

A Living Sacrifice

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From the Editor

In 1980, at my first General Assembly in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the late Bernard “Chip” Stonehouse exhorted rookie commissioners to wait five years before we opened our mouths in debate. Fresh out of seminary, I thought my Old School theology made my theological position superior to Chip’s on most questions. However, I am pleased to have heeded his exhortation. Over the past several decades I have been privileged to observe and participate in a system of church government based on principles that are self-consciously biblical. It has been difficult at times to learn to think and communicate in a way different from my native egalitarian—read Congregational—instincts.

The question that comes after we learn to think before we speak is: How do we speak when we do? Over two decades ago Elder Jim Gidley, moderator of the 67th General Assembly, addressed the 68th General Assembly in 2001 with an exhortation based on Romans 12:1, titled “A Living Sacrifice.” May this powerful encouragement to love and humility help set the tone for our upcoming assembly.

Alan Strange provides his commentary on the last three chapters of the Form of Government. This invaluable resource for officers and others will be published early next year.

Two reviews remind us of a better way of interpreting Scripture. T. David Gordon’s review article, “Dueling Methods,” reviews *Five Things Theologians Wish Biblical Scholars Knew* by Hans Boersma, a systematic theologian, and *Five Things Biblical Scholars Wish Theologians Knew* by Scot McKnight, a biblical theologian.

Interestingly, McKnight misses Craig Carter’s important work on premodern exegesis in his bibliography.¹ Boersma, on the other hand, not only includes Carter in his bibliography but also refers favorably to David Steinmetz’s famous 1980 article, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis.”² The revival of interest in more ancient ways of interpreting Scripture and doing theology is a salutary movement. Richard Muller has demonstrated conclusively that Post Reformation scholastic theologians, contrary to popular opinion, built their systems on sound exegesis, imitating a Pauline hermeneutic. Which brings me to the next review.

William Edgar reviews *The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind* by Jason M. Baxter. The least explored aspect of Lewis is his Medievalism. It shaped his epistemology along premodern lines, thus, like Boersma, inviting us to seek and enjoy a supernatural hermeneutic, while eschewing a positivism that reduces our view of Scripture and reality to the mundane.

Back to the subject of church government, Ryan McGraw reviews a book on a subject

¹ Craig Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

² David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 37 (1980).

rarely published today, church government. Guy Prentiss Waters's *Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government* is a readable, fair, and convincing treatment of the subject, showing how biblical church government fosters the health of the church.

Our poem in this issue is by Mark Green, a sonnet meditation on Daniel 3, "Daniel's Hope."

The cover picture is of the 82nd General Assembly (2015) at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

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.

Servant Word

A Living Sacrifice

By James S. Gidley

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).

What is the heart and soul of Christian ethics?¹

As those who are well-schooled in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, we might immediately respond, “the Ten Commandments.” The Ten Commandments was spoken by the voice of God from Mount Sinai, engraved by the finger of God upon the stone tables, and written by the Spirit of God upon the hearts of His people! Why should we look further? Because the Bible compels us to look further.

If not the Ten Commandments, then must it not be the two greatest commandments? “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind,” and “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37, 39). No less an authority than our Lord Jesus Christ himself has declared that all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments (Matt. 22:40). Need we go further? The Bible compels us to go further still.

It is a curious fact that the New Testament epistles do not quote the greatest commandment. Never in the epistles, never in the wealth of ethical instruction that we find there, do we find the command to love God. Were the apostles forgetting something? No, when the Bible leads us into the inner sanctum of Christian ethics, into the heart of hearts, we find something there even more profound than the command to love God.

In seeking for this heart of hearts, we can do no better than to examine Paul’s epistle to the Romans. Here is Paul’s fullest and most systematic exposition of his gospel, of which Calvin justly remarks: “when anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”²

In seeking for the heart of the ethical teaching of Romans, we can do no better than to turn to Romans 12:1. The first verse of the twelfth chapter of Romans is the turning point of the epistle. Paul has brought his doctrinal teaching to a climax at the end of chapter eleven, concluding with the marvelous doxology, so full of reverence and awe at the mystery of God’s eternal purpose (Rom. 11:33–36). Now with a brief “therefore” Paul turns to exhortation.

Let us not rush over this “therefore” too quickly. This little conjunction is remarkable. It stubbornly contradicts modern ethical philosophy. It is well-nigh an axiom of modern

¹ Exhortation by James S. Gidley, moderator of the 67th General Assembly, to the 68th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, May 30, 2001.

² John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, “The Argument,” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XIX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979): xxix.

philosophical ethics that the indicative does not imply the imperative, that is to say, no account of what *is* can imply what *ought* to be. With a single word, the Spirit of God speaking through Paul contradicts this error. For eleven chapters, he has been expounding to us what *is*: what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. With a single word he tells us that these great indicatives imply the imperative.

Such is the case with the whole structure of biblical ethics. What we must do follows from what God has done for us. Remove “therefore,” and you completely alter the teaching of the Bible.

There is a sense in which this single word begins to answer the question that I have posed to you at the outset. The heart and soul of biblical ethics cannot be found in command alone. The imperative cannot be detached from the indicative. You cannot do without “therefore.”

That this is not merely a question of form or grammar becomes evident immediately upon examining the clause in which “therefore” appears. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.” The earnest entreaty that the Spirit makes to the Romans comes not with the thunder of Sinai, not with the threat of wrath, but with the blessing of grace. The verb that he uses, παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*), is a warm word, which is elsewhere translated encourage or comfort, and which forms the root from which we get one of the names for the Holy Spirit, παράκλητος (John 14:26) (*parakletos*), helper or comforter.

To this tender, appealing verb, he adds the phrase “by the mercies of God.” He is not calling us before the bar of God's outraged justice but inviting us to the Mercy-Seat. Here God does *not* threaten us with death if we dare approach too near to the Holy Mount. Rather, he sweetly draws us with cords of love, divine love that expresses itself to sinners as mercy.

A singular mercy would be quite enough for poor sinners such as we are. But it is *mercies*, plural. There is a divine fullness in this plural, “mercies.” It is mercy *to* which we respond, and it is mercy *by* which we respond.

There is something deeply instructive in Paul's gentle appeal. The opening words of Christian ethics should always reflect this gentleness, for the opening words of Christian ethics always follow the Word of God's mighty acts on our behalf. The people of God are no longer to be subjected to the deadly threats of the broken covenant of works. Dear fathers and brothers, as you address the flock of God that is your charge, be mindful of this! Draw them with mercy!

Now to the heart of the matter. What is it that God so sweetly draws us to do? To present our bodies a living sacrifice.

The sacrificial language has often sent commentators to the Old Testament. It seems that Paul is alluding to the Old Testament sacrificial system. Some find an allusion to the fact that no dead animal could be offered to God; hence the “living” sacrifice means that which is brought to the altar alive and there slaughtered before God. Others find contrast with the Old Testament: whereas the Old Testament sacrificial animals were slain as they were offered, Paul describes a sacrifice in which the victim continues to live.

Both insights are part of the richness of the text, but they fall short of the mark. The whole sacrificial action that Paul commends to us should be kept in view: “present your bodies a living sacrifice.” I ask you: Which of the sons of Aaron ever offered his own

body in sacrifice? What Israelite ever came to the altar prepared to offer his own body? No, it is not the Old Testament priesthood of which Paul speaks.

But there *is* a priest who has offered his own body in sacrifice. There is only *one* priest who has made such an offering: none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. It is *his* sacrifice that the Holy Spirit wishes us to see as the very pattern of our own duty.

Paul has given us other clues that this is his meaning. What he here commands is based on what he declares in chapter 6: “we have been crucified with Christ.” (By the way, our own beloved John Murray makes this connection.³) Paul tells us in chapter six that we *have been* crucified with Christ. Here he commands us to offer our bodies in sacrifice. We have indicative followed by imperative, so characteristic of Paul's theology. We have what *is* by divine grace being followed by what we *ought* to do.

But it is not merely a matter of sequence. It is not merely that command follows doctrine. And it is not merely logical implication. It is not merely that the word “therefore” stands between doctrine and ethics, as vital as that conjunction is.

It is rather a matter of vital union between doctrine and practice. Or to speak more biblically, it is a matter of union with Christ. The Spirit wishes us to see our lives as so united with Christ in his death and resurrection that we reproduce the pattern of that death and resurrection in our lives.

For it is the pattern of death and resurrection that gives us the phrase “living sacrifice.” “Living” means resurrected. You will say to me: “How can this be? How can that which is resurrected be offered in sacrifice?” It is possible in the mystical union with the crucified and risen Lord.

This is not the only place where Paul inverts the order of death and resurrection. In Philippians 3:10–11, Paul prays that he “may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” Notice that the power of the resurrection *precedes* the conformity to Christ's death. Or to speak more fully, it is precisely the power of the resurrection in Paul that will make it possible for him to participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and be conformed to his death.

For us, then, it is not a question of how resurrection can precede sacrifice. Oh, no! The question is all the other way around! How can we, poor sinners that we are, offer *any* sacrifice to God *unless* we are empowered by the resurrection? The *sequence* of death and resurrection in the experience of Christ has become *simultaneous* in our experience. We offer our bodies in the spirit and power of the resurrection.

You see that we have come beyond mere metaphor. Let us be clear upon that point. If Paul were dealing in metaphor, he would simply be saying that there ought to be something in *our* experience that is like something in *Christ's* experience, or like something in the experience of the Old Testament priests as they offered their sacrifices. Sadly, it seems that this is how most of Paul's interpreters take Romans 12:1.

But if you will allow the Spirit of God to be his own interpreter, you will find him using the language of *union* with Christ, not merely *likeness* to Christ. In Romans 6, you will find the phrase “the likeness of his death” only once (v. 5), but repeatedly you find the language of union, for example: “crucified *with* him” (v. 6), “live *with* him” (verse 8), “baptized *into* his death” (v. 2). Even verse 5, which speaks of likeness, says, “we have been *united together* in the likeness of his death.” The language of union predominates.

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965): 111.

Why is this important? I ask you: Do you think that you can take one step in the Christian life apart from union with Christ, apart from the power of his death and resurrection? Do you think that the greatest act of sacrifice that you can ever make, considered in itself, could bear comparison to the sacrifice of Christ? No, to begin to think of our sacrifice apart from union with Christ's sacrifice is to begin to transform biblical sanctification into humanistic moralism.

What then is the heart and soul of Christian ethics? The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this sounds strange to our ears, perhaps it is because we are too accustomed to thinking of Christ's death and resurrection exclusively in a substitutionary way. That is to say, we think of Christ dying so that we might not die, and his rising as that which secures the efficacy of this substitution.

But the Bible presents the death and resurrection of Christ not only as that which takes place *on our behalf* but also that which represents our *union* with these events. Christ's death is not only *for* us but also *in* us. We are *united* to him in his death and resurrection. The New Testament consistently urges this consideration upon us—that Christ's humbling himself to the point of death is the pattern for our life. A classic example is Philippians 2, which speaks of Christ's being in the form of God and yet humbling himself to the point of death, even death on the cross. Paul introduces that teaching with “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God . . .” (Phil. 2:5–6.).

The ethical side of the cross is present from the moment that Jesus begins to teach his disciples about it. You will remember the great scene at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus leads his disciples, through Peter as spokesman, to acknowledge him as the Christ. Immediately thereafter, as Matthew 16:21 says, “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” And what is the sequel? Peter begins to rebuke Jesus, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord; this shall never happen to you!” (v. 22).

Do you think that this was a case of misguided zeal and concern for Jesus's honor and wellbeing? No, Peter is concerned for something much closer to his own skin! He knows, perhaps better than we do, that the disciple is not above his master (Matt. 10:24–25). If a cross awaits his master, surely a cross awaits him too. We may read Peter's rebuke much more personally: “Far be it from *me*, Lord; this shall not happen to *me*! I'm looking for a crown, not a cross!”

You think I do Peter a disservice? Immediately after Jesus rebukes Peter, we find this in Matthew 16:24: “Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” Jesus has read what was in Peter's heart, and here is the teaching that he so much dreaded: there is a cross for you too, Peter, and for each of my disciples.

Dear fathers and brothers, you cannot rightly preach the cross without *both* the redemptive side and the ethical side. Conversely, when you do preach the cross, you are always in reality not only teaching the people their hope of redemption but also their pattern of life. The cross is full of ethical instruction unless we take pains to suppress it.

But lest this seem to cast a morbid pall over the Christian life, let me remind you of something. Notice the last thing on Jesus's lips in Matthew 16:21 just before Peter begins to rebuke Him: “and on the third day be raised.” It is as if Peter never heard that last

phrase! Peter is missing more than just the cross when he rebukes Jesus. He is missing the resurrection!

Yes, people of God, there is a cross for you to bear, but there is also a resurrection. And if you will but see it, the power of that resurrection is at work even in your bearing of the cross.

Now let us return to Romans 12:1. If indeed the heart and soul of Christian ethics is the cross and resurrection of Christ, what implications does this have for the way we are to live? The Spirit of God does not leave us in the dark!

First consider the nature of the sacrifice that Paul urges us to make. Clearly, a sacrifice implies that we must offer something. We are to offer our bodies. In conformity to Christ's offering, this means the offering of our lives.

It is conceivable that what Paul is saying is that we are to give up the fleshly lusts of our bodies, to crucify our old nature, to put to death what is earthly in us. You will recognize in these phrases the very language of Paul in other epistles: Colossians 3:5 and Galatians 5:24 are examples. As Christ became sin for us and so was put to death as our sin, so also we are conformed to the cross by the putting to death of sin in us.

As true as this is, however, it is *not* what Paul has specifically in view in Romans 12:1. Here in Romans 12:1, Paul describes the living sacrifice as "holy, and acceptable to God." He is focusing on the fact that Jesus was the blameless, unblemished sacrifice. He is saying that we too, as those who have been made blameless and unblemished in Christ, are to offer our justified and sanctified selves as a sacrifice pleasing to God.

I trust that you see that Paul is thus drawing you to an infinitely higher plane! What you are to offer up in sacrifice is not that which is *worthy* of death. Rather, what you are to offer up is precisely that which is now worthy of *life*! You are to offer up what is good in you, the very good that has been created in you by God himself. You are not to hoard it up like some treasured possession that you will never let out of your grasp. No, immediately upon receiving it, you are to give it up again to God who gave it!

You will perceive then that on no account can we imagine sinners making such a sacrifice in their own strength. Sinners, as sinners, do not have something holy and acceptable that they can offer to God. This is a sacrifice that is inconceivable apart from grace!

Again, I ask, what implications does this have for the way we are to live? First and foremost, it forever banishes the selfish motive for holiness. Yes, there is such a thing as a selfish motive for holiness. The whole pursuit of holiness can be and often has been presented as a means of personal attainment, of holy self-actualization, if you will. The Christian life, sanctification, is conceived of as a lifelong self-improvement project. Under this kind of teaching, we conceive of the Christian life as a building up and a conserving of the life that God has given us, not as a giving of that life away in sacrifice.

But if we have heard what our text is saying, we must conceive of the Christian life far otherwise. The sacrifice that we are to make does *not* have in view the improvement of the self who sacrifices. Paul describes that self as already holy and acceptable to God, as that which God will gladly accept. What then is the end of this sacrifice? The glory of God? Certainly! But also the good of our neighbor. Ephesians 5:1–2 says it plainly: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Did Christ offer himself for the purpose of self-improvement? God forbid! He offered himself to God *for us*. That is the nature of the Christian life! Offer yourselves to God for others!

Don't you see that this is precisely where the Spirit of God leads Paul in Romans 12? He immediately begins telling us about the gifts that we have, and how we are to use them for the good of the body (Rom. 12:3–8). Then he paints a beautiful picture of selfless serving in the remainder of the chapter (Rom. 12:9–21). Do not think of how well you are doing! Think about how well others are doing, and what you might do to serve them!

You will object: "Am I not supposed to be improving in my Christian life? Shouldn't I be getting better?" Yes, but if that is your primary aim, you will become worse. Here as elsewhere, he who seeks to save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it (Matt. 16:25). Yes, you ought to improve. But do not serve others that you may improve. Rather, improve that you may serve others better.

Selfishness in the pursuit of holiness is perhaps the most refined and subtle kind of selfishness. But for that very reason it is deadly. How shall we escape it? The cross, the cross, the cross! The self-centered pursuit of holiness will never pursue the cross. The self-centered pursuit of holiness usually fastens itself in one way or another upon the law. Not the law rightly understood, but the form and outward appearance of the law.

Do not misunderstand me. The law of God is indispensable to true holiness. The law of God is like the skeleton of the Christian life. A body without a skeleton would be shapeless, useless, hideous. So also is a so-called Christian life that disregards the requirements of the law.

But the law does not contain the vital organs of the Christian life. It is the bare skeleton, which, being found without flesh and sinew, is the hideous face of death. So also is a so-called Christian life that goes no further than the law.

What God commands in our text is something that the law has no power to command. The law says, "Thou shalt not kill" but never says, "present your bodies a living sacrifice." The law teaches you not to harm others, but the law does not teach you to give yourself away.

Only the cross can teach you to give yourself away. Who would ever think to do so unless Christ had first given himself away for our sakes? Self-centered piety is drawn to the principle of the law as the covenant of works. That principle is self-preservation: "Do this *and live*" (Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5). But the cross is self-abnegation: "You have been made alive; *now give your life away*."

How then shall we give ourselves away? Read the rest of Romans 12!

There is a particular relevance of all this to the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. There is a great deal of adherence to law in the assembly. We know our rights and we cling to them! Rights and legality are not evils, but if they are all that we have, then are we most pitiable.

How long shall it be in this assembly before we hear bitter words of anger? How long before we verge upon slandering one another? How long before we treat one another not as precious brothers, but as enemies? And even if we *were* enemies, our Lord says, "Love your enemies" (Matt. 6:43–48). Imagine rather a General Assembly in which these things abound:

- Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.
- Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
- Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.
- Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
- If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Rom. 12:9–10, 14–18, 21).

These things are the outworking of the presentation of your bodies as a living sacrifice! A living sacrifice—that is the heart of the matter. Bear with me a little longer, for there is more that we can draw from these words.

You may have noticed that I entitled this exhortation “A Living *Sacrifice*,” singular. That is how Paul in fact puts it. Present your bodies, plural, a living sacrifice, singular. At first glance, this seems to be a trivial thing. It is the kind of slip of the tongue that is common enough and causes no confusion in conversation. For example, I might say to a class, “I expect all the students in this class to write a term paper.” Only the pedantic and legalistic would interpret me to mean that all the students, together, should write a single paper.

So also here it has generally been assumed that Paul is guilty of an innocent solecism. He says, “a living sacrifice,” (*thusian zōsan* θυσίαν ζῶσαν) but he means “living sacrifices.” So, the New International Version has actually translated it that way. But it is not so easy for me to believe that this is all there is to it. Not that I believe that inerrancy requires a pedantic grammatical precision. Rather I have concluded from the text itself and from the context that the singular is deliberate and meaningful.

In fact, it is not only the word “sacrifice” that appears here in the singular. There are six closely connected singular words in this sentence. (For those of you unfamiliar with Greek, nouns, adjectives, and participles have endings that denote, among other things, whether they are singular or plural.) Stating the words in the order in which they appear in the Greek text, we have: *sacrifice* (singular), *living* (singular), *holy* (singular), *acceptable* (singular), *reasonable* (singular), *service* (singular). Like six ringing hammer blows, these words emphasize the singularity of the sacrifice. It is difficult to imagine that Paul’s original audience would not have heard this emphasis as they heard the letter read aloud to them.

What is the significance of this? First and foremost, it is another reminder that the Holy Spirit is speaking here of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ and that he wishes us to see our sacrifice in union with Christ’s.

But there is more! We are to conceive of *our* living sacrifice collectively. To be sure, each of us individually is called upon to make this sacrifice, but the text leads us to think of all our bodies together as making up one great living sacrifice. Consider the surrounding context. In chapter eleven Paul has been expounding on the unity of God’s people, Jew and Gentile, under the image of the one olive tree. In the following context,

chapter 12, verses 3–8, he will speak of the people of God as the one body in Christ. Here, between those two images of unity, he describes the church as one living sacrifice.

In the broader context, Paul will go on in Romans 15:16 to speak of the Gentiles collectively as an offering (singular) which is made acceptable by Paul's apostolic ministry. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 66:19–20: “And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD . . .” These texts make plain that the people of God, collectively, are one offering to God.

It is a marvelous image, is it not? The whole church of Jesus Christ, in all ages and places of the world, offered as one great living sacrifice, empowered by the one great sacrifice of Jesus Christ himself. And it is more than just a literary image.

The gospels make plain that Christ was utterly alone on the cross. Betrayed by Judas, abandoned by his disciples, condemned by the Sanhedrin, condemned by Pilate, sacrificed by the crowd for Barabbas, mocked by the onlookers and even by his fellow-sufferers, and last of all, abandoned by God himself. Who can imagine such loneliness as this!

Yet in *your* sacrifice you are never alone. First of all, you are always united to Christ himself. You are never alone because Christ is with you.

But union with Christ is never merely a matter of Christ with you as an individual. No, union with Christ means union with his people as well. You are never alone, for the whole company of all the saints in every age and every corner of the world is with you also. You, together with them, make one great living sacrifice to the one true God and Savior. You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), but do not conceive of those witnesses as pitiless judges who are watching to see if you will slip up! Oh, no! These witnesses are united to you by the bonds of love and affection, and they gave their lives in sacrifice for your sake, that you also might join them, the happy throng who have found their lives by giving them away.

Are you still taken aback at the demand that the gospel lays upon you? Does it seem to be a daunting task that I have laid before you—one perhaps that is too heavy to bear? Listen once more to the Word of God. The last words on the living sacrifice are that it is “your reasonable service.” I am convinced by all that the Spirit has packed into this text that what he means by “reasonable” here is “fitting.” It is a fitting thing that you offer yourselves. Does it seem too great a thing to ask of you? Consider what Jesus has given for you. And after all you will come to see that what he asks of you is only fitting. Amen.

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Servant Standards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 30–32

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter XXX Organizations of Members of the Church

1. Every Christian has the freedom and obligation to exercise the general office of the believer not only individually but also in fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. Members of the church may therefore associate together for specific purposes in the exercise of their common calling. Such organizations, however, under ordinary circumstances, shall not assume the prerogatives or exercise the functions of the special officers of the church.

Comment: Christians properly operate, enjoying freedom and obligation to do so, in the general office of believer. They are to do so individually as they carry out the vocation that all have as believers. They may also do so in fellowship with other members of the body of Christ, not only in their own local church but in concert with other believers who may not even be members of the OPC. Examples of such cooperation with believers outside the OPC might be a Bible league for the publication of God's Word in many languages or a Christian school under parental control. When members of the church therefore associate together for specific purposes in the exercise of their common calling, it should be clear that such organizations, being extra-ecclesial, shall not assume the prerogatives or exercise the functions of the church as are carried out by her special officers.

It should be noted that this is the case "under ordinary circumstances." Missions, for example, should ordinarily be carried on by the judicatories and proper agencies of the church (the Committee on Foreign Missions, for example). However, in circumstances of manifest corruption of the same, as occurred in the PCUSA in the 1930's, in which it became clear to J. Gresham Machen and others that the denominational committee on Foreign Missions was comprised, it was thought necessary to form an independent board not under the jurisdiction of the PCUSA to carry out the work of missions.

While contemplation of an action of this sort would likely unsettle most members of the OPC today, this section not only recognizes that there has been need for such in the past but preserves a true Protestant view that the church is not infallible and that Christians within her may even need to act in contravention to her ordinary procedures in concert with other Christians when the church has manifestly lost her way. The visible church, in other words, may be so corrupt that before another purer branch can be established to carry out the ordinary work of the church, Christians may need to concert

together in the meantime to make sure that the work of the church is carried out in a faithful way, even if it must be done for a time outside the agencies of the visible church.

2. When a church fails to perform its divinely given task, church members should seek remedies through biblical procedures of government and discipline. In the event that remedy cannot be obtained, or if the church is unable to work in a particular situation, Christians may organize to carry on activities that would more normally be conducted under the appropriate judicatory of the church, until these unusual circumstances are overcome.

Comment: This section more specifically recognizes what was described in the immediately previous paragraph: a situation in which a church fails to perform its divinely given task, say, of missions, and remedies for such within the church itself are unobtainable. To be sure, as this paragraph notes, remedies to something like the crippling liberalism that afflicted the PCUSA in the 1930s should be sought and pursued through the courts of the church acting in their regular governmental capacity (according to the Form of Government) and in their judicial capacity (according to the Book of Discipline). Only when such remedies cannot be obtained through the procedures available in the judicatories of the church because of manifest corruption, can Christians organize to carry on such activities that would normally be conducted in the proper church judicatories. Such should last only as long as needed, until the unusual circumstances are overcome.

Those in the OPC who had worked together in the Independent Board for Presbytery Foreign Missions, since the PCUSA Missions program had become doctrinally compromised, no longer needed to do so once the OPC was formed. It was realized that the attainment, at last, as Machen put it, of “a true Presbyterian church” in the formation of the OPC spelled the end of the need for an independent mission board, and the faithful in the church could return to supporting the mission agencies of the church.

3. When an organization purports to represent a particular church, or a presbytery, or the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, it must obtain the approval, and be subject to the jurisdiction and oversight, of the session of the particular church, or of the presbytery, or of the general assembly, respectively.

Comment: Any organization that seeks to and presents itself as representing the church (whether a local church, a presbytery, or the OPC as a whole) needs and must get, for honest representation, the approval of said local, regional, or national bodies. Furthermore, any such organization must be subject to the jurisdiction of the level of the church (session, presbytery, or general assembly) that it purports to represent.

Chapter XXXI

Incorporation and Corporations

1. The general assembly, the several presbyteries, and the several churches may maintain corporations to act as agents of the respective authorities to handle affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by the civil authorities.

Comment: All levels of the church and the government thereof (GA, presbyteries, sessions) may be or become incorporated and maintain such corporations for interfacing with the civil authorities. Corporations act as agents of local, regional, or national churches to handle affairs with the civil authorities. Such affairs pertain, perhaps, with the greatest frequency to property matters. At the same time, other temporal matters (tax exemption status) may also be a proper concern of the corporation of the church. The reason that churches may wish to incorporate is both to limit liability and to act as the formal agent interacting with agencies of the local, state, or federal civil magistracy.

2. Only those and all those who are communicant members of a particular church in good and regular standing and meeting the requirements of the civil authorities shall be entitled to vote at corporation meetings of the particular church. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted, nor shall anyone be allowed to vote except when the vote is being taken.

Comment: The corporation of a local church is comprised of all communicants in good and regular standing who meet the requirements of the civil authorities. The most common sort of requirement is that only those who have attained their majority are able to vote, customarily eighteen years of age. Note that while all the communicants in good standing in a particular local church are members of the congregation, only those meeting the civil requirements for corporate participation are additionally members of the corporation. Here, as in the congregational meeting, only those then and there present are eligible to vote, proxy voting not being allowed. As noted earlier, proxy voting is not allowed by the FG: it is the conviction of this book that those voting must be present in the meeting to be properly informed to cast a vote.

3. The board of trustees of a particular church shall ordinarily be chosen from among the ruling elders and deacons in that church, but other communicant members of the church may be elected as trustees if it seems desirable, provided, however, that the number of such members shall be less than one-half the total membership of the board. Its duties shall be those which the state requires of trustees of corporations together with such other duties relating to the properties of the church as may be delegated to them by the session or the congregation. Such delegation shall be in accord with Chapter XIII, Section 7, of this Form of Government.

Comment: Every body that forms itself as a legal corporation, registered with the proper agency of the state, has a board of trustees that acts as the specific legal interface with the civil authorities on behalf of that body. The corporation itself commonly elects trustees to act as its representatives. This section provides that the board of trustees of a particular church, while ordinarily comprised of the elders and deacons in that church, may also include other communicant members of the church elected to such service. In any case, when electing those who do not hold the offices of elder or deacon to serve on the board alongside those who do hold those special offices, the number of non-special office holders must never exceed the number of elders and deacons on the board. In other words, less than half of those not holding special office can serve on the board of trustees alongside the ordained officers.

The duties of the board of trustees shall be those which the state requires of trustees of corporations. Thus, such trustees will often serve as legal signatories for financial matters, particularly those having to do with the purchase or selling of property,

construction of buildings, etc. Other duties, like upkeep of the property, buildings, and facilities, may be assigned to the trustees by the session. Any such delegation by the session to the trustees shall be in accordance with FG 13.7, which is the section recognizing the oversight that the session enjoys with respect to maintaining the local congregation and the government thereof.

4. Meetings of corporations for the transaction of their business shall be provided for in their charter and bylaws, which must always be in accord with the standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and must not infringe upon the powers or duties of the judicatories of the Church.

Comment: Just as the FG requires congregations to meet at least annually, the state may require such with respect to corporations —most do—and the corporation of the church (those legally eligible to vote in the meeting of a corporation) often meets at least annually. Such annual meetings shall be provided for in the corporate charter and the local bylaws of the church. These meetings customarily elect trustees, approve budgets, and take other actions fitting for the corporation, as assigned by the session (see section 3, above). In no case shall such meetings infringe upon the power or duties of the judicatories of the church. In other words, a corporation meeting shall not call a pastor or elect other officers: that and many similar sorts of action pertain not to the corporation as such but to the congregation.

5. All particular churches shall be entitled to hold, own, and enjoy their own local properties, without any right of reversion to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church whatsoever, unless the particular church should become extinct, provided, however, that any particular church may, if it so desires, give or dedicate its property to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A congregation that desires to withdraw from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and to retain its property shall follow the provisions of Chapter XVI, Section 7, of this Form of Government. Dissolution of a particular church by any judicatory, or by any other form of ecclesiastical action, shall not be deemed as making a particular church extinct within the meaning of this article. But these provisions shall not be construed as limiting or abrogating the right of the judicatories of this Church to exercise all constitutional and proper authority over the particular churches as spiritual bodies.

Comment: This is an important proviso, especially in light of the history of the OPC. In 1936, and after, when many churches sought to leave the PCUSA and come into the OPC, the arrangements with the PCUSA of many congregations were such that the ownership of all properties, including the buildings in which they met and the manses in which their pastors lived, was vested in the presbyteries or higher judicatories of the PCUSA. This meant that, even in cases in which a vast majority of a local congregation wished to leave the PCUSA and enter the OPC, they were not able to take their property with them in doing so. This was, and is, rightly considered a significant abuse on part of the broader church.

In contrast to this, the OPC hereby explicitly provides that particular churches are entitled to all that ownership entails with respect to their own local properties (holding, owning, and enjoying them). They have such rights without any right of reversion to the OPC, even if they decide to leave the OPC and enter another denomination or become independent. All this is to say that a local church that wishes to leave the OPC may do so

without losing its building, land, or other properties. Now a church may become extinct, and its properties or other assets become those of the OPC. Additionally, any particular church may, if it so desires, give or dedicate property to the OPC (to other local churches, the presbytery, the GA or its agencies, etc.).

A few things to be noted. Dissolution of any local church by a judicatory (usually a presbytery), or by any other form of ecclesiastical action (e.g., recognition of a church declaring independency), is not to be deemed “extinction” in terms of this section. Extinction is something like the members of a local church dying off or abandoning it without any succession plan. Furthermore, if a congregation wishes to withdraw and retain its property in the most orderly and clear of ways, it should follow FG 16.7, which details the process of orderly withdrawal. And finally, the provisions set forth for such property retention on the part of congregations leaving the OPC should not be taken to mean that the proper judicatories that may have authority over the churches as spiritual bodies do not continue to exercise such authority, which is neither limited nor abrogated by their act of leaving.

Chapter XXXII

The Constitution and Its Amendment

1. The constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, consists of its standards of doctrine, government, discipline, and worship, namely, its Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God. When the latter three documents are published together, the combined document shall be entitled *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.

Comment: Here we have, as noted earlier in this commentary, a definition of the constitution of the OPC. The Scriptures, to be sure, are foundational, and all that we believe and express in our constitution is drawn from God’s Word. The Bible, in other words, is the primary standard, not capable of error or reformation, and thus forms the basis for the constitution of the church, which is capable of error and amenable to reform. The constitution should, in fact, always be brought more closely in conformity to the Word to which it seeks to give expression.

The constitution, based on the Bible, consists of the secondary (or doctrinal) standards, namely the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, together with the tertiary standards: the Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God. These tertiary standards are typically published together (as are the Confession of Faith and Catechisms), with the combined tertiary standards being called *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.

2. With the exception noted in Section 3, below, the Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God may be amended only in the following manner: The general assembly after due discussion shall propose the amendment to the presbyteries; each presbytery shall vote on the question before the next regular assembly, and the clerk of each presbytery shall notify the clerk of the assembly, in writing, of the action of the presbytery; if a majority of the presbyteries has thus signified approval of the amendment, the amendment shall become effective on January 1 of the first year ending in 5 or 0 following the year in which the clerk

announces to the assembly that a majority of the presbyteries has approved the amendment. If the assembly proposing the amendment desires it to become effective earlier than the date hereinbefore provided, it may set an earlier date, but not sooner than the next regular assembly, by a two-thirds vote. No amendments shall be proposed to the presbyteries without written grounds for the proposed amendments.

Comment: Since this section is on the proper process for amending the constitution, it starts with that which may be amended with less difficulty: the three parts (FG, BD, and DPW) of the *Book of Church Order*. The section starts with, “The general assembly after due discussion shall propose the amendment to the presbyteries.” Note that this does not indicate how the matter came before the assembly for discussion, and thus it regards that as a matter of indifference. The matter may have come before the GA by a recommendation of one of its standing committees, through the office of its Stated Clerk, through overtures from the presbyteries, or through other legitimate ways by which matters may be brought before the GA. In any case, the GA comes to a determination on what form it prefers the amendment to be in and after due deliberation proposes the amendment in its preferred form to the presbyteries.

Once an amendment to the BCO is sent down to the presbyteries, by a simple majority vote of the GA, the presbyteries shall each vote on the amendment and through the clerks of the presbyteries shall notify the stated clerk of the GA, in writing, of the decisions of the respective presbyteries. If a majority of the presbyteries has voted in favor of the amendment, it shall become effective on January 1 of the first year ending in 5 or 0 following the year in which it was approved. When approved, the clerk shall announce such to the GA and to the presbyteries, noting the precise effective date, the formula for which was just stated. With the effective date of enactment as noted herein, the GA, if it wishes the effective date of the amendment to be before January 1 of the first year ending in 5 or 0, may do so by a two-thirds majority. Even then, such amendment could not be eligible for effectivity earlier than the next regular assembly. All amendments proposed shall have grounds for the amendment attached.

3. The Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the forms of subscription required of ministers, licentiates, ruling elders, and deacons, as these forms are found in the Form of Government, may be amended only in the following manner: The general assembly shall determine whether a suggested change is worthy of consideration. If so determined, it shall appoint a committee to consider any suggested change and to report to the next regular assembly with recommendations; that assembly may then propose the amendment to the presbyteries by a two-thirds majority of the members voting; approval by a presbytery shall be by a majority of the members voting, and following the decision the clerk of presbytery shall notify the clerk of the assembly, in writing, of the decision of the presbytery; if two-thirds of the presbyteries approve the amendment it shall be adopted finally only after approval of the next ensuing assembly by a two-thirds vote of the members voting.

Comment: Amending the doctrinal standards—the Confession of Faith and Catechisms—as well as the forms of subscription required for ministers, licentiates, ruling elders, and deacons, requires a higher approbation on the part of all parties. Such amendment begins with the General Assembly determining that a suggested change to these documents merits consideration. Note again that the FG is here indifferent as to the

method by which such changes come to the attention of the GA and may be, as noted in the comments on section 2 (above), through a variety of means.

When, by a simple majority vote, the GA has determined that a suggested change is worthy of consideration, it shall appoint a committee to consider any such suggested change(s) and to report to the next regular GA with recommendations. The assembly may act, of course, as it sees fit with respect to any such suggested changes, determining if any of them shall be sent down to the presbyteries for consideration. A two-thirds vote of the GA is required in any proposed amendments that it chooses to send to the presbyteries for consideration. When said amendment(s) come(s) to a presbytery, adoption of such is by a majority vote in the presbyteries.

Two-thirds of the presbyteries must vote to adopt a proposed amendment, and the respective presbytery clerks must notify the stated clerk of the GA of such, in order for the next ensuing assembly to have opportunity to act and adopt such changes. That next assembly must approve whatever two-thirds of the presbyteries have adopted by a two-thirds vote. It should be noted that all two-thirds assembly votes are two-thirds of those voting (not two-thirds of all commissioners elected to those respective assemblies).

4. Organic union of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with another denomination shall follow the same procedure as in Section 3, above, for amending the Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

Comment: For the OPC to organically unite with another denomination the same procedure is to be followed as is set forth in Section 3 of this chapter, above. In other words, such union takes the same kind of super majority votes as it does to amend the doctrinal standards: two-thirds of an assembly must send down the adopted action, which must be approved by two-thirds of the presbyteries, then returned for the next assembly to approve finally by a two-thirds vote. Both of the actions of sections 3 and 4 are of such significance that the church as a whole needs to be in significant concord in taking action of that sort.

5. None of the provisions of Sections 3 and 4 of this chapter nor of this fifth section shall be modified except by the process that is set forth in Section 3.

Comment: This is the standard “protection clause” that all thoughtful constitutions or by-laws contain. The logic is simple and compelling: sections 3 and 4 require a supermajority, but revision of the FG (in keeping with section 2) requires far less. So, one may not amend the FG in sections 3 and 4 under the lesser requirements of section 2 in a way that permits sections 3 and 4 to be undermined in their requirements for a supermajority. This section, section 5, may not be amended either, for the same reason, except under the supermajority rule required in section 3, which addresses the amending of the doctrinal standards.

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Dueling Methods

A Review Article

by T. David Gordon

Five Things Theologians Wish Biblical Scholars Knew (with forward by Scot McKnight), by Hans Boersma. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021, xv + 152, \$20.00, paper.

Five Things Biblical Scholars Wish Theologians Knew (with forward by Hans Boersma), by Scot McKnight. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021, xii + 161, \$20.00, paper.

InterVarsity Press, Hans Boersma, and Scot McKnight should all be congratulated on this two-volume publication project, both in its conception and in its execution. Each author is well-credentialed in his respective field: Boersma has taught at Regent College and at (his current institution) Nashotah House Theological Seminary, has written several scholarly volumes, and is ordained in the Anglican Church in North America. McKnight has taught at North Park University, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, and has written about fifty scholarly books. He is also ordained in the Anglican Church in North America, which nicely prevents inter-denominational squabbles from marring the project.

The publisher wisely decided not to assign particular questions or topics for each author to address but left it to the two authors to address the matter of what their own discipline wished for the practitioners of the other discipline. Note, then, that each author had his own wish-list of five matters, none of which I will attempt to unpack in this review (other than one brief explanation), encouraging readers either to hear the authors in their own voice or not at all:

Boersma

1. No Christ, No Scripture
2. No Plato, No Scripture
3. No Providence, No Scripture
4. No Church, No Scripture
5. No Heaven, No Scripture

McKnight

1. Theology Needs a Constant Return to Scripture
2. Theology Needs to Know its Impact on Biblical Studies
3. Theology Needs Historically Shaped Biblical Studies
4. Theology Needs More Narrative
5. Theology Needs to Be Lived Theology

Note, then, that InterVarsity permitted each author the freedom to address the matter on his own terms. This makes the project far more interesting and engaging than it would have been had the publisher assigned topics as a debate panel might do at a university forensics competition. Readers will quickly recognize that the concerns of the two authors are sincere, heartfelt, and of an enduring nature. Though each author wrote the forward to the other author's volume, this was the closest the project ever got to a debate. Neither author abused this privilege; each addressed the other thoughtfully and charitably.

Among the virtues of this two-volume project is the bibliographical material. Each volume has a nine-page (small font) bibliography in the back to direct readers into a fuller discussion of the general issues or into a fuller understanding of the authors cited throughout the two volumes. An interested pastor, elder, or deacon might wisely consult these bibliographies before planning one's vacation reading.

Exemplars Not Representatives

The two authors are *exemplars* of their respective disciplines but not necessarily *representatives* of their respective disciplines. Their credentials in their respective fields are typical of others in those respective fields; each has taught (at the graduate level) in his field, published in his field, and each is an ordained churchman. Each, therefore, is a solid exemplar of the discipline in which each labors. However, neither is necessarily *representative* of his respective discipline; if the publishers had polled twenty other theologians and twenty other biblical scholars, it might be that none of the twenty in each case would have an identical list of "five things" he wished. I would guess, however, that a significant majority would, at a minimum, have profound sympathies with each list. Wise readers of these volumes might find it helpful to make this distinction between exemplar and representative.

Means and Ends

Each author recognizes his own discipline (and that of the other) to be a means to a greater end of knowing God, a recognition that is appropriately pious without being pietistic. Each laments that neither discipline—especially in its academic form—has recognized its instrumental role adequately. Their respective recommendations and observations about how scholarship could and should better serve the interests of genuine devotion to Christ and his church were and are especially noteworthy. This regard for Christian faith and life, and for the health of the Christian church, would probably not have been true had some other representatives of each respective discipline been selected; InterVarsity wisely selected two credentialed academics whose writings pulsate with vital Christian faith.

"Christian Platonism"

One matter (the only specific one I will address more than summarily in this review) that arises in this two-volume project, that might not have arisen had other authors been chosen, is the matter of "Christian Platonism," the second of Boersma's five "wishes" and perhaps the only one expressly mentioned in McKnight's forward to Boersma's book. To

put it mildly, not every systematic theologian would elect to identify himself as a proponent of “Christian Platonism,” and Boersma does not do so without important caveats and qualifications. Permit an extended quotation:

Christians should not treat Plato as a sheer villain, because a proper reading of Scripture depends in part on the traditional mode of reading it, which we may fairly label “Christian Platonist.” . . . On my understanding, a Christian metaphysic is theological in character: we dare not impose the pagan philosophy of Plato (or of anyone else) on Holy Scripture. Christian metaphysics must take its starting point in the Christian confession of Christ as the incarnate Lord. Still, it is true that the early church typically read Scripture through the metaphysical lens of Christian Platonism, and I will argue that this approach safeguards rather than hampers biblical teaching. *The second thing that I, as a theologian, wish biblical scholars knew is that the Bible cannot be interpreted without prior metaphysical commitments and that we need Christian Platonism as an interpretive lens in order to uphold Scripture’s teaching.* (39–40, emphasis and parenthesis Boersma’s, and the emphasis appears in each chapter as the definition of each of his five wishes.)

Note three things here: First, Boersma places the expression “Christian Platonist” in quotation marks. Critics of this viewpoint often overlook that some of its protagonists appear to be quite conscious of the fact that the expression is intentionally oxymoronic. Boersma expressly warns that “we dare not” impose Plato’s pagan philosophy on the Scriptures. A Christian metaphysic is not identical (of course) with any pagan or polytheistic metaphysic; rather, Boersma argues that the two metaphysics share some assumptions about the natural order, a super-natural order, and language. Second, Boersma affirms, with many philosophers and theologians, that “the Bible cannot be interpreted without prior metaphysical commitments.” Third, he affirms that “we need Christian Platonism as an interpretive lens” and that the early church did so read Scripture. This third matter is the one where Boersma is more likely to encounter skeptics:

- regarding the necessity of “Christian Platonism” (even *if* qualified), and
- regarding whether the early church *did* adopt such Platonism, and
- regarding *whether* the early church’s assumptions would be authoritative even if they *were* Platonic in some senses.

Some readers will likely underestimate Boersma’s qualifications; others will likely exaggerate them; perhaps a few will find that they satisfy the Rev. Goldilocks’s criterion of “just right.”

Historical-Critical v. Grammatico-Historical

Criticisms by both authors of the weaknesses of biblical scholarship often refer to the historical-critical method but not to the grammatico-historical method. Nearly all scholars who have a high view of Scripture have recognized the severe limitations of the historical-critical method since its seventeenth century emergence; indeed, since Brevard Child’s seminal work on canonical criticism, even scholars with a *low* view of Scripture have

tended to recognize the limitations of the historical-critical method. The grammatico-historical method, by self-conscious contrast, has ordinarily been practiced, developed, and propagated by those who recognize divine inspiration and the methodological consequences thereof. To my knowledge, neither author expressly acknowledged the grammatico-historical method as an alternative to historical-critical methodology on the one hand, or an a-historical, proof-texting methodology on the other (though perhaps Boersma refers to the grammatico-historical method by denoting it as the “*sola scriptura*” approach, and perhaps McKnight does so implicitly by promoting what he calls “prima scriptura”). Perhaps each author just assumed knowledge of this alternative on the part of their readership, but I regard it as a mild defect in a two-volume project such as this that neither author expressed a “wish” for the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. Boersma, more so than McKnight, is willing to resurrect some aspects of the *sensus plenior* method of the early church’s allegorical exegesis (20–38), though with some qualifications. I believe this aspect of both books (rejecting historical-critical methodology but no clear commitment to grammatico-historical methodology) has been addressed more ably in several of Vern S. Poythress’s works:

- *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (P&R, 1995).
- *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (P&R, 1999).
- “Edmund P. Clowney’s Triangle of Typology in *Preaching and Biblical Theology*,” *Unio cum Christo* 7/2 (Oct. 2021): 231–238.

Poythress’s pertinent writings have always been sensitive to the proper limitations of “authorial intent,” which he has deftly addressed by recognizing dual-authorship (divine and human) of Scripture, thereby evading “the intentional fallacy” by acknowledging, methodologically, both authors of Scripture.

Inter-disciplinary Conversations in the Body of Christ

Inter-disciplinary conversations should be welcomed, though not canonized. In one sense, each of the theological disciplines is still a way of “doing theology.” Whether systematic theology, biblical theology, exegetical theology, practical theology, polemical theology, historical theology, missionary theology, apologetic theology; all theologies attempt to think God’s thoughts after Him, and they do it in varying ways for varying purposes. Whenever the various sub-theologies (if we may call them that) are conversing with one another, iron will likely sharpen iron. Armed with a robust understanding of differing gifts in the body of Christ, these various sub-theologies may devote themselves fully to their respective tasks, while welcoming the contributions and insights of others. All human knowledge is partial (and not just in the eschatological sense of 1 Corinthians 13:12); so it is not a fault of any discipline that it is not doing what other disciplines do. Conversations such as these perhaps even contribute to the “hermeneutical circle” becoming a “hermeneutical spiral,” in which each discipline leaves its own well-worn path temporarily in order to return to it more wisely.

Discussions such as those contained in these two volumes have the helpful effect of relativizing the respective enterprises of each discipline. Exposure to other disciplines that have equally-devoted practitioners and equally-erudite conversations may have the

desirable result of deflating our respective disciplines' egos. Recognizing our substantial ignorance of how other disciplines function may relativize not only our own discipline's knowledge but our personal knowledge as well. Recognizing our own (disciplinary or personal) fallibility need not injure our confidence in the infallibility of Scripture; as David Wells often reminded us, one can believe in biblical inerrancy without affirming one's own inerrancy. Indeed, scriptural infallibility shines brighter when contrasted with all human fallibility.

The complexity of hermeneutical and/or epistemological discussion reminds us that human communication itself (and the language/s we craft to facilitate knowing and communicating) is, like love, a "many-splendored" thing. Knowing is one thing; justifying knowledge is another thing altogether. My first Ph. D. dissertation proposal was to evaluate post-Bultmannian hermeneutics. My doctoral advisor, the late Paul Achtemeier, had written *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Westminster, 1969), so he was competent to direct the project. In my six months of provisional exploration (by reading Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, and their interpreters), I was almost eager for the proposal to be rejected by the department, as it eventually was, so I then pursued the comparatively easy matter of Paul's understanding of the Law (Biblical scholars may appreciate the irony of that last clause). Reading the concerns that these two individuals have about each other's respective discipline has the salutary effect of reminding us that there is a certain amount of mystery that surrounds every human effort to understand other humans or God himself.

Neither of these volumes is easy to read and should not be tackled without finding a decent amount of uninterrupted quiet. The difficulty is not due to either author's inability; the difficulty is due to the complexity of the matter of doing theology itself (in any of the various disciplines). Each author exposes failed assumptions and methods both within his own discipline and in other disciplines; in the process, they disabuse the reader of any hope for easy answers within disciplines or across them. But, after all, we are finite beings attempting to understand the Infinite God, and we are unholy beings striving to understand the Holy God, whose ways are inscrutable, who hides himself, and whose proper glory is, in part, to conceal things (Rom. 11:33; Isa. 45:15; Prov. 25:2).

My Advice to Potential Readers

I rarely give advice when writing book reviews; this may be the only time I have done so. But the following three things either helped me by doing them, or would have helped me if I had done them, so I pass the three along to potential readers.

First, read both volumes or neither volume (and read them both with few interruptions in between). InterVarsity planned this as a two-part project, and the authors participated in it as such; to remove one part or the other is to miss part of the intended affect. Each volume is reasonably brief; the two together are just under 300 pages, so the potential reader should consider this as a 300-page read in two parts, not as two 150-page reads. For this reason, I also add the above qualifier that, if possible, they be read with few interruptions or disruptions between them. I found that the juxtaposition of the two was part of the benefit of the project; to separate them by a month or more would be like separating the first movement of a symphony from the second for a similar time.

Second, read them in reverse order of your present competence. Most churchmen—whether academics or not—have certain interests and competences that differ. One immerses himself in church history, another in biblical studies, yet another in systematic theology. I chose this method myself and benefited from reading the theologian before the biblical scholar; Boersma welcomed me into his conversational world, as it were, before McKnight continued a conversation in our shared world of biblical studies. I felt much more at home in McKnight's world, of course, but benefited profoundly by adjusting my hearing to attune itself to Boersma's *patois*.

Third, ask what you can learn from each, rather than “who won?” Before I attended college, my uncle said, “David, when you arrive at college, learn as much as you can from every professor. Of course, you will like some more than others and find some easier to follow than others, but each knows a good deal more than you know, and you should make it your aim to glean as much as you can from each.” It was great advice (and literally avuncular!), and it would be good advice here. InterVarsity intentionally conceived this project to be an honest expression of wishes, not a debate; readers who attempt to make the project do something other than what it was intended to do will glean far less than will readers who let it do what it was designed to do.

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ServantReading

Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government, *by Guy Prentiss Waters*

by Ryan M. McGraw

Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government, by Guy Prentiss Waters. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2022, 100 pages, \$8.99, paper.

Church government has been a divisive issue among Protestants since the Reformation. For this reason, few authors, and even fewer publishers, are willing to tackle the subject in our modern world. Although church government affects the well-being of the church without striking at the heart of its being, the Bible still has something to say about the subject, and so should we for this reason. Guy Waters, as a convinced Presbyterian, illustrates in these pages why Presbyterian government is rooted in Scripture and how Christ designed this form of government for the benefit of his people. This is an easy-to-read and a useful introduction to this subject that readers will find edifying, even if they do not agree with all of his conclusions.

Reducing the biblical principles of Presbyterianism to five points in chapters 2–3, Waters addresses the church, its members, offices, courts, and ordination. Of course, this material answers the arguments of the first chapter for the relative importance of church government. Relative because church government relates to the well-being or health rather than the being or foundation of the church. Chapter 5 helpfully answers a range of questions arising in relation to church membership and church government. Concluding the work with three points of application, chapter 5 urges believers to think biblically, to choose self-denying love, and to be thankful to God and joyful in the church (85–8). The recommended reading list, following the conclusion, usefully introduces readers to material that can help them press further in exploring church government.

In terms of content, Water's treatment in chapter 2 of what the church is and why church membership is biblical should be points that all churches have in common. Divergences among churches occur primarily in relation to his last three points of Presbyterianism in chapter 3. He argues that Christ has appointed elders, divided into two classes, alone to govern the church, with deacons serving over believer's physical concerns. Some Presbyterians have described this classification as two offices, with a distinction regarding Word and sacrament within the office of elder, and some as three offices, consisting of ministers, elders, and deacons (45). The common point between these models is that ministers and elders alone govern the church locally, regionally, and ecumenically through doctrine, order, and discipline (51–6). Fifth, and finally, officers in Presbyterian churches, and in Scripture, are elected by church members and ordained by elders through the laying on of hands (58–61). By contrast, Episcopal churches of various

forms commit government into the hands of bishops in place of presbyters (elders), especially on the regional and ecumenical levels, while Congregational churches make church government terminate at the local level, whether elders or whole congregations govern such congregations. This presentation of Presbyterianism is biblically grounded, easy to follow, and punctuated by useful application to the church as a whole.

A few clarifying points are in order in relation to Appendix 2 by Bartel Elshout, who further illustrates what Presbyterianism is. Elshout augments Waters's material by adding that "two distinct models of Reformed church polity" emerged from the principle of Scripture alone: Presbyterianism and the Church Order of Dort. Both models stress Christ's headship, Scripture alone, rule by elders, and a federal relationship with other churches (94–5). He adds that they differ in the number of officers, in assigning rule to deacons as well as to elders (96, 98), in setting terms for service for elders and deacons (96; not for ministers!), in the autonomy of local congregations (97), in whether the term "church" extends to regional and ecumenical bodies as "permanent assemblies" of the church (98–9), and in the idea that church discipline can be "initiated and administered" only in local churches (99).

Readers should note, however, that many Presbyterian churches distinguish the offices of minister and elder, resulting in three offices, and that some implement terms for officers. This author questions whether setting term limits for elders and not for ministers can retain true parity of office. The main differences between Presbyterianism and Dutch polity, however, lie in their views of deacons being part of the church's governing body and in whether the term church applies beyond the local congregation. Deacons do not share in church government with the elders in Scripture, which is why elders must be "apt to teach," while deacons do not have this requirement (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). Elders are apt to teach because they must apply the keys of the kingdom in church government and discipline, while the deacons exercise authority over the church's temporal affairs (Acts 6). In this respect, Elshout is not quite right in saying that "both models are presbyterian" in that they recognize government by elders (94). Presbyterianism has always recognized that the elders govern the church exclusively and that "church" in Scripture includes local churches, regional churches, and the whole church, united in exercising elder government at its various levels. The Church Order of Dort, from which most Dutch churches draw, is more akin to English Congregationalism than it is to Presbyterianism, due to its refusal to apply the term "church" to synods and councils. This may have resulted from the number of Congregational Puritan refugees in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In any case, Dutch polity differed from other continental forms of church polity, such as in seventeenth century France and Geneva (via Francis Turretin, for example), which remained distinctively Presbyterian. In Congregationalism the church terminates at the local level, while in Presbyterianism elders govern the church in its regional and ecumenical forms as well.

Though the excellent features of Waters's book are hard to overstate, one additional thing that is worthy of note in relation to Appendix 1 is the content of the PCA's membership vows (91–2). While officers in Presbyterian denominations subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, the only "creed" required of members is their membership vows. Such vows express one's faith in Christ, rooted in the fundamental ideas of Christianity. In this light, it is unfortunate that these vows include

nothing explicit about the Trinity and the incarnation, as do vows in churches like the OPC, the URC, and in many Baptist congregations. This is a sad omission, since the Trinity and Christ's incarnation have always been the bedrock of biblical Christianity from the time of the Apostles, through the early church and Middle Ages, and into the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. Knowing the one Triune God through the one Mediator between God and man are the most essential components of the Christian faith, without which everything else we believe stands on thin air. Such a confession of the Trinity and the incarnation undergirded Paul's summaries of the gospel in passages like 1 Timothy 3:16, and we would do well to retain and cherish it. The church today desperately needs to recover the Trinity and the person and work of Christ as the bedrock of biblically grounded faith and life. Though it may be controversial to say so, I believe that the PCA vows are defective in promoting a distinctively Christian confession that reflects the confession of both the Scriptures and of the church in every age. The point here is to challenge all churches to dig deeper into these key foundations as they lead people into church membership.

Whether or not readers agree with everything that Guy Waters teaches in these pages, all believers will likely find elements that they resonate with. It is important to wrestle with the Bible's own teaching on church government as we seek to learn at Christ's feet as he governs and shepherds us through his church. We should be grateful that Reformation Heritage Books was willing to publish a book on church government, helping promote the well-being of the church today. Though such books should never mark the lines between true and false churches, they represent attempts to teach the whole counsel of God in Scripture faithfully. There is likely none better than Guy Waters to take up this task with winsome charity, writing clearly with the health of the church in view.

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ServantReading

The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis *by Jason M. Baxter*

by William Edgar

The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis: How Great Books Shaped a Great Mind, by Jason M. Baxter. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Academic, 2022, 166 pages, \$22.00, paper.

We do not realize how infected we are by the Enlightenment worldview until we are confronted with something so alienated from it; we either recoil or become, perhaps, over fascinated by its counter-cultural offerings.

You may have thought everything possible had been written about C. S. Lewis. But there is still more in the till. Baxter's unique study shows how Lewis rejected modern positivism in favor of a more ancient mentality. There are three Lewises: the Christian apologist (think of *Mere Christianity* or *Miracles*), the mythmaker (think of his fantasies), and Lewis the medievalist. This third Lewis is the least well-known and yet arguably the most important. He spent most of his working hours studying ancient texts and etymologies. His interests ranged from relatively well-known authors to obscure ones: Boethius to Macrobius to Chrétien de Troyes, Calcidius, Milton, and especially Dante.

Lewis was a conservative, but not in a cranky way. He was nostalgic, but not in a naïve way. If you have read the masterful *An Experiment in Criticism* or *The Abolition of Man*, you will encounter a man with a special burden to combat modern subjectivism with a sense that art objects have intrinsic value and are not primarily conduits for human feelings. Lewis's worldview centers on one notion: the universe reveals a very real *numinous*. This expression is not from Kant but from Rudolf Otto, the great German theologian who wrote on *The Idea of the Holy*, a text which claims that all people are longing for the *mysterium tremendum*. Although shrouded in mystery, the *numinous* is not inaccessible but simply inexhaustible.

For Lewis this means a given text or a work of art ought to be valued for itself and not for its capacity to incite a feeling, or even a particular message. The art object belongs to a world in which the supernatural (an expression Lewis did not care for) transpires into our world. For Lewis "the medieval universe was not just a system of exploded scientific beliefs, but the natural icon of transposition" (22). This may surprise certain contemporary readers who find in his fantasies a not-so-subtle pedagogical statement of a message. As curious as it may sound to us, he thought of his writings, including the fantasies, as explorations into language and, of course, other worlds, but not sermons. In a memorable statement, he declared that Christian authors ought to have blood in their veins, not ink.

One of many illustrations of this principle is the medieval cathedral. A somewhat obscure observer from the fourteenth century, Jean de Jandin, wrote that Notre Dame Cathedral was "terrible," meaning that it inspired wonder and awe. Its architecture is "saturated," meaning that it is pregnant with beauty and significance (33). Abbot Suger,

who is credited with the creation of the Gothic style, wrote of the sensory overload of the elements of his buildings, their diversity centering in the unity of a divine encounter (34).

Baxter's book indeed resembles the cathedral (the mobile comes to mind), with its many components united in the service of one basic theme: the defense of a worldview fated to disappear. What has replaced it is mechanization. Curiously (perhaps), Lewis despised the newspaper and the automobile. These represented efficiency, quantification, and all the idols of modernity. In ways reminiscent of Jacques Ellul, Lewis eschewed the idol of efficacy. The so-called scientific revolution introduced a new period of ignorance (63). Science is an "evil enchantment" covering up the wonder of the world (69–85). Like Wendell Berry, Lewis believed the heart of the battle was in language (70).

Does his view make Lewis a Luddite? Not really, for he accepted the reality of living in our world. Yet he lived in constant tension with its pretensions. Like his friend J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis saw the world as a sacrament. But it was not an unidentifiable mess. We do not need to be over-fascinated by the anti-Enlightenment view to perceive its limits.

As a Huguenot Protestant, I flinch at parts of this view. Lewis was an Anglican, which he recognized as part of the Protestant heritage. Yet, I must take seriously the objections to Lewis held by the greatest apologist of the twentieth century, the fiercely Protestant Cornelius Van Til. Van Til has written persuasively that Lewis is weak on the sovereignty of God and the sinfulness of man.¹ He compares him to Thomas Aquinas, with his frail view of divine election. I tremble to suggest this, but I believe Van Til has missed something of the genius of C. S. Lewis. He has missed Lewis's critique of modernity. Further, is there nothing in common between Lewis's sacramentalism and Van Til's doctrine of analogy? Is there nothing in common between Otto's *mysterium tremendum* and Van Til's insistence on the incomprehensibility of God? I offer these as items for discussion.

Baxter has articulately presented one of the greatest intellectuals of the twentieth century at his scholarly best. Lewis's rejection of the modern paideia and his articulation of an alternate view are deeply edifying and even moving. Such a book leads us to put into question our unthinking allegiance to the Enlightenment vision. But it does far more: it opens our eyes to sense the presence of the Lord in unsuspecting places.

Two minor quibbles: (1) The subtitle is not quite right. It is not so much "great books" as medieval texts that shaped Lewis's mind. Certainly a few of the other classics are mentioned, but this is a volume about Lewis's encounters with the medieval mind, not great books. (2) The cover. I hesitate to do this. But why cannot Christians accept a degree of abstraction? The picture is a young man sitting in a chair, reading a book, with scores of books "raining" on him from above. Some are suspended on vines. Two great lions are pictured in the lower corners. Sorry, but it doesn't work. It comes across as a piece of pedagogical literalism the artist feels needs to be depicted, and then ornamented. Just the opposite of C. S. Lewis's aesthetics.

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¹ See [<https://presupp101.wordpress.com/2012/08/23/the-theology-of-c-s-lewis-by-cornelius-van-til/>].

ServantPoetry

Mark Green (1957–)

Daniel's Hope

Daniel 3

Another one whose name I do not know
Another one whose name remains unnamed
Another one who did not have to go

Amidst the fires of passion I've inflamed,
That other one will feel injustice burn,
That other one will stand, and unashamed

To be with me, will quiet my concern
About the words that others shout enraged,
To have me killed so I'm unable to

Play my part upon an obscure stage
Where other men before me did not dare
Complain against this genocidal age.

When all of life seems furiously unfair
Another one will stand beside me there.

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