

A vertical stem of orange and yellow gladiolus flowers is the central focus of the image. The flowers are arranged in a dense, upward-pointing cluster. The petals are a vibrant orange, with a bright yellow center. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a garden or field setting. The lighting is natural, highlighting the texture of the petals.

Planned Giving

May 2024

Ordained Servant

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May 2023

From the Editor

There has always been a debate about giving in the new covenant: Is the tithe, ten percent, the rule for the Christian? I used to defend the tithe, for fear that without it giving would be anemic and not support the ministry of the local, regional, and national churches. I was a church planter much of my ministerial life. I have come to realize that, while ten percent might be a useful rule-of-thumb, our generosity ought to be an appropriate response to the overwhelming generosity of our King: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Alan Strange lays out the general importance of financial generosity in order to form the groundwork for our end-of-life giving in estate planning. His article, “Planned Giving as a Christian Duty,” is a biblical encouragement toward that generosity.

My servant thoughts this month deal with the red-letter versions of the Bible. Is there a downside? “Seeing Red” argues that red letters for Christ’s incarnate words only tends unwittingly to undermine the authority of what is in black letters.

The fourteenth of sixteen chapters of *The Voice of the Good Shepherd* covers general preparation of preaching and ministry: “Develop Your Whole Person.” This chapter expounds the implications of the Form of Government requirement that ministers have a liberal arts undergraduate degree, which is an integral part of their preparation for the ministry.

D. Scott Meadows’s review article, “Chrysostom on the Ministry,” reviews a fascinating early work on Christian ministry by the golden tongued St. John Chrysostom: *Six Books on the Priesthood*. It is remarkably relevant because the human situation has not fundamentally changed since Chrysostom’s day.

David Koenig reviews *Spiritual Warfare for the Care of Souls* by Harold Ristau. On rare occasions if I think a book is widely circulated among us but is not helpful, or perhaps even dangerous, I will have it reviewed. Lexham Press, while Lutheran in confession, has published many Reformed books over the past decade. This Ristau volume is in the “not helpful” category, because of his speculative assertions in some areas of his discussion of pastoral care.

Our poetry this month is a piece of mine based on Baroque composer Dieterich Buxtehude’s *Membra Jesu Nostri*, composed in 1680. Instead of focusing on the broad narrative of the events leading to the cross, this is a cycle of seven cantatas, each addressing a part of Jesus’s crucified body as he suffered on the cross: feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, and face.

The cover is a gladiola from my garden.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Thoughts

Seeing Red

By Gregory E. Reynolds

I was startled recently upon reading of the baptism of Jesus by John in Mark 1:11: “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” While this declaration itself is profoundly startling, I was startled in a less important way by the fact that the heavenly declaration of the living God is not in red letters. Why? Unfortunately, the ESV I use on my iPad is the ubiquitous red-letter version. While the fondness for this version is well meant, as was its nineteenth-century originator Louis Klopsch, I believe that there is a hidden danger lurking here, although to me—and I am sure I am not alone—the danger is obvious: the words of the incarnate Son seem more important than the rest of the Bible. This is patently not true, since the entire Bible is inspired by the Spirit of the Son, as we shall see.

But first I would like to briefly look at the origin of the red-letter Bible. Here is what Steve Eng says:

It is a surprisingly recent innovation, instigated by Louis Klopsch (1852–1910), an enterprising immigrant journalist. . . . By 1890 he was American editor of the British weekly, *The Christian Herald*. . . . Then on June 19, 1899, while composing an editorial, his eye fell upon Luke 22:20: “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which I shed for you.” Seizing upon the symbolism of blood, Klopsch asked Dr. Talmage if Christ’s words could not be printed in red. His mentor replied: “It could do no harm and it most certainly could do much good.” . . . Red letters are especially useful in the King James Version and in other translations where quotation marks are not used. There are also those super-intricate quotations-within-quotations (some of them four times removed), where the red letters are crucial for separating the words of Christ from surrounding text.¹

The Evangelical publisher Crossway pinpoints the first publication: The first red-letter New Testament was published in 1899, and the first red-letter Bible followed two years later.²

¹ Steve Eng, “The Story Behind: Red Letter Bible Editions,” *International Society of Bible Collectors*, (*Bible Collectors World*, Jan/Mar 1986), http://www.biblecollectors.org/articles/red_letter_bible.htm. Reprinted by permission of *Triads Quarterly*.

² “The Origins of the Red-Letter Bible,” March 23, 2006, by Crossway, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/red-letter-origin/>.

Crossway goes on to defend the red-letter New Testament. But by emphasizing the extensive words of Jesus, the incarnate Christ, mostly in the four gospels, the words of the eternal Word are unwittingly diminished. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” (John 1:14). The Son is the eternal Word, the second person of the Trinity. Prior to the incarnation he is intimately involved in the history of redemption in the Old Testament. Jude asserts this when he says, “Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe” (Jude 1:5). Paul reminds us similarly:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. *For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.* (1 Cor. 10:1–4, emphasis added)

The capstone of my argument against the red-letter version is revealed by Peter: Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time *the Spirit of Christ in them* was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet. 1:10–12, emphasis added)

So the Spirit of Christ inspired the old covenant prophets, demonstrating that these words are as much Christ’s as are his words in his humanity; and they bear the same authority. Klopsch explained what he believed one main advantage of the red-letter version is:

The plan also possesses the advantage of showing how frequently and how extensively, on the Authority of Christ himself, the authenticity of the Old Testament is confirmed, thus greatly facilitating comparison and verification, and enabling the student to trace the connection between the Old and the New, link by link, passage by passage.³

He goes on to make an argument for the red-letter Bible that actually undermines his case:

In the Red Letter Bible, more clearly than in any other edition of the Holy Scriptures, it becomes plain that from beginning to end, the central figure upon which all lines of law, history, poetry and prophecy converge is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. He expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself and the Divine plan for man's redemption, and the Red Letter Bible indicates and emphasizes this Divine exposition and personal revelation at each

³ Louis Klopsch, “Explanatory Note,” in *The Holy Bible: Red Letter Edition* (New York: Christian Herald, 1901), xvi. From Crossway’s “The Origins of the Red-Letter Bible,” <https://www.crossway.org/articles/red-letter-origin>.

successive stage, making them so clear that even the simplest may understand. It sheds a new radiance upon the sacred pages, by which the reader is enabled to trace unerringly the scarlet thread of prophecy from Genesis to Malachi. Like the Star which led the Magi to Bethlehem, this light, shining through the entire Word, leads straight to the person of the Divine Messiah, as the fulfillment of the promise of all the ages.⁴

Jesus's own hermeneutic demonstrates that the TANACH (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) reveals him in his suffering and glory (Luke 24:27, 44).

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Furthermore, Paul's words, as well as all the New Testament writers', are of equal authority with Jesus's because it is his Spirit that inspired them. Jesus promised this before his death:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13–14)

Peter equates Paul's writings with Scripture:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, *as they do the other Scriptures*. (2 Pet. 3:15–16, emphasis added)

My initial thoughts were spurred on by the realization that the words from heaven at Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:11 were not in red, and this gave rise to a concluding thought: Even if those words, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," were in red, the problem would not be solved because Mark's historical record of this event is also inspired. Who wants to read red type anyway; it is distracting at least, and misleading at worst.

All my other formats for the ESV do not have the red letters, and I like not seeing red; but when I see red, it makes me grateful that usually I do not, as it tends to undermine the authority of the whole Bible.

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⁴ Klopsch, "Explanatory Note," xvi.

ServantLiving

Planned Giving as a Christian Duty

by Alan D. Strange

I have been asked to write on Christian planned giving. This assignment, then, has in view how we as believers use our money, especially when it comes to financial and estate planning that may be part of an established trust or some other arrangement in our wills that makes sure our monies continue to work for kingdom causes, particularly the church and her agencies. I claim no expertise on the mechanics of such. What I write here should not be taken as any specific financial advice but rather as a biblical, theological, and historical look at how and why Christians should give of their resources, especially their financial ones, to the church.

While “planned giving,” at least the giving ordinarily indicated by the use of that couplet, is quite appropriate for Christians as they think about how to get the most out of their estate for the sake of the kingdom, it is appropriate for all giving to enjoy a measure of planning. In other words, Christians should determine regular giving patterns, increasing that amount as they have an opportunity, and not allow giving to be a thoughtless, “I’ll throw a couple of bucks into the collection plate.” I do not believe that the tithe is binding in the New Testament.¹ Still, I think that one’s giving in this era ought to be as generous as is reasonable given one’s income and worth, and it should include both regular giving and spontaneous giving, at times, all in keeping with being a “cheerful giver.”

The Committee on Coordination has asked Keith LeMahieu to help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with planned giving. Those with specific questions about this and seeking to follow appropriate giving procedures should contact him. He will also help those interested in working with the Christian planned giving organization, the Barnabas Foundation.² What I will endeavor to do in this essay is not Keith’s work—I lack the competence for that—but to examine the biblical call to stewardship, the challenge that comes to all of us who have received, as we have, all things in Christ, “in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Christ, we all joyfully confess, gave his all, holding back nothing, and we must give our souls, our lives, our all, as stewards of all the good gifts that God has so freely given to us (Rom. 8:32)

When we think about being stewards, we think about properly husbanding and using our resources. And we know from Romans 12:1–2 that our giving is to be unstinting, holding back nothing. As we often say, we are to give ourselves, our very persons, all that we are and have. We often put this in terms like this: we are to give to God, who has

¹ Iain Duguid, *Should Christians Tithe?: Excelling in the Grace of Giving* (St. Colme’s Press, 2018). Duguid helps guide us in the grace of giving in the New Testament era in which the tithe, as such, no longer binds. However, our giving should be no less in the time of gospel fulfillment than it was during the time of gospel foreshadowing.

² For information from Keith LeMahieu or about the Barnabas Foundation, see *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (April 2024), 20, 24. See also https://opc.org/planned_giving.html.

given all to us, freely of our time, treasures, and talents. Before unpacking more of this imperative that is ours—to give ourselves entirely to God and our neighbor, as the very expression of love to which we are called—we should first think of the indicative that serves as our motive to do so. In other words, the basis for all *our* giving is what *God* has given to us, particularly what God has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Citing Romans 12, as I did above, calls to mind what commentators point out about that great imperative that is ours in that passage, to present even our “bodies as a living sacrifice.” If we are to present ourselves to God in this fashion, it means that we are to give ourselves in the totality of our beings to God as our worship of him. On what basis does Paul make this remarkable appeal to give ourselves to our God? He dares to call us to such remarkable sacrifice based on the “mercies of God,” all Christ has done for us, as Paul has discussed thus far in the first eleven chapters of Romans.

We might say, in summing up Paul’s message in those chapters, that he discourses on how, though we are miserable sinners deserving judgment and death, God was pleased by the active and passive obedience of Christ to renew us, to grant us faith and repentance by the work of the Spirit, and to apply all the merits and mediation of Christ to us so that we are justified, adopted, sanctified, experience perseverance in all trials, and finally, are glorified. The Spirit applies all the merits and mediation of Christ to God’s elect, among Israel and the nations, all to the glory of our Triune God.

As noted above, we must give him all our time, treasure, and talent. With respect to our time, we are to labor six days and to remember and sanctify the seventh (now observed on the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day), emblematic that all our time is his, in labor, recreation, worship, etc. The older writers used to say that a sabbath well spent is a week well begun, presaging the spending of all our time in joyful service to him. Similarly, all the talents and gifts that he has endowed us with are to be used in his service and for his glory, both in the general office of believer and the special offices of deacon, elder, and minister within the church, as well as in all the particular pursuits and occupations held by believers as they live their lives (in the professions, the guilds, as homemakers, etc.). So whether we are exercising the gifts that God has given us on the six days in our various vocations or more directly in his service on the Lord’s Day, we are to do all for the good of all, especially the household of faith, and the glory of Christ.

And then there is our treasure, the monies and other valuables (lands, businesses, etc.), which the Lord has empowered us to obtain or blessed us to have. Ordinary ways we properly obtain money or other valuables are by inheritance, gift, or earning it by the sweat of our brow, whether through manual labor, professional work, etc. We are not to steal, Paul says in Ephesians 4:28, which would include all the illegitimate ways to receive money. In other words, we are not to be self-centered takers any longer, as we characteristically are in the flesh, but productive givers who not only refrain from taking what is not ours but also earn enough to care for our families, and even enough to give to others who may be in need. This was so the case in the Jerusalem community that the early church had a communal pot, as it were, in which monies would be put (Acts 2:44–45), supplied by things like selling land, so that all the saints in Jerusalem might share in the good things of the Lord and have no want, with sufficient food, clothing, shelter, etc., for all.

Whether or not we have that sort of common pot—for many reasons, and in most places, God’s people have not chosen to live precisely in that fashion—we are to ensure

that all in the household of faith have enough (Gal. 6:10). This does not mean that the church should support those in it who are fully capable of providing for themselves and their families (2 Thess. 3:10–12), but that those with genuine needs, whether widows, orphans, disabled, impecunious through persecution, etc., should be cared for (1 Tim. 5). No small part of this caring for all, and we may say a central part, is properly providing for those called to minister among God's people (1 Cor. 9: 7–12).

Paul makes it clear that those who minister should live out of what is provided to them as ministers and have a right to do so. That those who minister should be properly provided for both in their years of active service and thereafter in their retirement (as was the case with the Levites) has come more into view in recent years in the OPC. We have a pension fund to help secure such a system, and the newly minted Committee on Ministerial Care spends the bulk of its time seeking to ensure that ministers receive proper financial and other care both during and after their ministries. Resources like the Obadiah Fund, which is currently being further capitalized, help with ministers whose retirement resources are inadequate. The CMC can be contacted for further information in this respect, as well as other committees like Coordination, as noted above.

It should be noted here, as just intimated, that the imperative to give, particularly for the support of the church's ministers, whether as pastors, teachers, missionaries, etc., is not new, i.e., something peculiar to the New Testament. Of old, God's people were called both to care for each other, especially the most vulnerable and needy, with gleaning laws, a poor tithe, sabbath and jubilee laws, etc.; they were also called to care for the clerical class, the Aaronic priesthood particularly and the Levites more broadly (seen throughout Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.). The Levites had no land inheritance, in fact, and did not tithe but lived off the tithe. Ministers are to continue to live off the giving of God's people—the *Westminster Form of Presbyterian Government* notes that evangelical ministers are, in that sense, and other respects, the New Testament version of the Old Testament priesthood. This is why Nehemiah was so exercised upon the return from captivity when, once again, the care of the Levites fell into desuetude, and they suffered neglect and abuse (Neh. 13).

While a committee like Christian Education may use giving to produce hymnals and other Christian materials, no small part of giving to the church, more broadly, including planned giving, should be set aside for personnel, i.e., ministers serving in various ministry settings. Giving to the Committees on Home Missions and Foreign Missions, for example, is about church planting or getting missionaries to the field and supporting them there, all of which involve the support of personnel. We in the OPC do not think that buildings and real property are evil because they are material; rather, they are good gifts of God to be used for the edification of the saints and the glory of the Savior. Yet, nothing is more important than the support of personnel, because nothing is more important here below than people, those made in God's image.

Of all the things the church cares about, she cares the most for her people, those who are ministers, and those who are members. We are thankful for buildings, books, programs, and everything that enables us to serve our Savior. But nothing will ever be more important to us than the church's people. As Paul notes, God's call not to muzzle the ox is not ultimately about oxen (1 Cor. 9:9). Yes, God cares for all the creation, but no part of it more so than for those for whom Jesus lived and died. This is why we must be giving to support ministers, whether in our local churches, in their retirement, in church

planting, or on the foreign mission fields. This is one of the most important reasons for our giving.

Truthfully, if Christians gave as they ought to give, we would be able to fully support local ministries (no need for bi-vocational ministry) and have a vigorous program of church planting and supplying our foreign mission fields. With respect to that last point, it is the case that something more is needed, especially these days for the foreign mission fields: we need gifted men willing to answer the call to preach abroad as well as at home. There are doubtless many reasons, fear perhaps serving as no small factor in the 9/11 and post-COVID world, for the reluctance of men to serve as foreign missionaries, including even the misapprehension of the younger generation that such is no longer needed given the digital world. But “virtual” missionaries and AI will not do it; we need men to go to the field. Douglas Clawson can flesh this out for those interested, and I urge readers strongly to consider the call to serve on the foreign mission field. So we need more than money for the church to do its work. But we never need less than money (or less money).

We often hear the church commended, particularly in the aftermath of what is deemed a good Thank Offering, for its generosity. The giving of some, indeed, is exemplary and should be commended. So, too, with the stewardship of time and gifts for some. But most in the church could, frankly, do better. We need more of Christ’s church to give of their time, treasure, and talent, and while some are giving a great deal, many are giving little comparatively (remember, giving is to be in accordance with what we have; hence the extravagance of the “widow’s mite,” Luke 21:1–4).

I am reminded of a debate in a sister church about establishing a committee to support missions; some had raised the question of whether the church could afford it. A good brother gave a wonderful speech supporting it, noting the sort of cars in the parking lot at church and the sort of homes that parishioners lived in. He affirmed that, indeed, given the wealth that he saw in some of our churches, giving to the church should be far more than it is. He was right then and now. We can do much better in giving and planned giving to the church. We need to encourage one another in our giving.

I would argue, as did Charles Hodge in the nineteenth century, that we need to give to a churchwide fund to ensure that the gospel is preached everywhere: in the urban settings, as well as the suburban and rural ones. Hodge noted that in the Free Church of Scotland, which came into being when a number of churches left the established church because of its corruption (in 1843), one of its noble commitments was the Sustentation Fund for ministers in that church. The problem that the Fund sought to address was a perennial one: ministers in large churches had more than enough, and those in smaller churches often went lacking monetarily. The purpose of the Sustentation Fund was to encourage all the churches to give so that those in smaller churches would have enough.

In other words, the purpose of the fund was, if not to eliminate salary inequity, to at least minimize such, with the ultimate goal of achieving or coming close to salary parity. This concern about ministerial salary inequity was not absent from the American scene. Charles Hodge had such a concern, perhaps fueled partly by his Free Church contacts. It was so important, in fact, to Hodge, that when he preached the opening sermon of the 1847 General Assembly, as was the custom for the moderator of the previous Assembly—he had been the moderator of the 1846 General Assembly—he chose as his text 1 Corinthians 9:14, “Even so hath God ordained that they which preach the gospel should

live of the gospel”³ (KJV), arguing from the text that, among other things, the whole church ought to support its pastors as it did its missionaries.

Writing twenty years later about this, when his synod (of New Jersey) was addressing the matter, Hodge noted,

One reason assigned for the fact that so many ministers, well qualified for the sacred office, were destitute of regular employment, was the insufficiency of support. Many of them had been forced to leave their fields of labor because they could not sustain themselves and families upon the salaries which they received.⁴

Hodge argued that leaving the support of churches solely up to particular churches “cripples the energy of the church, and prevents its progress. Churches begun and cherished for a while are abandoned; promising fields are neglected, and to a large extent the poor have not the gospel preached to them.”⁵

Have things changed much among us? Hodge continues, “It is the crying sin and reproach of the Presbyterian Church that it does not preach the gospel to the poor. It cannot do so to any great extent or with real efficiency” if the burden for such must fall solely on the local situation in all cases. “What provision,” he plaintively asks, “have we for preaching to the destitute? . . . Something must be done to rescue our church from this reproach and to enable her to do her part in preaching the gospel to all people.”⁶ In Hodge’s day, especially those in remote rural areas suffered; in ours, it tends to be the urban poor who lack solid gospel preaching.

At the present time, of course, in our home missions program in the OPC, church planters receive support from both the presbytery and the denomination over the first four years or so of new mission work. There is a decrease each year in the amount of support received. However, there are some works in impoverished areas that cannot support themselves after four years. We could continue to support them (and the OPC has done this in some cases) beyond the four years. In some cases, organized churches remain, or may become, so impoverished that they can never pay a minister a living wage. Should we not be willing as a whole church to help those churches, even stateside, that cannot help their pastors?

Not only does the early Jerusalem church furnish us with a good example of saints making sure that all needs are met, but so does Paul’s fervent commitment to the Jerusalem Collection (2 Cor. 9). Paul’s zeal for the whole church to give its support to a part, perhaps far removed from those giving support, but in need, moved him to dedicate much energy to the gathering and delivering of a collection to Jerusalem, further evidence that we should be caring for the church universal, not only with our prayers but with our pocketbooks.

What is to be done to bring the gospel to those who cannot afford to support a Reformed minister among them? What about churches, whether OPC or other NAPARC

³ Reported on by Hodge himself in his article, “The General Assembly,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19.3 (July 1847), 396. In this same issue of the *BRPR*, Hodge wrote Article 3, “The Support of the Clergy,” on Thomas Chalmer’s description of and appeal for the Sustentation Fund, 360–78.

⁴ Charles Hodge, “Sustentation Fund,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 38.1 (January 1866), 1.

⁵ Hodge, “Sustentation Fund,” 4.

⁶ Hodge, “Sustentation Fund,” 4–5.

members, established in remote areas with no other Reformed churches around for hours that cannot afford to pay their minister a living wage because they have only thirty or forty members? Such churches cannot combine with another church. Should they simply close? Perhaps we need something like a Sustentation Fund now more than ever. Our resistance to such might reflect a church culturally (and economically) captive to misguided capitalism, in which we figure that churches that cannot support themselves have no right to exist.

I realize that this might be thought in missions (home and foreign) to contravene the three-self principle (Venn's and Nevius's insistence that churches ought to become self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating). But are there no places in the world, including in this country, where the Reformed church needs to go and establish a witness to Christ that may never be able to sustain a minister because of its great poverty? Should we not help? We give diaconal support to needy Christians. However, this is not ultimately a diaconal matter because ministers' salaries are not a matter of benevolence but are owed to them, as the ox that treads the corn is not to be muzzled. We can easily dismiss such concerns if we view the church as a market economy and take a laissez-faire approach. However, we should not view Christ's church under this rubric. Thomas Chalmers in nineteenth-century Scotland did not think so (he was the founder and a champion of the Sustentation Fund) and neither did Hodge in nineteenth-century America. Maybe our model needs further adjustment in twenty-first century America, and we need to be more concerned with supporting the entire church.

The point is that there is a lot to support in our churches, far more than we presently do. And so we should get busy giving more now and engaging in planned giving so that, after we're gone, the church in all her ministries, and particularly her personnel, might continue to receive due support. The concern of Christians in general, and members of the OPC in particular, should be "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, until the end of the world" (WCF 25.3). What does the church need to do this? She needs all the time, treasure, and talents of her members dedicated to the Great Commission. As our culture continues to darken, the church does not need its focus dissipated with the fleshly pursuits of mere Christendom or Christian Nationalism: she needs her members to give regularly, including planned giving, and in all the ways needed for the gospel to go to the whole world with the message of life and hope in Christ alone.

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Servant Word

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Develop Your Whole Person, Chapter 14¹

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

Shall we marvel then, if oratory, the highest gift of providence to man, needs the assistance of many arts, which, although they do not reveal or intrude themselves in actual speaking, supply hidden forces and make their silent presence felt?

—Quintilian²

*The Preacher sought to find words of delight,
and uprightly he wrote words of truth.*

—Ecclesiastes 12:10

Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God.

—John Calvin³

The Importance of General Preparation

General preparation is crucial for edifying preaching. Reading widely on a daily basis is the best fertilizer both for the soil of immediate exegesis and the blooming of the sermon itself. The study of theology has historically been embedded in the liberal arts. For example, Princeton Theological Seminary has always been part of what was originally the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. This connection also accounts for the ordination requirement of a liberal education for ministers in most Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The *trivium* (the tools of learning) and the *quadrivium* (the subjects on which to apply the tools of the *trivium*) formed the basis for

¹ Portions adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 49–51, 243–47, 272–76.

² Quintilian, *The Institutes of Rhetoric*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. E. Butler (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 1.10.7–8.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (1559, repr., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.2.15.

the study of theology—for Medievals, the queen of the sciences. The ancient orator Quintilian said, “Let his discourse continually turn on what is good and honourable.”⁴

“Though moral character is the foundation of Quintilian’s theory, he also advocates three additional practices to build oral competence. The first of these is to foster curiosity about many things.”⁵ Quintilian observes that the influence of the liberal arts on public speaking may not be overtly present in the act of speaking, but they “supply hidden forces and make their silent presence felt.”⁶

Common Culture: The Theatre of General Preparation

General preparation involves participation in common culture. In the common culture, inhabited by believers and unbelievers, there is common curse and common blessing in every area of culture under the terms of the Noahic Covenant.⁷ Since culture making, after the fall, is a human instinct rather than obedience to a command the term “cultural mandate” may be misleading, since fallen man, even with exquisite gifts, is not bent on glorifying God. “Common cultural instinct” might serve us better. In Genesis 9:1–17 we see the rainbow promise of God to Noah of a continual providential blessing on all people until the end of history. The theater of blessing and curse is common to all, until the redemptive program of God is fulfilled.

In the beginning God created man to subdue the earth to his glory. The presence of sin introduced at the fall does not negate or diminish man’s cultural calling. The fall initiated the idolatrous propensity to absolutize various elements of creation. However vitiated his motives or distorted his cultural creations, he is by nature a cultural being. Every activity involved in exploring and exploiting the potentialities of the creation is a cultural activity. Culture “is regarded by Scripture as an extension of creation.”⁸ Ken Myers demonstrates the richness and complexity of this enterprise when he describes culture as

a dynamic pattern, an ever changing matrix of objects, artifacts, sound, institutions, philosophies, fashions, enthusiasms, myths, prejudices, relationships, attitudes, tastes, rituals, habits, colors, and loves, all embodied in individual people, in groups and collectives and associations of people (many of whom do not know they are associated), in books, in buildings, in the use of time and space, in wars, in jokes, and in food.⁹

Henry Van Til offers a more distilled definition:

⁴ Quintilian, *The Institutes of Rhetoric*, 2.2.5.

⁵ Dave McClellan with Karen McClellan, *Preaching by Ear: Speaking God’s Truth from the Inside Out* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), 47.

⁶ Quintilian, *The Institutes of Rhetoric* (1.10.7–8), 163.

⁷ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (South Hamilton, MA: Meredith G. Kline, 1993), 95–99.

⁸ Kenneth M. Myers, *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Culture, then, is any and all human effort and labor expended upon the cosmos, to unearth its treasures and its riches and bring them into the service of man for the enrichment of human existence unto the glory of God.¹⁰

The presence of the Holy Spirit in all the creative and cultural activities of fallen man accounts for what Reformed theologians have termed “common grace.” In his commentary on Genesis 4:19ff, Calvin notes that

the invention of arts, and of other things which serve to the common use and convenience of life, is a gift of God by no means to be despised, and a faculty worthy of commendation. . . . Let us then know, that the sons of Cain, though deprived of the Spirit of regeneration, were yet endued with gifts of no despicable kind; just as the experience of all ages teaches us how widely the rays of divine light have shown on unbelieving nations, for the benefit of the present life; and we see, at the present time, that the excellent gifts of the Spirit are diffused through the whole human race.”¹¹

This restraining influence in turn accounts for the continuation of history for the redemptive purposes of God.¹² Since the church lives in this world, its members participate in common cultural activities, which serve as a theatre of gospel witness as well as enjoyment of God’s world.

Along with common culture in general there are several important ways in which a minister may begin to think about various communication technologies in terms of their positive benefits. Os Guinness and John Seel state the purpose for writing their book *No Gods but God*:

Our purpose in writing is to provide fellow-followers of Christ to be on the lookout for the idolizing of modern myths and be prepared to give a rigorous account of our use of the best insights and powers of modernity.¹³

The positive blessings of common culture impinge on our assessment and enjoyment of electronic media. Along with the need for rest in a fallen world, recreation is a gift of God meant not only to relieve the tedium of work but also to bring glory to him in the enjoyment of his creation. As Paul enjoins the rich to be humble, he also reminds us that such blessings may be enjoyed in faith:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1 Tim. 6:17)

¹⁰ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 30.

¹¹ John Calvin, *The Book of Genesis, Calvin’s Commentaries* vol. 1 (1540–1563 repr., Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969) vol. 1:218–19.

¹² Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 155. “Common grace whose mercies are real while they last, provides the field of operation for redemptive grace, and its material too.”

¹³ Os Guinness and John Seel, eds. *No God but God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 26.

Enjoying cultural blessings is an important aspect of the preacher's general preparation. It helps stimulate our imaginations. Clive Staples Lewis reminds us of the importance of the imagination as a gift of God:

I think that all things, in their way, reflect heavenly truth, the imagination not least. "Reflect" is the important word. This lower life of the imagination is not a beginning of, nor a step toward, the higher life of the spirit, merely an image.¹⁴

The image, the visual aspect of being human, is not per se problematic for the Christian. G. K. Chesterton properly distinguishes between imagination, as God-given gift, and illusion, which is the stuff of idolatry:

Now it is still not uncommon to say that images are idols and that idols are dolls. I am content to say here that even dolls are not idols, but in the true sense images. The very word images means things necessary to imagination. But not things contrary to reason; no, not even in a child. For imagination is almost the opposite of illusion.¹⁵

Many Jews and Protestants have wrongly constructed a dichotomy between word and image, based on a false interpretation of the Second Commandment. The biblical dichotomy is between idolatry and consecration to God. The Second Commandment specifically focuses on the *means of worship*. Even in the redemptive revelation of the tabernacle and temple, God displays a concern for beauty and craftsmanship using images of various kinds. Bezalel and Aholiab went to great pains to craft the tabernacle in accordance with God's plans and specifications. In Exodus 31:3–5 we read:

I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.

This included images of pomegranates and cherubim. Thus, even in the Old Covenant, images were not forbidden means of worship. But they had to be prescribed by God explicitly. While these images were part of the "types and shadows" of the Mosaic economy, the two New Covenant sacraments involve prescribed visual elements. The Puritan "Regulative Principle" clearly forbids the use of images in worship, which form part of the *substance* of worship. This does not apply, nor did the Reformers or the Puritans intend it to apply, to our cultural endeavors.

Imagination is a gift of perception, essential to all human activity. The verbal interprets the visual, and the visual expresses the verbal. Witness how many words refer to visual realities. Language is full of metaphors. Imagination involves a complex mixture of the verbal and the visual. Reading involves the interpretation of images of letters and words on a printed page. To drive a wedge between words and images is not an option for the Christian media ecologist. Electronic media, especially the image

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), 167.

¹⁵ In Vigen Guroian, "The Moral Imagination in an Age of Sentiments," *The Intercollegiate Review* 34, no. 1 (fall 1998): 16, quoting from G. K. Chesterton *Autobiography*.

media, are not inherently idolatrous. Remember, Calvin's "idol factory" is the fallen human soul, not Apple or Microsoft. Electronic media are part of the God-given development of human culture. The Christian must critically appreciate them as such.

Thus, well done movies, DVDs, documentaries, searching the Internet to pursue a hobby, may be enjoyed with thanksgiving as each of these activities is consecrated to God, and thus useful in cultivating the whole person of the preacher.

Reading and Writing: Cultivating the Soul

With all that we have said about the importance of orality in earlier chapters, it needs to be emphasized that private reading, deep reading, broad reading, and constant reading of Scripture are absolutely essential to the development of the mind and spirit of the preacher. As Joel Nederhood counsels: "Be addicted to reading."¹⁶ This does not contradict the need to distinguish between written and oral *in the pulpit*. As William Zinsser observes in his classic *On Writing Well*:

Good writers of prose must be part poet, always listening to what they write. E. B. White is one of my favorite stylists because I'm conscious of being with a man who cares about the cadences and sonorities of the language.¹⁷

Since the spoken word came first, good writing will reflect the qualities of speech. Hence, the reading of good writing will help make us better handlers of the language in the pulpit. Furthermore, being a good writer enhances logical and rhetorical skills in public speech.¹⁸

One of the best ways to develop oral skill is to read aloud and pay attention to the best oral presentation outside the pulpit. Baseball's radio announcers are an excellent example of vivid speech which engages the listener. In a visual age their skills are tested to the limit. They are well paid to hold attention, with words which stimulate the imagination so that the listener visualizes the game. These announcers were often English majors in college and former English teachers. "That hard grounder to the short stop ate him up. . . . He roped one over the head of the second baseman into right field. . . . He crushed that one and sent it into the stands in center field. . . . He had a notion, but checked his swing. . . . A one-two-three inning-ending double play."

The preacher must cultivate a love for the English language, especially the spoken word. Ransack the best dictionaries. Choose the best poetry and prose and read it aloud. Read the Psalms, George Herbert, Dylan Thomas, Shakespeare, the essays and stories of G. K. Chesterton, Hillaire Belloc, Stephen Leacock, Christopher Morley, *aloud!*

It is not just reading, but reading aloud that helps the most. This is closer to an oral interpretation of the literature. Reading out loud not only focuses the student on the content at hand, but also toward its oral expression, inflection, and pace. . . . It is writing that forms the capacity for natural-sounding speech. . . . our minds are

¹⁶ Joel Nederhood, "Effective Preaching in a Media Age," class notes, Westminster Seminary California, 1990.

¹⁷ William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 7th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 36.

¹⁸ Richard S. Storrs, *Preaching without Notes* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875), 45ff.

indelibly imprinted with speech patterns. . . . Reading good writing builds overall verbal agility, though in a very slow and indirect manner. . . . Quintilian has taught us that literacy and orality are not enemies.¹⁹

The *King James Version* is best suited to the practice of reading Scripture aloud, not because it is a perfect or even the best translation, but because it was produced in a golden age of orality, the Elizabethan age of Shakespeare. In this period the literary and the oral were held in superb balance. One thing is certain: the *Authorized Version* was translated to be read aloud in churches. The authorized title says, “appointed to be read in churches.” This did not mean silent, private reading. Let the beauty of the best of the richest language in history sink into your oral memory. Words are your tools. Court them. Work with them to become a wordsmith. Fall in love with them. As McLuhan said, “language itself is the principal channel and view-maker of experience for men everywhere.”²⁰ “The spoken word involves all the senses dramatically.”²¹ The preached Word is the most powerful “view-maker” of all, as it corrects the idolatrous “view-making” propagated by the electronic media, and inculcates the redemptive “view-making” of the heavenly reality of the incarnate Logos.

A rich vocabulary is only developed through hard work. Looking up every unknown word is essential to developing a storehouse of tools of expression, what Quintilian calls “the treasure-house of eloquence.”²² The *Oxford English Dictionary* is the standard,²³ but for everyday use Dictionary.com and the Merriam-Webster are excellent, and both have very accessible applications for computers and mobile devices. Furnishing the mind with tools for the tongue is akin to the painter’s skill in mixing colors on his paint-filled pallet.

Often the *King James Version* is considered a stumbling block to modern understanding. I believe that is only partly true, and largely due to some—there are not that many—archaic words. But when read aloud it has a vividness and an oral power unequaled by any other translation. Because the average person today has little sensibility for the beauty and power of Elizabethan English, jaded as we are by secondary orality, image media, and functional illiteracy, I believe we are wisest to use a modern translation like the *English Standard Version* in the pulpit, because it retains the accuracy and much of the oral excellence of the *King James Version*, without its archaisms. It may surprise some to learn that one of the great lessons of the *King James Version* as a translation is its use of vernacular. English, American or British, is an amazingly versatile language. It is always evolving. The preacher must pay careful attention to the language that people speak every day. The danger, of course, is the temptation to be trendy or vulgar. But one need not compromise grammatical correctness, or good taste, to use the people’s English well.

Today it is assumed that speed of communication is an absolute virtue. Efficiency has become an end-in-itself. Combining speed with a lack of context, electronic media radically undermine reflection and criticism. We live in a sea of thoughtlessness—

¹⁹ McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 48–9, 52.

²⁰ Marshall McLuhan, “Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters,” in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, eds., Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 154.

²¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 77–78.

²² McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 148; Quintilian, *The Institutes of Rhetoric*, 11.2.2.

²³ Many good libraries have access to the OED.

informing ourselves to death. Knowing where the off button is, and using it, is only the first step in creating a Christian counter-environment. Taking advantage of the change of pace this affords is a major key to cultivating the soul.

Reading—wide and good reading—fortifies us against the onslaught of high-speed media and promotes a healthy balance of the senses and of every aspect of the soul. We need an apologia for reading, writing, and print in the new context. Birkerts and Postman have in different ways made such an apologia—Birkerts as a writer and Postman as an educator. Second century Coptic Christians invented the codex.²⁴ This proved to be a gigantic improvement over the scroll, both for portability and accessibility. It is also a fine antidote to distraction elicited by our electronic environment. Inattentiveness is our natural tendency. The codex develops a high degree of concentration.²⁵ The ubiquity of electronic screens and sounds threatens to drown out all serious thought. Thus, for the preacher this is an ocean that requires serious navigation skills. As sociologist Jacques Ellul once sagely observed, “people manipulated by propaganda become increasingly impervious to spiritual realities.”²⁶ Efficiency pioneer Frederick Winslow Taylor fanned the flames of the modern worship of efficiency in every area of life.²⁷ Google exemplifies this efficiency. This is Neil Postman’s “technopoly,”²⁸ a culture promoting “cognitive efficiency” above all else.²⁹ “Google is, quite literally, in the business of distraction.”³⁰ “The strip-mining of ‘relevant content’ replaces the slow excavation of meaning.”³¹

The act of reading deepens and extends the self, because the printed word, at its best, involves a continuing conversation with the great ideas of the past, ideas which connect us with our culture and beyond. Reading expands the soul in its connectedness with creation, culture, and cult Lewis assures us:

In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.³²

Good reading then is more than just reading; it involves being delivered from ourselves—to rid ourselves of the narcissist.

²⁴ Svend Dahl, *History of the Book* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1968), 25–29. Cf. David Greenwood and Helen Gentry, *Chronology of Books and Printing [300 B.C.–A.D. 1935]* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 2.

²⁵ Cf. Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); a positive approach to the subject of focusing is Winifred Gallagher, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

²⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 229.

²⁷ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 149–50.

²⁸ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

²⁹ Carr, *The Shallows*, 151–52.

³⁰ Carr, *The Shallows*, 157.

³¹ Carr, *The Shallows*, 166.

³² Clive Staples Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 141.

But one of the chief operations of art is to remove our gaze from that mirrored face, to deliver us from that solitude.³³

Sven Birkerts emphasizes the importance of “inwardness,” or to use Ong’s term, “interiority.” The older definition of sensibility is as follows,

a refinement or cultivation of presence; it refers to the part of the inner life that is not given but fashioned: a defining, if cloudy, complex of attitudes, predilections and honed responses. . . . Here is the power, the seductiveness of the act: When we read, we create and then occupy a hitherto nonexistent interior locale.³⁴

Cultivating inner resources is the business of God’s image bearers, and especially the business of the preacher.

The Psalmist and Paul experienced and even longed for this inwardness in the profoundest way. “Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart” (Ps. 51:6). “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). “I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds” (Ps. 77:12). Meditation is reflection, often done by the psalmist on his bed in complete quiet, concentrated musing, consideration of the meaning of the text, especially the text of Scripture, and its implications in the wide world. “Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent” (Ps. 4:4). This alone builds the interior of the soul. It is one of the great antidotes to the a-musement (i.e. against musing) of the lightning-paced electronic world spreading itself thinner every day on the surfaces of our experience.

Good reading exercises the imagination. At the 1988 commencement of Columbia University, Professor Barzun told his students, “For to read intelligently and profitably, your imagination must work every minute, reconstructing the lives, events, and emotions depicted in print.”³⁵ There is a priority to the verbal and the written which prevents sinful creatures from being beguiled or stupefied by mere images. The best humanly produced images are dispersed purposefully among the paragraphs of a printed book and dominated by the text. We may think of this as an illuminated detail of our approach to all images in God’s world—controlled by the text of Scripture, the pure revelation of the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God.

In *An Experiment in Criticism* C. S. Lewis deals especially with works of literature. For all kinds of reading, the original 1940 edition of Mortimer Adler’s and Charles Van Doren’s *How to Read a Book* is very helpful. Lest Christians devalue other kinds of reading than the Bible, we should remember that we are first creatures made in God’s image and placed in his world. As redeemed sinners we read God’s infallible Word in the context of that world. Thus, we are called to explore, understand, and enjoy his world for his glory. Unless the Christian is a good reader, generally he will not be a good reader of Scripture. This is not to deny that many poor readers who become Christians will become

³³ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 85.

³⁴ Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1994), 87.

³⁵ Jacques Barzun, “An American Commencement,” *Columbia* (June 1988): 50.

good readers by first reading their Bibles; but reading more generally should follow, if they wish to be most useful in Christ's service.

Preachers especially must be deep and wide readers. The breadth of Paul's reading stands as an exquisite example. Joel Nederhood counsels ministers to understand the Bible as a "cultural tract," a document with a solitary purpose, divinely inspired to destroy idolatry.³⁶ Moses was profoundly aware of his culture and blessed by God's Providence with "all the learning of Egypt." The preacher must plumb the depths of Scripture to speak to our times, demonstrating the irrelevance and emptiness of idolatry and calling people to change by God's grace. "The Bible is our environment."

Marshall McLuhan participated very little in the electronic environment. He was one of the most literate men of his or any generation. Thus, we are not surprised to hear, "For all their obsolescence he himself finds books 'a warm, visceral, tactile medium'. . ."³⁷ He eliminated the clutter from his life to read and think and teach face-to-face. His son Eric echoes this effort with simple advice:

This could also take the form of advisories concerning exposure: e.g., "no more than three hours per week of e-mail or Internet" without necessitating, say, four or five hours of direct exercise of literacy as counterbalance (by reading a novel printed on paper—or something).³⁸

The preacher must order his time to master the art of meditation and develop critical intelligence.

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³⁶ Nederhood, "Effective Preaching in a Media Age."

³⁷ Jane Howard, "Oracle of the Electric Age," *Life Magazine* (28 February 1966): 96.

³⁸ Eric McLuhan, "Response to Tom Farrell," mediaecology@ube.ubalt.edu (6 November 1999).

ServantReading

Chrysostom on the Ministry

A Review Article

By D. Scott Meadows

Six Books on the Priesthood, by St. John Chrysostom. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977, 160 pages, \$20.00, paper.

What is the most difficult and dangerous calling in this world? Climbing Mount Everest? Establishing a base camp on Mars? Hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield? No. Everything else is mere child's play compared to one particular calling, according to John Chrysostom: the priesthood.

John Chrysostom (347–407) authored one of the three best known patristic writings of pastoral theology, entitled *Six Books on the Priesthood*. The other two titles are “De Fuga,” also known as Oration 2, by Gregory of Nazianzus (329–90) and “The Book of Pastoral Rule” by Gregory the Great (540–604). The first Gregory's work is the most similar to Chrysostom's, though it is simpler and more sympathetic. John was of the Antiochene school of Bible interpretation that emphasized the literal, plain meaning of biblical texts, unlike Gregory of Nazianzus, of the Cappadocian or Alexandrian school, that favored and emphasized a spiritual sense, indebted to Origen. John's rhetoric was powerful, even if his substance was not so profound as that of Gregory of Nazianzus, who was less eloquent. Gregory the Great's book is a classic on counseling, which deals mostly with how to advise congregants with diverse traits and needs, and so it is not really comparable to John's treatise.

This edition of “Six Books on the Priesthood,” is number 1 of sixty-five so far in the Popular Patristics Series. The translation into English from the original Greek is copyright 1964 by the late Rev. Graham Neville (1922–2009) of the Anglican communion, also contributing the helpful preface and introduction. Chrysostom's work that follows is newly divided into sixteen chapters instead of the original six “books.” The original book divisions were somewhat arbitrary. This edition helpfully correlates each page with the original book and paragraph divisions, making easier comparisons to the Greek text or other translations and allowing standardized citations in academic work.

My attention for this book was captivated by a remark of Nick Needham, author of the church history set of five volumes, *2000 Years of Christ's Power* (Christian Focus). Needham wrote,

In addition to his published sermons, Chrysostom continued to write Christian treatises at Antioch, the most famous of which was *On the Priesthood*, an exposition of the nature and duties of a Christian pastor. This has been reprinted and translated into other languages more often than any of Chrysostom's other works. Another early Church father, Isidore of Pelusium said of this treatise:

“Everyone who reads this book must feel his heart filled with the fire of God’s love. It sets forth the office of presbyter, its dignity so worthy of our esteem, its problems, and how to fulfil its duties in the most effective way.”¹ (emphasis added)

Having read and summarized its contents in twenty pages of my personal notes, this older pastor’s heart certainly was so filled. While Chrysostom’s time, place, culture, and ecclesiastical situation is far removed from mine, passage after passage resonated deeply with my own observations and practical experiences in the pastoral ministry.

One potential hindrance to appreciation of this book is precisely some of those differences, especially when they arise from distinctive doctrines and forms of church government. I would encourage interested parties to adopt to some extent the advice of the late theologian John Webster concerning the will of a person reading Scripture.

A crucial area for theological reflection is the nature of the reader’s will. If sin renders us unwilling to hear and manipulative in our reading, then properly-ordered reading is characterized by a certain passivity, a respect for and receptivity towards the text, by a readiness to be addressed and confronted. Attention, astonishment and repentance, together with the delight and freedom in which they issue, characterize the reader of Holy Scripture when he or she reads well, that is, with courtesy and humility.²

While repentance may not be required by something that challenges us in extra-biblical literature like Chrysostom’s work, courtesy and humility are still in order. Before we become critics, we must first become learners of any with potential to instruct us. We owe authors a sincere attempt to understand and to sympathize, as far as truth allows, with their written substance. A well-rounded education requires us to read widely, reflect thoughtfully, and think critically.

One example of our potential offense immediately confronts us in Chrysostom’s title, *Six Books on the Priesthood*. So deeply are we, as Protestants, committed to the priesthood of the believer, that we can barely suppress our dismay over the term being applied to the church’s ordained ministers of the Word. Recall, however, that this title appeared in the fourth century. In his lectures on church history, Dr. Robert Godfrey explained that in this early period, “priest” was merely a synonym for presbyter or elder. It lacked the full-blown connotations of the later Roman Catholic developments of sacerdotalism. Knowing this assists Reformed readers to appreciate Chrysostom’s book.

Other examples might be mentioned. Rather than being limited to ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons, fourth-century churches had ranks of ministers and the potential for promotions. Monks and hermits were respected for their spiritual devotion to Christ. Not only widows but also virgins (young women) were enrolled as a group living together for special care and oversight by the church. A high view of ordained clergy possessing the power of the keys also prevailed. These and other differences with twenty-first century Reformed ministers and churches may be found off-putting. However, it is with good reason that Chrysostom’s book has endured sixteen centuries. Most of it transcends its own peculiar setting and is of universal

¹ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (Newly revised edition, Vol. 1) (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 255.

² John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 80.

experience and application. These passages are typically golden.

It is well-known that John “Chrysostom” (lit., golden-mouth) was one of the greatest preachers of all time. His second name was given posthumously—a help to his humility no doubt. Eventually he did accept ordination to the pastoral ministry, later becoming, rather against his will, the patriarch of Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey). He was plain spoken, passionate, fearless, and sometimes tactless, leading to many sufferings as a minister, and he eventually was banished to the eastern shore of the Black Sea, where his health failed, and he died.

Concise Chapter Summary

This very concise summary of the book’s chapters is a distillation of the aforementioned twenty pages of my notes.

The entire book is a dialogue between John Chrysostom (hereafter, John) and his bosom friend named Basil. It is not certain which Basil this was, whether Basil the Great of Caesarea (330–79) or, more likely, Basil who attended the Council of Constantinople in 381 as Bishop of Raphanea. These two young men with very similar upbringings, advantages, views, and aspirations, had imagined becoming monks together one day. Then things happened they did not anticipate. First, church officials marked John and Basil as good candidates for the priesthood rather than a monastery. John and Basil thought that whatever they chose, they would do it together. Then John’s widowed mother made an impassioned plea for him never to leave her until she died. Basil would have none of it. Without quite saying he had changed his mind about ordination, John said the decision was not urgent and should be postponed.

When the day came for their ordination, Basil proceeded, being under the mistaken impression that John, too, was to be ordained. John ran and hid, letting Basil be deceived on purpose. John believed he was far from qualified and that Basil would be a great blessing to Christ’s church as a minister.

John’s book explains all this and then rehearses the difficulties and dangers of the priesthood, which allegedly excuse John’s resistance to it. Basil grows increasingly upset, realizing more and more, as John speaks, the nearly impossible charge he had accepted. At the end, John promises to support Basil with encouragement and entrusts him and his ministry to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note: Remarks in quotation marks below are not direct quotations but summaries and paraphrases of thoughts from John or Basil.

Chapter 1, John’s Deceit. John explains the circumstances leading up to Basil’s ordination without John. Basil discovers what has happened, comes to John very upset, and John laughs, hugs Basil, and tells him the little trick was all for the best.

Chapter 2, Basil’s Reproaches. Basil explains he does not know what to say to people who are judging John harshly for evading ordination this way. Basil’s main concern seems to be protecting John’s good reputation, though Basil has an underlying angst about being tricked into ordination alone.

Chapter 3, John’s Reply. John boldly says he misled Basil for his own good, since he should be a priest. John also testifies to his own spiritual inferiority as a reason for running from the priestly office. John comes very close to defending “the lie of

necessity,” but prefers to call it the skillful management of affairs for the best possible outcome.

Chapter 4, The Difficulty of Pastoral Care. John says the pastorate is the best possible way to prove one’s love to Christ, as Jesus’s counsel to Peter shows. Three times Peter affirmed his love and Christ said in response, “Feed my sheep.” Yet, only the best men, like Basil, can fulfill this calling.

Chapter 5, Love—the Chief Thing. Basil retorts, “You say you love Christ, and yet you are showing your love by not doing the thing that most shows love to Christ. Explain that to me.” John replies, “I know I am not qualified, so it would not be the best way for me to show my love.” Basil humbly rehearses his own faults. John begins praising Basil’s unselfish love demonstrated for others and is about to proceed to illustrate Basil’s wisdom, too, when he becomes embarrassed and changes the subject. He says, “Explain how I should answer your critics, John.”

Chapter 6, John Continues His Apologia. John, “They have no grounds to accuse me because, being unqualified, it was humble and prudent of me to decline.” Basil, “If I tell them this, they will admire you.” John, “Right, which only goes to show people find fault without knowing all the facts. We both have acted honorably.”

Chapter 7, The Glory of the Priesthood. John, “The priesthood is the highest of all callings, because it is a heavenly one. People should respect ministers far more than they do. I know it is a lofty calling, so no one can accuse me of pride for refusing it.”

Chapter 8, The Difficulty of the Priesthood. John, “If even the apostle Paul served with fear and trembling, how much more do we have reason to fear ruining ourselves and others in the priestly office? Disqualified men do disastrous things in other responsibilities like taking the helm of a merchant ship when they really do not know what they are doing. They should refuse the honor. Likewise, most should refuse to be priests, it is so lofty and difficult.”

Chapter 9, The Character and Temptations of a Bishop. John rehearses three indispensable traits of the sacred ministry: no ambition to be elevated, exceptional spiritual discernment, and endurance of provocative mistreatment. Basil argues that John has these traits and John disagrees strongly.

Chapter 10, Particular Duties and Problems. 1) Promotions, where ordinarily men are promoted due to earthly considerations rather than spiritual and moral, and this causes ministers much vexation in those circumstances. 2) Widows and the sick, where ministers have complex and social tasks to perform, which can hardly be done without coming under popular censure. 3) Virgins, where ministers are supposed to protect and guide young women toward holiness, and yet ministers lack important advantages of a girl’s own father in securing these aims. 4) Arbitration, visiting, and excommunication, where ministers are hated unless they secure an outcome favorable to the complainant, no matter what other factors may be involved, and unless they have the right expression upon their face at all times, and unless they can rebuke and discipline people with no backlash at all, which is extremely unlikely. You must train yourself to endure the mischief of the mob.

Chapter 11, The Penalty for Failure. John, “A severe penalty from God for failure attaches whether one grasps for the ministry or enters it reluctantly.” Basil, “Now I am really afraid of what I have done.” John, “Punishment is not unavoidable by the grace of God for qualified men like you. People have more common sense when choosing a contractor to build a house than a man for the priesthood.”

Chapter 12, The Ministry of the Word. John, “There is nothing like the ministry of the Word for the spiritual health of Christ’s body, the church. Great knowledge and skill in the Word and theology are needed for pastoral ministry. We must not build up one error by tearing down its opposite, but handle complex matters in a balanced way, like legalism versus antinomianism, and insisting on the oneness of God’s essence without losing the truth of the three distinct Persons, and vice versa. Paul’s denial of excellence of speech is abused by some as an excuse to be careless and lazy preachers, when all he really meant was that he did not adopt the rhetorical standards of the pagans. Paul’s true eloquence and doctrinal depth were stellar and continue helping churches everywhere today. Examine his epistles for evidence of this.”

Chapter 13, Temptations of the Teacher. John, “A priest must work hard in sermon preparation and use great skill to connect with and persuade a congregation. He must not care too much about their praise or blame, nor disregard it altogether. A thin-skinned pastor is headed for much more vexation than necessary. Expect people to judge you more than your sermon and to discount your whole ministry for one perceived fault. Only experience can fully acquaint you with the greatness of the challenge of disregarding the concern of popularity.”

Chapter 14, The Need for Purity. John, “God requires at our hands the blood of those we fail to warn. A minister needs extraordinary Christian virtue, both in public and in fulfilling his private duties like prayer. Some have testified of extraordinary spiritual experiences, sometimes as they are dying, and I believe them. I am not in that category of saintliness.”

Chapter 15, The Contrast Between Bishop and Monk. John, “To be a good monk is a lesser challenge than being a good priest. Monks live in private; priests in public. Monks practice ascetic disciplines; priests cannot do that but must eat and drink and talk with others regularly. Monks are not provoked to wrath by social relationships, and priests cannot avoid these provocations. Even though I am not a monk, I manage to keep mostly to myself, which makes it easier for me to manage my spiritual life. Given all these challenges of the priesthood, which are all but impossible to meet, I could not possibly consider that life.”

Chapter 16, The Conclusion of John’s Apologia. Basil, “Do you mean you have a life free of toil and anxiety?” John, “No, but I sail on a river of trouble while you, now a priest, navigate oceans of trouble.” Basil, “So do you hope to be saved while being of no use to others?” John, “I hope I am of a little use to others’ salvation, but whatever shortcomings I have will meet with a milder punishment from God. Let me tell you a little secret. Ever since we learned about the potential priesthood for both of us, I have been in deep distress of soul, never letting on to you about this.” Basil, “Now you have me all upset because I am terrified I will fail in the priesthood! Please help

me, whatever you can do.” John, “I promise you I will encourage you whenever you have time to get together with me again. As Basil sobbed, I hugged and kissed him on the head and urged him to bear his pastoral charge bravely. I told him, I am trusting in Christ concerning you. He called you and set you over his own sheep, and he will help you to be faithful. I fully expect that on Judgment Day, you will be there to welcome me into glory.”

Concluding Remarks

I must say that only after finishing the entire book did my appreciation for it come to a peak. It held my interest throughout but at times seemed a tad tedious. In his own defense at declining the opportunity to be ordained, John belabors the point, though he says he could go on much more due to the extensive difficulties and dangers of the priesthood, most remaining unmentioned. However, the climax of the book, with his affectionate commitment to Basil in this calling, largely vindicates the whole project, in my judgment.

Without a doubt, men in the pastoral office should read this book. Some will be further equipped to serve well. Others may realize they have intruded where they do not belong and, with good sense, repent and resign their posts.

If this were the only book of pastoral theology read by aspirants to the office, many would likely change their minds and find some other way to invest their lives. In cases of persistent unfitness, that would be a good thing, for them and for the church. However, we would not discourage qualified candidates. Those who are most spiritually minded would probably be the most reluctant to proceed, and yet, if they have the requisite gifts and graces, they are the most suitable for the noble task with the greatest potential blessing to Christ’s church. It still would be great if pastors had a better idea of the occupational hazards of the ministry before their installation. Lest we terrify them too much, however, we ought to recommend to them great books on the topic with a complementary, encouraging message. A modern, commendable example is “Pastoral Theology” by Albert N. Martin, volume 1 of three, entitled “The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life” (Trinity Pulpit Press, published 2018). He takes a moderate position on the divine call to the pastoral office, straddling the view of Charles Spurgeon, which bordered on the mystical, and the view of Robert Dabney, which was nearly as straightforward as choosing a career in the church. Martin’s counsel is wise and practical.

Looking inwardly, I am grateful that the bulk of my own pastoral ministry is now history and, God knows, by his grace alone, I have not disgraced my holy calling. Whatever days Providence yet affords me, however, present a temptation to anxiety, especially after reading Chrysostom’s sober analysis. This throws me all the more consciously upon the Lord. “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). “Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:4–5). Christ, have mercy upon me and all his servants.

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ServantReading

Spiritual Warfare for the Care of Souls, *by Harold Ristau*

By David J. Koenig

Spiritual Warfare for the Care of Souls, by Harold Ristau. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022, xxi + 246 pages, \$19.99.

As Christians all of us would believe in the spiritual world, or as some have called it “the unseen realm.” We are not naturalists after all. However, once we have affirmed this we are left with many questions. For instance, how much do we affirm the involvement of that realm in our day to day lives and ministries? Speaking especially to the ordained ministry, what does spiritual warfare look like as we seek to care for the flock of God? Almost every group of Christians has a specific answer to this, and not everyone in our own circles would agree as to what that looks like.

Spiritual Warfare is part of the Lexham Ministry Guides series. Some of the other titles in the series include *Stewardship*, *Pastoral Visitation*, and *Funerals*. Lexham Press is a Lutheran Publishing House, undoubtedly one we are familiar with as the publisher of Geerhardus Vos’s *Reformed Dogmatics*.¹ Their ministry Guide series does look at things from a clearly Lutheran perspective. The author of this little book, Harold Ristau, is a theology professor at Concordia Theological Seminary. The series is edited by Harold Senkbeil who wrote the first volume, *The Care of Souls*.²

In this book Ristau attempts to show the spiritual warfare aspect of pastoral ministry. This is a difficult and ambitious topic and seems destined to end up pleasing no one. Part of the difficulty Ristau faces is that, though we affirm the spiritual world, it remains largely hidden from us. There are two extremes to be avoided here: that of ignoring the spiritual world completely and that of ascribing everything to it and deemphasizing the physical world. On the one hand, Ristau seems to make more of the overlap with the spiritual world than Scripture does, but at the same time he is to be commended for showing restraint. For instance, he seems to go beyond Scripture in his angelology and much of his system is dependent on this. Now angelology is a notoriously unclear discipline and one in which it is easy to fill in the blanks with our human imagination. I think Ristau falls into this trap, taking as given some things that are extremely debatable scripturally (such as the idea of guardian angels for individuals). However, with all that being said, he stops short of the extremes and abuses that angelology is prey to in much of popular evangelicalism. Ristau does take Scripture very seriously and it prevents him from going too far.

¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012–2014.

² Harold Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls, Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019.

This being a practical book for pastors, Ristau has much to say about the overlap between our ministry and that of angels. This leads him into occasional discussions of means which have no scriptural support. Some of what he says reflects his Lutheran background. He discusses things like using the sign of the cross, vestments, and the use of images in worship as helpful tools in spiritual warfare. Other things he says seem more indebted to the charismatic movement such as the proper disposal of demonic objects and the use of house blessings to exorcise demons from a home. Suffice it to say there is much that a Reformed believer would not find convincing. Most troubling was his frequent discussion of exorcisms. Ristau simply assumes that ministers will be engaged in this sort of work in normal ministry without even interacting with other ideas of demon possession. He never even mentions the belief that a Spirit-filled believer cannot be demon possessed.

Thankfully, extra biblical means are not the only ones he discusses. As expected, he does speak about prayer a good deal. This is one of the better aspects of the book. Another of the book's strengths is his discussion of the spiritual aspects of the service of worship and offers good advice to ministers for encouraging wayward members to attend worship. These nuggets of pastoral wisdom are scattered throughout the book.

Reading this book, I found myself one moment nodding my head in full assent and the next, amazed at how speculative it all was. For OPC officers interested in the subject I believe we can do much better. I recommend giving this one a pass.

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ServantPoetry

G. E. Reynolds (1949–2050)

Passio Jesu

On Buxtehude, *Membra Jesu Nostris*

Nailed feet once beautiful upon
The mountains of Israel with
News of glorious restoration
Now accompanied by your sithe.*

Disabled knees once gamboling
Like a gazelle from lonely town
To lonely town with healing,
Removing every mortal frown.

Helpless hands once touching
Birth-blinded eyes with sight
Astonishing rulers without flinching,
Now facing the darkest night.

Pierced side now provided a hiding
Place for sinners who sent you to
This cursed tree, but you abiding
In your agony remained true.

Expiring breast heaving your last
Breath, bearing our load of sin's
Deserts in your final agonizing fast
Where our salvation just begins.

Bleeding heart, lamenting your
Cruel rejection by your own people,
Forgetting all faithful covenant lore,
The heavenward point of every steeple.

Agonizing face, once shining in your
Transfiguration, signaling the hope
That just begins as you cry and pour
Out your last words as we grope:

“It is finished.” The temple veil is rent
To gain our glorious entrance into your
Holy place for which you were sent,
Which we now and forever will adore.

* weary sighing