



Remembering
G. I. Williamson

Ordained Servant

December 2023

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: REMEMBERING G. I. WILLIAMSON

December 2023

From the Editor

'Tis the season to think about Christmas. My essay “Elf on the Shelf or Christ on the Cross” is such a meditation. We hear enough jeremiads against commercialism. As a child in a liberal Congregational church, we took up the banner of “Keep the Christ in Christmas” not realizing that the X in “Xmas” is the Koine Greek letter abbreviation for Christ. The Puritans and Pilgrims wanted nothing to do with Christmas, considering it both Papish and Pagan. The ancient church considered celebrating the incarnation a powerful alternative to the Pagan celebration of the winter solstice. I have sympathy with each the Puritans and Pilgrims, but since Christmas is part of American culture, it seems prudent to think about the incarnation and the alternative reasons people celebrate during this season. Our church is not dictating this (which was one of the main Puritan objections); nor do we have a church calendar. It is merely a matter of wisdom and an opportunity for the gospel. It is my contention that Santa Claus and the Elf on the Shelf send the wrong message.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of G. I. Williamson and his ministry. Many of us owe a debt of gratitude to him for his salutary influence on our lives and ministries. I first encountered G. I. at Covenant College through his commentary on the Westminster Confession. Later on I got to know him when he came regularly to the annual conference in Franklin Square. During those visits he often preached in Westchester OPC. Then, of course, I had the honor of being his successor as editor of *Ordained Servant* in 2006. He was a stalwart, and thus my first editorial, “Galvanized Iron,” alluded to the old nickname for U. S. Army soldiers. He was a soldier of the cross.

So, in honor of G. I. James Gidley presents “G. I. Williamson: Encounters with the Life of a Faithful Servant of God,” along with Archibald Allison “G. I. Williamson’s Farewell Sermon.”

As I mentioned in the August-September editor’s introduction,

When I left seminary (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1979), I was a fan of what is known as the Majority Greek Text (and earlier in 1611 the Textus Receptus or the Received Text), which underlies the King James Version and the New King James Version. After several years of sermon preparation using the third edition (1975) of *The Greek New Testament* of the United Bible Society (UBS 3), I realized that the UBS edition gave me access to a much wider variety of Greek manuscripts than either the Textus Receptus of Erasmus or the Majority Text. Concern with the accuracy of the Greek text is the concern of what is called Lower Criticism, whereas Higher Criticism calls into question the divine authority of the text.

A well respected elder in the OPC, Bruce Stahl, sent a thoughtful article defending the

Majority Text in response to T. David Gordon's article, "Textual Criticism," in the August-September issue. I asked Gordon to respond to Stahl's piece. Gordon is a retired New Testament scholar who taught lower criticism throughout his career. Stahl was grateful and made some revisions, and he is happy for me to publish his article, "The Case for the Majority Greek New Testament Text," with Gordon's response, "The Case for the Eclectic Greek New Testament Text," in this month's *Servant Exchange*.

It has also come to my attention that some churches use the New King James Version (NKJV), based on what I believe is the mistaken idea that it is based on a more accurate Greek text. After years of using the NKJV in my preaching and in the pew (from the mid-eighties to 2006), when the Committee on Christian Education and our Sunday School publisher Great Commission Publications decided to use the newly published English Standard Version (ESV) for all their publications (2006), our church changed to the ESV. It would seem wise to use the translation that our denomination and Sunday School publisher use, especially when it comes to memory work. I believe that the ESV is based on a sound Greek text and translated by faithful Greek scholars.

It would be remiss of any Reformed publication to forget an important one hundredth anniversary of one of the most important popular theological books of the twentieth century. Justin McLendon demonstrates the relevance of Machen's work today in "Theological Daylighting: Retrieving J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*." Kudos to *World Magazine* for its cover story on Machen's eye-opening 1923 book.

"The Trumpeter of God, Fulfill Your Office" is the ninth chapter of *The Voice of the Good Shepherd*. In it I focus on the importance of defining the role of the minister of the Word according to Scripture, not culture, and centering that role on the task of preaching.

An Older Elder presents his final (No. 10) letter to a Younger Ruling Elder, "Be a Presbyterian." His advice in this letter demonstrates the Presbyterian churchmanship of the older elder. This series is worthy of every elder's and session's consideration. This would seem a good precedent for another series by an older deacon and one by an older minister—any volunteers? Meanwhile, don't forget the Ruling Elder and Reformed Deacon podcasts, accessible on our OPC website.

David VanDrunen reviews *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction*, by Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, contending that its focus on Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck is narrower than the movement known by that name. "This is not really a book about neo-Calvinism. It is a book about Kuyper and Bavinck, the progenitors of neo-Calvinism." He also asserts that the discussions of theology rarely move beyond the topic of Christianity and culture, despite assertions in the introduction to the contrary.

This month's poem is by Robert Herrick (1591–1674), "An Ode of the Birth of Our Saviour." Educated at Cambridge University, Herrick was mentored by Ben Jonson. Herrick became the pastor of the Anglican church in Devonshire. Literary critic Harold Bloom observes that unlike the Metaphysical poets like John Donne, "Herrick charmingly transmutes his classical models—Horace, Catullus, the Greek Anthology—into a Devonshire pastoral poetry."¹ He was also somewhat unique in publishing his sacred devotional poetry (*Noble Numbers*, 1648) separately from his secular love poetry (*Hesperides*, the golden apples of the sun gathered by Heracles, 1648).

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

¹ Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 157.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES “ORIGINAL LANGUAGES”

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-31.pdf

- “Help in Using the Original Languages in Preaching.” (Jay E. Adams) 3:1 (Jan. 1994): 23.

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 Thoughts

Elf on the Shelf or Christ on the Cross?

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

I sat in the living room near the Christmas tree, back when I was a young. I thought of Santa Claus knowing whether I was naughty or nice. I never received coal in my stocking, but I knew I should have. Therefore, I thought well of Santa, because he overlooked my naughtiness, so it must be OK—but I still knew better. At the time I knew nothing about sin or the gospel.

Christmas has become the classic exemplar of the covenant of works. A cartoon recently showed a little girl standing before Santa Claus asking, “Isn’t there something in between naughty and nice?” The Elf on the Shelf, of recent commercial vintage, has become Santa’s spy, designed to get children to obey their parents. Christ may still be in the word Christmas, but Santa or the Elf have eclipsed him.

Wikipedia describes the Elf’s origin:

The Elf on the Shelf: A Christmas Tradition is a 2005 American picture book for children, written by Carol Aebersold and her daughter Chanda Bell and illustrated by Coë Steinwart. The book tells a Christmas-themed story, written in rhyme, that explains how Santa Claus knows who is naughty and nice. It describes elves visiting children from Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve, after which they return to the North Pole until the next holiday season.¹

The bestselling Elf is not without his critics. Kate Tuttle in her *Atlantic* article “You’re a Creepy One, Elf on the Shelf” calls this “a marketing juggernaut dressed up as a tradition,” whose purpose is “to spy on kids.” She argues that one should not “bully [one’s] child into thinking that good behavior equals gifts.”²

David Kyle Johnston in *Psychology Today* calls it a “dangerous parental crutch,” commensurate with what he terms the “Santa lie.” Children are taught that “The elf is actually alive and moves around when you’re not looking. He’s watching you and you never know where he will turn up next. And if he sees you doing something wrong he reports directly back to Santa.”³ Johnston is most concerned about the perception by children that if there is no Santa or Elf, it will undermine trust in parents and raise doubts about what they teach about God.

Remember the lyrics to “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town”:

¹ Wikipedia’s “The Elf on the Shelf” entry, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Elf_on_the_Shelf, accessed November 19, 2023.

² Cited in “The Elf on the Shelf,” Wikipedia.

³ David Kyle Johnston, “Let’s Bench the Elf on the Shelf,” *Psychology Today* (December 19, 2012).

You better watch out
You better not cry
Better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is comin' to town, gather 'round

He's making a list
And checking it twice;
He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice
Santa Claus is comin' to town

He sees you when you're sleeping
He knows when you're awake
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake!

This is not good news for sinners, especially little ones.

More than this, Santa and the Elf undermine two important attributes of God: his omniscience and his mercy. The Devil will do everything in his power to undermine the sovereign holiness of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ, the free and sovereign grace that saves us from sin and death. He uses what is apparently good to do so. That guilt will make kids be nice and kind. It leaves them with hopeless hypocrisy.

Our God is omniscient, Santa is a fictional imitation: “He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?” (Ps. 94:9). “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). The guilt this brings is what makes the gospel so glorious. In the incarnation we celebrate

the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Tit. 2:13–14)

We perform good works, not out of guilt, but as a response to the forgiveness of God based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ and his guilt defeating sacrifice. What a message for the Christmas season! The cross alone engenders true kindness and giving. This is the covenant of grace.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I 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.
(Phil. 3:8–11)

While I am not a fan of the Elf, neither am I a fan of the Grinch. Each Christian has the liberty to celebrate Christmas or not. The way I have found most compatible with my Christianity is to enjoy the festivity, during the cold and dark season, with family and friends. I seek to make opportunities to discuss, and for me as a minister, to preach about the incarnation. I also read “The Night before Christmas,” not as the truth, but as a delightful poem. The fictional gift giver is not Santa Clause, but St. Nicholas. He was the Greek bishop of Myra (now Turkey), who obeyed Jesus’s words to “sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21). Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God. He became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships. This is the fruit of the cross, the cross of Christ instead of the Elf on the Shelf.

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Servant Word

G. I. Williamson: Encounters with the Life of a Faithful Servant of God

By James S. Gidley

I first met G. I. Williamson in the Logos Bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I think it was 1976 or 1977. The store was in an old house just a short walk south of Harvard Square, on the street leading to the Lars Anderson Bridge. Things change. The bridge is now the Anderson Memorial Bridge. The street is now John F. Kennedy Street;¹ I cannot recall what it was named then. And the store is not visible on Google maps; it's probably long gone.

G. I. was not present in the flesh but in spirit. I was among a small minority of evangelical students at Harvard, and I was moving towards an even smaller minority by becoming a Calvinist. At least one person at the store was sympathetic to Calvinism, and he recommended G. I. Williamson's *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. Published in 1964 by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, it was a paperback volume with a plain blue cover. I have since obtained a copy of the second edition, published in 2004. P&R at least had the decency to provide it with a glossy cover sporting an architect's rendering of Westminster Abbey.²

But the old plain-blue-covered edition had a delicious sense of subversiveness about it. It was so obviously not a slick production of a major publishing house. The type resembled the output of a typewriter. If only it were mimeographed and collected as loose pages in a plain Manilla envelope, the impression would have been complete that this was a publication the authorities would gladly have suppressed.

G. I. made a powerful impression on me. He engaged theological questions like Valiant for Truth in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He could roar like a lion at great powers like the Roman Catholic Church. For example, he puts Rome and the Jehovah's Witnesses together in their insistence that authoritative interpreters—themselves—are needed to understand the Bible: "Rome and the Jehovah's Witnesses sect agree in their basic attitude toward the Word of God. The psalmist said, 'Your word is a lamp . . . and a light' (Ps. 119:105). But Rome and other false religions call that light 'darkness.'"³

G. I. not only grounded me in the doctrines of the Reformed Faith. He also contributed to my growing desire to unite with a church that held to the Westminster

¹ Google maps, accessed October 30, 2023.

² The Londonist, "Will Westminster Abbey Ever Get Its Spire?" <https://londonist.com/london/history/will-westminster-abbey-ever-get-its-spire>, accessed October 30, 2023.

³ G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 25. G.I. was not exaggerating; he had just quoted from *The Watchtower*, the principal periodical of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in which it was stated that one who studies the Bible alone, without Jehovah's Witnesses study guides, "goes into darkness."

Standards. This eventually led to my joining the RPCNA congregation in Cambridge. When I graduated, married, and moved to Morgantown, West Virginia, my wife Betsy and I joined the OPC mission work there, which is now Reformation OPC.

At the time, I did not know much of G. I.'s life story. The bare outline is told on his Wikipedia page⁴ and on his own webpage.⁵ He was born on May 19, 1925. A member of the “greatest generation,” he served in the Army in World War II. I never heard him speak about his military service, but I did hear him speak about his love for playing his clarinet or saxophone. It was the “big band” era, and he particularly enjoyed playing together with others in the saxophone or clarinet section. He was converted at age 21, went to Hope College and Drake University, and attended Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, from which he received a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1952.

My life was eventually to intersect with G. I.'s, but I have come close to his path at both the beginning of my life and now as I draw near to its end. I have been living in western Pennsylvania for over 33 years, not far from where G. I. went to seminary, and not far from where he first began to minister as a seminary student. G. I. wrote the following account of his encounter with Miss Margaret I. Duff at the United Presbyterian Church in New Bedford, Pennsylvania:

I was serving as a student pastor there and have a vivid memory of Margaret who was then attending the New Bedford UP Church because she was there to help care for an aging aunt and uncle. I was then in the last year and a half of my time as a student of theology at the Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. I attended classes and stayed at the seminary from Tuesday through Friday, and then taught a youth club on Saturday, preaching twice on Sunday. By that time in my study I was struggling with the effects of a lack of unity in doctrine among the professors there. I'm sure this must have been evident to Margaret, because she bluntly asked me one day if I would mind if she gave me written criticism of my preaching. Somehow God enabled me to say “Sure, I'd appreciate it.” And she began to do this. She evidently felt that I might have a promising future with some better influences. I also remember that she gave me a few books by Machen and other Westminster Seminary men. Those proved to be life-changing, along with the discovery of a proof-text edition of the original Doctrinal Standards of the UPCNA (the Westminster Confession, Catechisms and Testimony of 1858). I did challenge her to become a member of the New Bedford UPCNA, because I soon came to the conviction that the UPCNA was in need of doctrinal recovery, and I felt that her considerable influence would be enhanced further if she were also a member. Not long after these positive developments in the direction of my life, I was ordained at the Westminster United Presbyterian Church in Des Moines, Iowa where my parents (who both came from a UPCNA beginning in Pawnee City, NE), were members. And soon after that I received a call from the UPCNA in Fall River, Mass.⁶

⁴ G. I. Williamson, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._I._Williamson, accessed November 2, 2023.

⁵ https://web.archive.org/web/20180928121741/http://www.nethtc.net/~giwopc/My_Web_Site/Home_Page.html, accessed November 2, 2023.

⁶ G. I. Williamson, email to Mrs. Margaret (Peggy) Graham Duff, wife of the Rev. Donald J. Duff, nephew of the Margaret Duff mentioned by G. I. I have silently corrected several typos and grammatical lapses in G. I.'s text. A shorter selection from the same text appears in Margaret Graham Duff, “Margaret I. Duff: A Life of Sacrifice and Prayer,” in *Choosing the Good Portion: Women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, eds. Patricia E. Clawson and Diane L. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2016), 139–46.

Margaret Duff played a similar role in G.I.'s life to that of Pietje Balthus in the life of Abraham Kuyper.⁷ Each woman was unmarried, and each was well schooled in the Reformed faith. Their living faith impressed and influenced the men who for a time pastored them. The fruit of their faithfulness was greatly multiplied in the lives of the men for whom they played the role of Priscilla to Apollos.

I have felt a kinship to G. I. because of his brief pastorate in Fall River, Massachusetts. It was there that he developed the lessons that became *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. Fall River is about twenty miles from my boyhood home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. I was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, around the time when he was pastoring in Fall River.

While I was settling down in Morgantown, West Virginia, in the early '80s, G. I. was ministering in a congregation of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand in Silverstream, NZ, his second pastorate in New Zealand, with a pastorate at an RPCNA congregation in the States sandwiched between. He would return to the USA for good in 1984 to become pastor of Bethel OPC in Carson, North Dakota, where he would serve until his retirement in 1993. He always spoke highly of the RCNZ (the "Z" must be pronounced "Zed" in the British style). He believed that the RCNZ had solved the problem of Reformed and Presbyterian ecumenicity by adopting the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism as their doctrinal standards, thus showing in ecclesiastical practice that the same faith was taught in the Presbyterian standards and the continental Reformed standards.

In due time I was ordained as an elder at Reformation OPC in 1985. I met G. I. in the flesh at the 1989 General Assembly at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA. Sort of. At the opening worship service in the Old Main Chapel, I saw someone who looked like he might be G. I. I do not know why I thought so, because I do not think I had ever seen a picture of him. This was the era before internet usage became widespread. There was no Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, and even email was relatively new. At any rate, I must have whispered to someone, "Is that G. I. Williamson?" and was informed that it was so. I did not realize at the time how much I had idolized him. I do not recall now whether I approached him to introduce myself. Probably not—he was too high above my station.

At that Assembly there was a bit of a shake-up in the membership of the Committee on Christian Education. I was nominated to the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training by Charlie Dennison, at that time the historian of the OPC and a well-respected minister. Charlie had gotten to know me because he served on the session of Grace OPC, Sewickley, Pennsylvania, which was the overseeing session of the mission work that became Reformation OPC. I attribute my election to the SMT to the reputation of Charlie Dennison.

At any rate, being elected to the SMT put me in close contact with G. I. Williamson. Very close contact. At my first meeting of the SMT in October 1989, five or six presbyters were crammed into a small meeting room at the old denominational office building at 7401 Old York Road, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. My sitting in that small room with G. I. and the other brothers seemed to be an example of the Peter Principle: I had

⁷ Abraham Kuyper, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Kuyper, accessed November 3, 2023.

risen to the level of my incompetence. Whether for good or ill, I did not give up but entered into the business as well as I could, still in awe of G. I.

The only person I ever heard address him by any name other than G. I. was Tom Tyson, then the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education, who occasionally addressed him as “Jerry.” Tom used to tell a story about going to one of his professors at Westminster Seminary when he was nearing graduation. He was feeling unsure of his ability to expound the Word to God’s people. The professor attempted to bolster his confidence by saying something like, “You know much more about the Bible than they do.” Tom was less than encouraged.

Tom had gotten to know G. I. when they were both pastors in the RCNZ. As I recall, G.I.’s church did not have an evening service (at least for a time), and G. I. lived near enough to come to Tom’s church and listen to him preach. He gave Tom actual feedback about his preaching. The critique was often painful, but Tom, a humble man, received it and made changes. He said that G. I. had taught him how to preach.

By the time I began serving on the SMT, G. I. was already fired up about helping elders and ministers to serve God more faithfully. He admired the Canadian Reformed Churches for publishing a periodical for their officers, *Diakonia*. It had just begun publication a year or two earlier, and G. I. was chagrined that the OPC had not yet seen fit to do something similar. G. I., elder David Winslow, and I ended up on a subcommittee to consider producing periodic study materials for elders and ministers. This subcommittee eventually recommended that the CCE should publish a periodical, the name of which, *Ordained Servant*, G. I. himself had chosen.

Diakonia was the template for *Ordained Servant*, both in layout and content. G. I. was most concerned to encourage elders to visit the members of the congregation, a well-established practice in the Dutch Reformed churches. He was the natural choice for editor, a post which he filled with distinction from 1992 to 2005.

During these years my sons were growing up, and in due time they were introduced to G. I.’s exposition of the Shorter Catechism, a book (originally in two volumes) that has aided many children—and adults—to grasp the essentials of the Reformed faith. There they encountered Shorty, the stick figure who illustrates a number of points of doctrine. I learned that Shorty had been drawn by Tom Tyson, but I am sure that G. I. was responsible for conceptualizing what Shorty would do.

In the mid-90s some presbyters in the OPC were wondering whether it was time for the OPC to establish a denominational seminary. As I recall, the Rev. Jack Peterson brought that question to the CCE as a newly elected member of the committee. Jack, G. I., and I were appointed to a subcommittee to consider whether a denominational seminary or some other means of assisting with the training of ministers would be feasible and effective.

We realized that to grapple with the issues involved would require a face-to-face meeting, and it was still the pre-Zoom era. Because Jack and G. I. were retired, and their schedules were more flexible, they offered to come to Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, where I was by that time employed at Geneva College. During their visit, Betsy and I entertained G. I. and Jack for dinner; it was the only time that either man was a guest in my house. I felt like we were entertaining royalty.

We met in their room in the Lark Motel, as I recall. We had set the meeting to begin in mid-morning, and when I arrived, Jack and G. I. said that they had decided to pass the time before the meeting by taking a stroll around the Geneva campus. While there, they

had run into the Rev. Robert Johnson,⁸ a minister of another Reformed denomination, who naturally had asked them why they were in town. I asked, “What did you say to him?” I cannot remember whether it was G. I. or Jack who replied, “You never tell Robert anything,” but it was the sentiment of both of them.

The three of us concluded that establishing a denominational seminary would require a substantial initial expenditure as well as a permanent increase in the World Wide Outreach budget. So we recommended establishing an educational program that would offer specific courses at the seminary level to supplement seminary instruction, particularly in areas that we thought existing seminaries were not covering well. This became the Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Among the courses that we knew must be offered was a course on the Westminster Confession of Faith. And the SMT could think of no better instructor than G. I. Williamson. Beginning well into his retirement, he offered the course for about fifteen years and was always in demand.

I learned from G. I., Jack, and other fathers in the faith that the church should not be ruled by committees. We should do our committee work with a consciousness of serving the church. We should recognize that sessions, presbyteries, synods, and assemblies are the divinely ordained means of governing the church, and committees owe their existence to these judicatories. One outworking of this view was bringing major new initiatives to the General Assembly for approval. The 1999 GA approved the establishment of Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC.

In the months leading up to that Assembly, my session and I had been going through a particularly trying time that took a personal toll on me. Even now, I do not think it is appropriate to go into any of the details, except to say that G. I. became aware of the situation. When I met him at the Assembly, he embraced me and spoke some simple words of encouragement. It was an unexpected blessing, a light in a dark time.

G. I. was always a plain-spoken man in committee meetings. He could be counted on to speak up if someone suggested doing something that was not strictly above board. He was also conscious of the people he served in Carson, North Dakota, even as he was making decisions affecting denominational ministries. One year he objected to a proposed increase in expenditures—I think it was for staff salaries—because his flock in North Dakota, who were funding those expenditures through their contributions to World Wide Outreach, were having a tough year and were not getting raises.

It is not that G. I. was always all business. At one meeting, it had been planned that the committee would go out to dinner at Williamson’s Restaurant, which was a modest but formal restaurant in the vicinity of the denominational offices. At the time, Paul MacDonald, an elder from Maine, had been serving for many years as the secretary of the committee. There had been some mix-up about the reservations, and someone made a quip about the possibility that we would have to go somewhere other than G. I.’s restaurant. G. I. said, “That’s ok, as long as we don’t go to Paul’s restaurant.”

I lost regular contact with G.I. after he retired from the CCE in the mid-2000’s, except that I still heard reports of his work editing *Ordained Servant* and teaching for MTIOPC. In his retirement he had moved to Sheldon, Iowa, where he assisted in the establishment of a United Reformed church. I saw him twice more while attending GAs in 2015 and 2021 at Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa, less than twenty miles as the crow flies from Sheldon. He had come over to visit the Assembly. The last time I saw him, he was

⁸ I have changed the name to preserve a reputation and an ecumenical relationship.

physically feeble and was assisted by the Rev. Archie Allison, his protégé. Yet he was still mentally sharp and solicitous about the state of the church.

G. I. entered into the presence of his Savior on April 12, 2023, a month short of his ninety-eighth birthday. His funeral was held on April 18, thirty years to the day after his final sermon at Bethel OPC.⁹ Mr. Chris Campbell, who had profited from G. I.'s ministry there, composed a poem from the words of one of his sermons. It is a fitting epitaph:

“The Coming of the Son of Man”
based on a sermon on Matthew 24:27
by G. I. Williamson

The sun goes down, it gets dark,
And there's not a cloud in the sky.
Then, at eleven or twelve or one o'clock,
The sky fills with light.

Seconds later you hear
The clap of thunder
Because sound doesn't travel
At the speed light does.

There's no warning, no sign:
Just a sudden flash
Over the plain from east to west,
And the sky is brighter
Than you've ever seen it,
Brighter than it ever was.¹⁰

James S. Gidley is a ruling elder in Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, Pennsylvania. He serves as a professor at Geneva College, where he is chairman of the engineering department. He is also a member of the Committee on Christian Education and the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training.

⁹ Chris Campbell, personal communication, May 10, 2023.

¹⁰ Chris Campbell, personal communication, May 10, 2023.

Servant Word

G. I. Williamson's Farewell Sermon

By Archibald A. Allison and G. I. Williamson

When G. I. retired from Bethel OPC in Carson, North Dakota, he preached two farewell sermons on April 18, 1993, his last Lord's Day as pastor. Four members of the congregation present that day were also present thirty years later for G. I.'s funeral service on April 18, 2023, in Sanborn, Iowa. The author was one of those four and had the privilege of speaking on behalf of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church during the funeral service about one of those farewell sermons. Interest in those remarks has encouraged him to present that sermon more extensively here.

In the morning service, after reading Psalm 1 and 2, Revelation 22:8–17, and 1 Corinthians 16:13–24, G.I. preached a sermon on 1 Corinthians 16:22–24, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus,” (NKJV) entitled “Paul's Solemn Salutation.”

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That is a remarkable statement because it brings together two things that seem so utterly in contrast with one another. On the one hand, you see the apostle Paul calling down the curse of God upon anyone who does not love the Lord Jesus, and on the other hand, immediately afterwards calling down the grace of Christ Jesus on all who love him. The problem is to understand why you have this remarkable conjunction. Why does the apostle say these two things in virtually the same breath?

There are many today, including in the Reformed world, who blame it on the fact that Paul was brought up under the Old Testament and his mentality was affected by that imprecatory element in the Old Testament. Psalm 5, which we sang, is a good example of that. Psalm 109:6–13 is another example:

Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, *and* let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. . . . Let his posterity be cut off, *and* in the generation following let their name be blotted out. (NKJV)

Many people say that is just not according to the mind of Christ. Something about that Old Testament revelation clashes with the words of Christ in the New Testament. Did not Jesus say, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:44–45, NKJV)? They say that here Paul lapsed

back into the old ways again, forgot for a moment, and then swiftly corrected himself in the last two verses.

That can be made to sound attractive, but it is nothing less than an attack on the authority of the Word of God. The apostle Paul cannot be dismissed that way. If any among you seems to be spiritual, he says, let him acknowledge that I speak for God. The holy apostles and prophets of God did not say or write anything of their own volition. Those holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Anyone who dares to engage in this kind of criticism is simply storing up wrath for the day of judgment. I say to you that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works (see 2 Tim. 3:16–17). It was Christ himself who said, “I did not come to annul or destroy or abrogate the Law. I came to fulfill it” (Matt. 5:17, G. I.’s translation).

The simple truth is that if we are biblical, we have to hold to both of these things at the same time. So I say to you for the last time, if anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be damned, and I mean it. That is what anathema means—Let him be damned. O Lord, come! I also say to my congregation with all my heart, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and my love be with you all in Christ Jesus.

That is always the way God has spoken to man made in his image. When God first created man and put him in the garden, he commanded him, “You shall not eat of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, for in the day that you eat thereof, dying you shall die” (Gen. 2:17, G. I.’s translation). Right from the beginning of human existence, God set before man two alternatives: fidelity and obedience to the living God and life, and disobedience and turning away from the living God and a death that only gets worse with time. That is what “dying you shall die” means. It does not come all at once, and it keeps getting worse. So there is life or death, blessing or curse. That is the way it has always been.

Moses said the same thing before the children of Israel when he was about ready to lay down his task, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19, NKJV). When his successor, Joshua, was about to die, he said the same thing, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15, NKJV).

The Book of Psalms begins with the same two alternatives, “Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, not stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night” (1:1–2, NKJV). There are two alternatives. One is to stay close to God and have fellowship with him. The other is to turn away from God and delight in the counsel and fellowship of the ungodly.

No one ever made this more clear than our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He said, “Narrow is the way that leads to life, and few find it, but broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many walk therein” (Matt. 7:14, G. I.’s translation). An older member complained about a sermon on hell. What a sad and tragic thing that is because I am no minister of God if I do not warn God’s people about hell! The country is full of preachers who will not do it anymore, but it has to be done because there are two eternal destinies

and one of them is hell. One way you keep people out of hell is to warn them about it. What kind of a pastor would I be to you if I did not warn you? Yet after nine years, an older member complains about hearing the truth about the dark side of God's revelation. That is inexpressibly sad and tragic. Again, I say to you, if anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be damned.

That means love for the Lord Jesus Christ is the criterion of genuine membership in the kingdom of God. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in. If you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, you are not. You are not saved by love. The Bible never says that. It always says, by grace you are saved through faith, not love. Your love is too puny and flimsy to ever save you or anybody else. So is mine. Paul says that you are only saved by faith in Christ, "and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10, NKJV).

If you really have faith in Christ and are saved from eternal damnation by the precious blood of Christ, then you are going to love him. You could not possibly have saving faith and not love Jesus. Therefore, in the Bible, love is the thing that certifies the genuineness of your faith and the reality of your salvation. That is why Christ said, "the first and greatest of all commandments is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Matt. 22:37–38, G. I.'s translation). He said that because it is primary. Love of Jesus Christ and his Father is first priority in the Christian life, but it is only a response to his love.

"We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19 NKJV). The Lord says, I have loved you with an everlasting love. He chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, in love, that we might be holy and without blame before him. That is what Scripture says. In love from all eternity, God chose us to be his. The Bible says, even when we were hell-deserving sinners, he showed his love for us in sending his Son to die for our sins. Jesus showed his love for us in being willing to come and be obedient even to the accursed, terrible death that he died on the cross. He did it even though he knew that we deserve God's wrath and punishment. You cannot possibly believe that, or even understand that, if there is no love in your heart for Jesus.

There were still some members in Corinth that needed to hear these solemn words. They had the second greatest pastor in history and needed to hear these words, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ," let him be damned, and that means damned eternally in hell (1 Cor. 16:22). In Paul's theology, which is God's theology, there must be the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. These words have to be spoken in the church, because for some people Christ is not supreme. Many other things are supreme rather than the Lord Jesus.

One of the most constant is love for relatives. That is why Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and is not willing to hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, NKJV). The twentieth-century church has said, "We do not accept that." Too bad for the twentieth-century church, because anyone who rejects that will end up in hell! How sad! When Jesus's mother, brothers, and sisters came to Jesus, what did he say? He said, "'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And he stretched out his hand toward His disciples and said, 'Behold my mother and brothers! For whosoever will do the will

of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, sister, mother” (Matt. 12:48–50, G. I.’s translation).

If you love your children more than you love God, you do not have it. If you are willing to compromise the claims of Christ for your dad, your mother, your sister, your brother, or any other relative, you do not have it, because the day is coming when there is going to be a great separation. You had better get ready because some of your relatives are going to be on the other side from you, and some of mine also. What is important is to be on the side of the Lord and his family, not our family’s side.

Paul did not make this statement because he was an unloving man. Many people say that today. You would be surprised at the hard things I have heard against the Apostle Paul in forty-one years in the ministry from those who claim to be God’s people. Paul was a loving man. Do you know that he once said, “I would even be willing to be damned myself if it could save my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3, G. I.’s translation). The only other man in history that said something like that was Moses, as far as I know. He did have a condition: if it would be possible, I would do it. I have never reached that level of sanctification, but it does show that he was a loving man. He never manifested that love more faithfully than when he said to his people in Corinth, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be damned” (1 Cor. 16:22, G. I.’s translation).

There is no conflict here at all. You need to understand why there is no conflict. You say both of these things precisely because you love Jesus and you have compassion on people and you do not want them to perish but to have everlasting life. Many years ago I was very sick. I had terrible pains in my side, and I went to the doctor. He said, “You have echovirus. Do not worry about it. It is not much. You will get over it soon.” I was happy, but I got worse. Finally, a nurse in my congregation said, “I know a doctor. You will not like him, but I want you to see him.” I did, and I did not like him because he said things I did not want to hear. One of the things he said was, “You have a bad case of pneumonia, and you have cracked your own ribs coughing.” I did not like that man, but he is the one that helped me. He is the one who did me good, because he told me the truth.

That is what Paul is doing here, because the judgment day is going to happen. Every one of us here today is going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He is going to return. When he does, he is going to separate the sheep from the goats, and he is going to drive those on his left hand into outer darkness, and there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (see Matt. 25). Some of the people that will wail and gnash their teeth sat in church for fifty years. Can you believe it? That is the way it is going to be, and if Paul did not warn these Corinthians, he would be partly responsible if that is where they ended up. That is the only reason in this world why I keep saying these things to you people. I do not want you to end up there.

One of the things I have heard ever since I started to preach is that I am too heavy, too much on the dark side, too much about law, and not enough about grace. That is possible. I am not an inspired apostle. I do not claim to be without error. I do not claim that I have been entirely free from one-sidedness, but I have certainly tried not to be one-sided, but remember this: we are living in a day in which there is a great clamor for an easier gospel. The Bible says that in the last days there will be those who “will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:3). That day has come all over America. That is what is wrong with the country. That is why it is in the shape it is in morally and spiritually. People do not

want to hear the true gospel, and they do not hear it either. They have the kind of teachers they want.

So far this has not happened to you. You had better be thankful it has not, and let me say that for the last nine-and-a-half years I have never one time knowingly corrupted or distorted or departed from the sound doctrine of the Bible, and I think you know that too. Some of you who do not like one word I have ever said, know in your heart-of-hearts that that is what I have been doing. I warn you that you are going to answer for it. The Bible says, "But He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Cor. 4:4-5, NKJV). I have my eye on that day. I hope you do too.

With all my heart, I would rather say to you, and I do say, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, and my love be with you all in Christ Jesus. That is what I have labored for, and that is what I have prayed for, but if you do not want eternal life enough to love the Lord Jesus with a life-dominating love, then I have to say, "May you be accursed," for the one thing that matters to me above everything else is my own standing with Jesus Christ.

As I look at you, I am so grateful that I can say for most of you, "The evidence is there." Why do some of you drive seventy miles to this church and stay all day to attend both services? It is because you love Jesus. Why are you always here when there is a worship service called by duly constituted authority, which is the ordinance of God? It is because you love the Lord Jesus. Why has the giving of this congregation gone up so much? It is because you love the Lord Jesus so much that you not only give ten percent but more than ten percent of what God gives you. I know that. That is a fact. It cannot be denied, and it cannot be faked. People who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ do not do that. They do not even want to do that. You cannot even get them to do that.

In New Zealand, Dick VanderPyle fell in love with a girl named Addy Meyering. He would come home from a hard day's work, and what do you think he did? He quickly took a shower, dressed up, and walked several miles on foot to see Addy. He would stay there until pretty late and then walk all the way back, go to bed, get up, and work with a song in his heart and mouth. Do you know why? It was love. He will willing to do things that he never would have been willing to do before because he had love.

That is why some of you do these things. It is the only reason, and it is a wonderful thing to see, but it is just as clear to me that there are some of you who do not have that love in anything like that degree, to say the very least. Half the time you are not even here when Christ meets with his people. That is not a human invention. That is a divine ordinance. You are called to be here to meet with Christ in the fellowship of the congregation of the saints, and you do not come. It is because you do not have the kind of love for Jesus that the Bible wants you to have. Why is it that some of you that have plenty of money in your wallets give such a stingy little contribution? I will tell you why. It is because you do not love Jesus the way you should.

It is as simple as that, and if that does not change, I have to say to you what Paul said to the Corinthians. Jesus did not do much, did he? He just came down from heaven to die a terrible death, to be accursed of God for sinners. That is not much, is it? That does not merit much love in your heart, does it? Of course, it does. Of course, it does!

One of you was telling me about his mother. She stayed in the liberal church. One of the things that offended her was the fact that for people like us, religion dominates all of life. Too right, it does! Amen and hallelujah, it does! Too bad that lady died in opposition to that concept of life because the Bible says, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31)! If it does not dominate your life, something else does. You are in a bad way. So I exhort you for the last time, consider what you are doing. Do you really love the Lord Jesus? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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ServantExchange

The Case for the Majority Greek New Testament Text

By Bruce A. Stahl

The question that gives rise to my inquiry is, Given the variant readings of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament books, can we know without a doubt what is the Word of God to be translated into English?

When I first took my faith in the promises of God's Word seriously as a teenager fifty years ago, I began reading the Bible using the New American Standard Bible (NASB). It had numerous marginal notes that made me wonder whether we really had the Word of God. You too may have had questions in your own mind, perhaps when reading your own version silently while simultaneously listening to another person reading out loud from a different version. Not only is running into these differences disconcerting simply because differences suggest uncertainty, but sometimes the differences in meaning also seem material. When we read Colossians 2 with the New King James Version (NKJV) and the English Standard Version (ESV) side by side, we run into a different meaning in verse 18.

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God. (NKJV)

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (ESV)

A footnote in the ESV indicates that "about visions" could be translated "about the things he has seen," and this shows clearly that the underlying text refers to something contrary to the underlying text that the NKJV translated. In the ESV, the Greek text is missing the word "not."

While the primary objective of the exhortation for the two verses is not altered, one of the characteristics of the described spiritual enemy is much different. In the NKJV it is one who is inappropriately focused on something he has not seen, and in the ESV it is one who is inappropriately focused on something he has seen.

Another example of a changed meaning is found in Revelation 4:2–3. The NKJV reads:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there* was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

The Majority (Byzantine) text omits “And He who sat there was,” so that it would be translated,

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

The NKJV indicates that the One who sat on the throne was like a jasper and a sardius stone, while the Byzantine text describes the throne itself to be like a jasper and a sardius stone. This leaves two different impressions and is confusing to the reader.

The Authority of the New Testament Comes from God

The Bible itself seems to speak against confusion regarding what is the Word of God. Furthermore, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) seems to support what the Bible says.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13 NKJV)

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. (WCF 1.4)

As with the Thessalonians, the writers of the Westminster Confession of Faith received the Word of God as it is in truth, and they built the whole of its system of teaching upon the Word of God. Their reception was true of the New Testament as well as the Old. They recognized that the authority of the Word was God himself. Focusing on the New Testament, Christ told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of all that he had taught them (John 14:26). Those who received the Word of God would have made sure that they kept good copies of it, because they understood that doing so was more important than any other book apart from the Old Testament Scriptures. As Peter suggested in the first chapter of his second epistle, the written word of eyewitness testimony made God's promises more certain.

Those who received the written New Testament as books or letters in its original language had confidence that what they were hearing was in fact the Word of God. They wanted to make sure that the churches had the Word of God available to them and they made numerous copies of it. The Bible repeatedly implies that the followers of Christ have the Word of God. Colossians 3:16 is just one example where we read that believers

are commanded to let the word of Christ abide in them, and they could not do so without the Word being available.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (NKJV)

A Reason to Favor the Majority Family of Manuscripts

Not only were the original written documents inerrant, but from this perspective the churches also carefully copied the written Word. This premise seems to be expressed in the first portion WCF 1.8:

The Old Testament in Hebrew . . . and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.

The premise attaches to it the necessity that what was written in the original languages would be available to all ages by God's singular care and providence, with emphasis on God's governance over the process. As with God's providence in all of life, often using means within his creation to accomplish his ends, He used the activity of men to preserve the purity of the text. Objectively receiving the Word of God as it is, from God, we may consider the Greek New Testament as being accurately handed down through the ages.

Again, from this perspective, the New Testament in the original language was and is available to those interested in seeking it. The Greek New Testament is presumed to have been often copied on papyrus numerous times. When used frequently the papyrus medium deteriorated much faster than the medium of paper today. People who had reliable Greek manuscripts would have used them more than those manuscripts that were not reliable. The manuscripts that were relied upon and therefore used, wore out. So as to continue using the Word, individuals copied more manuscripts, and this copying continued through the life of the church, most notably among the Greek churches because they had it in their own language. Those manuscripts that had errors were more likely to be set aside. Consequently, the old, unused manuscripts were more likely to survive because they did not wear out. Those copies which the church relied upon through the ages would have had more manuscripts copied, and carefully copied. Today there are thousands of New Testament manuscripts in whole or in part available to the church. The majority of them came from the Greek speaking region around the Mediterranean Sea with some also found in southern and western regions around that Sea.

Many of the thousands of manuscripts were lectionary in nature and used for reading in weekly worship. They support those manuscripts which are more comprehensive.

These Majority readings are not generally the oldest manuscripts, yet again, from this perspective, they likely represent the original documents (called *autographa*) because they were faithfully copied. Also, when there are visible spelling mistakes, they are easily identified due to the availability of many copies. This copying of the Greek text through

the ages follows the premise stated in chapter 1 of the WCF and follows what the Bible itself attests regarding itself.

Within the past two hundred years, many Reformed theologians have been willing to rely more on a relatively very small number of manuscripts that date back to around 200 or 300 AD. In doing so they accept a premise that seems to me to be contrary to that which is stated in chapter 1 of the WCF. Because these few manuscripts do not always agree with the majority of manuscripts available and often disagree among themselves, they surmise that we do *not* know in full what the original Word of God is that was inerrant.

Presumably, whether intentionally or not, those who accept translations of Scripture that rely more on a relatively small number of manuscripts accept the work of certain experts who place a large weight on the Vaticanus manuscript, which was rediscovered in the Vatican in the 1700s, and the Sinaiticus manuscript, which was rediscovered in the 1800s. (The Sinaiticus, or codex Aleph, was discovered in the mid-1800s and is on parchment or vellum rather than on papyrus.) Both manuscripts are recognized as being from the early time period of around 300 AD or before. Even though they each have observable copying problems, and even though the readings between them often disagree, the experts assign them a high weight of credibility on account of their age. Experts have put together a text that is eclectic, and it is sometimes referred to that way. The experts consider whether a particular variant reading is more appropriate than another in each case where variants exist. We refer to it here as the “eclectic text.”

Here and throughout this paper, I am not trying to downplay the value of experts to people who are not themselves experts. Rather, I am trying to emphasize whose authority we follow, that of God or the experts. The comparison is intended to be between God and experts, not between experts and other people.

So, from this perspective, the experts who sought to identify an eclectic text tried to follow specific rules in doing so, though the rules were complex. Simple rules do not work. For example, a simple rule may be that if a variant reading has fewer words, it is the correct one. But the experts will sometimes choose variant readings which include the greater number of words because they have other more weighty reasons to make an exception to this simple rule. For illustration, the Eclectic Text included a parenthetical phrase from 1 Corinthians 9:20, presumably because it was found in either the Vaticanus or Sinaiticus manuscript. It is not found in the Textus Receptus or the Majority Text.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. (ESV)

The “experts” do not always agree on how best to follow rules in each case, and they ultimately conclude that the texts of the original *autographa* cannot be fully identified. Therefore, while the original manuscripts were “inerrant,” they do not agree that we know what that inerrant text was.

Many modern English Bible versions such as the ESV are translated from the Eclectic Text. When such an eclectic text is compared to the Textus Receptus that was used to translate the King James and the New King James versions of the English Bible, approximately ten percent of the verses of the New Testament are affected. This is based upon the footnotes of the publisher of the NKJV, which appear to me to have already

removed spelling variants unless they had to do with names such as Beelzebul or Beelzebub. In the footnotes, the majority text represented a consensus of the majority of the surviving New Testament manuscripts. Again, in the footnotes, what I refer to as the Eclectic Text was represented by the twenty-sixth edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament and the United Bible Societies' third edition.

Measuring the Significance of Variants

This ten percent figure needs to be handled carefully. It includes verses where one word may be different, even the use of the article “a” rather than “the” or the use of “we” rather than “he.” The meanings of these small words are different, but they do not necessarily alter the thrust of the meaning of a given verse. For example, the first portion of Revelation 14:1 in the Textus Receptus reads “a Lamb,” while the Eclectic and Majority Texts read “the Lamb.” “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand . . .” (NKJV).

Sometimes the differences only alter the emphasis. For example, the Eclectic Text excludes “of God” from Matthew 22:30. “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (NKJV).

Other times they may be a bit more meaningful. For example, the Eclectic Text has “up to salvation” rather than “thereby” in 1 Peter 2:2: “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

In these cases, counting each verse that contains a variant reading seems to be excessive because there were many other words in each verse other than those effected. In a more extreme measure, one could say that eighty-nine percent of the New Testament chapters are affected by the differences, because only one variation needs to be found in each chapter for the chapter to be counted.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to consider single words or even letters because the denominator is difficult to identify when sometimes the Eclectic Text has more and sometimes fewer verses. Sometimes entire verses are different, or large portions, and these may not receive enough weight in counting them only once as variants. Furthermore, counting letters or words is much more tedious.

If we select the number of verses affected, and understand what we mean by the count, we know what we are discussing. When using this ten percent figure, remember that while it is helpful for comparison, it is likely overstated from what would be measured had we only used the counts of words or letters affected.

Significance of Variants to a Person's Faith

Returning to the differences between the text, a willingness to place in doubt a specific meaning within ten percent of the verses of the Word of God seems to me to be a dangerous premise because our faith relies on the written Scriptures being available to us and received as the Word of God.

Some English translations try to point out where variations exist. In doing so, they demonstrate that the readings of the Eclectic Text, and to a lesser degree the Textus Receptus, are ones that were constructed rather than known. The thoughtful reader is left with the notion that not knowing the Word of God, we have no fully trustworthy source for following Christ. Rhetorically, one may ask, “Who is to say that we have the Word of

God?” One could logically think that another, older manuscript could be rediscovered and alter the perspective entirely. Hypothetically, if ten percent is in question because of manuscripts rediscovered in the 1700s and 1800s, further rediscoveries in the future could jeopardize our understanding of another ten percent of the verses.

The theologians who follow these experts hold to a second important premise. They often assert that regardless of not knowing the original text when collecting the thousands of manuscripts available to us in the Greek, no doctrine is altered by the various readings. This second premise seems noble, yet it also seems to ignore the previously referenced claims of the Scriptures and the first chapter of the WCF. Admittedly many Reformed theologians believe they follow the premises of chapter 1 of the WCF when applying or accepting textual criticism. As best I can discern, they think God preserved the teaching of the *autographa*, but not each word. I find this to be circular reasoning. We understand the teaching based upon knowing the Word of God, yet we cannot know for certain we have the Word of God of the original manuscripts that provided that teaching.

Also, accepting that we do not know the precise meaning of the whole of the New Testament, it seems as though only a portion of Scripture rather than “All scripture . . . is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness . . .” (2 Tim. 3:16–17 NKJV). Some of the variations may be interchangeable, which could suggest that either variation is profitable for doctrine, etc. This may be the case when two items in a list are switched in order. Yet such is not true for all variations where words are either added or deleted and where the meaning is entirely different.

The second premise also misses the practical implications within preaching. For one example, two different preachers teaching from John 8:59, one from the majority of manuscripts and one from an expert-selected text, are likely to draw two different conclusions for their congregation.

The NKJV, translating the “Textus Receptus,” says, “Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” The ESV, relying primarily on the expert-selected manuscripts, says, “So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” The preacher using the NKJV will conclude that Jesus was in control of the situation, hiding in such a fashion as to be able to pass through them, and consequently facing no threat until the time of his own design. The Preacher using the ESV may be more likely to assume that Christ fled for his life, much as Moses fled when he became aware that his murder of an Egyptian became known to Pharaoh, even as I in fact heard once during my many years of listening to sermons. (It was not the main point of the sermon by any means, but it was so described. Presumably, if a generally good minister can make the mistake, a reader with less education can make the mistake.) In each translation, Jesus removed himself from the situation, but one leaves open the possibility that Jesus fled. Depending on how the preacher uses this text, one can be left with a different emphasis about Christ’s ability to oversee the circumstances around Him.

Significance of Variants to Preaching with Authority

I am not a preacher, yet I wonder how a preacher can explain Scripture verses with the authority of God when there is a question about the text such as in John 8:59, or when we have a reasonable expectation to wonder whether another early manuscript is rediscovered.

Receiving the text as the experts tend to construct it with the Eclectic Text is to receive at least a portion of the text on the authority of these experts, not merely on the authority of God himself.

There are also differences between the Textus Receptus and the Eclectic Text. The Majority Text represents the Byzantine manuscripts which are by far most numerous. The Textus Receptus relied upon the Byzantine text with the exception that Erasmus used some Latin variants in preparing the text for printing shortly after the printing press was invented. Those who hold strictly to the Textus Receptus do not seem to be as consistent regarding the providential preservation of the text “in all ages.” They allow for a shift in the general acceptance of the Greek text, just before the Reformation, to a slightly modified version at the time of the Reformation. While the differences between the Textus Receptus and the Byzantine text are much fewer than between the Eclectic Text and the Textus Receptus, they still present the reader with a question of who has the Word of God. I estimate that the Textus Receptus has variations from the Byzantine text that affect four percent of the verses. One and a half percent out of this four percent are found in Revelation, and without Revelation, only two and a half percent of the verses are affected. Yet this difference is not expected when “All scripture . . . is profitable.”

Though not to the same degree, and likely with a different intent, those who hold to the Textus Receptus rely primarily upon one expert, Erasmus, who occasionally chose variant readings from Western manuscripts. They name a few other Reformers over the course of about a hundred years as well.

Differences in the premises behind the use of different Greek texts generate confusion for the thoughtful Christian trying to serve the Savior. Such confusion seems inappropriate and would not exist if the church relied upon the copied New Testament texts that had been available through the centuries.

Thoughts about Favoring a Family of Manuscripts

One may conclude from reading the comparison between the Majority and Eclectic texts, that adherents of the Eclectic Text ought to be willing to use the Majority Text. They limit their concern to the teachings from God’s Word, and they imply that the Majority Text represents no difference in teaching. Yet perhaps they do not agree to that because they want to rely on what they believe are older manuscripts regardless of how badly copied they were, or because they choose to rely more on academia than on what came down through the ages.

If so, then perhaps they should consider what readings the ancient orthodox theologians quote. According to the testimony of Theodore Letis in an audio recording, a proponent of the Textus Receptus (Received Text), J.W. Burgon of the nineteenth century, exhaustively compiled such a list. The quotes were readings that corresponded to the readings of the Byzantine manuscripts (Majority).

Work such as Burgon’s may be very useful for the church to consider in uniting on the text that represents the very Word of God.

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ServantExchange

The Case for the Eclectic Greek New Testament Text

By T. David Gordon

Aristotle wisely cautioned us to avoid extremes in our pursuit of “the golden mean,” the virtue that often resided between two extremes. I attempt to do so with textual criticism, by this paradoxical mini-creed: Text criticism is not unimportant; text criticism is not all-important. After Robert Lewis Dabney completed an extremely detailed and erudite discussion of “The Doctrinal Various Readings in the New Testament,”¹ he observed that not one significant doctrine would be affected by any text-critical conclusion. I agree with Dabney, both in my willingness to do text criticism whenever the interpretation of a given text demands it, and in agreeing that comparatively little is at stake. The gospel, for instance, is not at stake text-critically, nor is the “word of Christ,” or “the Word of God” at stake. The apostolic gospel existed and was proclaimed orally before there were any apostolic writings, much less twenty-seven of them. That same gospel exists today, and is proclaimed orally today by missionaries in cultures that have no written language.

At the time Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians, the New Testament was still in the process of being formed; indeed, Paul was still writing letters himself. The “Word” that was available to them was the apostolic gospel, perhaps as summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11. A brief argument *ad absurdum* may help see the point: How would we obey Paul’s command today in countries where the gospel has been preached, but the Bible has not yet been translated? The existence of the proclaimed gospel is not dependent upon individual believers owning or reading a Bible translated into their own language (assuming their culture *has* a written language).

Mr. Stahl writes: “Those who received the *written* New Testament as books or letters in its original language had confidence what they were *hearing* was in fact the Word of God.” Which was it? Did they *hear* the gospel/Word of God, or did they *read* it? Prior to the printing press, for fifteen centuries, the Christian church expanded nearly globally, without individuals owning Bibles at all. Indeed, most Christian churches did not have an entire Bible, they merely had copies of the lectionary readings for the year. It is anachronistic to assume that Paul wrote to people who owned Bibles; they did not. The only reason the Ethiopian in the chariot had access to a manuscript of Isaiah was because of his professional duties: “And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, *who was in charge of all her treasure*” (Acts 8:27, emphasis added). A hand-copied manuscript, whether on animal skin or papyrus, was

¹ Robert L. Dabney, “The Doctrinal Various Readings in the New Testament,” vol. 1, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (1891; repr., Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1967), 350–90.

indeed, in the first century, a “treasure,” and only one who had access to such treasure would have had access to a manuscript.

The claim that “the churches also carefully copied the written Word” is a form of special pleading. We may not assume such a historical matter. Some churches may have had scribes; many, if not most, churches likely did not (especially those that were not in larger metropolitan areas). Note how expensive such manuscripts were in the ancient world: “And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19). We do not know how many people were practicing black arts, but it may have been as few as the seven sons of Skeva, or possibly more, perhaps fifty. But fifty thousand pieces of silver is over a thousand times what Judas received for betraying Christ; considering that he took his own life in grief, even forty pieces of silver must have been of fairly substantial value. If books were readily available in the first century, Paul would not likely have needed Timothy to bring his from Troas: “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Tim. 4:13, and the “above all” here, μάλιστα (*malista*), should probably be “namely,” indicating which books were to be brought, distinguishing parchment—τὰς μεμβράνας (*tas membranas*)—from papyrus).

It is only plausible, not at all necessary, to interpret Westminster’s “kept pure in all ages” to mean “kept *equally* pure *in all places* in all ages,” which the comment appears to assume. Even Stephanus—a Renaissance scholar with access to libraries and *scriptoria*—did not have an entire Greek text to work with. His original was missing an entire page. It simply is not historically true that Greek and/or Hebrew manuscripts were available everywhere at all times. They probably intended only to affirm that, despite the wide global spread of the church, and despite occasional persecution, copies of original manuscripts survived (almost miraculously); and, insofar as they are available in any given generation, it is they (copies of the *autographa*) that are authoritative, not the Latin Vulgate. “Authentic” is merely an archaic form of “authentic,” and it was sometimes used to distinguish an original document from a copy thereof. The Assembly knew that they did not have the “authentic” books in that sense; they did not have the autographs. “Authentic” in their context undoubtedly meant that it was the original/authentic sacred writings themselves, not a Latin translation thereof, that was to be considered authentic in the sense that “all controversies in religion” were to be resolved by “appeal unto them” (as opposed to the Vulgate). The Assembly knew about the kinds of imperfections characteristic in ancient manuscripts; they knew that one of them was missing an entire page. Their point was to settle “controversies in religion” by “appeal unto” copies of the original languages, not copies of translations of the original languages.

Neither I nor, I trust, anyone else either knows who Mr. Stahl’s “many Reformed theologians” are, or what difference it makes. Commitment to an eclectic text does not require commitment to any particular textual tradition. Westcott and Hort were (in)famous for their preference for Alexandrian readings, but successive generations have mostly become truly eclectic, preferring internal evidence to external evidence in most cases (and recall that Stephanus himself, the principal originator of the Textus Receptus, employed an eclectic text, even using a Latin text where his Greek manuscript was defective). Anyone who compares available manuscripts, and then selects the reading that

is best explained by what we know by the process of copying, embraces an eclectic text, as Stephanus did.

Westcott and Hort are *not* representatives of the eclectic text tradition. They had strong, presumptive, commitment to Alexandrian manuscripts. Most today regard their viewpoint as naïve, and make text-critical decisions based on internal evidence, not external evidence. Much of Mr. Stahl's reasoning, therefore, may be a tilting at non-existent windmills.

I also regard all Mr. Stahl's references to "experts" in the previous article as misleading, whether intentionally or not. The late Bruce Metzger, himself an "expert," was often in the minority of the committee that produced the UBS text, and the other "experts" permitted him to write the commentary on their work. His commentary demonstrates that there was a range of opinion among those "experts," as is true in almost all cases where expertise is germane. The frequent references to such "experts" I regard not only as *ad hominem* but also as a somewhat crass appeal to American populism. Whether an expert or a bumpkin embraces a view is irrelevant to the question of the evidence and reasoning behind the view. Bumpkins are not always wrong, and experts are not always right (they were frequently wrong about Covid), but the frequent reference to unnamed "experts" mars the article with needless smoke through which the reader must cut. If an error is erroneous, its error should be refuted, without regard for its human origin.

I could wish that the matter were as simple as choosing between divine authority and human authority. Who *does not* prefer divine authority to human authority? Who would not prefer the *divine* Expert to *human* experts? But we do not have direct access to God himself (I recall something about a banishment from a garden . . .). We have access to several thousand hand-copied manuscripts of portions of Holy Scripture, every one of which has some demonstrable errors in it, and so we have basically three approaches to sorting through the matter: choose the right *family* of manuscripts (some Textus Receptus/Majority Text and Westcott and Hort, though they choose *different* families); choose the largest *number* of existent manuscripts (Majority Text); choose the reading that *accounts for the other readings* (Eclectic Text). God's "singular care and providence" has preserved an enormous number of manuscripts, not one of which is free from obvious human error; respect for that providential care moves some of us to be willing to entertain the full range of what is providentially available.

Mr. Stah's statistical discussion of percentages was curious, and not pertinent to the question. Do we count all of the letters in the original manuscripts, and calculate how many have variants? An individual with a speech impediment may have an erroneous articulation (an error?) in every word he speaks, yet speak with entire truth. When Dabney wrote about "The Doctrinal Various Readings" in the Greek text, he addressed only variants that might have a substantive consequence for what the Scriptures "principally teach," namely, "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man" (WSC 3, and also referred to as "faith and life" at WCF 1:2). I don't recall a single arithmetic statement in his discussion; and he concluded that none of the various readings affected Christian duty or belief. Suppose, for instance, that every sentence in the Hebrew or Greek Bible had a variant in the textual tradition somewhere; would this mean that the Bible is one hundred percent unreliable? No; it would merely mean that human copyists are unreliable. Attempting to quantify the matter would be an

enormously difficult task (the equivalent of counting every letter in the Bible, then comparing each letter on each occasion to every known variant, a fool's errand if ever there were one). It is also an entirely unnecessary task; if our goal is to find in the Bible what we are to believe and what we are to do, we already find more than we can handle, and the Westminster Assembly gave sage advice for reading said Bible: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly" (WCF 1:9). Westminster candidly indicated that some places in Scripture spoke "more clearly" than others and had earlier noted,

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them (WCF 1:7).

Westminster seemed quite content to discover what is "necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation," and that if the entire Bible were consulted (in some place of Scripture or other), people could attain to a "sufficient" understanding of the matter. They said nothing about the "precise meaning" of individual texts or the "specific meaning" of individual texts; they were concerned with "faith and life," with Scripture's basic doctrine of salvation.

Neil Postman² and Jacques Ellul³ were very wary about modernism's movement towards numerical calculation in every intellectual endeavor; even without a thermometer, we can ordinarily tell whether our forehead, or a child's forehead, suggests a fever; and the treatment for a fever is the same for 100.5 or 101.2. For Ellul and Postman, many/most of life's important realities could not be calculated numerically, but could be spoken of helpfully and meaningfully. Similarly, the Westminster Assembly was concerned with "faith and life," with "what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man," with what is necessary "for salvation." None of their concerns were about ten percent of this or twelve percent of that.

It should be noted that Mr. Stahl's reasoning suggests that an inerrant manuscript text is necessary to one's faith, and necessary to one's faith in the gospel and God's Word. This suggestion is neither psychologically nor biblically true. Psychologically speaking, "truth" and "accuracy" are not identical concepts. A wartime soldier might aim at an enemy's heart with his rifle and hit the lung instead, with the same result, that the enemy is no longer a combatant. The soldier "truly" shot the enemy, though inaccurately. Indeed, one purpose for aiming at the heart is that it is nestled between the lungs, and the "heart-lung area" is referred to by some specialists in these matters as the critical target area. Similarly, a public speaker may find himself reasoning with a series of negatives:

² Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

³ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964). His frequently-repeated thesis was that "the essence of technique is to compel the qualitative to become quantitative." Cf. also his *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986).

“This is *not* to say that Paul was *not* concerned that the Corinthians may *not* give as generously as the Macedonians, resulting in saints in Jerusalem *not* having enough food.” In such a situation, at some point the speaker loses momentarily his Aristotelian logic and is not sure whether he has the right number of “nots” in his sentence, fearing that he may be off by one, inverting his intention. His hearers, however, understand his *thought*; they also may have lost the train of “nots” themselves, but they understand the *truth* of what the speaker intended.

After the printing press, the more-fluid nature of oral discourse or hand-copied manuscript was replaced with fixed type. The expectations of fixed type differed from those of oral discourse or manuscript, and, yes, when the “Adulterous Bible” was printed—regrettably omitting the “not” from “Thou shalt ~~not~~ commit adultery,” the Bibles were withdrawn from the public and reprinted at no expense to those who had purchased the original, mistaken version. The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New, were generated in that segment of human history in which the sacred writings were neither oral nor printed. For roughly three and a half millennia, oral discourse could be reduced to writing (to the chagrin of Socrates), but not to fixed print, where each individual copy is precisely like the others. It does not take a Media Ecologist to realize that, in this substantial era of human history, human sensibilities shaped themselves to the media they knew (orality and manuscript), not to media they neither had nor anticipated (fixed type). In the brief period when the “Adulterous Bible” was in print, some minister or lay reader must have read aloud the misprinted Decalogue during the liturgy, provoking only laughter, not widespread sexual infidelity.

It is possible that there are individuals today, over a half-millennium after the printing press, whose sensibilities differ from those of humans who preceded them; and perhaps Mr. Stahl is one of them. But his sensibilities are neither universal nor, in all likelihood, even humanly possible, prior to the printing press. And, as to the inference that our faith depends on an inerrantly-reconstructed printed product made from inerrantly-copied manuscripts, I might suggest that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17, see also Gal. 3:2, 5), which, when Paul wrote these words, would have been a Word of God fallibly proclaimed orally or fallibly read orally from fallible manuscripts. Fallible apostles preached to fallible hearers, and the gospel nonetheless flourished.

An assumption throughout Mr. Stahl’s article is that we cannot function as faithful Christians unless we place our faith in an inerrant translation culled from errant manuscripts. This is not so; God requires of no generation that it do more than can be done in its own generation. Both Noah and David are described as having been faithful or obedient in his own generation (Gen. 6:9; Acts 13:36), suggesting that God only expects of us what can be expected in our specific moment in human history. But the characteristic trait God expects of us is faithfulness; his servants are routinely commended for being “faithful” (Matt. 24:45; 25:21; Luke 16:10; 1 Cor. 4:2, 17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7, 9; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 2:17; 3:2, 6; 1 Pet. 5:12), not “accurate” or “precise.” Those who lived in those 1,500 years when one’s only access to Scripture was to hear audibly the lectionary readings for each Sunday of the church year, could have been very “faithful” to what they heard each week. Those who, like Stephanus, freely translated the Latin of Revelation *into* Greek to the best of his ability were “faithful.” We who fallibly read fallible translations based on fallible Greek

manuscripts can still be by God's grace, "faithful," which is all that God expects of us. I am reminded of President Washington's physicians, who treated him by draining blood from his veins, a practice common in the late eighteenth century. Their "treatment" hastened his demise. Their knowledge of medicine was imperfect, and a physician who did such today would lose, at a minimum, his license to practice. But the President's physicians did the best they could with the best knowledge available in their generation and treated him as they would have treated an uncle, father, or son. They were medically wrong but ethically right. Approximate knowledge is the only knowledge humans have, and we are judged for being faithful to what we know and for how diligently we went about pursuing it. We will hardly be found unfaithful by all-knowing God if our translation reads "color," rather than "colour," and the overwhelming majority of variants in the manuscripts of the Bible are merely such regional variations.

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Servant Word

Theological Daylighting: Retrieving J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*

By Justin McLendon

In 2025, New York residents will benefit from a long-planned environmental project of Tibbetts Brook, a small stream that flows through Yonkers and the Bronx, eventually merging into the Harlem River. This project promises to address annual flooding and the stressed stormwater infrastructure of New York's aged sewer system. Like other waterways in the United States, Tibbetts Brook was once a thriving water source that developers chose to contain by burying the waterway underground, forcing water through culverts and other coverings. Over time this process contributed to neighborhood flooding as underground culverts proved to be incapable of handling excess water and drainage.

Daylighting is the environmental act of restoring a covered waterway, and this tedious process can be pursued for a variety of reasons, such as to improve water quality, provide wildlife habitat, or create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.¹ Daylighting, however, can be a complex and challenging process, for it often requires the removal of buildings, roads, and other infrastructure that has been built over the waterway. Complicating matters further, daylighting requires strategic thinking to ensure that the banks of the waterway are stabilized to prevent future erosion and flooding. While daylighting is fraught with complexities, its benefits can be significant.

In one sense, daylighting a buried waterway is the exhuming of a buried life-source, with the belief that its resources are critical to future flourishing. From my perspective, daylighting can be theologically applied to old books that often sit untouched on our bookshelves, forgotten by the distance of time and change. Theological daylighting offers a compelling picture of how we can rejuvenate and reinvigorate theological discourse by retrieving the theological riches of the past to bring them into dialogue with contemporary challenges. As such, in what follows we will consider an old life-source from which we can theologically daylight three applications.

¹ Jim Morrison, "How 'Daylighting' Buried Waterways Is Revitalizing Cities Across America," *Smithsonian Magazine* (March 15, 2023). https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/how-daylighting-buried-waterways-is-revitalizing-cities-across-america-180981793/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=editorial&utm_term=3/15/2023&utm_content=new

Confronting Liberalism

Biographical treatments of J. Gresham Machen are easily accessible, and a full treatment is beyond the purview of our reflection.² We should recall, however, that Machen was a prominent American theologian and a key figure in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the early 20th century.³ Born in 1881 in Baltimore, Maryland, Machen displayed exceptional intellectual abilities from a young age. He pursued his education at Johns Hopkins University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the Universities of Marburg and Göttingen in Germany. For our purposes, we recall his lengthy service as New Testament professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he taught from 1906 until Princeton's reorganization in 1929.

Recognizing the urgent need for a new institution committed to the preservation of orthodox Christian doctrine, Machen (and others) founded Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. The seminary aimed to provide rigorous theological education firmly rooted in the authority of Scripture and the Reformed tradition. Machen's establishment of Westminster showcased his unwavering commitment to doctrinal integrity and his determination to equip future generations of Christian leaders with a solid theological foundation. John Murray, who arrived at Westminster in 1930, claimed that "Westminster raised a banner for the whole counsel of God when concrete events had made it more than apparent that Reformed churches throughout the world had laid in the dust that same banner, defaced, soiled, and tattered. When the enemy came in like a flood, God in his abundant mercy and sovereign providence raised up a standard against him."⁴ We cannot overlook Murray's insistence upon the seminary's role in confronting enemy forces, stationed as it were as a bulwark against the intellectual assaults of Modernist proponents and institutions.

Machen's opposition to the theological liberalism within the PCUSA led to his involvement in various controversies, including the Auburn Affirmation and the subsequent trials that resulted in his suspension from the ministry. Despite facing opposition and criticism, Machen remained steadfast in his defense of orthodox Christianity and his commitment to the authority of Scripture. His theological convictions and willingness to stand against the prevailing cultural and theological trends earned him both admirers and detractors.

Due to his untimely death in 1937, Machen's primary theological challenges and his enduring influence are often bookended within the confines of the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy. Overall, Machen's academic career was characterized by significant contributions to New Testament studies and his frequent engagement with theological issues: his publications addressed New Testament criticism, Pauline studies (e.g., *The Origin of Paul's Religion*; 1921), Bible surveys, doctrinal

² Biographical information gleaned from Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2020). See also D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

³ Though Machen appreciated the Fundamentalist movement and was sympathetic to its concerns, he disliked the term "Fundamentalist," believing it was reductionistic to refer to Christianity as an "ism." See David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 343.

⁴ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1, *The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 101.

treatments of the virgin birth (e.g., *The Virgin Birth of Christ*; 1930), theological anthropology, the Christian understanding of faith, and most notably, the intersection of Christianity and cultural engagement. He played a leading role in the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936 (serving as its first moderator), after his departure from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA).

Machen's classic, *Christianity and Liberalism*, has now reached its one-hundredth anniversary and remains a standard academic text to engage early twentieth-century theological developments in American seminaries and churches. The book, however, has a grassroots origin: its first iteration occurred in 1921, when Machen addressed the Ruling Elders' Association of Chester Presbytery with concerns over theological trends infecting academic and ecclesiastical audiences. Machen knew, and we must never forget, that theological wandering in the seminaries eventually infects the people in the pews. The following year, *The Princeton Theological Review* published Machen's remarks, which ultimately created widespread interest and the need for a more substantive presentation. Thus, in 1923, Machen's mature presentation appeared and challenged American Protestants to reject the appeals of theological liberalism. As D. G. Hart acknowledged, Machen's book "met a chilly reception" among his peers, and Machen's formidable opposition dismissed his concerns as extremist and alarmist, only fostering a theological isolationism.⁵

Though not a lengthy work, throughout *Christianity and Liberalism* Machen offered a robust defense of orthodox Christianity against the encroachment of modernist ideas. He argued that theological liberalism diluted the essential doctrines of the faith, including the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the significance of the atonement, and the role of the church in society. Machen contended that Christianity and liberalism were fundamentally incompatible, as liberalism sought to reinterpret and revise Christian doctrine to accommodate modern sensibilities and scientific advancement.

Machen lived in an era where Christian orthodoxy was contested from internal and external forces. As he argued:

The great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism."⁶

According to Machen, theological liberalism transcended mere variations in ecclesiastical practice or divergent Christian theological perspectives (more on this later). Rather, he contended that liberalism constituted an entirely distinct and humanized religious system, characterized by a sentimental, superficial, and man-made understanding of God. Machen believed liberalism departed wholesale from the historical and doctrinal tenets of orthodox Christianity.

⁵ D. G. Hart, "The Rise and Fall of J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*," in *Christianity and Liberalism Revisited: A 100 Year Appreciation*, Christ Over All podcast (June 5, 2023), paragraph 4. <https://christoverall.com/article/longform/the-rise-and-fall-of-j-gresham-machens-christianity-and-liberalism/>

⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 2.

Thus, Machen meticulously dismantled the theological presuppositions of liberalism and exposed its inconsistencies. His rigorous analysis not only challenged the intellectual foundations of theological liberalism but offered a warning of perilous consequences if churches and institutions failed to reject what amounted to an imposter religion clothed in Christian garb.

Three Applications of Machen's Work for Today

There is, of course, a great distance between 1923 and today, and over the course of one hundred years, the Church has encountered significant challenges on every front. Machen could not have imagined Vatican II, the outbreak of liberation theology, or the recent theological compromises related to marriage and sexuality. Even though much has transpired since Machen's publication, we should carefully daylight key features of his work to assist our efforts in maintaining doctrinal fidelity. Of course, it goes without saying, every generation of Christians must articulate a robust defense of the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, and Machen provides a timeless and informed example.

We can further assume that Christians will continue to encounter challenges from secular worldviews whose epistemological framework rests upon scientific findings and secular humanism. As Mark Noll observes, "*Modernists* were Protestants who felt it was important to adjust Christianity to new science, new economic expansion, and new ideals of human progress."⁷ We are careful to remember that Christian orthodoxy will always be challenged on two fronts: from a secular, godless culture whose rejection of Christianity persists, and those within the church, like the Modernists of old, who seek to soften the perceived rough edges of doctrine, often with the aim of bridging the gap between traditional faith and a younger generation. This phenomenon occurs across generations and cultures, as the allure to adapt and accommodate doctrinal principles remains a recurring challenge for the Christian community.

In addition to these obvious areas of continued relevance, we can discern three additional applications as we address present crises and forecast future challenges. The following applications do not exhaust the usefulness of Machen's work, but these broadly apply, even if portions of his work are deemed outdated.

1. Making an Apologetic Approach

In every era, the presence of Christian apologists is indispensable, and Machen serves as an example of a comprehensive apologetic approach encompassing biblical fidelity, historical acumen, a deep devotion to the gospel, and a commitment to safeguarding the church from error. Christians are called to be apologists, which means we are tasked with providing a rational defense of the Christian faith. This responsibility does not mean every Christian must possess expertise in all areas of knowledge, but rather, we are expected to provide answers for the hope that resides within us (1 Pet. 3:15). In essence, this means, as part of our faith, Christians work as ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20), whose task

⁷ Mark Noll, *The Work We Have to Do: A History of Protestants in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57. Emphasis in original.

centers upon articulating and explaining the basis for their beliefs when engaging with others, demonstrating the historical, biblical, and theological reasons for our hope in Christ. When we consider our duty to defend Christian orthodoxy, we can retrieve a critical aspect of Machen's approach.

Though he did not use our modern term when assessing the modernist challenges, Machen viewed the severity of modernist claims through the lens of theological triage.⁸ In short, theological triage refers to the process of prioritizing theological issues based on their significance and impact on Christian doctrine. As such, this evaluation involves categorizing theological disagreements into different levels of importance, distinguishing between essential doctrines, secondary doctrines, and issues of lesser consequence. This approach helps Christians navigate theological tensions, ensuring that we focus on preserving core, essential beliefs while allowing room for secondary disagreements.

In Machen's case, he argued, "We do not mean, in insisting upon the doctrinal basis of Christianity, that all points of doctrine are equally important. It is perfectly possible for Christian fellowship to be maintained despite differences of opinion."⁹ As an example, Machen noted the rising interest of eschatology, especially the growing popularity of dispensational premillennialism (Machen also uses the older term, Chiliasm). Though Machen admitted that the rise of premillennialism "causes us serious concern," for he denied its hermeneutical conclusions, he nonetheless praised premillennial advocates for their adherence to orthodoxy: "how great is our agreement with those who hold the premillennial view!" Despite his rejection of premillennialism, he recognized that its adherents

share to the full our reverence of the authority of the Bible, and differ from us only in the interpretation of the Bible; they share our ascription of deity to the Lord Jesus, and our supernaturalistic conception both of the entrance of Jesus into the world and of the consummation when He shall come again.¹⁰

With the challenges the church now faces, we must resist every effort to delegate apologetics to specialists. Instead, from the perspective of Christian discipleship, the employment of theological triage can assist our apologetic witness to clarify the gravity of theological novelty, all with the hopes of providing a grid with which we can discern the legitimacy and seriousness of new proposals.

2. Maintaining Theological Vocabulary

Christians must preserve and promote theological terminology as means of Christian discipleship. Machen recognized the downstream dangers of abandoning theological vocabulary to accommodate modern sensitivities. He claimed that "among students [at theological seminaries] the reassuring employment of traditional phrases is often abandoned, and the advocates of a new religion are not at pains, as they are in the Church

⁸ For a helpful summary, see Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

⁹ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 40–41.

¹⁰ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 41.

at large, to maintain an appearance of conformity with the past.”¹¹ In other words, to avoid offending others, modernist sympathizers jettisoned specific theological terminology to situate Christianity around experientialism and morality. This practice was justified as a way to convey Christianity in relational rather than doctrinal terms. Machen, on the other hand, understood that Christianity is much more than doctrine, but it is not less than doctrine.

In his advocacy of retaining theological terminology, Machen argued that From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name “gospel” or “good news” implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. “Christ died” —that is history; “Christ died for our sins”—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.¹²

From its inception, Christianity was more than a mere lifestyle; it was a way of life rooted in a profound message. Foundational to this way of life was the significance of doctrine. Machen appealed to the Apostle Paul, demonstrating that doctrine served as the very bedrock of his ministry, fueling his intense concern for the substance and content of the Christian message. Machen is not rejecting the reality of theological contextualization (explaining doctrine in an understandable way to any specific audience); he is, however, rejecting revisionist definitions of theological terminology and the diminishing efforts modernists applied to its importance.

3. Involving the Whole Church

Our current theological and cultural challenges must be confronted in a joint effort between Christian academics and Christian laypersons. Noll argues that Modernists won their most important victories and gained their most ardent advocates in academic institutions, while the Fundamentalists were primarily led by laypersons.¹³ To be sure, Fundamentalists had academic advocates, even if they were outnumbered. George Marsden notes that Machen “eventually assumed Warfield’s mantle as chief intellectual spokesman for conservative Presbyterians.”¹⁴ But Machen knew that the challenges before the church necessitated a diverse alliance to sustain an effective witness.

Similarly, a broad coalition encompassing both academics and laypersons offers several compelling advantages. First, academics’ inclusion provides rigorous intellectual engagement, drawing upon scholarly expertise and research. When in service to the church, academic specialization provides theological frameworks and nuanced responses to complex issues. Second, the engagement of laypersons plays a vital role in anchoring theological discourse to the practicalities of daily Christian life. Christians bring a wealth of diverse perspectives, experiences, and insights forged by their distinct contexts and

¹¹ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 15.

¹² Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 23.

¹³ Noll, *The Work We Have to Do*, 57–58.

¹⁴ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137.

vocations. Their active involvement serves as a safeguard against detachment from real-world realities, ensuring that theological discussions retain relevance and applicability to believers across diverse cultural and societal contexts. Third, a coalition of academics and laypersons invites collaboration, where scholars benefit from the wisdom and contextual knowledge of laypersons, gaining insights into the practical implications of their research. Conversely, laypersons can draw upon the theological expertise of academics to deepen their faith and to navigate complex theological challenges. Together, this means seminaries and churches cannot minimize their shared governance of confronting theological compromise while training the next generation of ministers.

Conclusion

Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* is a significant work of Christian theological discourse that remains relevant in our tenuous theological and ecclesial landscape.¹⁵ Machen's insights provide continued guidance for Christians to navigate the challenges brought by modern versions of theological liberalism and its accommodationist alternatives. Machen's vigorous and unwavering defense of orthodoxy highlights Christianity's historical verifiability and foundational doctrines, emphasizing the inseparable connection between several fundamental truths. His work serves as a reminder that God's self-revelation finds its primary expression in concrete historical events, most notably in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. These pivotal moments in history, accessible to humanity through the sacred Scriptures, form the solid foundation upon which the Christian faith firmly stands. Machen's emphasis on the historical basis of Christianity underscores the significance of these events as essential components of the faith, reinforcing their central role in shaping the belief system and providing a solid foundation for believers to cultivate lives of sanctified devotion. As believers strive to uphold the timeless truths of the Christian faith, Machen's overall emphases remain a relevant and indispensable resource that we can daylight, applying his classic work in our efforts to discern an apologetic that confronts the theological challenges threatening the vitals of orthodoxy, to reinforce our commitment to promote and protect the doctrinal bases and terminology underlying our faith, and to emboldened us to foster mutual partnerships between academic learning and ecclesial ministry.

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¹⁵ There is a website dedicated to the celebration of Machen's work: <https://www.christianityandliberalism.com/>

Servant Word

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Trumpeter of God: Fulfill Your Office,¹ Chapter 9

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

*Now I am speaking to you Gentiles.
Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry.*

—Romans 11:13

*The saying is trustworthy:
If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*

—1 Timothy 3:1

*Christian ministry functions on the borderline between
the cross and the resurrection, between heaven and hell.
This frontier is no place for the faint-hearted; those who have
little faith in their message and its power do not belong in the pulpit.*

—James Daane²

The most effective weapon in the arsenal of the church militant is the preaching of the Word. This is so because God has mandated it to be so in his Word. Moreover, we have seen something of the wisdom of his arrangement in previous chapters. If unmasking and challenging idolatry is our best critical weapon in apologetics and evangelism, preaching is the central *formative* weapon in building the church to withstand the onslaught of the world. The preacher is the trumpeter of God, announcing the arrival of the Savior of the world in whom sin and death have been judged and conquered and before whom all will one day stand on the Day of Judgment. The trumpet (*shopar* שׁוֹפָר) is a symbol of the sharp, penetrating sound of God's holy voice of judgment on all covenant breaking and sin. We first encounter its use at Mount Sinai. The people are stricken with fear at the trumpet's sound (Exod. 19:16) and moved to recognize their need for a mediator, Moses, who is a type of the Christ. Thus, the Mediator alone is able to bear hearing the trumpet. "And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God

¹ Adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 354–66.

² James Daane, *Preaching with Confidence: A Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 29.

answered him in thunder” (Exod. 19:19). The trumpet of judgment is sounded at Jericho when the people enter the promised land to establish the typological kingdom of Israel (Josh. 6). It was a call to battle against the unbelieving nations who threatened God’s claim upon Canaan (Judges 3:27).

The trumpet is also a call to listen to God and celebrate his sacrifice of Jesus the coming Mediator (Num. 10:2–10). The New Covenant uses the trumpet symbol prefigured in the Day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9): “Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land.” The sound of God’s judgment in the all-encompassing annual sacrifice for sin is a signal of the coming liberty to be found in the Lamb of God, and the consummate victory of God over all his enemies. In the Olivet discourse Jesus describes the decisive denouement of the last battle: “And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:31). The long awaited glory will be realized:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:51–52)

It is with his trumpet voice that the glorified Lord of the church reveals to John the unfolding of this last epoch of history in which we now live (Rev. 1:10).

It is thus with trumpet voice that the preacher is to announce the reconciliation of God in Christ to the nations. The electronic world seeks to drown out the sound of the preacher’s voice, to mute the clarion call of the trumpet. It is God’s gracious call to hear the message of the gospel. In the midst of the confusion of tongues in Corinth, Paul asks: “if the trumpet gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8, NKJV). The uncertain sound emanating from the modern pulpit will only be clarified by men who know their calling before God and are committed to trumpeting the clear, powerful, penetrating Word of God to the nations.

Remember Your Office: The Idea of Office

If we expect to receive a proper conception of our office from our cultural context, we are doomed to disappointment, because we live in the worst of times for such a conception. Christians have been spoiled by a cultural respectability which no longer obtains for the Western church. Egalitarianism represents a radical threat to the biblical idea of office. The democratization of office has leveled the authority structure which was once assumed by Western civilization all the way back to the Roman Empire in which the gospel was first preached.³ If the past tendency of abuse was toward elitism, authoritarianism, and oppression, the opposite is the case today. Now the individual is king, and personality rules. All claims to proper authority are characterized by elitism or “stuffiness,” or worse, “patriarchy.” Of course, the removal of all official distinctions, and

³ Cf. Gregory E. Reynolds, “Democracy and the Denigration of Office,” *Ordained Servant* 23 (2014): 12–22; and in *Order in the Offices*, ed. Mark R. Brown (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Resources, 1993); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

thus God's authority structure, leaves a culture open to all kinds of veiled elitism and oppression. Modernity posits the seat of authority in the individual, as an inherent right, rather than as the sovereign disposition of God, which Paul asserts in Romans 13:1–7. Professionalism, as we have seen in chapter 8, has replaced the idea of calling to office with an anthropocentric, arbitrary social construct—initiated, perpetuated, and realized by the individual. The preacher, however, must begin with God's conception of his role.

The conception of who we are as pastors directly affects both what we do and how we do it. We have already examined the primacy of preaching in the Bible and church history, and the unique qualities of preaching, which explain why God has chosen it as his preferred medium. Now we need to look more closely at the biblical conception of the office of the minister, comparing and contrasting it with modern conceptions of the ministry. The title *Minister of the Word* (*verbi divini minister*), for all centuries since the Reformation, except the twentieth and twenty-first, has embodied the church's concept of the pastoral office. It is telling that in most Protestant churches today the title has disappeared. The concept disappeared long ago. The Word, as the entire subject of the minister's calling, has been supplemented, and in many cases almost entirely replaced, by a host of other managerial and "leadership" duties. *Minister of the Word* succinctly expresses the nature of the pastoral office, and it is from this vantage point that our discussion shall proceed.

After discussing the place of hymns and "praise songs" in the context of the present-day debate and confusion about worship, J. I. Packer makes an important assertion:

What will resolve this unhappy situation is a renewal of the kind of preaching that gives congregations a strong sense of God. Here I think we need to learn from the Puritans. The strong preaching of the majesty of God, of His holiness and awesomeness, will create a sense of how we ought to worship Him. I can't see a congregation ever agreeing on how to worship unless they become united in a deeper and stronger sense of the greatness and glory of God.⁴

Packer points to the Puritans for a biblical corrective to the present misconceptions about the role of the minister. What the Puritans can teach us regards

the Puritan understanding of God as holy and almighty, great in awesome and fearful judgment as He is great in grace. You can't break up the truth about God. The church today has a scaled-down understanding of Him that is shallow, sentimental, and incoherent. Such inadequacy in our thoughts about God is causing a great deal of suffering among Christians. It's the legacy of liberal theology, which diminished God right from the beginning. God's holiness, His active judgment, and His sovereign providence began to be eaten away years ago. I fear the greater part of the Christian church has ingested this. People today don't stand in awe of God. They don't tremble at His Word. They believe God is great only in the sense of being a great pal. Even when preachers emphasize God's holiness the congregation often does not take them seriously. Out of the pulpit,

⁴ J. I. Packer, "The Challenge of the Third Millennium," *RTS Reformed Quarterly* 18:2 (Summer 1999): www.rts.edu/quarterly/summer99/qa.html (April 29, 2000).

few preachers enforce the awesomeness of God in their counseling, instructing of people in the faith, or directing the leadership of the congregation.

Too many preachers spend the majority of their planning time thinking about programs which will enlarge their church's membership or income; in America, no institution is thought healthy unless it is expanding. Practical performance is emphasized—how to manage your family, how to manage your budget, how to do anything and everything as a Christian. But all this centers on human relationships and the business of living with other people. It doesn't have much to do with growing downwards, as Christians must do, in the knowledge and adoration of the Lord.

We should focus on our relationship with God in light of His greatness, holiness, and awesomeness. If we'd appreciate these qualities more, we'd be a humbler lot of people than we are. And our hearts and consciences would be more sensitive to God's glory.⁵

God has ordained that his majesty and glory should be known through preaching, for it is his speech. The vertical dimension of preaching, properly understood and implemented by preachers who are faithful and passionate in their proclamation, is the only means of reclaiming the glory which has departed from the church's worship. Only by defining our office in terms of *ministering the Word* of the living God will we begin to recover the biblical emphasis.

The minister of the Word is essentially a *servant* of the LORD, as Moses (*ebed yahweh* עֶבֶד־יְהוָה, Deut. 34:5), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), and David (Ps. 18:1) were called. We are now ministers of the Great Servant of the LORD who has suffered in the stead of his people and is calling them into his glorious kingdom by the gospel we preach. "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). And so we are to exemplify his ministry as Paul tells Timothy: "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:24-25).⁶ Unlike the leaders of the unbelieving world, who rule by force and often by tyranny and deceit, the minister of the Word is to be a *servant* who imitates his suffering Savior in humility. Our Lord contrasted the two in his cautionary response to the Sons of Thunder:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:25–28)

Yet humility is not to be confused with a pandering or obsequious lack of authority. For the suffering Servant of the Lord "was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:29). In both cases the word translated "authority" is

⁵ Packer, "The Challenge of the Third Millennium."

⁶ K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, trans. Henry Vander Goot (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1985), 19.

(*exousian* ἐξουσίαν).⁷ Servanthood is the way in which biblical authority is to be exercised. The word *office* comes from the Latin *officium*, a work or service performed. Biblically, office is a position of specific duty assigned to a person by the Lord. Each believer has a calling to general office. The minister is called to be a servant of the Lord as his spokesman, a minister of his Word *of God*. Paul needed to remind Timothy of his office. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim. 4:13–14).

The teaching office is God’s gift to the church. It is also commanded. Sietsma asserts: “the essence of office depends on the divine mandate.”⁸ Years ago I asked an older Reformed minister how to deal with emotion in preaching at funerals. Without hesitating he responded with words I shall never forget, “Remember your office!” This is our calling from God himself. Do not ever forget it. This alone will give you courage not only to preach with all your might and to spend some of the best hours of your life preparing and praying for your ministry in the pulpit, but also to count preaching among the greatest joys and privileges of your poor life in this lost world.

No wonder Paul writes with such passion and force when he tells Timothy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim. 4:1–5)

Our fable-filled culture is not conducive to the reception of preached Word, but preaching is what God has called us ministers to do. We must know what we are about and cultivate it with all our might.

One clear implication of what we have said above is this: *Study* the nature of your office. Every wise pastor will make it his business to regularly consider the qualifications for his office in such passages as 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9. Along with these obvious classical texts, the ministries of Jesus and Paul, as well as every minister of the Old and New Covenants, should be mined for the biblical conception of office. Every minister will command respect for his office as he exhibits what his ministry entails. But this *commanding* will also necessitate gently correcting misconceptions as they appear in the life of your congregation. The account of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi demonstrates the importance of the concept of Jesus’s office as Messiah (Matt. 16:13–28). Every preacher ought to answer this same question: “Whom do men say that I am?” Some say a psychologist and a counselor, some a social coordinator, some a chief executive officer, some a fund raiser. Is the ministry a calling or a career? Are you a professional or a prophet? God *calls* you to be *prophet*, nothing else. Paul defended and defined his office

⁷ The verb form is used in Matt. 20:25 (κατακυριεύουσιν) *katakuriuousin*, the root being the same as the noun used in Matt. 7:29.

⁸ Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, 24.

regularly, especially in his Corinthian epistles. Now we know that, unlike an Old Testament prophet or an apostle, we do not receive direct revelation from God. But in as much as we explain and apply God's Word, we are exercising a prophetic ministry—God still speaks.⁹

In addition, we must regularly teach our congregations the proper conception of our office in the course of our preaching as we come to texts such as 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews 13:7, 17. The book of Acts shows the ministry of the Word in action. Feast regularly on a good diet of books describing the history of preachers and their biographies, such as C. H. Spurgeon's *The Early Years* and *Full Harvest*, Douglas Kelly's *Preachers with Power*, James Stalker's *The Preacher and His Models*, James Garretson's *An Able and Faithful Ministry: Samuel Miller and the Pastoral Office*, and Gardiner Spring's *Power in the Pulpit*. It is also important to read books of wise counsel for preachers and reflections on preaching, such as Samuel Miller's *The Christian Ministry*, Charles Bridges's *The Christian Ministry*, Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students*, D. Martin Lloyd-Jones's *Preachers and Preaching*, and James W. Alexander's *Thoughts on Preaching*.¹⁰ Of course, *Minister of the Word* itself does not limit the activity of our office to preaching alone; rather, it centers and focuses it. Every other activity of the ministry should be conceived of as an extension of the act of preaching. Every time we visit the home of a Christian family, we bring the Word of God. Every time we visit someone in the hospital, we minister the Word. Every time we plan the order and content of worship, we are planning to minister the Word. However, the point of this book is to focus on the chief exercise of the ministerial office in the public preaching of the Word.

A Minister of the Word: Focus on Preaching

As a corollary of the idea of office, the wise preacher will constantly cultivate his own understanding of his task by studying that task through various tools which focus on preaching as his central work.

Study the best classic and contemporary homiletical texts such as Robert Dabney's *Sacred Rhetoric* (new Banner of Truth title *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching*); Broadus's unabridged classic *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*; and Jay Adams's *Preaching with Purpose*. Jay Adams once told a class that most books on homiletics are simply a rehash of Broadus's classic. However, there are new works that emphasize neglected aspects of preaching, such as orality and the late modern context of thought.¹¹ Along with these the best printed sermons should be read, and from a wide variety of authors. Calvin's sermons, Geerhardus Vos's *Grace and Glory*, Spurgeon's *New Park Street Pulpit* and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Henry Fish's *Masterpieces of Pulpit Eloquence, Ancient and Modern*, are among the best.¹² Remarkably Spurgeon's sermons were written for publication on the Monday after he

⁹ Gregory E. Reynolds, "God Still Speaks Today: The Power of Orality," *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 25–31.

¹⁰ Consult the bibliography for a full list.

¹¹ See McClellan, *Preaching by Ear: Speaking God's Truth from the Inside Out* and Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*.

¹² Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994); Henry C. Fish, *Masterpieces of Pulpit Eloquence, Ancient and Modern, with Historical Sketches of Preaching in the Different Countries Represented, and Biographical and Critical Notices of the Several Preachers and Their Discourses*, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton; New York: M. W. Mead, 1856). See the bibliography for a full list.

preached them. The danger of reading printed sermons, of course, is developing a conception of preaching which is literary and not oral. It is critical, therefore, for the preacher to carefully distinguish between the written productions of a preacher and their oral presentations, as I shall emphasize in the last chapter.

Every preacher should also make it his business to study the best living homiletical models. Some may say that in our day they are not plentiful, but we may even learn valuable lessons from the simplest, least gifted, and least known among us.

When asked about the reason for their remarkable careers as the founders of the Mayo clinic, the Mayo brothers responded that they made it their business to learn something new about their medical profession every day of their lives. If that is so for ministering to mortal bodies, how much truer is this for the one who ministers to the eternal concerns of people made in God's image. Let nothing deter you from concentrating on this task.

Remember Your Office: Who Reads Scripture?¹³

Ours is not an age in which the Western church places a high value on the public reading of Scripture. In many churches, anyone who volunteers may read Scripture in public worship. To assert that only the minister of the Word is to read Scripture is tantamount to heresy in our egalitarian climate. It is curious that, while ministers are not thought to be necessarily the only ones called to the public reading of Scripture, they are often believed to be CEOs, public relations experts, social organizers, psychiatrists, and many other callings that are well beyond the pale of the biblical job description of the minister. And so this is why I think it preferable to refer to the office of pastor as minister of the Word.¹⁴ The reading and preaching of Scripture are inextricably linked and form the central task of Christian ministry.

In the Presbyterian tradition, going back to the Westminster Assembly, the original *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (1645) read thus: "Reading of the Word in the congregation, being part of the publick worship of God, . . . is to be performed by the pastors and teachers." The one exception was for those who "intend the ministry . . . if allowed by the presbytery."¹⁵ That the public reading of the Scripture belongs to the pastor's office was everywhere asserted by Presbyterians, as well as other Reformed communions, as the clear biblical teaching.

The fact that over three hundred years of Presbyterian tradition is being largely jettisoned in our day should give us pause to at least reflect on the rationale for the old practice. That only ministers of the Word should read the Word publicly is an idea to which our egalitarian world is entirely unfriendly. The church is in need of a renewed interest in the public reading of Scripture. A high view of what ministers are doing when they read will help us strive to put greater effort into it.

¹³ Adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, "Who Reads Scripture?" *Ordained Servant* 22 (2013): 9–12.

¹⁴ For those interested in my argument for the three office view see Gregory E. Reynolds, "Democracy and the Denigration of Office," *Ordained Servant* 23 (2014): 12–22; originally in *Order in the Offices*, ed. Mark Brown (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993), 235–55. See also "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church" submitted to the 58th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1991). <http://www.opc.org/GA/unordained.html>.

¹⁵ *The Confession of Faith* (Inverness, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1976), 375.

Some will complain that I am advocating a “one-man show.” But I hope to demonstrate that there is a biblical and confessional logic to the single leadership of the minister of the Word in public worship on the Lord’s Day. Many of us succumb to the fear of being labeled “elitist” for suggesting that only ministers should lead worship, being under the false assumption that only those “on stage” are participating.

Metaphors of the “one-man show” and “on stage,” are, themselves, very instructive in analyzing the problem we face. In a world strongly flavored by, and motivated with, entertainment, we have become a world of spectators who tend to envy those on stage. Thus, in smaller venues like bars and churches it is expected that everyone gets their moment in the spotlight. But public worship is not karaoke. Where worship is led by the minister alone, many struggle to participate, because our culture has largely spoiled that ability.

Hearing the Word read and preached is true participation. The *Shema* (שמע) of Deuteronomy 6:5–6 indicates that biblical hearing is active, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” This is the true meaning of participation—that everyone in the worship of God is fully involved—God speaking through his servant and the congregation responding by hearing, praising, obeying, and serving. Hughes Oliphant Old, in commenting on the ministry of Ezra, observed that the reading and preaching of Scripture comprise the ministry of the Word. This ministry is “a public act of worship. It was done with great solemnity and reverence. . . . It was an act of the whole religious community.”¹⁶ Thus, properly understood, the leadership of one man, called by God for that very purpose, is in no way inimical to congregational participation, but is inherently a powerful summons to participate.

Along this same line of thought is an aesthetic consideration. Unity of leadership enhances unity of liturgy. Liturgical aesthetics is a consideration usually downplayed or ignored today. However, every kind of worship service has an aesthetic dimension, whether it is acknowledged or not. Sensitivity to the perception of beauty is an inescapable reality. When a man is called and trained to lead worship, the simple beauty of Word and sacrament ministry will be more suited to leave a lasting spiritual impression on worshippers.

During the Reformation the “Liturgy of the Word” encompassed every other part of public worship except the separate liturgy of the Lord’s Supper. The nomenclature indicates the centrality of the Word, read and preached, to worship, but it also indicates the unity of the liturgy itself as essentially a ministry of the Word, to be administered by a minister of the Word. My concern is that, above all, the reading and preaching of Scripture go inseparably together as the central task of ministers of the Word.

Professor Old’s phrase “with great solemnity and reverence” reminds us of the most fundamental and germane doctrine underlying my assertion: that the public reading of Scripture is an authoritative and interpretive act. “Reading the Bible out loud is an act of interpretation.”¹⁷ Worship leadership in the Bible is clearly restricted to men gifted and called by God to minister the Word. So the public reading of Scripture is an essential part of that leadership. Minister of the Word Timothy is the one who is enjoined by Paul to

¹⁶ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 59.

¹⁷ Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 209.

read Scripture. This is inexorably tied to preaching. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13). The ESV properly interprets “the reading” (τῆ ἀναγνώσει *tē anagnōsei*) to refer to public, not private, reading. Modern ears instinctively hear this in terms of personal devotions. But in the first century few could afford to own personal copies of Scripture. Furthermore, the codex had not yet been invented, although a century later Christians would be the ones to do so, given their intense devotion to God’s Word. The royally authorized King James Version (1611) was “appointed to be read in churches”—read *aloud* by the minister of the Word.

The present directory for public worship in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church asserts the divine authority inherent in the reading of the Word in public when it states, “Through this reading, God speaks directly to the congregation in his own words.”¹⁸ The logical corollary to this is that only those God has called to preach his Word should read it publicly. The two activities are inextricably connected. The Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) is instructive in this regard:

Q. 156. Is the Word of God to be read by all?

A. *Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families: to which end, the holy scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar languages. (emphasis added)*

So the restriction of the public reading is made clear. Question 155 ties reading and preaching together: “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means . . .” (cf. WSC 89). Then question 158 makes the above restriction explicit in terms of the authority of preaching: “The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.”

The restriction mentioned in WLC 156 gives the following proof texts:

Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. When all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. (Deut. 31:9, 11–13, emphasis added)

“So Ezra *the priest* brought the Law before the assembly” (Neh. 8:2, emphasis added).

The reason for the restriction on public reading of Scripture is the authority of God’s Word. Public reading of Scripture requires an authoritative office.

¹⁸ “Directory for the Public Worship of God,” in *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education, 2015), 133 (DPW II.A.2).

But what is often entirely overlooked, due to a misunderstanding, is the interpretive aspect of reading aloud. Some misunderstand by thinking that because the words of Scripture are fixed, the reading of the Word itself involves no interpretation. However, anyone who has ever heard the difference between a schoolboy stumbling through a Shakespearean sonnet and an actor such as the consummate Shakespearean John Gielgud knows the vast difference. Expert reading clarifies meaning. It is an authoritative activity.

Another misconception is fostered by thinking that synagogue worship, because laymen were allowed to read Scripture, had authoritative status in New Testament times. The assumption that synagogue worship is normative for the New Covenant church is false. The Old Covenant does not authorize the synagogue. What was done there was not worship but “Torah study.” It was voluntary in nature. In reviewing Ralph Gore’s book criticizing the regulative principle, Dr. T. David Gordon observes:

If we are required, by apostolic example (Acts 2, Acts 20), endorsement (1 Cor. 16:2), and command (Heb. 10:24), to assemble on the first day of the week, what can those who call us to those assemblies lawfully require us to do there? This was the question that Calvin and the Puritans addressed; and they would have been unmoved by any consideration of what free individuals did in voluntary societies for encouragement, prayer, or study.¹⁹

What are the practical implications of this? Paul addresses Timothy as an ordinary (not apostolic) minister of the Word. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13). He places the public reading of Scripture on a par with preaching. This means that denying that the reading of Scripture in public is an authoritative and interpretive act diminishes God’s Word. I am not saying that this is necessarily intentional. But, when the reading is not done by an ordained minister, the authority of the Word *is* diminished.

Having said this, it is therefore incumbent upon the church and seminaries to train ministers to take the public reading of Scripture with the utmost seriousness. The corollary to this involves the continuing education of ministers of the Word. We need to continue developing rhetorical and interpretive skills necessary to read the Word of God well in public. I suggest listening regularly to poetry read aloud, which is widely available online. Reading Scripture aloud for daily devotions is an excellent way to cultivate this holy skill. I will have more to say on this topic in subsequent chapters.

In 1 Timothy 3:8 Paul warns deacons to not be “addicted to much wine.” The word “addicted” (προσέχοντας *prosechontas*) is the same word used in 1 Timothy 4:13, translated “devoted.” Truly “public reading of Scripture” is something to be addicted to. Oh, that we may devote ourselves with great energy, enthusiasm, and intelligence to this important task.

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¹⁹ T. David Gordon, Review Article: “The Westminster Assembly’s Unworkable and Unscriptural View of Worship,” *WTJ* 65:345–56 (2003), 347.

Servant Work

Be a Presbyter

Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder, No. 10

By An Older Elder

Dear James,

It is time for me to go. As David said to Jonathan, so I say to you, “There is but a step between me and death” (1 Sam. 20:3). I must shortly give an account of my own stewardship (Heb. 13:7), just as you, dear James, must one day give account of your own. I feel coming near what Asahel Nettleton described as that “solemn hour of exchanging of worlds.”¹ As such, this may be my last letter. The tender words and kind expressions in the note I just received from you mean a great deal to me. I see now, more clearly than ever before, the weightiness of words. Be no miser of good words, dear James. “A word in season, how good it is!” (Prov. 15:23).

Knowing my time is at hand, I have just a couple final thoughts to share with you on the work and calling of a ruling elder. The first one is this: to the degree our Lord allows and enables you, *be a presbyter*. Involve yourself, in some capacity, in the work of the presbytery. I had a mentor, when I began my first significant leadership position at the hospital, say to me, “Look up and out!” I was a bit too focused on the department and was missing opportunities in the organization. Ruling elders also need to look up and out.

Far too often the responsibilities of the presbytery, not to mention the work of the denomination, have fallen mostly on the shoulders of our ministers. Some of this cannot be avoided. But the Word calls us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2), and this includes presbytery burdens. Those who do will generally find by experience that the Lord helps them and that Christ’s words are true, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30).

When attending a presbytery meeting, make it a point to get to know some of the other ministers and elders. Listen for prayer requests and needs, add them to your prayer list, and then check in with these men from time to time. Join a committee if you can. I always enjoyed talking to some of the retired ministers at these meetings. Ask them questions. Listen. Those who approach presbytery with brotherly kindness and love in their hearts will keep themselves “from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord” (2 Pet. 1:8).

James, the great calling of the eldership is to love the church, protect the church, serve the church. That begins in your own flock, but our care must grow according to the measure of Christ’s own love. Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold” (John 10:16). He loved them too, and so must you. Love the church. Love the presbytery. Love the denomination. Love Christ’s sheep wherever they are found. As Paul said to the

¹ https://www.gracegems.org/33/asahel_netton.htm

Ephesian elders, so I say to you, “care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). He serves Christ best, who loves him most.

Isn't the church lovely, James? Can you not see beyond her spots and wrinkles (Eph. 5:27)? She becomes more glorious every day (2 Cor. 4:16). The bridegroom is coming. Oh, let us love what he loves (Eph 5:25)! There is so much to love about the church! Her gospel is beautiful, isn't it? There is no message like it on earth; it beautifies the preacher and the hearer (Rom. 10:15). I love to hear of that grace that saved a wretch like me! Tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and his love.²

And the church's worship is lovely too, isn't it? Consider whom we worship: our God is an awesome God. Look, look at the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4)! Oh, how our Triune God is worthy of our praises! “Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness” (Ps. 96:9). And the singing of the church is beautiful . . . glorious! Listen to her hymns, her Psalms! Hear the music. Breathe out the lyrics from your soul.

Chosen not for good in me,
Waked from coming wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified—
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show.
By my love how much I owe.³

I can hear singing now—somewhere, softly in the distance . . . a triumphant song. Are those angel voices? I cannot quite make out the tune, I think it is new! It is! It's a new song! Heaven sings James, heaven sings!

Dear James, this is Aunt Bonnie. When I came in to check on your uncle this afternoon, he had, according to the perfect timing of our Lord, passed into the presence of that Jesus whom he loved. He is there now. I can almost hear him singing, I think. This letter was the last thing he appears to have been working on before our Lord called him home. I know he would have wanted you to have it.

² “Tell Me, the Old, Old Story,” *Trinity Hymnal* (revised ed.) (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), #625.

³ “When This Passing World Is Done,” *Trinity Hymnal* (revised ed.) (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), #545.

ServantReading

Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction

by Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto

By David VanDrunen

Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction, by Cory C. Brock and N. Gray Sutanto. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022, 322 pages, \$36.99, paper.

Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction is a straightforward title that indicates what this book's authors, Cory Brock and Gray Sutanto, wished to accomplish in writing it. But both title and subtitle need clarification. By "neo-Calvinism," the authors refer to "a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement in the Netherlands" (3). This means an almost exclusive focus on the work of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. In writing "a *theological* introduction," the authors unfold "the unique dogmatic contributions" (2) of these two figures. Brock and Sutanto observe that most treatments of neo-Calvinism explore topics such as "public theology, politics, and philosophy" (1). In contrast, Brock and Sutanto aspire to explain the "key dogmatic developments" in Kuyper's and Bavinck's thought, and to do so in a "*descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*" (7) way.

After a brief introduction, chapter two ("Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism") argues that Kuyper and Bavinck identified Calvinism with the development of a Christian worldview, an emphasis on divine sovereignty, and a robust doctrine of common grace. Their neo-Calvinism, then, developed John Calvin's theology into a holistic worldview within the context of the modern world. The third chapter ("Catholic and Modern") claims that Kuyper and Bavinck distinguished between the essence and the external forms of historical orthodoxy. They were devoted to preserving the essence but believed that the external forms rightly change from time to time and place to place. Thus, they defended the "multiformity" of the church over against stale conservatism.

Chapter 4 ("Revelation and Reason") explains Kuyper's and Bavinck's views of general revelation. It argues that they affirmed the classical Reformed position but that they combined it with "a romantic emphasis on the *affective* dimensions of revelation's reception" (72). The basic idea is that God has implanted his revelation deep in the heart, such that human beings *feel* God's existence even before they reason about it. Chapter 5 ("Scripture and Organism") explores Kuyper and Bavinck on the Bible. They affirmed Scripture's divine inspiration but also emphasized its human character and authorship. According to the authors, they held an *organic* rather than *mechanical* view of Scripture, and they believed Scripture was authoritative for all scientific disciplines although not a manual for non-theological disciplines.

Chapter 6 (“Creation and Re-creation”) revisits perennial questions about nature and grace. The authors suggest that affirming the continuity of God’s work in creation and re-creation was Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s central contribution to the topic. This chapter also contains a lengthy refutation of recent claims about Bavinck’s view of the beatific vision.

Chapter 7 (“Image and Fall”) focuses on anthropology, particularly on humans as image of the divine Trinity and its vocational implications.

Chapter 8 (“Common Grace and the Gospel”) explores a topic especially associated with Kuyper. Brock and Sutanto contend that Kuyper and Bavinck found the idea of common grace in earlier Reformed theologians but were the first to give this doctrine “magisterial treatment” as “a distinct loci [sic] of dogmatic logic” (216). This chapter includes extended discussion of natural law. The ninth and final full chapter (“The Church and the World”) unpacks the famous Kuyperian (and less famous Bavinckian) distinction between the church as *organism* and *institute*, and particularly its implications for the church’s relationship to the world. The volume concludes with sixteen theses summarizing neo-Calvinist theology.

It may be tempting to judge this book by the degree to which one appreciates the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck. But the important question to consider is whether the authors accomplished their purposes in writing. In important respects, I believe they did. They generally maintained the descriptive tone they desired and set forth these Dutch theologians’ work in ways that allow readers to agree, disagree, or argue with them. Brock and Sutanto effectively draw readers into Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s thought. In the big picture, this is precisely what the book aims to do.

In some other respects, I judge the book to be less successful. I first mention three concerns briefly and then reflect a bit further on the book’s title and subtitle.

First, this volume could have been considerably more concise. Some individual chapters circle around similar issues repeatedly. This was especially the case in chapter nine. Moreover, many of the same topics appeared in multiple chapters. In part, I believe, this is because so much of the book comes back eventually to a handful of core issues related to Christianity-and-culture questions. I will return to this last point shortly.

Second, while the book usually explains its claims clearly, there are occasional exceptions. In my judgment, chapter four fails to clarify some of its key assertions. The basic human-psychological distinction between the *affective* and *rational* is clear enough, and the idea that Kuyper and Bavinck believed that general revelation provokes both affective and rational responses is persuasive. But the authors portray the affective as a “preconceptual” (96) knowledge, a knowledge “without thinking” (80). What exactly “knowledge” is that exists entirely without concepts or thinking is not obvious, and the authors never adequately explain. The chapter also suffers from lingering confusion on whether, for Kuyper and Bavinck, general revelation itself is distinct from the human responses it provokes. For example, the authors say that general revelation both “has” affective dimensions and “produces” an affective knowledge of God (96).

Third, the authors’ discussion of Kuyper and Bavinck on natural law in chapter eight was not entirely satisfying. Brock and Sutanto state that Kuyper and Bavinck affirmed much of the older Christian (including Reformed) tradition of natural law. This is clearly true. But the authors portray older and contemporary Reformed thought on natural law in a somewhat flattened and unnuanced way, which allows them to present the Dutchmen’s views as distinctive and richer. While I have no quarrel with their description of Kuyper

and Bavinck themselves on the topic, I believe there is more to the Reformed natural-law tradition than the authors give it credit for. Kuyper's and Bavinck's views were probably not as substantively distinct from the larger tradition as the authors suggest.

I conclude with a few reflections on this book's title and subtitle. The authors entitle their book *Neo-Calvinism*, yet their focus is almost entirely on the work of Kuyper and Bavinck, whom they frequently refer to as "the neo-Calvinists." To their credit, Brock and Sutanto are very clear what they mean by "neo-Calvinism," but neo-Calvinism ordinarily means something rather different from the thought of Kuyper and Bavinck. Neo-Calvinism represents a tradition of thought that has been developing for nearly a century and a half. It has spread to many places around the world, and its practitioners have advocated a variety of ideas, many of which Kuyper and Bavinck themselves did not advocate and some of which, arguably, they would have rejected. Kuyper and Bavinck may have been its progenitors, but neo-Calvinism involves a good deal more than their work. There is something off-kilter about defining neo-Calvinism so narrowly when the neo-Calvinism almost everyone knows has been filtered, modified, and developed through many subsequent writers and institutions. Treating neo-Calvinism as "a nineteenth-and early twentieth-century movement in the Netherlands" (3) is analogous to defining Christianity as a mid-first-century movement in the Mediterranean or Reformed theology as a mid-sixteenth-century movement in Switzerland. This is not really a book about neo-Calvinism. It is a book about Kuyper and Bavinck, the progenitors of neo-Calvinism.

The book is subtitled *A Theological Introduction* because this is a study of Kuyper's and Bavinck's *theology*, in distinction from most works on neo-Calvinism which focus on the movement's views of politics, art, or other broader cultural issues. I found this an intriguing and promising goal. Yet it is remarkable how almost every topic addressed in the book turns into a discussion of something related to "Christianity-and-culture" debates. As two examples, chapters three and nine address ecclesiology, yet a major theme of the former is the "leavening" power of Christianity's catholicity, and a major theme of the latter is the relationship of the church and the world. One might also note how the authors define neo-Calvinism in terms of developing a "holistic worldview" (20) and their suggestion that "the continuity of God's work in the nature-grace relationship is the key insight of neo-Calvinism" (134). This book is indeed a work of *theology*, but more precisely it is a book on the theological roots of Kuyper's and Bavinck's views on Christians' place and work in the broader world. If one of the book's purposes was to show that neo-Calvinism is more than a Christianity-and-culture movement, its success is limited. In fact, it may reinforce the opposite conclusion. The authors say that the term "neo-Calvinism" has "become associated, even as a synonym, with transformationalism" and that "this ought not to be so" (4). Although I agree with them that such an association is simplistic, their book has not done as much to dispel this impression as they probably hoped.

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ServantPoetry

Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

An Ode of the Birth of Our Saviour

In numbers, and but these few,
I sing thy birth, oh JESU!
Thou pretty Baby, born here,
With sup'rabundant scorn here;
Who for thy princely port here,
Hadst for thy place
Of birth, a base
Out-stable for thy court here.

Instead of neat enclosures
Of interwoven osiers;
Instead of fragrant posies
Of daffadils and roses,
Thy cradle, kingly stranger,
As gospel tells,
Was nothing else,
But, here, a homely manger.

But we with silks, not cruels,
With sundry precious jewels,
And lily-work will dress thee;
And as we dispossess thee
Of cloths, we'll make a chamber,
Sweet babe, for thee,
Of ivory,
And plaster'd round with amber.

The Jews, they did disdain thee;
But we will entertain thee
With glories to await here,
Upon thy princely state here,
And more for love than pity:
From year to year
We'll make thee, here,
A free-born of our city.