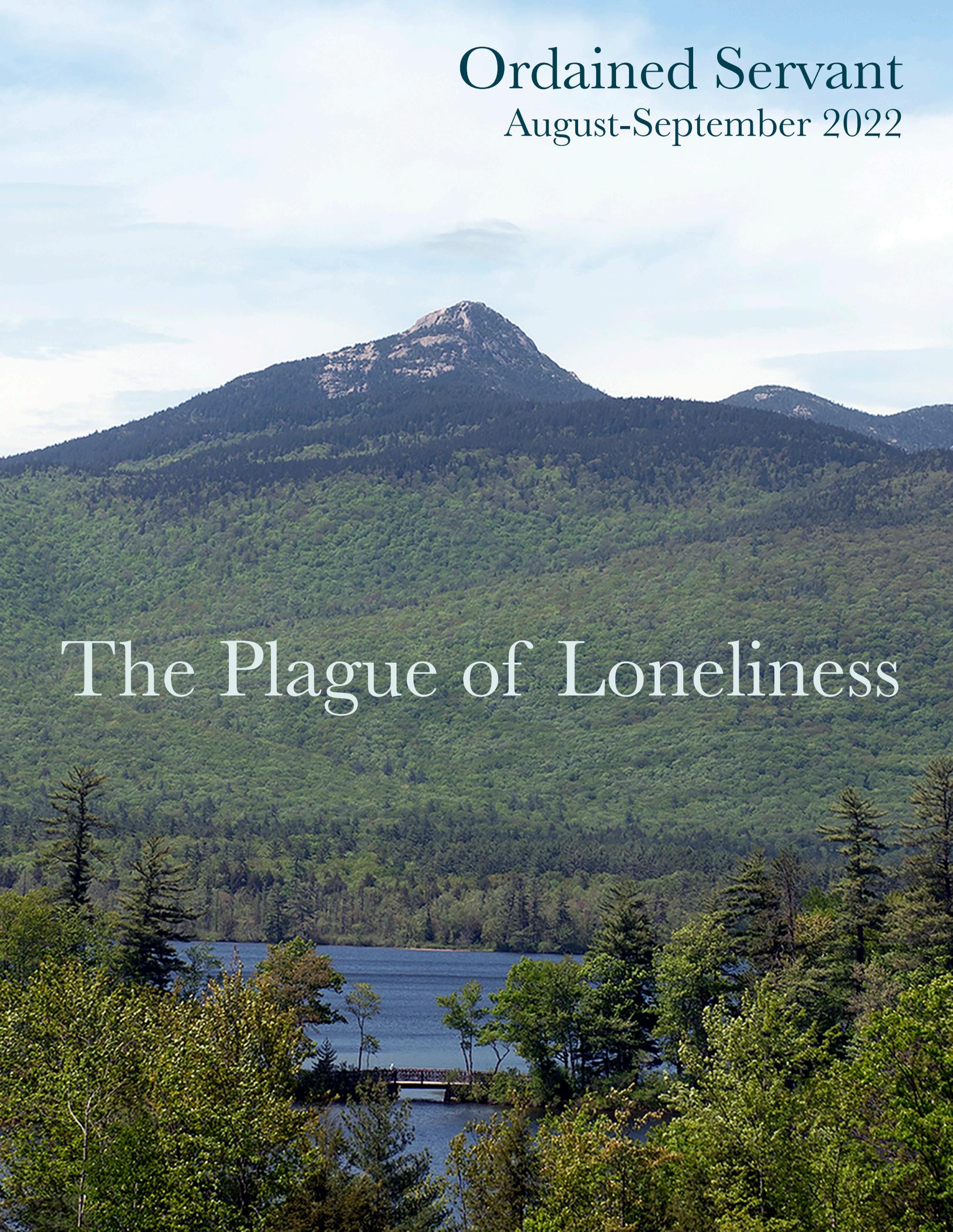


Ordained Servant
August-September 2022

The Plague of Loneliness



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August-September 2022

From the Editor

One of the greatest social problems in modern America is loneliness, and it does not simply affect older people. Judith Dinsmore in “Connecting Some Dots on Disconnection” explores some of the reasons for loneliness. Chief among them is our efficiency and performance-oriented lives as well as the nature of social and mobile media. Dinsmore offers some very thoughtful ways to help us overcome our part in creating loneliness. Thoreau was properly concerned about contextless information purveyed by the telegraph, exemplified by a telegram reporting Princess Adelaide’s whooping cough. Our increasingly contextless lives, disconnected from other human beings, would have appalled him.

“11 Passages to Read When You Feel Lonely” is a recent post by Crossway’s *Passages to Read* series. It reminded me that God’s Word applied by his Spirit is the most tangible way by which we experience God’s presence.

On the same topic, John Fikkert reviews an important new book: *The Loneliness Epidemic: Why So Many of Us Feel Alone—and How Leaders Can Respond* by Susan Mettes. Mettes is a behavioral scientist and Christian who “illustrates the physical, emotional, and social toll of loneliness in our country. . . . [and she] offers meaningful ways the church can minister to lonely people” (from the dust jacket). The book is written for church leaders. She also looks at the impact of social media, insecurity, churchgoing, and privacy on loneliness.

Loneliness and the Internet, especially social media, are definitely related. Elon Musk is asking if social media are destroying civilization. While that is too broad a statement, it is the damage that social media is clearly doing that concerns many people just now. In “Global Pillage: Stealing Our Data, Our Intelligence, and Our Souls,” I review an important new critique of the social media, *Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media* by Chris Martin. I also recommend a book written by a Presbyterian pastor, *Three Pieces of Glass* (2020),¹ that relates loneliness directly to our world mediated by screens. The three pieces of glass are our computers, our mobile devices, and our automobile windshields. Each in its own way distances us from embodied life and community.

Along similar lines, T. David Gordon reviews Mark Bauerlein’s sequel to his earlier book *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and*

¹ Eric O. Jacobsen, *Three Pieces of Glass: Why We Feel Lonely in a World Mediated by Screens* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020)

Jeopardizes our Future (2008). In “Dumb and Dangerous” Gordon reports an even more dire assessment of the generation whose twin educations from the cultural media and academia form a mutual admiration society in place of the critical sensibilities academia once cultivated.

Painting generations with a broad brush, however, especially when the focus is on its negative traits, can be dangerous, leaving out the many exceptions. One reason is that the educations of Millennials are quite varied. The Millennials I know were ordinarily homeschooled and or attended Christian schools focusing on a more classical education. They are also members of a solid biblical church. Maybe in their generation they are the adults in the room. We should also keep in mind that each generation should take heed to its weaknesses, to which none of us is immune. For the Christian this should be a very important part of the process of sanctification.

Alan Strange begins a new commentary on our *Book of Discipline* with a very informative preface in which he describes the unique nature of church discipline; and he distinguishes between inquisitorial and adversarial approaches in judicial matters. This should prove a very useful and necessary commentary since sessions are always seeking help in applying this portion of our *Book of Church Order* to various disciplinary matters.

John Mahaffy “First Things in Acts and Paul,” reviews *In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul* by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. For those of us who were present when Dr. Gaffin taught the classes at Westminster Theological Seminary (1977–2010) upon which this book is based, this is a special treat. But for every serious Christian this book will prove an enduring legacy to Gaffin’s contribution to the Reformed discipline of biblical theology.

Our poem this month, “The Deluge of Data,” is complement to my review of *Terms of Service*.

The cover photo is of Mount Chocorua in Albany, New Hampshire, the easternmost peak of the Sandwich Range in the White Mountains.

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.

ServantLiving

Connecting Some Dots on Disconnection

by Judith M. Dinsmore

The last three years underscored what many were already realizing: it is both possible and terrible to avoid human contact. Pre-COVID, loneliness had become serious enough to be grouped into our country's burgeoning mental health issues. A study from 2018 indicated that one in five Americans "rarely or never feel close to people."¹ The same study indicated that Generation Z (those born after 1996) may be the loneliest. More recent research may show that the pandemic exacerbated loneliness.²

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

Our Busy, Efficient Lives

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

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

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

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

² American Psychological Association, "COVID-19 pandemic led to increase in loneliness around the world," (May 2022) <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2022/05/covid-19-increase-loneliness> (accessed July 1, 2022).

There is no space in contemporary life that has not become subject to the dominion of rational methods for achieving maximum efficiency . . . That's not to say we never prioritize other values—we certainly do—but our one agreed-upon value in nearly every sphere of life tends to be efficiency.³

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

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

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

I had allotted—generously, I had believed—thirty minutes each day to care for, pill, feed, and clean up after these cats during my neighbor's vacation. But twenty-four-hour cat crisis management, and neighbor-worldview-clash-grief ministry on top, well, this was simply not on my list of things to do . . .⁴

But she stresses the necessity of inefficient, interruptive hospitality to provide what our neighbors often lack: connection. “We live in a world that highly values functionality,” she reflects earlier in the book. “But there is such a thing as being too functional.”⁵

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

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

³ Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2021), 55.

⁴ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 164.

⁵ Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*, 111.

Our Performative Instinct

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

The act of creating an identity—often with the help of specific products—and projecting that identity for the approval and even “consumption” of others is second nature to digital natives. Some are professional brand-builders; perhaps they work in public relations or graphic design, perhaps they are an influencer of some kind being paid for product placement on their social media posts. The rest of us just pick branding up instinctively. BuzzFeed author Anne Helen Petersen wittily summed up some examples of informal branding in her book *Can't Even*: “I have a friend whose brand is ‘Parenting is hard but always worth it.’ Others include ‘My kids are so bizarre!’; ‘I’m a Cool Dad’; ‘Wilderness overposter’; ‘Books are life’; ‘Wheels up’; ‘Culinary adventuress,’” etc.⁶

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

The scaffolding for our billboarded lives has been a long time in the making. In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, writer and OP minister Carl Trueman provides an intellectual genealogy for our modern sense of self, one aspect of which, he says, is its inward turn and another its need for recognition by others.⁷ Alan Noble would add there is no line between the two: “Expressing your identity is the same step as discovering or creating it.”⁸

This has profoundly affected how we relate to one another inside institutions, including the church. Trueman explains that instead of finding purpose and well-being by being connected to something outside ourselves, now our commitment is “first and foremost to the self and is inwardly directed. Thus, the order is reversed. Outward institutions become in effect the servants of the individual and her inner sense of well-being.”⁹

How does the outward institution become a servant to the individual? By being a platform for them to perform upon, argues Yuval Levin in his 2020 book *A Time to Build*, “Americans increasingly expect institutions not to form and socialize the people within them but rather to display those people and provide them with arenas for self-expression,” he writes.¹⁰ We come to an institution not to be molded and trained in almost-imperceptible ways but to build our brand or project ourselves. This is an inherently lonely endeavor: “[Institutions as platforms] can become venues for acting alone, more than together, and they therefore contribute to the sense of alienation and detachment that pervades our social life.”¹¹

⁶ Anne Helen Petersen, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation* (New York: Dey Street Books, 2020), 163.

⁷ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 60.

⁸ Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*, 44.

⁹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 49.

¹⁰ Yuval Levin, *A Time to Build* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 137.

¹¹ Levin, *A Time to Build*, 37.

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

Performing is lonely work; no matter how vulnerable you are, if you are doing it to build your brand, you forever “use” the other and reserve yourself from being known. “Our moments of vulnerability are often carefully cultivated and prepared for public consumption to maximize attention and develop our image,” observes Alan Noble.¹² Sometimes the temptation to perform is obvious, such as using the church as a launching pad for snappy statements on hot-button issues. Other times it is less so: forever standing apart from the institution to comment upon it (the music! the sermon length! the elders!) can be the disassociative impulse of a performative individual. Being an audience member can also be lonely; no matter how affirmative you are, you are always commenting as an acknowledged outsider—as a fan, not a friend.

It can be an uphill battle on Sunday morning to lay aside the roles of performer and audience and to move beyond the flurry of giving and receiving small affirmations. Yet failing to may be a decided hindrance to Christian love. Social media demonstrates this. There has been a debate bubbling up even within church conversations about whether social media is a tool, which can be used for good or for ill, or something more sinister, which makes its users more miserable, more lonely, and more angry. Simply by being a platform, however, surely social media supports its users’ sense of self as performers. “Mediating our social lives through information and entertainment platforms suggests we understand our social lives as forms of mutual entertainment and information,” writes Levin.¹³ How’s that going? On social media, real knowledge of one another seems to be dwindling away, leaving in its wake only expressions of affirmation (or disapprobation) for someone else’s performance. What Levin says next seems to be increasingly undeniable: “The sense of being connected but lonely, in touch but untouched, is pervasive in the age of social media, *and it is hard to overcome on the platforms*” (emphasis added).¹⁴ Our obstinate, modern, performative instinct, centuries in the development and only accelerated by social media, makes it challenging for Christians to interact both on social media platforms (it is hard to stop performing when you are standing onstage) and in person (habits of communicating in order to entertain and inform bleed readily into real life).

Our Relationships

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

How scarce are meaningful, connected relationships? Very, argues journalist Johann Hari. In his 2018 book *Lost Connections*, Hari tackles the mountain of research surrounding the wider sociological forces of disconnection, beginning with Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* and including Hari’s own childhood in quiet, alienated suburbia. Hari began taking

¹² Noble, *You Are Not Your Own*, 102.

¹³ Levin, *A Time to Build*, 121.

¹⁴ Levin, *A Time to Build*, 124.

anti-depressants as a teenager and continued taking them for the next decade and a half before questioning their efficacy, as he recounts in the book. He develops the controversial argument that the burgeoning prescribing of antidepressants over the last few decades ignores not only the questionable data about the benefits of their long-term use but also the underlying cause of many of the symptoms of depression, which he sums up in his title—lost connections.

The understanding of depression as only biological malfunction says that there is a “war taking place in your head,” Hari writes. “On one side there are your feelings of distress, caused by the malfunctions in your brain or genes. On the other side there’s the sane part of you. You can only hope to drug the enemy within into submission—forever. . . . [But] you’re not crazy to feel so distressed. . . . ‘It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a sick society.’”¹⁵

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

Deep grief and depression, she explained to me, have identical symptoms for a reason. Depression, I realized, is itself a form of grief—for all the connections we need, but don’t have. And now I realized—just like it is an insult to Joanne to say that her ongoing grief for her daughter is a form of mental dysfunction, it was an insult to my teenage self to say that this pain was just the result of bad brain chemistry. It was an insult to what he had been through, and to what he needed.”¹⁶

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

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

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

Judith M. Dinsmore is a member of Providence Presbyterian Church, Robinson, Pennsylvania, and is managing editor of *New Horizons*.

¹⁵ Johann Hari, *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression—and the Unexpected Solutions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 155.

¹⁶ Hari, *Lost Connections*, 259.

ServantLiving

11 Passages to Read When You Feel Lonely

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

1. Joshua 1:9

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

2. Psalm 73:23–26

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

3. Mark 10:29–30

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

4. Isaiah 41:10

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

5. Lamentations 3:22–24

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

6. 2 Corinthians 1:3–5

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

7. Psalm 25:14–18

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

8. 1 Peter 5:6–7

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

9. Isaiah 53:3

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

10. Hebrews 4:15–16

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

11. Psalm 139:1–16

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down

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

Servant Standards

Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Preface

by Alan D. Strange

Preface

The Form of Government (FG), one might say, deals with the day-to-day operations of the church. It does so in agreement with the principles of God's Word. It describes what the church is, the qualifications and duties of its special officers (all members of the church holding the general office of believer), and how they enter their offices and carry out their tasks, in sum, all that pertains to the ordinary, daily administration and governance of the church. The FG, in other words, gives the broad principles of church government, while the Book of Discipline (BD), in relation to the FG, the subject upon which this commentary now proceeds, takes up a particular part of church government—church discipline—and explains its proper principles and application, in agreement with God's Word and the doctrinal standards of the church.

One place in the FG that especially highlights the distinction between it and the BD is seen in FG 26.2, which directs anyone looking to divest an officer for an offense in doctrine or life to the Book of Discipline, away from the ordinary administrative divestiture described in FG 26 to the more detailed protections of full due process afforded by the Book of Discipline. The FG, to put it another way, describes the life of the church in its ordinary contours, as it carries out its great spiritual task of gathering and perfecting the saints, as set forth in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

The BD, on the other hand, deals not with the ordinary governmental affairs of the church but specifically with alleged offenses, trials and censures for such, restoration, complaints, etc. Certain biblical passages, like Matthew 18:15–20, 1 Timothy 5:19–21, etc., that have clear implications for church discipline are a primary focus of the BD. While a distinction is rightly made in the BD itself between judicial discipline (that which involves alleged offenses on the part of individuals) and administrative discipline (that which involves alleged delinquencies or errors on the part of judicatories), all church discipline is dealing with specific sins or errors, seeking that such be properly addressed.

The bodies that govern the church at all levels (session, presbytery, and general assembly) are referred to as judicatories. These judicatories are duly defined and their relative powers described, in the FG. A special subset of the ordinary judicatory manifests itself when the session or presbytery determines to enter the judicial process of trying charges and considering ecclesiastical censures: the judicatory is constituted in such circumstances as a distinctly judicial body and becomes known as the “trial judicatory.” While everything in the FG derives from God's Word, either directly or by implication, the Word of God comes into view in a more marked way when a judicatory

is acting as a trial judicatory, as seen in the announcement and exhortation made by the moderator in the beginning and at each subsequent session of a judicial trial (BD 4.A.1.a.). This sort of emphasis on God's Word and other due process concerns manifests itself as the special focus of the BD.

The BD sets forth a due process for dealing with charges, complaints, and the like. It is important that such process be held to as closely as possible, so that justice and equity can be achieved, as much as possible. Short-circuiting due process not only exposes judicatories' flawed procedures/tactics to appellate judicatories (as when appeal is taken from a session to the presbytery or the presbytery to the GA) but also fails to do justice to the concerns of accusers and accused. Judicatories should always treat both accusers and accused with all the patience, kindness, and firmness that make for equitable procedures, remembering in every case to observe the golden rule: do unto others as you would have others do unto you. The BD, as does the FG in the area of ongoing ecclesiastical government, as noted above, seeks to give expression to administrative and judicial discipline in a way that is consonant with God's Word, in a way that maximizes fairness for all the involved parties.

Before proceeding to address the way that church discipline developed in the Reformed and Presbyterian sphere, it might be helpful to recall a few things that I have set forth previously in this publication about church discipline more broadly.¹ The purposes of church discipline, for instance, are classically cited as three: the glory of Christ, the purity of the church, and the reclamation of the offender. Others have put in a fourth, something like justice for accusers and accused. (cf. WCF 30.2, which also cites "vindicating . . . the holy profession of the gospel" and "preventing the wrath of God.") Additionally, we often note that biblical church discipline comes to be considered among the Reformed and Presbyterian a third mark of the church after the first two marks, the pure preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments. The marks of the church function to identify the true church in the new context of the Reformation. Historically the attributes of the church (unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity) had served to do so; once Reformation occurred, Reformed churches recognized the necessity not only of confessions and catechisms that reflected Reformed insights but also clear marks (distinguishing characteristics) that further qualified the attributes for the proper identification of the true church in the new circumstance of the rise of denominations in the West.

Though the Scots (connected to Calvin and the continent by John Knox and other Marian exiles), in establishing the Church of Scotland as a Presbyterian Church, adopted the First (1560) and Second (1578) Book of Discipline, rules of church discipline, as is this case with our BD, were not their concern; rather, the First and Second Book of Discipline dealt with the basic rules of church government, such as we have in our FG. Rules dealing specifically with what we think of as church discipline (the conduct of trials, degrees of censure, etc.) emerged in the Reformed Churches somewhat slowly and cautiously, especially after the church had experienced the overly scrupulous and highly developed canon law of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. The particular concern of the Reformed churches was to make sure that disciplinary procedure was biblical, not merely a set of complicated rules requiring canon lawyers, especially so that

¹ Alan D. Strange, "Conflict Resolution in the Church," *Ordained Servant* 28 (2019): 49–59; *Ordained Servant Online* (Nov. and Dec. 2019), https://www.opc.org/os.html?issue_id=150 and https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=786.

proper Christian liberty would be maintained, i.e., that what the church was asked to submit to was not simply man-made rules but the commandments of God, drawn either directly or by implication from the Bible.

After the heavy ecclesiastical yoke of Rome was thrown off, many were concerned lest it be resumed in the Protestant churches, with some reluctant that church discipline should be in the hands of church governors at all (since many clerics, the pope especially, had used church discipline as a tool of personal vindictiveness and settling political scores), preferring that the civil magistrate exercise external ecclesiastical discipline, especially excommunication. Erastianism, this view of the magistrate over the church in whose hands discipline often resided, it should be noted, was hated by many continental and British Reformers, whether occurring in Geneva, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, or elsewhere. This is why, at least in part, as noted above, for many Reformers biblical church discipline became a third mark of the true church after all the perceived Roman abuse of discipline. For Calvin and those who followed in his train, not only on the continent but also in Scotland, America, and elsewhere, it was critical that the exercise of church discipline remained solely in the hands of church governors (ministers and elders), not coming under the control of the civil magistrate.

Given that forms of government tended to develop first among the newly Reformed and Presbyterian churches, when did the equivalent of rules or books of discipline emerge that would serve as precedent for our BD in the OPC? As might be expected, it was in the line of Presbyterianism reflected in the Church of Scotland (and later the Free Church of Scotland) that rules of discipline emerged and influenced the Presbyterian Church in the USA (the body out of which the OPC came). As Stuart Jones, long-time teacher on the BD in the OPC, notes: “Two major Scottish influences on the American disciplinary process tradition . . . were the Church of Scotland’s 1707 *Form of Process* and Pardovan’s *Collections and Observations* (1709) which referred to the Form of Process, had the recognition of the Scottish General Assembly, and referenced acts and traditions germane to process.”²

The latter refers to Walter Steuart of Pardovan, a major influence on American Colonial Presbyterians, who adopted the first BD of sorts in 1788/9: a short two-chapter *Forms of Process* that grew over many years in the PCUSA to a full-fledged *Book of Discipline*. The PCUSA (the Northern church), after several revisions of the BD through the years that followed 1788, adopted a revision of the BD in 1934 that became the basis (in an amended form, of course) for the first OPC BD³, which itself received a major revision in 1983 (as noted in the “Preface” to this edition of the *Book of Church Order*). Thus our present BD, upon which extensive comment will be made hereafter.

One other especially helpful observation that Jones makes that I here note (his commentary is, in fact, full of insight) is the different approaches to church law between those of the continental Reformed traditions and those of the Scottish/American Presbyterian traditions. In the former, the pastoral, transformative nature of discipline is particularly in view, and the legal recedes into the background. In the latter, while concerned with the pastoral and restorative aspects of discipline, process came to have greater play, especially determining guilt when one denies that he has sinned.⁴ Different

² Stuart R. Jones, “Commentary on The Orthodox Presbyterian Book of Discipline,” (unpublished manuscript, 2020), 3.

³ Jones, 3–4.

⁴ Jones, 3.

as these emphases may be between the Reformed and Presbyterian approaches, neither are concerned merely with process, as is sometimes alleged by friends and foes alike of the Presbyterian approach, but with getting at the truth.

This concern for getting at the truth, while protecting the rights of the accused and placing a premium on due process, suggests the influence of an inquisitorial approach on our church legal system as reflected in our current BD. To be sure, aspects of the adversarial legal system, which is the approach embodied in American jurisprudence (and other common law judicial systems, like those in the UK, Canada, and elsewhere), may be found in our church law, but the system of our ecclesiastical law favors the inquisitorial method.

Because the BD concerns itself with due process, trials, censures, and the like, some have assumed that it is to be approached and understood in the same way that the American system of jurisprudence is. Some seem tacitly to assume, or sometimes explicitly assert, that if one understands civil law, one understands church law. This is not quite the case however. That church law differs in marked ways from the American legal system is a matter that warrants further attention. While there are many similarities with American civil law (and by civil here I do not mean in distinction from criminal, or common, but in distinction from ecclesiastical), church law is rather different. Historically, especially as it developed from the Middle Ages, church law developed from inquisitorial, not adversarial, roots, unlike American law, which, as noted above, is clearly adversarial.⁵

A brief survey of the origin and rise of inquisitorial law might be helpful so that we can better understand how our BD really works. It is the case that most of the law of the state in the Middle Ages was more or less adversarial, requiring accusers to come forward to charge someone, state authorities taking almost no part until accusers were willing to press charges. The penalties for bringing charges, if they proved not justiciable, or those accused were found not guilty, were such that many witnesses/accusers were loath to make charges. The judicial system proved unworkable and consequently suffered a breakdown: many charges were resolved not by witnesses and evidence but in trial by ordeal or combat, the latter approaches bespeaking superstition and irrationality, not the clear rational procedures that accompany any system dedicated to simple justice. The papacy wanted to secure a better legal system and developed an approach to law that came to be known as inquisitorial. This was viewed as a superior approach to the previous legal systems and came to prevail not only in ecclesiastical law but in civil law in many European countries, which still have inquisitorial law to this day.⁶

⁵ This brief online definition helps highlight that our BD leans chiefly in the inquisitorial direction: “An inquisitorial system is a legal system in which the court, or a part of the court, is actively involved in investigating the facts of the case. This is distinct from an adversarial system, in which the role of the court is primarily that of an impartial referee between the prosecution and the defense.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquisitorial_system). In the BD, both in the preliminary investigation and the trial, the judicatory and the trial judicatory take an active role, whether in bringing the charges or receiving charges from private parties and appointing an examiner to lead in questioning on behalf of the trial judicatory. This will be seen particularly in the commentary on BD 3 and 4.

⁶ “Inquisition” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08026a.htm>) gives a good overview from a decidedly Roman Catholic perspective. For both the development of canon law and relationship of civil law and church law, see the many masterful works of Berman and Tierney, especially Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA:

One may witness the differences between an inquisitorial system and an accusatorial system in civil law. If we identify those different features of such systems in the context of the state, it may help us better understand the differences in terms of the church. France, for instance, enjoys an inquisitorial judicial system (as do many other countries in continental Europe and elsewhere), in which particular judges actively involve themselves in preliminary investigations and a different set of judges commonly work at the trial level, depending on the nature and importance of the case. The judges are in charge of the preliminary investigation, as they typically style it, and determine whether a case will be brought and against whom. The judges are more active, and the prosecuting and defense attorneys more passive, making sure that the judges garner the evidence that is needed from their striving-to-be-objective perspectives.

This inquisitorial approach, which places a premium on getting at and getting to the truth, contrasts at several points with the adversarial approach, in which latter system the judge strives to be neutral and to rule only on points of law, taking no active part in investigating the case. The adversarial system, in common law constituencies like the UK or the US, features a passive judge, who has before him two highly active defense and prosecution lawyers, who present their partisan cases. The judge acts as a referee, especially for the sake of the jury. Not so in the inquisitorial system in which the courts (in this case our sessions and presbyteries) take a much more active role, akin to what we see in our ecclesiastical judicatories.

While the details of this will be discussed in the BD commentary that follows at all the appropriate places, especially chapters 3 and 4, perhaps it will suffice here to note that in our system of ecclesiastical law the session or presbytery typically serves as the investigator of charges, whether brought by the judicatory itself or private parties, the examiner in hearing the charges, the judge in ruling on all objections, as well as the determiner of facts and appliers of the law (the typical role of the jury). In other words, our ecclesiastical trial judicatories are not simply umpiring a match in which combatants (prosecution and defense) do battle before the court. All of this is to say that we will much better approach and understand the BD if we do not come with the “conflict of interest” view and strict separation of roles view (of prosecutor, defense, judge, and jury) that obtain in American jurisprudence. Rather, our ecclesiastical judicial system, operating inquisitorially not adversarially, yet committed to full due process (including the protection of the rights of all parties), ultimately seeks to get at the truth, for the good of all parties involved, in any given case, and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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ServantReading

The Loneliness Epidemic *by Susan Mettes*

by John M. Fikkert

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

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

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

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

Likewise, another commonly held belief is that single people are more lonely than those who are married. However, Mettes's study results show that the quality of relationships in a person's life is more impactful on one's experience of loneliness and connection rather than the type of relationships one has (including marriage). She recommends both single and married persons work at developing meaningful relationships that cultivate a sense of belonging to a church and civic community.

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

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

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

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

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

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Global Pillage: Stealing Our Data, Our Intelligence, and Our Souls

A Review Article

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Terms of Service: The Real Cost of Social Media, by Chris Martin. Nashville: B&H, 2022, xii + 212 pages, \$17.99, paper.

The author of this important new book on social media, Chris Martin, is a digital native (born in 1990), those who were born into or brought up in the Internet world. This makes his serious critique of social media especially poignant, since most in his generation are uncritical users of the Internet and the social media, allowing the electronic media to form them. I have been warning people about the potentially deleterious nature and goals of social media for two decades. Myspace began in 2003, but the seeds of the dangers are inherent in the Internet itself. I have avoided social media for both principial and practical reasons. Some would assert that that disqualifies me from critical analysis. However, having studied the nature and effects of media since 1990, my refusal to participate is based on careful consideration of the benefits and liabilities of social media as a powerful and pervasive manifestation of the electronic media. Social media surreptitiously mine data from our Internet participation for advertising—Facebook is the largest focus group in history, except most people are unaware of this. Martin is deeply involved with the Internet and social media as a content marketing editor at Moody Publishers and a social media, marketing, and communications consultant.

Starting with McLuhan's fish in the water metaphor to illustrate our lack of awareness of our immediate and pervasive electronic environment, Martin asserts that the "social internet is brilliant and obscene" (2). The point of the book is to demonstrate that the water is toxic (3–4)—what purports to serve man ends up enslaving us (6).

The book is divided into three sections: 1) "How We Got Here," 2) "Five Ways the Social Internet Shapes Us," 3) "Where Do We Go from Here?"

Part 1 traces the presence of the Internet in our lives from its limited academic and military origins to its invasion of our homes and souls (13–18). Although Internet 2.0 represented the full emergence of the social media, the social aspect of the Internet was present from its inception; also present was the development of attention-getting methods, especially for commercial purposes (16). The greatest change occurring in this new phase of electronic media was its presence in everyone's pockets (22ff). The smart phone is often much smarter than its users.

Martin's analysis of how the present social networks function is most helpful. This is where the fish examines the water. What is discovered is "the fear of missing out" and "addiction" (35). Martin refers to Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* to point out the danger of being so obsessed with what is going on online that off-line life fades into the background (36). This obsession has all of the classic ingredients of addiction (37). But what is insidious about this is that the media themselves are designed to promote addiction (38ff). What people assume are neutral tools are making tools of us. Causing anger and disagreement is the most effective way of commanding attention (40).

The final chapter (3) of this first part explores the druglike effect of social media. It creates “virtual tribes” of like-minded people, not expanding our horizons as the early promoters claimed. This in turn undermines empathy (47), as one tribe develops intolerance for others. This isolation causes anxiety, and mental health problems arise in young and old alike.

Part 2 explores five ways that the social Internet shapes us. First, we falsely believe that attention assigns value, and so what is popular, or trending, must be important, thus we must pay attention (63). This phenomenon has great cash value for advertising and sales. Our identities are at stake. At this point Martin makes a statement that I wish he had expanded upon, “As Christians, we are to find our identity in the finished work of Christ and our standing as image bearers of God” (65). We are being surreptitiously hijacked by the commercial interests of social media (66ff). “If socializing is the most valuable part of the internet for users, it’s the most lucrative part for businesses” (69). It is not that advertising is inherently wrong, but social media act more like magicians than salesmen, addicting its viewers for commercial purposes.

Second, social media play on the ultimate high of attention, affection, and fame (72ff). When using a product is free, there is a hidden price—for social media it is our data, and thus we are the product (75). This invasion of privacy is serious, but many ask, “Why should I care? I have nothing to hide.” All online activity, social Internet and otherwise, is recorded. It is not only used to increase profit but to modify behavior as well (80–81). The freedom for personal expression we receive in return for data harvesting is actually “the gasoline that keeps the social internet running” (85). Even if you are not on Facebook, there are Facebook Pixels, little “pieces of code installed in countless websites that sends your web activity back to Facebook” (87). And in the terms of service, “which no one reads, users consent to this covert activity” (90). Martin advises turning location services off and limiting personal information but admits in the end that the best way to limit intrusion is to stay off social media (94).

The third way that social media shape us is by alluring us to pursue affirmation instead of truth (97). Thus, the proliferation of conspiracy theories is encouraged by the platforms’ ability to connect the like-minded, thus narrowing our understanding of various issues. Martin observes that “a lot of falsehoods (or ‘fake news’) [are] built on an acorn of truth” (101). And we tend to trust like-minded people in the place of critical thinking. The pursuit of truth should be high on the Christian priority list; placing the affirmation of the like-minded ahead of pursuing truth tends to jettison that priority, or at least modify it.

The fourth way that the social Internet shapes us is that it amplifies our sinful tendency to demonize people with whom we disagree. Martin warns: “In many corners of the social internet, a lie lingers that ‘people who disagree with me cause me harm’” (113). Thus, the new progressive liberalism ingrained in the media-saturated Millennial generation has little room for considering contrary ideas (114). Christians are not immune from this tendency. Like muscles, “we do need to endure some measure of disagreements, conflicts, and social strife so that we may learn, adapt, and grow” (119). Martin counsels care in our use of language on the social Internet and to practice the Christian ideal of giving others the benefit of the doubt (121). Martin notes that “microaggressions” are impossible because aggression by definition is never unintentional (123).

The fifth and final way that social media shape us is that they tend to seek the destruction of the people who are demonized. A second commonly held lie is that the lives of harmful people must be dismantled (127). This is the logical conclusion of cancel culture. In answer to the question “Why are people nasty on the social internet?” Martin

opines that the importance of attention in the design of social media means that nastiness gets the most attention (128). I would add that the lack of face-to-face presence undermines accountability. Martin goes on to take an in-depth look at cancel culture. Cancel culture is good when the immoral or illegal behavior of the rich and powerful is exposed and justice is served (133). However, often cancel culture looks more like vengeance than justice (136). The moral relativism of these digital vigilantes leads for example to canceling of Christians who hold to biblical sexual ethics (137). Reconciliation is impossible because the vigilantes want to punish period. The anonymity of the Internet makes follow up impossible (139). Since Christians view every human as image bearers of God, we must seek real justice, true forgiveness, and treat those with whom we disagree with respect.

Part 3 provides six ways to counteract the worst tendencies of the social media, or put positively, “to provide . . . tools to more wisely engage the social internet” (147). Sixty pages of solution is unusual for social and media critics. Thus, Martin’s effort is to be applauded, despite his being repetitious at points.

The first tool is “Study History.” Martin quotes Ecclesiastes 1:9, “There is nothing new under the sun,” to make the point that history shows us that people have faced what we face before. History also helps us formulate solutions to problems. History expands our view of other culture’s ideas and people, helping us to understand alternative perspectives. Like travel, history encourages empathy. Being situated in the stream of our heritage and traditions is severely lacking in most Millennials. The electronic environment has left them without context—no past, no future.

The Second tool is “Admire Creation.” Getting out and admiring the created world slows us down and tends to make us more thoughtful, as it removes electronic distractions (157)—that is if you remember to leave your phone at home. It involves all five senses (157) and reorients our sense of beauty (160), which has been corrupted by the daily barrage of photoshopped pictures of nature.

The third tool is “Value Silence.” This is one of my favorite ideas. Before coming in to write this review, I was sitting in our garden hoping that the dogs would stop barking, the hedge trimmer would run out of gas, and the person playing a radio too loud would locate the volume button. But Martin is thinking of a different kind of silence—refraining from using the social Internet as a digital soapbox. By not responding we are quenching our natural sinful tendency to spout off. So, this kind of silence produces empathy and encourages wisdom and humility (166–172). The missing element here is the option of getting off all social media. While critics like Nicholas Carr helpfully suggest media sabbaths, I would like to recommend consideration of something akin to the eternal sabbath, of which our temporary weekly sabbaths are a foretaste.

The fourth tool is “Pursue Humility.” Martin begins with a quote from Rick Warren, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less” (174). That may be cute, but a better quote comes from Paul:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:3–7)

“Pride is integral to so much of the disfunction we find online” (175). While Martin warns about several sins and recommends Christian virtues, his desire to reach a non-Christian audience blunts the vital connection between Christian virtues and Christ.

Humility makes us willing to admit when we are wrong, assume the best of others, and forgive others when they wrong us (176–80). Looking at the nature of the medium of the social network, Martin observes that “No algorithm is engineered to promote reconciliation and forgiveness. All algorithms are engineered to favor the spread of conflict argumentation” (180). The conclusion of this chapter left me wanting more. Martin’s concluding section, “We Cannot Do It Alone,” never mentions what Christians would expect: the most important person in our lives, our helper the Holy Spirit. The false impression is left that family, friends, colleagues, and self-discipline alone can cultivate biblical humility.

The fifth tool is “Establish Accountability.” This chapter reminded me of *The New Yorker* cartoon showing a dog in a chair in front of a computer saying to another dog sitting on the floor, “On the Internet nobody knows that you’re a dog.” Martin fails to drill down on the way that the Internet alters social space and does an end run around traditional gatekeepers, invading our households and our hearts. When he properly observes that “mental health statistics are growing more discouraging as social media use is increasing,” he fails to suggest that opting out of social media may be the best way to restore accountability and mental health (185).

The sixth and final tool is “Build Friendships.” “The social internet has cheapened friendship. . . . Our screens mute the full range of friendship” (192). Again, “I think many of us have become so fused with our phones that we have forgotten the magic of real, embodied friendship” (193). But if embodied friendships are superior to online friendships, why take time pursuing the inferior? Martin’s emphasis on sacrificial love cites Christ as an example, but this and other suggestions leave us with a semi-Pelagian view of human nature. The discerning Christian will add theologically what Martin leaves out, and probably believes himself, in the interests of appealing to a non-Christian audience. His many excellent insights make the book worthwhile.

No one likes the idea of being used, but under the guise of expressive individualism that is just what social media do. Like it or not, if you participate in social media, you are being used. The Internet is not just a technology, it is a philosophy of life, a worldview. At its heart is the Baconian idea that reality can be analyzed and manipulated for our own ends. The Christian is in the unique epistemological position to stand outside of this way of thinking and living. Christians must not succumb to the chimera of Enlightenment dreams that reality is ultimately manipulable, and humans may take complete control. Social media not only tend to addict its users, but they also reorganize our social spaces and relationships. Romans 12:1–2 should lead us in the direction of leaving the lake whose water, as Martin begins and concludes the book, is toxic and enslaving.

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First Things in Acts and Paul

A Review Article

by John W. Mahaffy

In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul, by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 448 pages, \$44.99.

Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has blessed the church with a most helpful fruit of his years in the classroom. He began teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1965 and became Professor Emeritus, Biblical and Systematic Theology, in 2008. *In the Fullness of Time* is based on the course Acts and Paul, which he taught from 1977 to 2010.

Always the teacher, Gaffin has not disguised the source material of the book but rather aimed to “maintain the classroom level of its content” with the exception that the use of the original languages has been kept to a minimum. Gaffin targets not his academic peers (though they too will benefit from the book) but serious students who are “looking for an initial ‘deep dive’” into Acts and the writings of Paul (20). This book is a “must read,” especially for the audience of *Ordained Servant*, officers in the OPC. For many others, men and women holding the general office of believer and interested in serious study of God’s Word, this book will also prove a rich blessing.

As Sinclair Ferguson states in his foreword, for those who have studied under Gaffin, “It certainly adds to a reading experience to be able to ‘hear’ the writer’s accent” and to recognize familiar speech patterns (16). The far greater benefit, however, is that those who have not sat under his teaching are here exposed to his careful, even-handed treatment of the Word of God.

In the Introduction, Gaffin reminds us that “sound preaching presupposes and flows from solid exposition” (24). Interpretation, while intensely personal, is carried out in the context of the church of the risen, ascended Lord. His interest in the writings of Luke and Paul is

for their revelatory character and function, as they are part of the revelation of the triune God that has its climactic focus in the person and work of Christ. We will be occupied with them as, in a single word that captures the essence of their content all told, they are *gospel*, and therefore as—a description applicable to all of them—they are “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). (27)

God’s spoken or written verbal communication has come to us as a historical process, always “occasioned by and focused on God’s activity in history. God’s revelatory Word is oriented toward his action as Creator and Redeemer” (29). The opening words of the Letter to the Hebrews provide a biblical basis for this view of revelation, with its emphasis on the Son as God’s “last days” speaking. Gaffin draws the important distinction between “redemptive or salvation history (*historia salutis*), the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation, and the ongoing application of that salvation (*ordo salutis*,

the order of salvation),” (33) while reminding us that the two are always related because God is the author of the whole.

Following a *very* brief summary of the history of the development of biblical theology as a recognized discipline (with, of course, acknowledgment of the crucial role of Geerhardus Vos), Gaffin emphasizes that the New Testament, while the endpoint of Scriptural revelation, also describes the progression of events in the life and ministry of Christ:

In fact, this historical progression is not only present but basic to the gospel. At the heart of the gospel is the historical progression experienced by Christ himself. He moves, pivotally by the cross and resurrection, from his state of humiliation to his state of exaltation—from bearing the just wrath and curse of God that his people deserve for their sins to being restored irreversibly, with that wrath propitiated and removed, to God’s favor. The result is the permanent *transition from wrath to grace in history*, effected for the salvation of his people. The gospel stands or falls with the historical sequence of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation. (41)

His contrasting this with the theology of Karl Barth illustrates Gaffin’s concern that biblical theology assists in maintaining a sound, orthodox systematic theology.

Eschatology, or the teaching of Scripture concerning the last things, is not properly limited to dealing with events shortly before the return of Christ. Rather, “Biblical eschatology is to be defined in terms of the first as well as the second coming of Christ. New Testament eschatology has a dual focus. In that respect it is elliptical, defined by two foci, present and future, the proverbial already-not-yet” (67).

“The Theology of Acts” includes an overview of the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God as found in the Gospels. It then focuses on the Holy Spirit and the kingdom in Luke-Acts, tracing it from the annunciation through the baptism and temptation of Jesus, his teaching, and his miracles. Luke 24 and Acts 1 overlap, describing that unique, forty-day period in which the resurrected but not yet ascended Christ prepared his disciples for their upcoming apostolic work.

What transpired, as it might be pictured, was a forty-day intercession in which Jesus gave a crash course on Old Testament hermeneutics, in how to interpret the Old Testament as a whole from a postresurrection perspective. . . . This interpretive activity consisted in showing that his earthly ministry, culminating in his death and resurrection, is the focus of Scripture, the sum and substance of the Old Testament . . .” (88)

At the heart of the Book of Acts stands Pentecost, the baptism of the apostolic church by the risen, ascended Lord. Gaffin takes us back to Luke 3 and the promise of John the Baptizer that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Both blessing and judgment are implied. For the baptism at Pentecost to be one of blessing, it was necessary for the Messiah to undergo his own baptism with fire, the second Adam bearing the sins of his people in his suffering and death before being raised triumphantly. Jesus’s own baptism by John was the occasion for the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the Messiah to equip him for his public ministry.

When the ascended Lord deluges (to use Gaffin's term) the church with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this is an epochal event. Those familiar with Gaffin's *Perspectives on Pentecost*¹ will recognize the biblical argument developed at some length here, that Pentecost is not the first in a series of repeatable events to be sought after by the church and by individual believers. Rather, it is foundational, as unique as the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The once-for-all character of Christ's accomplishment of salvation and of the outpouring of the Spirit in no way distances us from either Christ's work in our lives or the enlivening, empowering work of the Spirit. While carefully guarding against any confusion of the persons of the Trinity, Gaffin, looking at John 16, speaks of the "functional identity of Christ and the Spirit" as they work in the lives of believers and in the church (162). The involvement of the Father in Pentecost (Jesus speaks of the promise of his Father)

. . . opens up the widest possible perspective on Pentecost, because it links Pentecost to the fulfillment of the promise that is at the core of Old Testament expectation. . . . the promise that is at the core of covenant history and has shaped its course and outcome from the beginning. That is the promise of Genesis 12:3 that in Abraham all the families or nations of the earth will be blessed. (163)

Gaffin brings out several underemphasized aspects of Pentecost (though this review does not have the space to summarize the biblical arguments he uses). Pentecost has a forensic or judicial aspect:

Returning to Acts 2, when at Pentecost Christ comes to baptize his people—triumphant as he now is from his baptismal ordeal—for them the just wrath they deserve has been removed. For them, the church, the judicial fire of destruction has been exhausted, quenched by his death. (168)

It also has adoptive force. While guarding against the error of adoptionistic Christology, Gaffin anticipates the point he will make in discussing Romans 1:4, that "by his resurrection through the action of the Spirit, Christ, the preexisting divine Son" was appointed or declared "Son of God in power" (172).

Calvin is known as the theologian of the Holy Spirit. Gaffin outstandingly maintains that emphasis for our generation. His focus on the work of the Spirit is not confined to Pentecost or the Book of Acts—it is also prominent in his treatment of the theology of Paul.

In contrast with much contemporary Pauline scholarship, Gaffin takes seriously Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "when you receive the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God." God, not Paul, is the primary author (185). Yet it is at the same time fully Paul's teaching as well.

Chapter 7, "Paul and His Interpreters," provides a brief overview of the church's understanding of the apostle. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, Paul, though cited and commented on, seems to have had relatively little impact, with a notable exception of

¹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979).

Augustine. That neglect was remedied by Luther and Calvin. Gaffin touches briefly on representative figures in the historical-critical school, who, given the rise of rationalism, denied or neglected the divine source and authority of Scripture. In a footnote, Gaffin, agreeing with Vos, explains his method, “I proceed in this largely descriptive manner convinced that for those who do not share its unbiblical commitments and rationalistic procedures, diagnosis of the true intent of criticism is the best prophylaxis” (204). He interacts more extensively with the New Perspective on Paul, concluding, contrary to that perspective, “that the Reformation is essentially correct in its understanding of Paul’s opposition to Judaism” (217). The chapter ends with a brief note of appreciation for the work of Vos and Ridderbos.

Paul’s letters are occasional and pastoral, not a doctrinal handbook, though they are rich in theological content and Paul is a profound theologian. Is there a center to his theology? “[T]he center of Paul’s theology is the gospel, and at the center of that gospel are the death and resurrection of Christ.” The death and resurrection for our sins are “nothing less than eschatological.”

At the center of Paul’s theology, constituting that center as much as anything, are Christ’s death and resurrection—or, more broadly, messianic suffering and glory, his humiliation and exaltation, in their saving and Scripture-fulfilling, eschatological significance. The center of Paul’s theology is determined by the triangulation of his Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. (238)

Gaffin then explores Paul’s Christology and soteriology in the light of his eschatology. He examines key texts that reference the present age and contrast it with the age to come (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:2; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:8–3:23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 1:2, 16:25–27; Col. 1:26–27; and others). Gaffin’s theology is exegetical. The age to come arrives with the coming of the Messiah. For Judaism in Paul’s day and orthodox Judaism today, “Messiah has not yet come. For Paul the Messiah has already come in the person of Christ. The end of this age has arrived, the age to come has been ushered in” (281). Yet the coming of the Messiah has two stages, epochs, or installments. His first coming with its saving events has ushered in the kingdom, but believers, still subject to a sin-cursed world, have a certain hope of his second coming. The Christian not only looks forward to the fulfillment of the age to come but, because the risen Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, also looks upwards, seeking the things that are above, for his life is hidden with Christ in God.

I dare say that most readers who have studied under Gaffin will recall him drawing on the chalkboard (or its more modern equivalent) the rectangular diagram from Vos’s *The Pauline Eschatology*, illustrating the relationship between the present age and the age to come. That diagram, slightly modified with arrows pointing backward, forward, and upward, is reproduced as “Paul’s Tridirectional Eschatology” (293). He comments, “The arrival of the age to come in its fullness at Christ’s return will mean the disappearance not of the distinction but of the present disjunctive distance between heaven and earth.”

Gaffin works through several Pauline passages that focus on the resurrection of Christ and its connection with believers. “On balance, for Paul, the resurrection of Christ is thoroughly messianic, just as much as are his sufferings and death” (320). That leads to exploring what his resurrection meant for Christ personally—crucially, the relationship

between Christ and the Holy Spirit. He spends nearly twenty pages unpacking 1 Corinthians 15:45, “The last Adam became the life-giving Spirit” (his translation). “What should not be missed, particularly prominent in this passage, is the large megapoint that keeps coming out as we consider Paul’s theology: the way in which his eschatology both shapes and is shaped by his Christology, and with that, his soteriology” (341).

In his treatment of Paul’s summary of his gospel in Romans 1:3–4 (“who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be [*or* appointed] the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.” Gaffin’s translation), he carefully guards against any view that Paul is confusing the persons of the Trinity or has an adoptionistic Christology. “[B]y resurrection, the incarnate Son of God was in his human nature transformed by the Holy Spirit and entered the eschatological order of the Spirit’s working” (359). He discusses the Pauline contrast between flesh and Spirit, leading him to observe that the present situation of believers is “in the flesh, but not according to the flesh.”

The ongoing challenge to the church is to recognize and not lose sight of both of these dimensions and so to avoid falling into the extreme of some form of triumphalist thinking, on the one hand, or of no longer being able to distinguish itself from the present evil age on the other. (358)

He summarizes:

The inseverable bond between Christ and the Holy Spirit in the experience of believers (in the *ordo salutis*), expressed in Romans 8:9–10, exists because, prior to their experience (in the *historia salutis*), Christ has become “the life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45), and the Spirit is “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9; cf. Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19). (365)

Because believers have been raised with Christ and their lives are hidden with Christ in God (indicative statements of fact), they are commanded (imperative) to set their minds on things above, rather than on earthly things.

The covenant bond established by God with his people at the beginning of redemptive history has been given its final, eschatological form in Spirit-worked union between the exalted Christ and believers. Union with Christ is the climactic realization of the covenant relationship structured by the promise, “I will be their God, / and they shall be my people.” (373)

Romans 6 provides a crucial perspective on sanctification. Given Paul’s emphasis on the believer’s union with Christ in his death and resurrection, the important, ongoing, progressive work of sanctification (which is not merely our work, but, no less than other aspects of our salvation, is God working in us) has undergirding it a definitive break with the enslaving power of sin. Following John Murray, Gaffin argues that Romans 6 tells us the believers *are* dead to sin and have been made alive to God (385). Even in Reformed circles, that definitive break with sin is too often overlooked. Describing the debated relationship between justification and sanctification, Gaffin argues,

The reason that justification and sanctification are inseparable is because of Christ, because of who he is as our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). His is the righteousness that is the final, eschatological answer to any and every charge against God's elect, the justifying and intercessory righteousness of God reckoned as ours (cf. Rom. 8:33–34). (395)

But our sanctification cannot be separated, because “the Christ of our concern is Christ who is what he now is in the fullness of his exaltation glory and redemptive triumph and because we have been united with this Christ.” (396) He cites Calvin's emphasis that we cannot receive a partial or a half Christ.

Readers unfamiliar with Gaffin's other writings may be surprised that the final chapter, “The Resurrection and the Christian Life (Part 2),” is subtitled, “Christian Suffering.” Gaffin writes, “My thesis, as paradoxical as it might at first sound, is that for Paul, suffering is an essential mark of the believer's present experience of resurrection. Suffering specifies as fundamental a dimension as any of the Christian life, precisely as that life is sharing in the life of the resurrected Christ” (399). Gaffin deals at some length with 1 Corinthians 4:7–12 and Philippians 3:10–11: “The sequence is not, as might be expected suffering-death-resurrection, but resurrection-suffering-death” (407). The age to come has dawned, but believers, though united to Christ, still live in the present age, with the resultant tension and suffering: “For Paul, Christ's resurrection power is to have cruciform effect. The impact of Christ's resurrection life in the church, the impression or imprint that the resurrection ought to leave in the life of the believer, is, as much as anything, the cross” (408).

Gaffin is not a pessimist. He considers himself, like Paul, an “optimistic amil” (298). The church is filling up the afflictions of Christ pending his return, when it will enter its exaltation.

But while in this way the church is one large step behind its Lord, he has not left it behind. The church is not on its own or abandoned. For in its state of humiliation its exalted Lord is present in the power of his Spirit. Already, not just in the future, he become [sic] the life-giving Spirit, is active as “head over everything for the church” (Eph. 1:22 NIV), And in its suffering, his resurrection life and power are being perfected. This is why, we may say, Christ's present eschatological victory is for the church an eschatology of suffering. (418)

If the church evades sharing in the sufferings of Christ, it risks losing its identity and fails to be faithful to its Lord.² On that note, Gaffin concludes this book.

Why read *In the Fullness of Time*? Read it because when Gaffin deals with a passage, as he does repeatedly in this book, one is left with the indelible impression that he has examined it thoroughly and with transparent clarity. The quotes in this review illustrate

² That evasion appears in some circles in which an emphasis on exercising dominion downplays the humiliation of Christ and jumps to him as the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19. While that may be cited as justification for the aggressive instincts of males (for instance in Michael Foster and Dominic Bnonn Tennant, *It's Good To Be a Man: A Handbook for Godly Masculinity* (Moscow, ID: Cannon Press, 2021), 301), such a view flattens the eschatology of the New Testament.

his careful exegetical work. Read because, even though this book is written on a level not too academic for the ordinary saint, Gaffin models careful, respectful scholarship at its best. He presents opposing views correctly, avoiding unsubstantiated generalizations. He writes with a readable and refreshing humility. Read because this book, although self-described as an introduction, provides a sweeping framework of biblical thought, an explication of the structure of biblical theology, that will assist the reader in understanding all of Scripture. John Murray's *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*,³ reprinted multiple times, has been a profound influence on the church for more than seventy years. *In the Fullness of Time* has the potential to have a similar impact on our understanding the Scriptures for at least the next seventy to one hundred years.

If the book has a weakness, it is that, even at more than 400 pages including exceedingly helpful Scripture and subject indices, it is only an introduction. At times the reader is left wishing that space and time had allowed Gaffin to deal with additional passages of Scripture or to have explored issues further. (One can hope that chapters in other books and internet articles referenced in footnotes could be gathered into a *Collected Writings of Richard Gaffin*.) Yet his explication of the text manifests the depth and the height of the Word. His introduction has an astounding grasp of the passages he considers. One cannot put it better than Sinclair Ferguson does in the Preface:

A hallmark of *In the Fullness of Time* is its penetration into the deep structures of Paul's thought. There are many pages here where I suspect readers will want to slow down, perhaps reread, meditate, and, best of all, worship. (16)

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³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

Dumb and Dangerous

A Review Article

By T. David Gordon

The Dumbest Generation Grows Up: From Stupefied Youth to Dangerous Adults, by Mark Bauerlein. Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2022.

When I saw a notice of Mark Bauerlein's new book I saw the title (not the subtitle) and wondered if Dr. Bauerlein had changed his opinion since he wrote *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future*.¹ When I read the subtitle, I realized he had not; if anything, the circumstance he describes in the recent volume is more dire than the circumstance that prompted his writing of the earlier volume, because the rootless, screen-lobotomized teens who dwelt in what he called an "adolescent cocoon" in the earlier volume are now adults (at least by a chronological definition), who enjoy voting rights. They were "stupified" in 2008; they are "dangerous" now.

Retirement has some advantages, and I am happy that Bauerlein's recent book appeared shortly after I retired, so I do not need to require it, as I did his earlier book, in my introductory course on media ecology. The students did not universally like the earlier volume, and I suspect they would not like the present one. In each, Bauerlein stoutly resists describing the digital generation with the usual congratulatory adulation many others have employed; to the contrary, the evidence is stronger than ever that many/most of that generation have been mis-educated, rather than educated.² Neil Postman had earlier observed that cultures have two curricula: the formal curriculum of the academy and the informal curriculum of their dominant cultural media; and Postman believed the former should question the latter. The academy should promote and facilitate an informed, critical perspective on the dominant media in one's culture. Since television was the dominant medium of Postman's day, he said, "Viewed in this way, television is not only a curriculum but *constitutes the major educational enterprise now being undertaken in the United States*."³ The dominant medium now is the cluster of digital devices (and the social media they purvey), and Bauerlein regrets that the two curricula—both the dominant cultural medium and its educational curriculum—reinforce each other in their messianic expectations of digital media.

Bauerlein is as wary of what the digital media *replace* (reading itself as a neurological activity, literature as reflection on the conflicted nature of the human condition, and history as reflection on human imperfection⁴) as he is of what they actually *do*, and some sense of his perspective can be gleaned by observing his five chapter titles: Making Unhappy—and Dangerous—Adults; They Have a Dream; An Anti-Formation; The Psychological Novel; Multiculturalism or Malcolm X?

¹ Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone under Thirty)* (New York: Tarcher, 2008).

² A claim that is substantiated by interviews and the General Social Survey by Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—And What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria, 2018).

³ Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* (New York: Delacourte, 1979), 50, emphasis his.

⁴ Let us not forget that one of America's better-known popular historians, Barbara Tuchman, entitled her last book *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1985).

Were Bauerlein's voice the only one crying in the wilderness, we might conveniently dismiss it as idiosyncratic; but his voice is one in a chorus, joined to those of Christian Smith,⁵ Maryanne Wolf,⁶ Sherry Turkle,⁷ Nellie Bowles,⁸ Jaron Lanier,⁹ Nicholas Carr,¹⁰ Tim Challies,¹¹ Chris Hedges,¹² William Powers,¹³ Tony Reinke,¹⁴ Mari K. Swingle,¹⁵ et al.

Chapter One: Making Unhappy—and Dangerous—Adults

One of Bauerlein's repeated theses is that the Millennials did not make themselves who and what they are: parents, educators, and other adults failed to pass along to them any sense of cultural heritage. Parents allowed Instagram to shape their children; educators permitted Wikipedia to educate them; adults allowed digital devices and social media, informed by the natural interests of children and teenagers, to "shape" them shapelessly. Assuming the neutrality of the digital world, many adults thought what Chris Anderson (former editor of *Wired* magazine) did: "We thought we could control it. And this is beyond our power to control. This is going straight to the pleasure centers of the developing brain. This is beyond our capacity as parents to understand" (11). Many news outlets featured stories indicating that the CEOs of many of the tech companies were unwilling to abandon their own children to unrestrained digital activity: "As public schools serving poor and minority kids were pushing one-to-one laptop programs, the reporter observed, executives in Palo Alto and Los Altos were sending their children to vigilantly low-tech private campuses such as the Waldorf Schools" (11). Many such leaders of the digital industries were already aware, especially, of the addictive properties of such media, and Bill Maher said this: "The tycoons of social media have to stop pretending that they are friendly nerd-Gods building a better world and admit that they're just tobacco farmers in T-shirts selling an addictive product to children" (12).

Bauerlein, as a professor of English literature, has been interested in the question of reading; he participated in the studies that led to the National Endowment for the Arts to produce their Research Division Report #46, "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America," published in 2004. Regarding cognitive development, Bauerlein referred to Maryanne Wolf: "The act of learning to read added an entirely new circuit to our hominid brain's repertoire," said cognitive scientist Maryanne Wolf, and when we shifted from print reading to screen reading, that circuit was modified (as we shall discuss later, Wolf believes the modification causes damage)" (16).

⁵ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford: University Press, 2011).

⁶ Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper, 2007); *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

⁷ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011); *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

⁸ Nellie Bowles, "A Dark Consensus about Screens and Kids Begins to Emerge in Silicon Valley," *New York Times* 26 (October 2018).

⁹ Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2010); *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (New York: Holt, 2018).

¹⁰ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010).

¹¹ Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family and the Digital World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

¹² Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and The Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation, 2009).

¹³ William Powers, *Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

¹⁴ Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

¹⁵ Mari K. Swingle, *i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming, and Social Media Are Changing Our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 2016).

Bauerlein's emphasis in this chapter, and throughout the book, is that the adults who were responsible for rearing the Millennials largely failed in doing so:

To cut the young off from a living past was to deprive them of a profound and stabilizing understanding of life, of themselves. . . . to neglect the masterpieces of art and ideas, epic events and larger-than-life personages, was to level their enjoyments to the mundane. To allow their religious impulses to flicker, not to expose them to the orderly ministrations of Sunday mornings, was to leave them among the "Nones," a label with sad undertones. (29)

Chapter Two: They Have a Dream

This disturbing chapter is titled ironically, because the Millennials do not, in fact, have a dream. Their dream is no dream at all; it is closer to a nightmare. Unlike Dr. King, who dreamt of a better possible future, they are hopeless Marxists, mired in the belief that the "privileged" wish to enjoy privilege exclusively, that therefore nothing but the entire eradication of the current "system" can provide any hope (yet they know that there are entirely too many people unwilling to permit it to be destroyed). As Bauerlein put it:

So they attached themselves to something else: a religion of sorts, a pugnacious, illiberal demand, a twenty-first-century American-youth version of, precisely, Utopia. . . . Like every Eden, though, it had a dark aspect: a fury toward anyone or anything that threatened to ruin this sacred preserve. Utopian justice is the harshest. (46–47)

When Bauerlein asked a graduate teaching assistant what protestors at Emory were so angry about:

"Well," she answered, "they believe that everyone . . . deserves . . . to be happy." (58)

Everyone deserves to be happy—there you go; a new rule of human existence, a binding but odd expectation—and unrealistic, too, because never, not ever, will everyone actually be happy. That occurs only in a place called heaven. (59, emphases and ellipses his)

Their utopian "beliefs," however, are unsubstantiated parroting of their group-speak and are not intellectually serious:

The clichés certainly betray an absence of thought, but this mindlessness only makes their accusations all the harder to answer: you can't debate with obtuse people utterly convinced of their own rectitude. They don't want to debate, and they're not going to. (72)

To label Millennial activists "socialists" is a mistake. It grants them way too much intellectual heft. It overlooks the deepest sources of their activism, the emotional, even anti-intellectual, side of utopianism. . . . It's a mistake, then, to call one-third to one-half of Millennials "socialists" or to assume they have acquired real knowledge of socialism and weighed socialist ideas. No, they are utopians, and they are utopians precisely because they haven't acquired any political knowledge or weighed any political ideas. (82)

Since their "beliefs" are not rational, they are unsusceptible to rational debate or refutation, and this belief/desire for an unattainable utopia is what makes them, in Bauerlein's language, dangerous:

Ignorance plus self-righteousness is a dangerous mix. As avid and unbending utopian desires go unfulfilled, you know what will happen next: idealism will slide into frustration, the promised happy fellowship to come veering into a merciless search for enemies who must be obstructing it; the positive will turn negative. (84)

“Cancel” culture is the product of this unfulfilled utopian longing. The unhappiness of Millennials (and their unhappiness is well-documented by Jean Twenge) is perceived to be due to those evil people who must be preventing the longed-for utopia; and such people can only be cancelled. Citing the 2020 American Worldview Inventory, Bauerlein says:

. . . findings show Millennials—by their own admission—as far less tolerant than other generations. In addition, they are more likely to want to exact revenge when wronged, are less likely to keep a promise, and overall have less respect for others and for human life in general. (95)

This Lamechian tendency toward vengeance is surely evidence of grave spiritual danger. Jesus only cited two things that were unpardonable: the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (apparently a reference to persistent resistant to his grace) and not forgiving others: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15). Indeed, perhaps one reason for Millennials being so notoriously unchurched is that they find the Christian teaching on forgiveness to be entirely inimical to their angry, cancelling, vindictive belief-system.

Chapter Three: An Anti-Formation

I found this less interesting and more depressing than the others, because I was familiar with its topic and depressed by it; indeed, the evidence for the non-education of American adolescents has been observed even since before Bauerlein’s earlier book in 2008. Here are some of the lowlights:

- As of 2010, 16-to-18-year-olds spent 3.5 hours per day in “educational activities” but five hours and forty minutes in “leisure and sports” (104–105).
- Kaiser study: 45 minutes/day talking on phone, an hour and 51 minutes texting, 2.5 hours watching television, 7 minutes/day reading (110).
- (citing Arum and Roksa in *Academically Adrift*): referring to college students: “. . . we find that students are not spending a great deal of time outside of the classroom on their coursework: on average, they report spending only 12 hours per week studying” (109).
- [Observed that 86% of HS students spend less than 6 hours/week in leisure reading] (110).

Much of the remainder of this chapter dealt with the issues raised by E. D. Hirsch’s 1987 *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. It traces the movement from a cultural canon to teaching “critical thinking skills,” so the student is trained to ask suspicious questions but not trained in discerning whether a text—ancient or modern—contains any wisdom, or any insight into human behavior.

Chapter Four: The Psychological Novel

This was perhaps the most compelling (if depressing) chapter of the book for me, as an individual who has always enjoyed reading fiction. Bauerlein argues that novel (and, perhaps especially, the modern novel) discloses the mixture of motives that constitutes the human experience, the way Harold Bloom described Shakespeare as the inventor of the human, because of the way Shakespeare represented humans as conflicted (not simple) beings. I therefore find and found Bauerlein's argument here to be convincing. Since Millennials have not been exposed to much literature at all, they have an immature, childish understanding of the duplicitous nature of the human psyche; people are either entirely good or entirely evil, and if you make them "feel" uncomfortable, you are entirely evil and suited only for destruction (which, in their case, ordinarily takes the form of cancelling, rather than murdering).

Bauerlein recounts an interesting 2020 conversation he had with an old friend (now deceased), in which Bauerlein asked why the rioters seemed so angry:

"Why are they so emotional, Bob? Why does a joke set them off?" . . . "Well," he drawled, "they haven't read enough literature." (168)

But that was Bob's point, and it was easy to follow. Literature helps you get to know what people are like. Novels get you out of your own thoughts and into other people's heads. The fiction needn't be terribly profound nor the experience of reading earthshaking. . . . Follow a lot of these characters, enter vicariously into their circumstances, do it consistently for a few years, and you find that you've received a psychological coaching. (172)

Each art-form has its distinct merits and demerits. Novel (and short story) naturally does something that is entirely un-natural to film; the narrator takes the reader into the inner workings of another human's mind; and skilled authors display therein the conflicted nature of our present human condition, giving us insight to our own flaws and empathy for some of the flaws of others.

Too many hours of their adolescence were spent on a screen and not enough hours with fiction—that's the genesis of our closed-minded Millennials. They haven't undergone the literary formation that teaches one to interpret people cautiously, to withhold judgment until all the facts are in, to understand personality as multifaceted, a mix of positive and negative. . . . Miss Betsey in *David Copperfield*, for example, appears at first to be a brusque, cold woman, but later she is revealed to be a staunch and loving aunt, though her manner doesn't really improve. Literary readers learn to expect such variation, and it carries over to their actual lives. The stories they read encourage a more hesitant and careful reading of real-life characters. The young adult who doesn't read is more impatient, likes the snap judgment, and arrives early at a full verdict with full confidence. (189)

In Bauerlein's words, many/most film characters are "flat," whereas novel easily presents "round" characters: "It's a problem of depth. To our nonreading Millennial, everyone is a 'flat character.' That's all the youth-oriented screen gives him, surface beings with overt designs and words with no resonance" (190).

Chapter Five: Multiculturalism or Malcolm X?

The basic thesis of this chapter is that history and literature connect us to our predecessors and thereby connect us to them and define us *by* them. He mentioned Ezra Pound's statement about Walt Whitman, "He *is* America" (206). The consequences of no past are no future; the individual is not at a place in a flowing river that has both past and future; the individual is in a mere puddle, and a small, disconnected one at that.

The chapter includes an interesting mini-biography of Malcolm X, who learned to read while he was in prison (for burglary), who took correspondence courses, and even a course in Latin. He also copied in his own hand an entire dictionary. "I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life, . . . As I see it today, the ability to read awoke some long dormant craving to be mentally alive" (242).¹⁶ Reading connected Malcolm to more than his immediate circle of fellow burglars and caused him to raise broader issues of culture and cultural justice.

This chapter is similar to the third chapter on anti-formation:

You can't leave nineteen-year-olds with no anchors. They need aged things that stabilize and ennoble them, such as American youth used to find in *The Columbian Orator*, the collection of ancient and modern writing and speeches used in nineteenth-century classrooms and which served teenage slave Frederick Douglass as a treasured (and secret) intellectual roadmap to freedom. (238)

This "dangerous" group of young adults is so because it is unmoored, unanchored, and uninformed, doomed with Narcissus to attempt to know the self only self-referentially, exhibiting the traits anticipated in George W. S. Trow's 1980 *Within the Context of No Context*.

Bauerlein's readers will form varying opinions about just how "dangerous" this generation is; but few will escape reading him without both concern and compassion for a generation that expects a utopia that cannot be found here and now. In the penultimate paragraph of the book, Bauerlein says: "Social progress requires not just indictments of injustices, but positive inspirations as well—from the very past that utopians condemn in toto. Without them, young people lose their balance, fall sway to *ressentiment*" (252).

Neil Postman was right in observing that widespread cultural media are a curriculum in their own right, a shaper of humans that ought to be critically inspected by the academic curriculum. It is unlikely that the financially-entrenched digital industries will encourage (or even permit) such inspection of their activities by the academic curriculum; the best we can realistically hope for is insights from individuals such as Mark Bauerlein.

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¹⁶ Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine, 2015), 182.

ServantPoetry

The Deluge of Data

G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

Where is wisdom in our words?
Data without datum want meaning,
Information without knowledge is surds
Which leave us simply leaning

In toward truth, while the trivial
Floods our minds with advertising,
Spinning them into quadrivial—
At an intersection ill advising

Which direction we should go,
Warping our confiscated minds
To fail to thrive and grow—
That's the way modernity grinds.

So, all our findings seem to end
With understanding that bends
With the warp and woof to pretend
That there's meaning that our media sends.

But the Word incarnate has the answer,
Full of grace and truth he came
To prove to be the final Dancer
In the dance of truth to claim.