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for
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Officers

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A Journal for Church Officers

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Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

Dedicated to Meredith G. Kline

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✦ From the Editor



Last year I attempted to procure a digital photograph of a stained glass window at Oxford for our cover. After making the request several times there was no response. So I literally took matters into my own hands—I shot pictures with my Nikon digital single lens reflex camera of our historic church building here in Manchester, New Hampshire. As I contemplated future pictures, I realized that there is something important about local, recognizable places. Even if you have never seen Amoskeag Presbyterian Church in person, you may have read about the purchase of the old PCUSA building by a tiny mission work in 1998. Or perhaps your only connection is knowing that the building is now being used by an Orthodox Presbyterian Church for its worship and ministry. These connections are a celebration of the local and the historically concrete. The places we inhabit and are located in—in space and time—are significant because God has providentially planned our connection with them in his world.

Mobility is not all it's cracked up to be. The automobile has changed our relationship to space, and to the built environment—and the society that populates that environment. And so I have decided to use both digital technology and the printed page to promote the local over the coming years. This will largely be undertaken through my New England home, especially New Hampshire. I will use historic churches as concrete symbols of the heavenly reality to which they point. As actual places of worship and community they represent the church as an embassy of Christ, which—despite the quest of the Puritans who first settled this land to establish a holy commonwealth—were a testimony of their heavenly hope and to the celestial center of ecclesiastical authority and power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to whom they owed their ultimate allegiance.

Early in 2006, as I began my tenure as editor, I realized that my chief challenge was to attract quality writers. In 2007, I was able to publish almost 125,000 words at opc.org, almost 150% more than what was published in 2006. Due to publishing costs we have had to limit the annual printed edition to 150 pages. This has required making some difficult choices. Thus, articles that were reprinted from previous editions of *Ordained Servant* will not be reprinted. Articles and reviews that are ephemeral, and may lose their importance in the coming years, will not be printed.

I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Paul MacDonald, for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel; and the many people who help in various ways with the publishing of the online edition: Diane Olinger, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, Andrew Moody; the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal; and finally Ann Hart for her meticulous editorial work, and Stephen Pribble and Jim Scott for their final proofing of the printed volume itself.

I hope you will continue to benefit from the articles and reviews that we are publishing on the Web and in print.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Thoughts

Meredith George Kline: Artist-Exegete¹

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2007²

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

As I write I am preparing a sermon on the second Servant Song in Isaiah 49. In my files on the prophets I found a paper on Isaiah 49:6–7 presented to Dr. Kline on November 22, 1978, for his class on the “Prophetic Books” at Westminster Theological Seminary—there was only one in those days. It reminded me that Kline’s biblical theology was influencing me despite some resistance. Having fortified myself against the fragmenting tendency of dispensationalism with the unity of the covenants discovered in the covenant theology of O. T. Allis and John Murray, I was in no mood to consider the discontinuity between old and new covenants. In reviewing my paper I find that nine of fifty-five endnotes refer to Kline’s class notes or writings. The Vos-Kline influence was operating below my intellectual radar. Later, after years of Scripture study and weekly sermon preparation, it began to sink in that continuity and discontinuity were not mutually exclusive but necessarily complementary concepts—and essential for both biblical theology and its systematic brother.

Just after the covenant theology of our Confes-

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1 I owe many of the insights and ideas in this editorial to those who spoke at Dr. Kline’s memorial service, held at First Presbyterian Church, North Shore on April 18, 2007: Meredith M. Kline, David O’Leary, David VanDrunen, Gordon Hugenberger, and Russell Copeland.

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=53.

sion began to become clear to me, a remarkable offer came my way. Meredith George Kline and his son Meredith M. had heard of the modest school that pastor Allen Tomlinson and I had started in the late 1990s.³ The Klimes offered to teach. I was amazed. Thus began a four-year stretch of their selfless efforts to teach a small number of hungry students. M. G. Kline taught a full ten-week course, based on *Kingdom Prologue*, titled “Covenant-Kingdom Foundations” in the fall of 1999; another staple of his teaching career, “Old Testament Prophets” in the fall of 2000; and then “Old Testament Exegesis,” which focused on the night visions of Zechariah, based on *Glory in Our Midst*, in the fall of 2001.⁴ Finally in the fall of 2002 Meredith taught his last class—he ended where he had begun (in good eschatological fashion) with “Covenant-Kingdom Foundations,” a fitting conclusion to a brilliant career. And like one of his theological heroes, J. Gresham Machen, he finished happy to serve in humble circumstances. Even his and Grace’s decision to move to New England in 1965 was rooted in a sense of the spiritual need of the region. A continual presence as a helper at the Deerwander summer camp demonstrated his dedication to serve his Lord above all else.

I still marvel that one of the finest living Hebraists taught in our little church for forty evenings. I chuckle as I remember how he resisted my clipping a microphone to his lapel. But soon he forgot that he was being recorded. He taught with all the energy of a man half his age, and as if we were in a room full of hopeful seminary students. He was a scholar of the top rank, a fine writer, and a very creative and insightful biblical theologian; but he was above all a teacher, with a passion for his subject.

Kline was a gentle and gracious man, especially in disagreement, but not one to back down from controversy when it came to cardinal doctrines of

.....
3 The Granite State School of Theology and Missions held its first classes in 1997.

4 Meredith M. Kline taught “Basic Biblical Hebrew” in the spring of 2000 and “Psalms and Wisdom Literature” in the spring of 2001.

the faith. Also, as a good professor, he knew how to keep students on the alert by teaching insights on the text of Scripture that sometimes went against the grain of conventional evangelical wisdom. Sadly, his view that Genesis 1 is a literary framework has sometimes prevented those who disagree from exploring and appreciating the riches of his exegesis both of that passage and the rest of his extensive work. Often overlooked is his brilliant exegetical defense of both the historicity of the Old Testament narrative and the mid-second millennium BC date of the Exodus. No one has helped me understand and preach the Old Testament like Kline. I don't need to agree with everything he taught to do so.

Further, Kline's writing style has prevented some from benefiting from the profound insight and "breath-taking vistas" he presents in his writings. Just as he often went against the grain of conventional evangelical wisdom, so he developed a rich vocabulary to express his insights, in place of more conventional Christian vocabulary. Far from using such creativity as a ploy for theological innovations, this vocabulary was rooted in the Bible's vocabulary, often hyphenating transliterations of the original languages, such as in *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*. Such linguistic artistry was a pedagogical technique to awaken students to the depth and breadth of Scripture's meaning. Let me suggest that it was the artist in Kline that, humanly speaking, enabled him to see what he saw in the text and express it as he did, both in the details of exegesis and in his larger redemptive-historical program. Allow me to elaborate.

Several things about Dr. Kline's character and gifts stand out as I came to know him since 1978. He looked like a combination of Frank Lloyd

Wright—though thankfully not imitating his arrogant character—and the famous German violinist Fritz Kreisler: the artist and the musician. It was not until his memorial service that I learned that Kline was a violinist and a member, with his artist wife Grace, of the Guild of Beverly Artists. *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* is dedicated to Kline's three sons: Meredith M., littérateur-theologian;

Sterling, architect; and Calvin, musician-maestro. The painting featured on the cover is by Muriel Grace Kline of the White Mountains of New Hampshire (an apt depiction of the heaven land, in my view). Artistic sensibilities clearly run in the Kline family.

Kline's literary artistry was manifested in his ability to discern patterns, especially literary structures, and to see the beauty of both aural and visual imagery in the biblical narrative. In seminary I wondered if he wasn't finding chiasms where there were none. More recently, however, my media studies

have helped me understand the literary structure of oral cultures, especially those predating the printing press. Communication in memorable oral and visual patterns was mnemonically essential. Renewed appreciation of the presence of literary artistry in ancient documents has revolutionized Old Testament and New Testament studies. Kline was on the vanguard of this movement, as one of the few in his day who was solidly committed to the inspiration of Scripture.

The word "artist" in the title of this tribute is first, but as a modifier, not as the most important thing. It is meant to give perspective to Kline's work as an exegete and biblical theologian. His first commitment was to accurately unpack the meaning of the inspired text of God's Word. His artistic sensibilities did not lead the way in his



Dr. Kline playing the violin (with Howard Porter at the piano) in 1957.

exegesis—that would lead to eisegesis. In this regard, the *New Oxford American Dictionary* gives us a helpful definition of “sensitivity”: “The ability to appreciate and respond to complex emotional or aesthetic influences; sensitivity: the study of literature leads to a growth of intelligence and sensibility.” Kline had the uncanny ability to see the literary structure of the Old Testament text as a formative influence on his interpretation of the details of his linguistic analysis.

Furthermore, Kline’s observation of patterns in the textual fabric of Scripture served to fortify the traditional covenant or federal theology of the Reformed tradition. He drank deeply of the covenantal structure propounded by the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. The three essential kinds of biblical covenants were staples of his teaching and writing vocabulary: the covenant of redemption (or peace between Father and Son); the covenant of works (between God and his representatives, the first and second Adams); and the covenant of grace (between the Son and the elect). He understood the importance of this system to the various doctrines of the systematic enterprise—especially the doctrine of justification. He saw the foundational importance of the covenant of works to the nature of justification and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. In the true Vosian spirit, he believed that 2 Corinthians 5:21 teaches that Jesus advanced our nature. In other words, the eschatological hope given to Adam in the garden was realized, not in a return to Adam’s prelapsarian nature, but in the crucified and resurrected Christ. Appropriately, Kline dedicated his biblical-theological reading of Zechariah’s night visions, *Glory in Our Midst*, to Geerhardus Vos.

Kline’s giant intellect was also used to make significant exegetical and theological contributions in the areas of canon; the relationship of the Bible to culture and science, as he explored the biblical doctrine of common grace. For all of his linguistic expertise, Kline never got lost in the details, but rather marshaled them in the service of the grand unified narrative of redemption.

In the great Princeton tradition Kline believed in using the intellect to serve the Lord and his

church. Perhaps this is why his grandchildren called him “Grampa Hodge.” In the great Hebrew tradition, he was like a Torah scholar, poring over his Hebrew text for hours in his study (his maternal grandfather was Jewish). An assiduous worker, he wrote all of his books and articles with pen and paper. But, like the apostle John, he preferred personal conversation, as the many hours he spent with me in recent years attest. Although he was not a gifted preacher, he had a fine pastoral sensitivity. When a student sought comfort upon the miscarriage of his young wife, Professor Kline did not offer an elaborate theodicy, but rather the counsel of a simple and humble piety: “God is a good heavenly Father.” In imitation of his faithful covenant God, Dr. Kline was loyal to friends, family, wife, and church. My last communication from Dr. Kline was April 10, 2006. I was deeply impressed that he took the time to handwrite a letter while experiencing the side effects of radiation treatments. He impressed me with the importance of continuing in the “Machen legacy.” He also summed up the purpose of *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* as “an urgently needed defense of vital, essential elements of traditional covenant theology ... and at the same time a probing of some frontiers in biblical theology.” Truly this is the Machen legacy.

He always had a book to read and wrote a few of his own. On April 14, 2007, Professor Meredith George Kline went to be with his Lord. The opening and closing lines of his last book, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*, reveal his hope: “The Bible tells us of the existence of a realm our mortal eyes cannot see.”⁵ The last sentence reads, “The predestined pleroma of Christ will be assembled in fullness of joy before his Parousia-Presence on consummated Har Magedon, Mount of Gathering.”⁶ His prayers before each class convinced his students that he believed what he taught. For over half a century he taught students to exegete and preach the Christ of Scripture whom he loved.

5 Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 3.

6 *Ibid.*, 222.

Meredith George Kline was truly one of our great professors of biblical theology and one of our great professors of Christ.

We end where we began, because, as in biblical theology, so in the life of the Christian, the end is in the beginning. The hope of the heaven land was the inspiration for the scholarship and teaching of MGK. His life ended with this hope—the reality he taught us all to hunger and thirst after in Christ—the hope rooted in the suffering and glory of the second and last Adam, the coming consummate glory in which the triune God will reign supreme in Christ. ;

Ordained Servants: The Ruling Elder

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2007¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

A friend and colleague in the ministry recently told me that he resigns every Monday morning—mentally, that is. I believe this conveys a true sense of both the intensity and the difficulty of our calling—that is the nature of the ministry itself—but especially the unique difficulty of the ministry in our times. Luther said, “If anyone had told me about what the ministry was really like, ten wild horses could not have dragged me into it.” Some things never change. But in the early 1980s, a retired Reformed minister named John Piersma told Bill Shishko and me that he did not envy us entering the ministry in the late twentieth century, because, he maintained, there is little respect for the ministerial office in the modern world. I would add to this that alongside, and partly responsible for spawning egalitarianism is the dramatic rearrangement of social space and consciousness by the electronic environment. This combination of influences has made our world an extraordinarily

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=31.

challenging place in which to minister.

But this is the world in which we, as servants of the risen Lord, have been ordained to serve. In essence it is the same sinful, confused, rebellious world in which Paul ministered. Above all, it is the world in which the risen Lord Jesus Christ is gathering his elect from among the nations, to join him in inheriting the glorious kingdom over which our Lord is presently the monarch.

The Importance of the Eldership²

One of the great causes of the contemporary church’s weakness is its failure to understand, accept, and implement the biblical form of church government. An essential element of that form is found in the scriptural office of the ruling elder. While it has often been thought that the word “Presbyterian” in the name of a denomination or local church obscures the biblical witness of that church, it should be remembered that the word itself is preeminently biblical. “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word **presbuteroj** (*presbyteros*), which means “elder.” (In various forms, the word **presbuteroj** occurs seventy times in the New Testament.) Since good ordering of the church was important to the New Testament church, we must take church government seriously. It is an important means of spiritual formation. To lament the low state of doctrine and morals in the church today, while simultaneously neglecting and, perhaps, disdaining one of the chief means which God has appointed to correct these problems, is reprehensible and foolish.

Not only does Christ, as the head of the church, have the *right* to institute an office such as the ruling elder, but, as the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the flock, he has done so for the spiritual health and welfare of his people both now and forever (Heb. 13:17).

Why, then, has this good office been largely

2 Based on the Foreword to *The Ruling Elder* by Samuel Miller. Dallas TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1987 (reprint of 1832 edition), iii–vii. © Copyright 1987 by Gregory E. Reynolds. The text of this edition was taken from the second edition of Samuel Miller’s *An Essay, on Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1832).

abandoned by the church in our day? I believe that there are two major reasons.

First, in battling the theological liberalism over the past century, orthodox Christians have minimized doctrinal differences and theological precision in favor of a broad coalition based on certain “fundamentals.” It thus becomes convenient to dismiss biblical doctrines which are not under attack as unimportant or even “divisive.” This reduction of the church’s confession of its beliefs has been aided and abetted by the anti-intellectualism of modern America, leading to an emphasis on emotion at the expense of clear thinking.

Pragmatism has never been a friend of careful thought, and the modern church often seems more interested in getting things done than in considering the biblical warrant or theological foundation for a given activity. Why waste precious time discussing church doctrine when souls are going to hell? Besides, assuming that evangelism is the central task of the church, more than careful oversight and feeding of the flock, might get the church off track. Hence, it has become generally accepted by religious leaders and laity alike that church government is not only secondary to but outside the scope of biblical concern.

Second, the minimizing of doctrine has combined with another unbiblical ingredient—radical individualism—to thwart the exercise of biblical church government. The spirit of the Enlightenment has blossomed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Each man is his own master, accountable to no one but himself. In the church this individualism translates to: “All I need is my Bible and my God. Anything and anyone else is a threat to my freedom.” Pastors may preach, but they had better not meddle. The idea of a body of ruling elders overseeing and shepherding the flock of God has fallen on hard times.

It is incumbent on elders and ministers of the Word to identify this autonomous instinct for what it is: rebellion, not an inborn right. It is perhaps somewhat understandable that secular man in Western democracies should overreact to the spread of totalitarianism in our century. What is sad, though, is that Christians often fail to realize that both totalitarianism and individualistic

egalitarianism are children of the same diabolical parent: autonomous freedom. To live in absolute independence from God has been the agenda of fallen man ever since his rebellion in Eden. This autonomous freedom is the essence of secularism. In fact, pure democracy and the resultant chaos of everyman rule have often paved the way for totalitarian control. The “one-man show” syndrome in most baptistic churches offers a case in point. At its worst this instinct, fueled by modern technologies, levels all of reality to the horizontal—the human—eviscerating human experience of all transcendence.

The other side of this secular cycle is revolution against the dictator or ruling class. Strict Plymouth Brethrenism, in which there are no officers, along with the general disdain for official authority in the church at large, are cases of this reaction. Resisting the concept of church membership and walking away from problems and conflicts are both symptomatic of this pernicious spirit.

Both the abuse of God-ordained authority and the failure to respect that authority are, of course, equally unbiblical. Only a biblical view of eldership will enable the church to avoid this Scylla of dictatorship and Charybdis of radical individualism. The church will steer a safe course in this and every area only if she consciously charts that course according to the inspired map and compass of Scripture.

Positively speaking, when delegated authority in the church is respected by the people and exercised faithfully by the officers, it will bring glory to God and good to his flock (Eph. 4:11–16). In the church, unlike the world, authority is exercised in service, not to self, but to God and his people. The ruling elder is called to be an undershepherd of his self-sacrificing Lord (Acts 20:28). His regard is chiefly for the glory of his Lord and the welfare of his blood-bought flock.

In the present climate of the tyranny of cults, the impersonal manipulation of the mega-churches and mass-media ministries, the therapeutic individualism of the emergent church, and the general malaise of the average church’s leadership, a return to biblical church government is desperately needed. The doctrine of the ruling elder must be a

keystone in any reform.

Today, the church must remember her true identity. In returning to her biblical roots, she will do well to consult the men who have best guided her in the past. In the area of church government, Samuel Miller should be among the first on the list, though his book, *The Ruling Elder*, is regrettably out of print once again. Thankfully, there are many other useful sources in our tradition.³ ;

The Necessity of a Doctrinal Road Map

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2007¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

In my first pastorate in New Rochelle, New York, I was thrilled to discover a series of maps produced and published by Hagstroms. These maps of the five boroughs of New York City and of Westchester County saved countless hours of driving over the years. They also prevented me from

3 Presently, we need to reach back into our Presbyterian heritage. A good place to start is Samuel Miller's *The Ruling Elder*. It was originally published in 1831 and proved seminal to all subsequent debate on biblical eldership. Though Miller's work was an American first, he saw himself building on a rich tradition of teaching on church office. For example, Miller demonstrates that the essential idea of the office of ruling eldership is not a New Testament innovation, but harkens back to Mosaic times. Neither is eldership the ecclesiastical invention of John Calvin. It was recognized by the earliest sixteenth-century reformers; and, in turn they simply rediscovered and amplified what the ancient church had once known. It should also be pointed out that some of Miller's exegesis tends toward a two-office view. For example, he understands 1 Timothy 3 to apply to both elders and ministers, despite the fact that he along with most of his colleagues held a three-office position. As a man of his age, Miller was not entirely free of a few unbiblical customs then current. The most glaring example of this fault concerns his approval of the practice of allowing non-communing, unbaptized tithers to vote in the election of elders. He believed this was a practical necessity, the abuse of which would be safeguarded by the jurisdiction of presbytery. Fortunately, due to the lack of salary, the election of ruling elders was not subject to the same corruption of patronage as was the salaried teaching eldership. The book, however, is remarkably free of this sort of anachronism.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=32. If you are interested in a sermonic treatment of this important subject, go to Pilgrim Crossings <http://www.pilgrimcrossings.org/> and click on "Sermon Audio," then "Topical Messages" for two sermons on catechizing.

ending up lost in one of the many dangerous parts of the New York metropolitan area. Best of all, they helped me to become increasingly familiar with the fascinating place in which we lived.

Discovering the Westminster Confession and Catechisms was even more thrilling. With this accurate Bible map I became familiar with the terrain, avoided getting lost in dangerous places, and became at home with the complex and wonderful world we call the Bible.

As Darryl Hart points out in "The Religion of the Catechism," our radically individualistic culture has little patience with being formed by someone else's ideas. Thus, the thought of using the words of a group of dead men is simply not plausible. I often hear this expressed by Christians: "I want to listen to what God says, not the words of men." This is tantamount to saying, "I don't need a map. I can find my own way." But, while this stance may first appear to be humble, it is actually supremely arrogant. The Reformed Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon, who retained many of the Presbyterian instincts with which he was raised, had a sharp answer to people of this ilk:

Of course, you are not such wisecracks as to think or say that you can expound Scriptures without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd that certain men who talk so much about what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves should think so little of what He has revealed to others. My chat this afternoon is not for these great originals, but for you who are content to learn from holy men, taught of God, and mighty in Scriptures.²

When Washington's troops built their fortifica-

2 C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, 1876 (reprint, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 1.

tions in Brooklyn, he insisted that they explore the terrain before battle to be surefooted during the rapid movements often required in the fight. In the same way, catechizing should be a chief concern of the church militant.

The concept of catechizing is found in many places in Scripture, even where the word itself is not used. From the beginning, the leaders of God's people have been given the task of forming both the thinking and living of the church. Therefore, the religion of the covenant of grace has always been a religion of the catechism. In Genesis 18:19 the LORD said of Abraham, "I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Catechizing is the way of guarding and keeping the church in the way. In the *Shema*³ we have an Old Covenant command to catechize:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 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. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut. 6:4-7)

An example of this kind of Old Testament catechizing is found in Psalm 119. This psalm is structured catechetically as an alphabet acrostic based on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet to aid in memorizing. In New Testament times catechizing continues. Paul describes his fellow Jews as those who "know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law" (Rom. 2:18; cf. 1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6).

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3 A Hebrew text consisting of three passages from the Pentateuch (Deut. 6:4, 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41) and beginning "Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one." It forms an important part of Jewish evening and morning prayer and is used as a Jewish confession of faith.

And, in this issue of OS, Mark Garcia demonstrates that Peter's first letter has a catechetical concern ("Pilgrimage in the Mode of Hope: Thoughts on the Usefulness of Catechism").

In our congregation we teach our young people that when it comes to biblical truth, dogs and cats get along. The certainties of historic Christian faith, known as *dogmas*, are formed in us by the process of catechizing. Of course, memorizing is only the beginning of that spiritual formation, but it is an essential ingredient. As Paul tells Timothy: "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). We could translate the phrase "pattern of sound words" (**υποτυπωσιν ευγιαivovτων λογων**, *hypotypōsin heugiaivovtōn logōn*) as "standard of healthy doctrines." The specific form, as well as the systematic relationship, of sound teaching is crucial to biblical discipleship.

Many people are surprised to discover that the actual word "catechize"—as well as the idea of catechism—is found in Scripture. Luke told Theophilus that he wrote the gospel in order to catechize Theophilus: "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4). The Greek verb for "taught" is **καθηcew** (*katēcheō*), from which we derive our English word "catechize," which means literally "to sound a thing in one's ears, impressing it upon one by word of mouth."⁴ "[T]hose things" are literally "the words" (vv. 2, 4), i.e. the doctrines, the truths. The question-and-answer format has become a time-tested way of achieving this end. So one of the central tasks of the New Testament church was to inculcate the truth through oral instruction. "Inculcate" means "to impress upon the mind by frequent repetition or persistent urging."⁵ The passive voice in the verb "taught" indicates that Theophilus did not seclude himself to privately study the Bible but humbled himself and sought out the teaching of the church. The

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4 Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1853), s.v. "**καθηcew**."

5 *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, College Edition (1964), s.v. "inculcate."

ancient church continued this apostolic tradition in preparing new converts to publicly profess their faith in Christ through catechizing them. They were appropriately referred to as “catechumens.”

An odd usage of the word “catechize” is “to charm or fascinate.”⁶ This is precisely what the church seeks to do with what is memorized: to show how utterly charming and delightful is the truth of God’s Word as start-to-finish it reveals his amazing grace. In other words, to teach God’s accomplishment and application of our redemption in Jesus Christ is to captivate and, thus, mold the hearts and lives of God’s people with God’s truth. This became the all-consuming task and passion of Apollos as Luke describes him in Acts 18:25. “This man had been instructed [catechized] in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord.”

The doctrinal map helps us find our way. Many are justly concerned that an extensive written statement of faith like the Confession, and its teaching instruments the Catechisms, will undermine the authority of the Bible. Properly understood, however, confessions and catechisms help us appreciate the Bible more. Without them, the Bible often becomes either a closed book or a seriously misunderstood one.

Just as no one confuses a map with the reality of the terrain it depicts, so we understand that the Catechism helps us understand the Bible’s terrain. It is not a stand-alone source of truth. So reading the Bible confirms the terrain, just as traveling confirms the map’s accuracy. A map teaches us what to look for and keeps us from getting lost. “Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way” (Prov. 19:2). Learn the map and you will find your way. Forsake it and you will soon be lost.

One of the reasons the church is filled with so much error today is that she has forgotten her past. She has lost the map and is floundering in the dark and often in dangerous places. We are fortified with true doctrine “that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and

6 Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1889), s.v. “kathcew.”

carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14). The ancient church struggled with much doctrinal error. It took centuries to develop sound theology after the New Testament record was completed. Eventually the church fleshed out a very important segment of the doctrinal map by defining the Trinity and Christ’s two natures. The authors of our Confession and Catechisms relied heavily on these formulations in stating these doctrines. It is dangerous to travel as pilgrims without the map our forefathers have labored so arduously to provide. It is positively foolhardy.

The doctrinal map helps us to make spiritual progress individually and corporately. Without a good map we make our own way very slowly, if at all. Imagine moving into a new area and refusing to buy a map; while insisting on making your own. Each time you went out to explore you would add to and revise your map. Your progress would be painfully slow.

But with a good map the wisdom of others helps us make quicker, and more importantly better, progress. Confession writers throughout church history are like biblical cartographers. Their collective wisdom, tested and verified over the centuries, is an accurate systematic guide to the teaching of the Bible. “No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible” is a half-truth. Everyone has a system of doctrine which answers the basic question: What does the Bible teach about God, sin, salvation, Christ, etc.? The real question is: Is your system—however informally constructed—what the Bible teaches? American Christians often sound like Thomas Paine, who once proclaimed that his only church was his own mind.⁷ But, as Presbyterians, the catechisms should be ringing in our ears.

So, to insure safe and profitable travel through the terrain of Scripture, ministers and elders should be fostering the time-honored practice of catechizing in our congregations. ;

7 Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1898), 6.

Preaching and Fiction: Developing the Oral Imagination

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

No one among us would doubt the importance of reading for pulpit preparation. By all accounts we are a bookish lot. We love to pore over tomes of theology and volumes of commentaries. We have been well-trained to seek the collective theological and homiletical wisdom of the past. But how many works of fiction do Reformed preachers read? If the answer is “not many” or “none,” we should ask why. My guess is that many Reformed preachers do not think fiction is worth their time. They may claim that it doesn’t deal with reality the way non-fiction does. Thus history or biography may be considered excellent extra-biblical fare. But, as the logic goes, fiction is fluff; non-fiction alone is valuable. From the Latin *factio* the word may mean either creating or counterfeiting. I hope to prove that the notion that fiction is unreal is itself a fiction, in the pejorative sense. The best fiction probes reality—especially human reality—in a way that no other medium does. Its consideration of the meaning of the human is incomparable. Our Reformed doctrine of common grace provides a theological rationale for appreciating good fiction. As Calvin taught, God gifts unbelievers in various arts and sciences.²

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=36.

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559; reprint, Library of Christian Classics, 20; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.2.15. “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.”

I am—along with my fellow writers in this issue—an amateur reader of fiction. That means I read fiction for the sheer pleasure or love of it (“amateur” from the Latin “to love”), but I have not studied it academically and, therefore, do not analyze it in the way that an English literature major might. As an encouragement to amateur readers, C. S. Lewis suggests a fast from the surfeit of literary criticism.³ Thus, not having studied English literature formally may be, in Lewis’s view, at least partly, a good thing. We amateurs could probably use a little of what Lewis had had his fill of. I do not—because I cannot—pay attention to the technical nature of the structure of fiction. And there is value in understanding such things. But beyond the simple enjoyment (or perhaps at the heart of my pleasure), I have discovered three homiletical benefits from good fiction, which I think are of inestimable value to preachers. First, good fiction presents a picture of humanity that squares with reality, and thus with the biblical account—horribly fallen and yet made in God’s image. Good fiction, whether by a believer or an unbeliever, explores this complex tension. Second, good fiction helps us become better storytellers. The Bible is, after all, the story of redemption. Thus, since God is the divine storyteller, we should imitate his essential means of communicating truth to his people. Third, good fiction expands the color and cadence of the preacher in the preaching moment. Together these form what I call the “oral imagination” of the preacher.

Good Fiction and the Meaning of the Human

As Harold Bloom suggests in the title of his monumental commentary on the Bard—*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*—good fiction expands our understanding of the human condition and, thus, our sympathy with our fellow mortals. We might say that Shakespeare was the inventor of good fiction. Some may object that the Bible tells us all we need to know about the human condition. It is true that the Bible gives us the only authoritative theological grid through

3 C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 129.

which we can accurately assess the human situation. But good fiction helps us to see that condition in its particularity in various places and situations in history, especially our history. It confirms what the Bible says in fallible but insightful portraits. As preachers we need the expansion such reading affords.

We tend to read works that mirror our own attitudes, ideas, and opinions. This approach inhibits intellectual and spiritual growth; we fail to develop the skill of seeing through the eyes of another. In order to do this we must give ourselves to the author's view. C. S. Lewis instructs us along these lines:

We are so busy doing things with the work that we give it too little chance to work on us. Thus increasingly we meet only ourselves.

But one of the chief operations of art is to remove our gaze from that mirrored face, to deliver us from that solitude. When we read the 'literature of knowledge' we hope, as a result, to think more correctly and clearly. In reading imaginative work, I suggest, we should be much less concerned with altering our own opinions—though this of course is sometimes their effect—than with entering fully into the opinions, and therefore the attitudes, feelings, and total experience, of other men.⁴

A good piece of fiction is a good piece of art—a good piece of art gives us unique insight into reality, which we should not wish to live without. Shakespeare has taught us that there is a world in every human soul; it is this world that great fiction both explores and expands in us. Our theology itself compels us to cultivate wider interests than theology proper because we are called to minister to the people—the world—around us. Understanding them, sympathizing, and empathizing with them are not optional.

Painting is similar to fiction: to truly appreciate a work we must submit to the artist's vision or

4 Ibid., 85.

narrative. In late Medieval and Renaissance times painting was a visual narrative—one that need not be idolatrous when appreciated outside of public worship. Christian painter Makoto Fujimura makes an eloquent plea for this sort of engagement with art in his recent article "Come and See."⁵ It is amazing what he learned as he went and "stood under" in order to "under-stand" da Vinci's "The Last Supper" in the St. Maria delle Grazie in Milan. So standing under good fiction can be an illuminating and expanding experience. As Fujimura indicates, good art offers both relief and perspective in the midst of a surfeit of vacuous images and sound bites.

By contrast Thomas Kinkaid, the self-styled "painter of light," depicts an unreal world. Light emanates confusingly from everything. In da Vinci's painting there is a many-layered interplay between light and darkness. But the source is clear: God incarnate at the center.

Good fiction deals honestly with good and evil in the world. Good fiction does not revel in evil, for the sake of evil; but depicts evil as evil—for what it is in its ugliness and deformity; the very best fiction depicts evil in light of hope and redemptive grace and glory. In twentieth-century fiction, such as the novels of Graham Greene, character development is often profound in its depiction of the human predicament. The landscapes of human life are like the paintings of Edward Hopper, desolate and even desperate, yet in Greene's case not without a glimmer of light and hope. In his work the hope of redemption comes in subtle rays of light penetrating darkness, only occasionally entering the horizontal world of hopeless and bleak fallen humanity.

Good Fiction Teaches Us How to Be Better Storytellers

The temptation to preach with too much doctrinal density can be resisted by helping people enter the sermon through good storytelling, especially in connecting the pericope with the story of

5 Makoto Fujimura, "Come and See: Leonardo da Vinci's Philip in the Last Supper," *Books and Culture*, 12:6 (November–December 2006): 10–13.

redemption. But, of course, many texts are themselves stories. Novelist Larry Woiwode suggested to me that the use of narrative, or storytelling in preaching, slows us down so that we can better engage people with the divine message.⁶

When truth is embedded in narrative it is more memorable, not only because of the pace, but also because of the concreteness of human detail. Stories deal with the specific realities of life in space and time—in the history with which we are familiar. Truth is more believable when presented as history, since it is in history, not mythology, that God has dealt with his people—most pointedly in the Incarnation. Truth resides in the created order—in the world in which we live and move and have our being. All of Scripture is embedded in history—in space and time. When not situated in the narrative, doctrine alone may appear to the hearer to be the construct of the preacher’s mind. I believe this is one reason why people have enjoyed the Joseph story more than any series of sermons I have preached in twenty-eight years. It is storytelling at its best. The truths of providence and salvation are never made more memorable, woven as they are throughout into the rich drama of the Jacob cycle.

Storytelling’s importance in the ancient, biblical world has been largely overlooked by Reformed preachers. Perhaps in reaction to Evangelical anecdotal preaching, we have left a void which needs to be filled. In the more orally-aurally oriented culture of the ancient world, where personal possession of “books” was rare, storytelling was the primary means of propagating and transmitting tradition. The increase of oral-aural sensibilities in the electronic age is a providential prod calling us to return to the power of the story of redemption to shape the souls of his people. Unlike the “metalinguages” of structuralism, post structuralism, deconstruction, and all earth-bound attempts to describe the world, the narrative of redemption functions as the metanarrative by which all others, including good fiction, are to be interpreted and judged.

Our Lord often used stories, such as the good Samaritan tale, making his point stick by telling it

6 From an email exchange in 2003.

in an unforgettable way. Such stories are set in the context of the larger story of the history of redemption. This is the way God himself has chosen to impress us with his truth. From Jesus’ example we preachers should take our cue. Reading well written fiction will help us become better storytellers.⁷

Good Fiction Helps Cultivate the Color and Cadence of Pulpit Speech

Perhaps some Reformed preaching is dull because of a lack of imagination—what we might call “oral imagination.” Well-written fiction teaches us how to speak in colorful, euphonic ways. Rich and well-sounding language is the fabric of Scripture and the gift of human speech. As good fiction describes the world and its inhabitants in detail, it also inculcates patterns of speech that are concrete and down to earth—for contemporary fiction is up-to-date, giving us the best formed sounds of our world. Such patterns invite people into our sermons and help purge us of the Christian clichés to which we are all too accustomed.

Developing healthy oral imaginations also helps us to maintain a cadence of speech more reflective of the everyday world as we experience it. Electronic media, unfortunately, tend to make us impatient with the slower paces of space and time. This is one reason that I favor reading slowly, and often stopping to read a well-written passage aloud. If God took time to create, we preachers ought to take more time to communicate our thoughts to God’s people. The meaning of the human, the art of storytelling, the expansion of the oral imagination—these are all good reasons to read good fiction. I hope these reflections and this issue of *Ordained Servant* will whet your appetite for fiction and help you find your “voice” in proclaiming God’s Word. ;

7 Gregory E. Reynolds, “Preachers: Tell the Story of Redemption!” *Kerux*, 15:3 (December 2000): 26–30 [link www.pilgrimcrossings.org/ “Literature” “Cross-examination – exploring biblical doctrine / preaching”].

Preaching and Poetry: Learning the Power of Speech

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

I still remember my internal gasp when, to my auditory horror—as I presided over my daughter’s wedding, one of her well-educated friends recited the poem of her choice: Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116, “Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments...” He read it in a near monotone, expecting I think that mere spontaneity—it was obvious that he had never read it before, even silently—would see him through, perhaps even making it a great reading. I secretly vowed never to allow this to happen again and promptly memorized that lovely poem myself to insure it—“If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved.” But what does this have to do with preaching? Everything. Not one word the hapless chap recited ever stuck in my mind. He did not serve the Bard’s word well. It was written to be read memorably. Shakespeare’s Elizabethan world represents a pinnacle of the written—printed—and oral word’s triumph in English culture. Our wedding reader represents the antithesis of the world of the sonnet he read so poorly.

Several years later I experienced the polar opposite. New Hampshire hosted the first national gathering of the poets laureate from each of the states (around forty, as not all states have one) in 2003. A literate neighbor alerted me to the fact that novelist and poet Larry Woiwode, whom my friend remembered reading with great delight in the *New Yorker* in the sixties, would be giving a reading at the New Hampshire State Library that Friday as the poet laureate of North Dakota. I worked extra hard at completing my sermon preparation and

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=39.

headed for Concord, half an hour north. Larry’s recitation was by far the most polished and passionate of the four poets who read. It was arresting, a kind of presence all too rare, invoked by speech. I introduced myself and recalled our meeting at an OPC general assembly at Beaver Falls in the 1980s—I had gotten him to sign a paperback copy of *Beyond the Bedroom Wall* (1975). Now in New Hampshire Larry was still wearing his cowboy boots and looking very much the western North Dakotan. It was obvious the way he walked that he was used to wearing these boots at home on his ranch and not just for readings. The urban air had not poisoned his love of home. His years in New York learning his craft had only deepened his affinities.

Larry worshipped with us that Sunday and stayed in our home. On Saturday evening he had been present to hear Dana Gioia, the then newly inaugurated chairman for the National Endowment for the Arts, give the keynote speech to the gathered poets. Gioia, himself a very imposing poetic presence, is one of the founders of the New Formalism, a movement to restore metrical structure and rhyme to poetry. Larry and I spoke late into the night about the place of fiction and poetry in the church and in the pulpit.

On the following day I invited Larry to the annual Shakespeare Festival at Saint Anselm’s College at which all 154 sonnets are read by alumni and friends in the open air. The readings were varied in quality, until Larry volunteered, during an open mike intermission, to do a reading. Decades ago in New York City he had acted in King Richard the Second with the then unknown Robert Duval. Now he recited—acted—a soliloquy of the king (Act V, Scene V) in which the Bard reflects on his own place in the world as the many-faced writer-player on the stage of life.

I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world:
And for because the world is populous,
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it; yet I’ll hammer it out.

The crowd of students and professors—meandering inattentively toward the refreshment table—was stunned. The presence of the word—not the divine Word, the human word as one of God’s best gifts—was like a strange voice, remembered from the distant past of primary orality, when words counted and made their mark. No one drank coffee until Larry had finished. This made me long for the church to know more of this oral power in the preaching moment. By his own speech God called the cosmos into being. By it he is calling his people into his kingdom. Preaching is, after all, God’s chosen medium. The spoken word changes the world. The Word of God produces a new creation.

Our neighbor, though a sonnet reader—and one of the best—was not present for King Richard’s epiphany. But, when we arrived home, he was there next door reading under the maple trees. I asked Larry if he would recite something for Jim. So there on our deck against the hue and scent of spring he read Sonnet 116 in a way I shall never forget. And that is the point of poetry. No wonder it is in such eclipse—we so infrequently read aloud. We miss the immediacy of the spoken word—a God-given power to cultivate and form his world. Scientific rationalism—analyzing the world to death—has evacuated the spoken word of poetry and disenchanted us all.

April is National Poetry month. How many ministers of the word are celebrating? We wordsmiths should care. Many in our circles may believe that reading poetry is a superfluous pursuit. I should like to convince you that the poetic sensibility lies at the heart of our task as interpreters and communicators of God’s Word.

I ended last month’s editorial encouraging preachers to find their “voice” in the pulpit. “Finding one’s voice” is usually meant and taken as a metaphor for the way one writes—one’s writing style. Let me suggest that we preachers also need to think about the way our voices literally sound in the ears—the original meaning of “catechize”—of those we are addressing with the Word of God. How does what we preach sound, not How does it look on the page?

An Interest in Poetry Is Biblical

Poetry’s place in the Bible should inspire us to give it prominence in both the preparation and practice of preaching. Would a prophet write a poem to communicate God’s truth? Jacob, David, and countless other biblical writers did. More germane for you, my readers, is the question, As a preacher would you read a poem—would you read it aloud?

We must admit that our tendency—were we writing Scripture—would be to write a journal article or a lecture. Perhaps we even secretly wonder if the literary forms in which the Bible was written are the best modes of communicating. This is because we are mostly “silent” readers. But the original audience of both testaments would not even have had the luxury of owning manuscripts unless they were very wealthy. The average cost of a book would have been equivalent to a working man’s annual income. The Bereans in Acts 17 would have had to go to the synagogue to search the Scriptures. Ordinarily through all of the millennia of Bible history, the primary access to God’s Word among God’s people was through hearing the Scriptures read and preached.² Thus the patterns of sound in the structure of the text would need to be memorable—and so they are. A large portion of the Bible is written in poetry and poetic structures like the chiasm. But how often do we take advantage of this in the preparation and delivery of sermons?

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says that “we are his *workmanship* [poetry, literally *poiēma poiēma*, emphasis mine], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” In Romans 1:20 Paul uses the verb form: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in *the things that have been made*

² This point is made repeatedly by Hughes Oliphant Old in his monumental multi-volume series *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* in 6 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2007). This is a rich historical resource with excellent commentary and extensive bibliography and indexes, more than a history of preaching, loaded with biblical and historical wisdom for the preacher.

[*poiēmasin poiḡmasin*, emphasis mine]. So they are without excuse.” This word comes from the Greek verb “to make,” **poiew** (*poieō*). So we are God’s poetry, especially as remade in the image of his incarnate Son. I quote this verse, not to suggest that what we call poetry is what Paul had in mind. Rather, poetry as a spoken art is a species of this general idea of God’s craftsmanship in creating and recreating. There is a world in every soul, and a poem is a tiny universe of meaning reflecting the reality that we are made in God’s image. As new creatures in Christ—new poems—we say the world through his words, the incarnation of thinking God’s thoughts after him. A poem, like a person, is a carefully crafted creation, in which every part serves to form the beauty and meaning of the whole. Because poetry is so intimately connected with our humanity, I believe that our hearers are hungry for the beauty, healing, and recreative power of the word in every arena of life, especially in worship.

As Paul Engle puts it:

Poetry is ordinary language
raised to the Nth power.
Poetry is boned with ideas,
nerved and blooded with emotions,
all held together by the delicate,
tough skin of words.

A poem is words patterned to impress. This is the genius of hymnody. Poetry and song—the music of the human voice—are very closely related.

Developing the Poetic Sensibility in the Service of Preaching

Preachers must learn to distinguish between oral and written speech. The written is for the eye, while the oral is for the ear. The greatest problem for the seminary trained *preacher*—and we all need such training—is that our training has been rigorously literary. We are book, text, and lecture oriented. Lectures are content heavy, designed primarily to inform, not so much to move or persuade. Nineteenth-century English bishop J. C. Ryle expressed this well: “English composition

for speaking to hearers and English composition for private reading are almost like two different languages, so that sermons that ‘preach’ well ‘read’ badly.”³ Perhaps there is some truth to the provocative statement that “people today are not tired of preaching, but tired of *our* preaching.”⁴ Thielicke observes that “the man who bores others must also be boring himself.”⁵

I think that the kind of notes we bring into the pulpit bears directly on the quality of our oral presentation. Try putting the results of your study in a more oral format. Homiletics is the art of translating the text’s meaning, in the context of systematic and biblical theology, into a form designed to transform God’s people in the preaching moment. Theology—and the academy—serve homiletics not vice versa. Think of your preparation as soil for the sermon, not the sermon itself. Don’t bring your study into the pulpit. Bring the results; and bring them in oral form—bring them to be spoken. *Extemporaneous preaching* is live preaching, fully prepared for, but exclusively oral, not directly rooted in the manuscript itself. “The written text of the New Testament is ordered to . . . oral activity.”⁶ The structure of persuasive speech is essential to its effect on the memory and, thus, the heart of the hearer. Consequently, your sermon notes should be structured more as a set of cues than a manuscript to be read or memorized. Use two manuscripts, if necessary: one is a written summary of your exegesis and application put in the order of your sermon; the other is a one page abbreviated form for the pulpit.

Poetry is invaluable in teaching us the rhythms and cadences of the spoken word. One of the best

3 Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 345.

4 John W. Doberstein, Introduction to Thielicke, *The Trouble with the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), viii, referring to a statement by Paul Althaus, emphasis added.

5 Helmut Thielicke, *The Trouble with the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 9.

6 Walter Ong, Review: *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (William A. Graham) in *America* (March 4, 1989), 204.

ways to develop oral skill is to pay attention to how others read—to the best oral presentation. John Gielgud’s recitation of Shakespeare’s sonnets is incomparable.

Baseball radio announcers are excellent examples of offering vivid speech which engages the listener. In our visual, high resolution age their skills are tested to the limit. They are well paid to hold attention, with words that stimulate the imagination so that the hearer visualizes the game. The best of these announcers were often English majors in college and former English teachers, as is Red Sox announcer Joe Castiglione. “That hard grounder to the shortstop 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.”

Poetry teaches us to love words—their sounds and their meanings. The preacher must cultivate a love for the English language, especially the spoken word. Ransack the best dictionaries. Above all, *read aloud*. 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!*

How poorly we ministers often are at reading of Scripture in public. Many seek to overcome the monotone by over-reading. The proper expression should be a heightened form of our ordinary speech—each word weighted according to its position and meaning. 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. I am not recommending it for public worship, only for practice—because it was produced in a golden age of orality. 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 certainly did not mean silent, private reading. Reading aloud—even to yourself—impresses the beauty and power of the richest language in history into your oral memory. Words are your tools. Labor to be a wordsmith. As

Marshall McLuhan said, “Language itself is the principal channel and view-maker of experience for men everywhere.”⁷ “The spoken word involves all the senses dramatically.”⁸ The preached Word is the most powerful “view-maker” of all, as it corrects the idolatrous “view-making” propagated by our fallen world, especially by the electronic media. The preached Word inculcates the redemptive “view-making” of the heavenly reality of the incarnate Logos.

As we learn both the rhythms and cadences of the spoken word in reading, so the entire sermon should be varied in intensity, rich in linguistic diversity and acoustic texture. Poetry can teach us this.

An Example of the Use of Extra-Biblical Poetry in Preaching

The verbal economy of poetry makes every word count. Poetry can help us curb the verbosity to which we preachers are prone. In preaching on Ecclesiastes, I have noticed that my sermons are ten minutes shorter than normal (45 minutes). I believe that this is related to the economy of language that poetry tends to cultivate in our speech patterns. These sermons not only involve interpreting the poetry in the text itself, but also the quoting of extra-biblical poetry, which I have reproduced below.

The best hymns are poetry heightened by music. Or, because both poetry and song are musical in nature, we may say that hymnody is poetry in its highest form. Great hymns have retained or regained favor among those who have some measure of poetic sensibility. But properly sung and read, they may also teach preachers and worshippers alike to be better stewards of the spoken word.

The poems below were used in a sermon titled “Trust God amidst Life’s Uncertainties” on Ecclesiastes 7:13–18. God is sovereign over the crooked

7 Marshall McLuhan, “Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters,” in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, edited by Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szlarek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 2–3.

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

things in life and uses them to teach us the limits of our wisdom and the boundlessness of his. He alone can make the crooked straight.

William Cowper (1731–1800)
New *Trinity Hymnal*, #128

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain.
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

**“The Pulley” by George Herbert
(1593–1633)**

When God at first made man,
Having a glasse of blessings standing by,
'Let us,' said He, 'poure on him all we can;
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.'

So strength first made a way;
The beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour,
pleasure;
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottome lay.

'For if I should,' said He,
'Bestow this jewell also on my creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

'Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlesnesse;
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse
May tosse him to My breast.'

May every month be poetry month for
preachers. ;

Some Resources

Adams, Jay. *Studies in Preaching: Sense Appeal in the Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, vol. 1. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976. Provides an excellent study of the importance of the “sensual” element in effective preaching.

Dombeck, David. “Reading the Word of God Aloud.” In *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1986. Pages 419–44.

Gielgud, John. *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare*. 1963. 2 cassettes, Caedmon Audio. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. Incomparable performances given by one of the finest Shakespearean actors of all time.

Ong, Walter. *The Presence of the Word*. New Haven: Yale, 1967; reprint, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1981. This is a foundational study of the primacy of the oral/aural and the radical nature of the change in the human sensorium which printing and the electronic media have initiated. Some of the best insights into the power, immediacy, and effect/affect of the oral

in divine and human life, by a Jesuit who interacts with Scripture. Ong is somewhat neo-orthodox and takes his cue from Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary perspective on redemptive history.

_____. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Methuen, 1982. Ong's magnum opus, not in size, but in substance. A seminal study of the comparison of orality and literacy. Stimulates us to think especially of the difference printing has made in the way we use and think about words. A must-read for anyone interested in media ecology.

Osgood, Charles Grosvenor. *Poetry as a Means of Grace*. Princeton, 1941. These five chapters were originally delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary as the Stone Lectures in 1940. The book is an engaging apologia for a lifetime appreciation of poetry and for poetry's value to the minister and the Christian "to meet the increasing materialism of the modern world."

Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. "On the Voice." In *Lectures to My Students*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972. Pages 110–26.

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What Is the State For?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2007¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Seeking to define the purpose of government has been a quest of American Christians since the settling and founding eras of our nation. Even though the initial pursuit of religious freedom was still tainted by the Medieval notion of Christendom, the establishment clause in the First Amendment made the disestablishment of state-supported Christianity inevitable. By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century it became an institutional fact according to the laws of every state. But ever since, American Christians have been uneasy with their position as an embassy of the heavenly kingdom. Whether it is reviving Christian America or reconstructing government and society after a Christian pattern, the culture wars continue. So I ask the question, what is the state for?

There are probably few more controversial subjects in Christendom than the relationship between the church and the state. Since Constantine, the debate has raged. The editorial opinions expressed below are merely a small part of that debate among the Reformed. While we must labor especially hard not to enshrine our own convictions on this subject, I hope that those who may strenuously disagree with me will be patient enough—as I have attempted to be with the ideas of others over recent years—to carefully consider a minority view—one which I, too, once opposed.

I once believed that the British—or original—version of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) was the best. I was convinced that the separation of church and state enshrined in the Constitution—although I used to think that people beginning with Jefferson misinterpreted the establishment clause of the first amendment²—and the

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=47.

2 "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

1788 American revision of the Confession, were responsible for the decline of American culture.

So what is the state for? We must remember that the state in the Old Testament had the same purpose as the state in the New Testament: God's providential arrangement to protect life and property in the fallen situation. The nation of Israel was unique—*sui generis*. It was a stand-alone institution in redemption history. It prepared the way for the Messianic Age, a prototype of eschatological glory, and a witness of the uniqueness of God's grace and holy ways to the nations. God's moral standard for his image bearers never changes, but the organization of his people as a nation does. Israel as a nation had a typological function, now fulfilled in Christ.

Even the Puritans, who believed in a Christian commonwealth, understood that the civil administration of Israel was so inextricably tied to the ceremonial or cultic that it was all done away with, as a single entity, in Christ. This doctrine is explicit in WCF 19.4, "To them [Israel] also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require." Significantly, this paragraph was not revised in the American revision of 1788, because it comports well with the distinction between the church and state accentuated by the American revisers. The seeds of the separation of church and state were already sown in the two kingdom distinction rediscovered during the Reformation. So emphatically both the judicial, or civil, laws and the state of Israel itself, have expired, with no obligation to obey either, except as "the general equity thereof may require." Note that even this is tentatively stated as "may" require. Theonomists and reconstructionists often ignore this radical reduction of obligation, and make the "general equity" clause require more than it was meant to—a mandate for the civil magistrate to enforce Mosaic laws or the true religion—as well as ignore what it clearly says about the expiration of the laws and state of Israel. But did the Confession writers have the state principally in view regarding general equity?

The proof text of the Assembly is insightful: "Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop" (1 Cor. 9:8–10). The equity referred to is a general principle of Mosaic law applied by Paul to ministers of the New Covenant, i.e., to the people of God under a different administration of the Covenant of Grace. The limited obligation commanded by this law is not for the civil magistrate but rather for the church. Certainly the concept of general equity in seventeenth-century jurisprudence refers to principles of justice common to all people. But Paul's focus in applying the general equity of this particular Levitical law is the church, not the general population, however applicable it may be to the latter.

After the initial extended proof text for this passage in the WCF is referred to (Exod. 21:1–23:19), Jacob's prophetic blessing on Judah (Gen. 49:10) is cited. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." The coming of Messiah changes everything. The relationship of God's people to the state reverts—*mutatis mutandi*—to the equivalent of the Patriarchal situation, in which the Lord used the state to protect his redemptive project. As Craig Troxel and Peter Wallace point out, the Assembly used the Mosaic law in its proof texts to apply the judicial or civil law to Christ and his kingdom, as does the New Testament itself.³

The moral law, which continues in all administrations of the covenant of grace (cf. WCF 19.2), is by parity of reasoning, still applicable to the people of God. The New Covenant rendition of the holy demands of obedience, similar to the Ten Words, is distinctly covenantal in nature and

3 A. Craig Troxel and Peter J. Wallace, "Men in Combat over the Civil Law: 'General Equity' in WCF 19.4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (2002): f.n. 317–318. This is an excellent treatment of the historical moorings of the concept of general equity in Western jurisprudence.

not addressed to the nations *per se*. It is not that the nations are not held accountable to God's moral standards, rather that they know those standards through a different revelation, as Paul makes clear in Romans 1:20. "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

Special revelation, it may be argued, has also been passed on from Eden through common culture, and has been especially amplified through the powerful influence of subsequent special revelation in Western culture's development. Hence, Moses is included, along with Confucius and other jurisprudential influences, on the Supreme Court's pediments in Washington, D.C.. What does the New Covenant teach us about both the purpose and role of the state? Emerging from several millennia of living under the Mosaic arrangement, in which the nation and its ruler were in special covenant with the Lord, we would expect special instruction in the New Covenant documents as to how believers should relate to the secular state in the new situation.

The Apologetic of Luke-Acts

Written after the day of Pentecost, Luke-Acts is, in part, an apologia for the church's mission in not seeking revolutionary overthrow of the civil government. The first-century Roman Empire was rife with revolutionary movements. In contrast, the New Covenant church is called to be supportive of civil government as a God-ordained institution, providing temporal order—protecting life and property—but not directly supporting the church. The transcendent spiritual nature of the church enables it to work within God's extant providential arrangement, while depending directly on him for its life, guidance, and government. There is no establishment agenda anywhere in the New Covenant. To the contrary, the New Covenant assumes the disestablishment of God's people as a national identity.

Many have argued that John the Baptist exemplifies the church's interest in secular lead-

ers' morality. Actually, he is the last Old Testament prophet pursuing a covenant lawsuit against Herod Antipas's immorality. Antipas claimed to be the king of Israel. Paul, on the other hand, as a New Covenant prophet to the world, does not call Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25–26) to repent of his incest as a king in covenant with God, as John did Antipas. Rather, Paul calls him to repent as a sinner and to believe the gospel as a man. Such is the prophetic mission of the church.

The idea that the church, as the church, is to continually inform the state of its duty, is contrary to what we see in the inspired record of the church's early mission. The Assembly asserted this in WCF 31.5, "Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the common wealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate." The absoluteness of the prohibitions here is startling considering that these Puritans believed in a Christian commonwealth concept. Yet they make it clear that there are only two exceptions to their strongly stated separation of church and state: "cases extraordinary," and when the church is asked by the state for advice. The latter is unlikely in a democracy, although individual Christians, like J. Gresham Machen, may be asked to testify before Congress. "Cases extraordinary" would seem to indicate that if the church's welfare, as the church, is at stake, then a humble request for relief might be in order. What is clear is that such cases are extraordinary; they are not the regular business of assemblies.

The Imperatives of the New Covenant

Romans 13 offers the definitive New Testament text on the believer's attitude toward the secular state. Peter summarizes Paul's concern in a succinct imperative. "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good" (1 Pet. 2:13–14). The focus

of those who claim this classic text as a mandate for the civil magistrate is Paul's definition of the ruler as a "minister of God" (NKJV) in verse 4. The ESV's "servant" doesn't help until one puts the noun in biblical context. Similarly, the LORD refers to the secular ruler Cyrus as his "shepherd" (Isa. 44:28), doing his sovereign providential will in restoring Israel. It is well-known that the Caesar at the time Paul wrote Romans 13 was actually Nero, a ruler who, as far as we know, knew nothing of either Old or New Covenant special revelation.

Equally important is the description of the civil ruler in this passage as a promoter of good and an avenger of wrongdoing. This is a fact—all verbs being in the indicative mood—not a standard to which the ruler is commanded to aspire. All of the imperatives are directed to the church. The letter itself is written to the church in Rome. Paul's concern is that they understand the secular state, not as the Jews did, as an enemy of the true religion, but as a providential provision of God to keep order in the world in which the church is called to proclaim her message. But how can a secular ruler know what is good and bad?

Where Does the State Get Its Guidance?

First, it is important to remember that the Old Testament is filled with examples of good and wise rulers who were not believers, and had no knowledge of special revelation. Abimelech functioned this way in the lives of Abraham and Isaac. So Pharaoh with Joseph. Acts is full of such examples. In Acts 28, Paul experienced the benevolence of both people and ruler alike: "The native people showed us unusual kindness." (28:2).

Second, the "good conduct" in view in Romans 13 is not to be confused with the covenantal ethics of special revelation, emanating as they do from the heavenly loyalty of new creatures in Christ, but refers rather to conduct sufficient to maintain civil order. That both citizens and rulers alike often compromise and sometimes transgress what promotes the commonwealth, is no argument against the fact that unbelievers know what is right and are capable of civil behavior. As I see it, the crux of the debate is the question: Is the state

guided by special revelation or not? And if not, what is the source of the state's guidance?

Fallen people are able to distinguish good conduct from bad because of general revelation. Paul makes this clear earlier in the same letter: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:14–16).

The objective of Paul's exhortation in Romans 13 is for Christians to respect and, therefore, obey civil authority, despite the fact that secular rulers are not in covenant with God as they were under Moses. Jews, and Gentiles associated with the synagogue, would need to adjust to this new idea, having been under the covenantal kingship of the Mosaic order for so long. The exhortation is applicable today, especially for those who believe that civil magistrates ought to be Christian or at least rule by Christian principles. An extreme example of this is a New Hampshire couple presently convicted of tax evasion who refuse to even listen to civil authorities because they are not "people of God." It is precisely Paul's assumption in Romans 13 that the civil ruler is not a believer. In the new situation, his explanation of the common grace institution of the state is necessary.

Thus, it is not only important to distinguish between the institutions of church and state, but the source of each institution's guidance. Additionally the purposes of each must be identified. It is not even enough to say that the goals of the state are temporal, and those of the church eternal. It must be added that the sources of guidance and purposes are dramatically different. The essential interests of one are not the same as those of the other. As our Confession defines the purpose of the state: "It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people" (WCF 23.3). Rulers are not tasked with promoting or enforcing the "true religion." They are called to

maintain civil order for all of its citizens, including Muslims, Jews, and atheists; and special revelation commands Christians to support them in this distinct endeavor. But we do not need the state to promote the interests of the religion. The power of the Spirit of the enthroned Lord Jesus Christ operating through his appointed means of grace is all the church needs to achieve her eternal purpose of gathering the elect from among the nations.

The Hermeneutics of Our Millennial Views

Greg Bahnsen once insisted to me that amillennialism was no impediment to accepting his theonomic understanding of the state. He maintained that the two are compatible. I mildly disagreed then and eventually my amillennialism, combined with the notable absence of a transformational agenda in the New Testament—especially in Romans 13—lead me to my present position.

Postmillennialism, whether of the Edwards or Bahnsen variety, demands an interest in Christianizing civilization, including the state. The Constantinian instinct animates both. By taking Israel as a model for civil government Theonomy ends up land-locked in this world and stuck hopelessly in the old order with its agenda. Our eschatological destination is not a simple repristination of the old order. It is, as Vos and Kline have shown us, an advancement to a glorious new and consummate state of being in a new heavens and new earth. Thus, the state, like our mortal bodies, will be left behind in the wake of the coming glory. Meanwhile, integral to our worldview, we are called to respect and support the state as good citizens in its temporal business. However, expecting more from the state than the protection of our lives and liberties is to disrespect the power and purposes of Almighty God.

In the midst of the debate over what the state is for, while I am committed to be tolerant of opposing views, I would like to challenge those who see the magistrate as called to promote a specifically Christian agenda, whether enforcing the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic judicial laws, or the true religion, to prove their case from the New Testament documents. What does the inspired

text say that the state is for? My reading makes me conclude that the state in the New Covenant situation is God's providential institution, guided by general revelation for the maintenance of civil order so that history may continue as the context for the achievement of God's redemptive purposes in—and through—the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Lord Jesus Christ. ;

The Wired Church

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Malcolm Muggeridge once asked: "Suppose there had been a fourth temptation when our Lord encountered the Devil in the wilderness—this time an offer of networked TV appearances, in prime time, to proclaim and expound his Gospel. Would this offer, too, have been rejected like the others? If so, why?"²

If we think of idolatry in terms of fallen man's quest for control over his life and destiny, then we will have a clearer lens through which to view and understand the electronic environment. Looked at in this light, modern man has invented better, more pervasive, and efficient ways to escape God—or should we say *evade* God, for he can never be escaped. In the absence of genuine faith, control is the only alternative. Our mechanical and electronic inventions have created the illusion that we do not need the God of the Bible. The sum of these technologies is broadcasting a continual message: there is no need for God, unless he functions in our service. The problem for the church is how to manage technology so that this

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=48. Portions of this editorial are taken from my *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), chapter 8, "The Fourth Temptation: The Compromise of the Church."

2 Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 30.

message is muted.

This problem relates not only to messages of consumerism or radical individualism that technology brings into the church, but also to the idea that God is unnecessary to the church's existence and ministry. Church fund-raising software wraps these messages all up in one pernicious package.³ The only invisible reality affirmed is the mysterious interaction of bits and bytes. The technologies involved in alchemy have changed; the meaning and message have not. If the church thinks that its message isn't being altered by the naive use of technology, especially in worship, it is giving in to what Muggeridge called the "fourth temptation."

Succumbing to Temptation

Marshall McLuhan didn't mince words when he observed: "Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot."⁴ The term "idiot" is only *apparently* uncharitable. The original Greek word (**ιδιωτής**, *idiōtēs*: 1 Cor. 14:24, "unlearned"; 2 Cor. 11:6, "untrained in speech") indicated ignorance of a particular language. The point is that, as a culture, we are largely ignorant of what we are doing with media, or more precisely, what the media are doing to us. That too was McLuhan's point—technological ignorance.

Communication technologies are even more dramatic in their effect. In *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman summarizes the three types of changes which such technologies bring into culture. They change the "structure of interests," by refocusing what we think about. They change the "character of symbols," by alter-

3 A brochure which I recently received in the mail highlights the problem. It is titled: "Fail-proof Church Fundraising." Inside we are told: "Fundraising does not happen just because you are doing God's work. ... This remarkable new guide makes the fund raising process less mysterious ... more manageable and useful. ... Low on philosophy, high on nuts-and-bolts, this book fills an urgent void." Whatever happened to prayer and tithing? One can barely imagine a more blatant example of American pragmatism as it affects the church.

4 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 18.

ing the visual and linguistic tools *with which we think*. They change the "nature of community," reorganizing *social structure*. Machines are ideas with consequences,⁵ consequences with which the church must reckon.

Lewis Mumford, American historian of technology and science, describes the enthusiasm with which the machine was greeted: "Mechanics became the new religion, and it gave to the world a new messiah: the machine. ... The machine came forward as the new demiurge that was to create a new heaven and a new earth."⁶ The advent of the electronic media elicited similar encomiums from secular and sacred quarters alike. Mid-twentieth-century television teacher Bishop Fulton Sheen epitomized the naive attitude of the church toward television when he declared, "Radio is like the Old Testament, hearing wisdom, without seeing; television is like the New Testament because in it the wisdom becomes flesh and dwells among us."⁷

The printing press radically altered the cultural environment, and thus affected the church in a dramatic way. But there is a vast difference between word based media and the image media. Gary Rowe, director of communications for the Chicago Federation of Churches, chastises clergymen who resist the use of television for ministry: "It's not news to say that we are living with a new consciousness about reality. Church professionals need to get involved with the miraculous opportunities of telecommunications and match actions to their words." For Rowe, thinking about Gutenberg and McLuhan, during the sixties, was a "pleasant fad." Rowe concludes with breathless optimism: "As the great moments in television attest, there is a vast appetite for a larger vision of the world, our connections with each other, and the immediacy of thought and feeling that can bind us together.

5 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: Allen, 1983), 23. Postman's summary is based on the work of Harold Innis.

6 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1934), 45, 58.

7 Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 188.

Surely we have community, drama, symbolism, and information ready for a hungry audience. Let's brighten our ideas and light up the tube."⁸

Since electronic and image media have become our culture's vernacular, we must consider their potential for communicating the gospel. However, if we accept them uncritically, we will accentuate the liabilities, and these liabilities will in turn eclipse the benefits. Neil Postman has asserted that Samuel Morse has been more influential than Darwin because Darwin's ideas are debatable, whereas Morse's idea of electric communication is not.⁹ In the church the nature as well as the messages of electronic media must be debated. At present little debate exists in the church on this subject, yet it is here where the Word is of paramount importance.

Marketing the Church: Building an Audience

Too often the influences of the electronic media are uncritically affirmed as a blessing. While most of the Church Growth movement's literature—advocating the use of marketing techniques—does not deal explicitly with the electronic media, the assumption that we should give people what they want tacitly affirms one of the greatest liabilities of the electronic media—its man-centeredness. Rather than challenge the idols of our culture, Church Growth has chosen, perhaps in many cases unwittingly, to invite them to dinner. The lack of a well developed Christian mind and sensibility has allowed the Trojan horse of modernity into the church.¹⁰ "Churches are right to seek ways to communicate with and appeal to contemporary society. They must remember, however, that while we need to reach out to postmoderns, they dare not leave them where

they found them."¹¹ While not catering to idolatrous tendencies, the church certainly needs to be aware of the idols, identify them for what they are, and gently wean their worshippers away from them. The preacher, especially, must seek ways to overcome the sins, propensities, and weaknesses of our culture, especially as they impinge on worship and preaching—the supreme act of worship; but to overcome, not to succumb, must be the goal.

Being "user friendly" has become the controlling goal of the marketing church. Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, has one of the most successful megachurches in the country—almost 15,000 people per Sunday in 1990. Rejecting much of his Christian Reformed background, Hybels sought to answer the question: How can we make church so it isn't what baby boomers always say: boring, predictable and irrelevant? The answer is "Ask consumers what they want, then let them (as they say at Burger King) have it their way. At non-denominational Willow Creek, that means a slick, show-biz service where drama and soft rock are served up on a stage washed in pink and blue spotlights. A soft-sell sermon is delivered by Hybels from a Lucite lectern. It's been put down as pop gospel, fast-food theology, McChurch. Hybels says his message is rock-solid Biblical principles, only the medium is unorthodox. No one disputes it sells like Big Macs."¹²

There's the rub: as if unorthodox media will yield orthodox Christians. "Hybels . . . wants to remain doctrinally sound but with his dualistic approach this has become entirely impossible. For, as Paul says, the form of the message and its content belong together (1 Cor. 2:13)."¹³ Once marketing dominates the church's agenda, "the concern is not with 'finding an audience to hear their mes-

11 Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with All Your Mind: How to Survive and Prosper as a Christian in the Secular University and Post-Christian Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), 227.

12 Cindy Lafavre Yorks, "Gimme That New Time Religion," *U. S. A. Weekend* (13–15 April 1990): 4–7.

13 Jacobus De Jong, "User Friendly Evangelism," *Lux Mundi* 17:1 (March 1998): 4.

8 Gary Rowe, "The Living Room Pew," *The Christian Ministry* 12:3 (May 1981): 11–15.

9 Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, 69.

10 Richard Keyes, "The Idol Factory," in Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No Gods But God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 31.

sage but rather with finding a message to hold their audience.' After all, when the audience and not the message is sovereign, the good news of Jesus Christ is no longer the end, but just the means."¹⁴ It has always been the temptation of the church to use the wrong means to achieve God's ends, but it is an even greater temptation to use the right means as ends in themselves. In either case God's glory is diminished, and the purity of his sovereign grace is sullied. The reader controls the text.

The question Christians must ask is: What kind of an audience do we build when we market the church? The tragic answer is that we gather a group of people who are consumer oriented, who may have come to church for the wrong reasons, and who find as George Barna attests that "the Christian life-style and belief structure ... [are] ... impractical and unreasonable for today's world."¹⁵ Professor David Wells sums up the result: "The audience is sovereign, and ideas find legitimacy and value only within the marketplace."¹⁶ The gospel, on the other hand, is not a "marketable product." Sinners do not know what they need.¹⁷ The most important question of all is: What kind of a God are we communicating? Is he the majestic sovereign God who uses means, but doesn't depend on them, to fulfill his purposes, or is he really just a psycho-sociological phenomenon? Despite their best intentions—and I believe many have them—the Church Growth movement relegates God and his truth to second fiddle. Technique is king.

Discarnate Christianity: The Church in Cyberspace

The ultimate in compromise is revealed in

14 Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 78.

15 David Eby, *Power Preaching for Church Growth: The Role of Preaching in Growing Churches* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 1996), 105.

16 David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 207.

17 David Wells, "Our Culture of Chaos," Lecture notes, July 12, 1996, L'Abri Fellowship, Southborough, MA.

cyberspace, where many poignant examples of contemporary Gnosticism in the church may be encountered.¹⁸ This is the perfect medium for "reimagining" God and seeking to escape from the God-given creaturely limits of his world, along with the nasty imperfections encountered in the real church. This is precisely what McLuhan meant when he used the term "discarnate." One church's Web site designer makes the extravagant claim that "all elements of congregational life can be experienced through the Internet."¹⁹ Equally serious is the arrogant "trendier than thou" attitude that getting the church on the Internet is keeping pace with the "real world." The "Minister of Technology" of a Presbyterian megachurch recently opined that a failure to come up to speed technologically will render the church "completely irrelevant."²⁰

Does this mean that there is no appropriate use of the Internet by Christians? Is the Gnostic, postmodern tendency inherent in the medium, or the medium of media? Certainly not, if, and only if, it is used with great caution, as indeed *dis-incarnation* is its tendency. The church has examples of thoughtfully using the Internet. A fine example is the Web site of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church www.opc.org. It functions essentially as an information center. It does not seek to replace the church's ministry in any way. Its conception and design are based on a prudent policy, which is in turn rooted in a biblical conception of the mission of the church. There are hundreds of quality Web sites of this kind being used fruitfully by Christians and by the church as an institution.

Profitable Spirituality: Beliefnet

In the first month of the new millennium USA Today announced the formation of a new religious Web site:

18 Cf. <http://www.Godweb.org> (17 Aug 1999) © 1999 About.com, Inc.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid. I owe the apt phrase "trendier than thou" to the late Charles Dennison, church historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Beliefnet [is] a Web site launched last week that aims to be an on-line spiritual community for people of all religious backgrounds . . . Waldman and co-founder Bob Nylen are gearing up to sell ads and plan to add an e-commerce section by spring—everything from crosses and meditation cushions to books, music, travel and charity donations on-line.

Beliefnet manages to gracefully walk a fine line, balancing inspiration and practical information, entertainment and spiritual substance. Staffers in New York package news and features on religion, spirituality and culture, as well as family and “milestones,” deeper issues raised by births, deaths and the rites of passage in between. . . .

Many of the articles are by a diverse group of more than 50 columnists, top names in religion and spirituality, from orthodox to fringe. They include Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, Jesus scholar Marcus Borg, Catholic priest/sociologist Andrew Greeley, Buddhist Lama Surya Das, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin and Margot Adler, a writer on goddess spirituality.

Even though Beliefnet’s scope is broad and inclusive, “our goal is not to create one big, bland amalgam religion,” Waldman says. He expects the site to be controversial. “It can’t help but be, dealing with death and sex and abortion and God.” But in a multicultural society, he adds, “people will tend to disagree, and the Net is a great place to explore our diversity. People are coming from so many different directions, there’s a need for information and help in sorting all this out.”²¹

Lance Rose observes that Beliefnet is “A demonstration, as it were, that now we can aggregate religions at a web site as if they were different

21 Lance Rose, “Heard of Beliefnet?” nlc@bbs.thing.net (13 January 2000), quotes from <http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/tech/cth139.htm>. Leslie Miller, “A Community of Believers of All Faiths: Religious Site Strives to Be Inclusive,” *USA Today* (13 Jan. 2000).

brands of laundry soap on the supermarket shelf . . .”²² There is a clear connection between the commercial and the inclusive. Just as we have a wide range of products for everyone, so a wide range of religious preferences to suit all needs, and thereby build the market, the bottom line. Many churches have secular advertising on their Web pages, like renting the steeple to a cell-phone company. It is not accidental that the electronic galaxy is the context in which the commercialization of the church has emerged. As the church naively—and in some cases knowingly—participates in the electronic world, which is driven largely by commercial, not communicative or spiritual, motives, it is no wonder that narcissism and consumerism are promoted and reflected in the church itself.

Today, as the Middle Ages, when superstitious and subjective expressions of Christianity thrived, the image is the chief means of communicating with the masses. The charismatic movement has experienced a revival in tandem with the electrifying of communication. Since images have taken center stage (beginning in the mid twentieth century), the charismatic movement has begun to dominate the Evangelical church. This should not be surprising, for at the heart of this movement is the man-centered theology of Arminianism which looks at the reason, will, and emotions of man as essentially untainted by sin. Cultural productions are, thus, considered “neutral.” This subjective theology puts a premium on feelings, which in turn emphasizes the “needs” of the Christian, tending toward a kind of Christian narcissism. The purpose of New Testament miracles is inverted, bringing excitement and therapy to individuals, instead of glorifying God as the author of redemption. In the New Testament Jesus performs miracles as attestations of his divine power: “What manner of man is this that the wind and the seas obey Him?” His authority to forgive sins is verified by his healing of the paralytic in Capernaum.²³

22 Lance Rose, “Heard of Beliefnet?” nlc@bbs.thing.net (13 January 2000).

23 Mark 2:1–12. All Scripture quotes in this article are from the NKJV.

Celebrity Preachers: Television Worship

Pastor and homiletics professor Warren Wiersbe sagely observes, “When it comes to religious TV, I think evangelicals missed the boat completely because we didn’t take time to understand the medium and how it worked . . . What does TV add to our ministry? I say it adds nothing to our ministry, but it can take a great deal away. TV puts God’s people and God’s Word into a context that can rob the message of reality.”²⁴ “Television worship” is an oxymoron. Those for whom it is not, should consider the ways in which television distorts the biblical concept of worship. In his now classic critique of television, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman presents an overwhelming case, in his chapter on religion titled “Shuffle Off to Bethlehem,” to support the proposition that television is not a suitable medium for preaching or worship.²⁵ I will summarize his case in three points.

First, television is essentially an entertainment medium. Entertainment focuses on what the audience wants, especially what a large, diverse audience wants. Worship focuses on what God wants.²⁶ Television creates a passive audience which demands to be entertained. “. . . on television, religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away; there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows (Schuller, Roberts, Swaggart, Falwell, Baker, Robertson) the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana.”²⁷ Harvard Divinity School professor Harvey Cox picks up on the irony of fundamentalists using the tube. “This is a tension

24 In Douglas Van Allen Heck, “Is TV a Medium for the Gospel?” *These Expository Times* (May and June 1990): 1.

25 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 114ff.

26 I owe this insight to my dear wife Robin Reynolds.

27 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 116, 117.

between content and form, between message and medium, that occurs when the Old Time Gospel Hour goes out on network television. . . . The move from the revivalist tent to the vacuum tube has vastly amplified the voices of defenders of tradition. At the same time it has made them more dependent on the styles and assumptions inherent in the medium itself. . . . a set of attitudes and values that are inimical to traditional morality. . . . If the devil is a modernist, the TV evangelist may have struck a deal with Lucifer himself, who always appears—so the Bible teaches—as an angel of light.”²⁸

The entertainer is the preacher. The preacher is the celebrity who gets help like David Letterman from celebrity musical performers and converts. “On television God is a vague and subordinate character. Though His name is invoked repeatedly, the concreteness and persistence of the image of the preacher carries the clear message that it is he, not He, who must be worshipped. I do not mean to imply that the preacher wishes it to be so; only that the power of a close-up televised face, in color, makes idolatry a continual hazard. Television is, after all, a form of graven imagery far more alluring than a golden calf.”²⁹ “What makes these television preachers the enemy of religious experience is not so much *their* weaknesses but the weaknesses of the medium in which they work. . . . not all forms of discourse can be converted from one medium to another.”³⁰ Billy Graham and Pat Robertson have publicly (and naively) approved of TV as an excellent medium for preaching, overlooking ways in which the “delivery system” affects the message.

Second, television, like the Internet, promotes secularism and inclusivism, thus undermining absolute truth. “Television favors moods of conciliation and is at its best when substance of any kind is muted.”³¹ It caters to the wide audience of the Neilson ratings. The revenues required to pro-

28 Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 68–70.

29 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 122, 123.

30 *Ibid.*, 117.

31 *Ibid.*, 116.

gram make attracting an audience for advertising purposes the main goal of the program. TV gives people what they want. It is “user friendly” and, therefore, market driven. In 1990 *Newsweek* provided statistics showing the percentage of airtime devoted by television preachers to “fund raising and promotion”: Oral Roberts 53%; Pat Robertson 44%; Jerry Fallwell 37%; Billy Graham and D. James Kennedy 19%.³² Rex Humbard represents “the infantilization of theology.”³³ Anti-doctrinal Evangelicals find television to be the perfect medium because emotion replaces content. Charisma is everything. As Calvin asserted, images distract from the mission of the church, which is inculcating biblical truth in the heart, minds, and lives of people.³⁴ The “television screen itself has a strong bias toward a psychology of secularism. The screen is so saturated with our memories of profane events, so deeply associated with the commercial and entertainment world that it is difficult for it to be recreated as a frame for sacred events. . . . The television screen wants you to remember that its imagery is always available for your amusement and pleasure.”³⁵

Third, television is an artificial reality and does not establish, but undermines, personal relationships. It especially undermines the covenantal interaction of the congregation. On television there is no congregation. If an actual congregation is being televised it becomes like the seconds on a set, part of the setting for the *real* audience. But, the preacher cannot truly relate to anyone outside of the studio. “. . . there is no way to consecrate the space in which a television show is experienced.”³⁶ The electronic church “separates the media clergy

from their audience, believers from their local communities, and the experience of worship from the problems of daily affairs in the social realm. These are matters of great concern. The services of the historic Reformation churches . . . have been pushed off the air. On our screens and radios worship is dominated by preachers, the community is secondary, and the Eucharist is absent.”³⁷

Because of its focus on faces, television gives the illusion of intimacy, when in fact the preacher does not even know that any individual viewer exists. What the preacher gains in the *quantity* of presence in the mass audience, he loses in the *quality* of presence. This is a great loss indeed. The television viewer conforms without belonging, is isolated without a unique identity. In the church each individual is a unique part of a larger corporate whole. He belongs without conforming, he is an individual without being isolated. What a contrast the biblical picture presents of the church “speaking the truth in love,” in order that she “may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”³⁸

Another dimension of this artificiality is what Walter Benjamin called “the decay of aura.” In his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” he says, “the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.”³⁹ Image media detach us from the reality of personal presence. In worship this presence is not only of the congregation, but the presence of God himself, who promises to be present himself in the congregation of his worshipping people. “I will praise You forever, because You have done *it*; and in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for *it is good*” (Ps. 52:9). “Let us come before His presence with

32 Stephen Winzenburg, “Vital Statistics,” *Newsweek* (9 April 1990): 8.

33 Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, 116.

34 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559; reprint, Library of Christian Classics, 20; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I.11.7.

35 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 119, 120.

36 *Ibid.*, 118.

37 R. William Franklin, and Joseph M. Shaw, *The Case for Christian Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 174.

38 Eph. 4:15, 16.

39 In Cox, *Religion in the Secular City*, 68.

thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms” (Ps. 95:2).

Whatever naive notions preachers may have about the use of television, it is clear that “old time religion” is impossible on television. Television transforms Christianity into another religion altogether. Postman concludes:

The executive director of the National Religious Broadcasters Association sums up what he calls the unwritten law of all television preachers: “You can get your share of the audience only by offering people something they want.” You will note, I am sure, that this is an unusual religious credo. There is no religious leader—from the Buddha to Moses to Jesus to Mohammed to Luther—who offered people what they want. But television is not well suited to offering people what they need. It is “user friendly.” It is too easy to turn off. It is at its most alluring when it speaks the language of dynamic visual imagery. It does not accommodate complex language or stringent demands. As a consequence, what is preached on television is not anything like the Sermon on the Mount. Religious programs are filled with good cheer. They celebrate affluence. Their featured players become celebrities. Though their messages are trivial, the shows have high ratings, or rather, *because* their messages are trivial, the shows have high ratings. I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether.⁴⁰

“There is no doubt, in other words, that religion can be made entertaining. The question is, By doing so, do we destroy it as an ‘authentic object of culture’?”⁴¹ Postman makes a fundamental mistake in identifying the church with culture

40 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 121.

41 *Ibid.*, 124.

per se. More important is the question, By doing so, do we destroy it as “authentic”? Paul wanted to make sure the Thessalonians understood that the means of communicating the gospel message must be suited to the message. “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.”⁴² The medium of television corrupted both the men and the message in the televangelist scandals of the 1980s. The beguilement of Madison Avenue is nothing new—only its electric means are new. Just as the first-century church identified and resisted the sophistic rhetoric of its day, so must the church today evaluate every medium for its suitability to the glorious message of saving grace in Jesus Christ.

However, even without electronic media in our own worship, we are not immune from the media’s pervasive *environmental* influence. We bring the subtle attitudes and expectations of our cultural environment into the church, to its worship, the hearing of the word preached, and every aspect of the Christian life.

As a baby boomer, I am part of what I call the “cross-over generation.” I remember low definition television and a world without cell phones, personal computers, or the Internet. Perhaps it is easier for me to stand back and critically observe my situation. Ministerial colleagues have told me that some Christian college students hear media ecological concerns as a kind of apocalyptic liberalism—of the Al Gore variety. Some younger people are puzzled by my concerns over these influences in Christians’ spiritual formation of Christians. This is troubling since these are concerns as ancient as the fall of Adam. The Bible is full of such concern. Its interest in the problem of idolatry is one of the major threads in the biblical story of redemption. The apostle John ends his first epistle with a stark reminder: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Paul sets up the perfect contrast when he exhorts: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by

42 1 Thess. 2:4–5.

the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

But as I sit here typing on my word processor, preparing to publish on the Internet, I remember that this rising generation also needs to hear about the value of common culture and the reality of common grace. So, I am not advocating doom and gloom via technology. I would like to temper our optimism about the benefits of technology by challenging us to good stewardship of our inventions. This may be less painful in the long run than unmitigated good cheer about every new invention. Stay tuned. ;

Shorter Catechism 33, Etc.

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

So much talk about justification by faith. One wonders if this is a good sign or a bad sign. Perhaps a little of both. Revisiting the verities certainly helps us understand them better. But to be continually seeking to reformulate the verities does not seem to me to be the proper instinct for a confessional tradition. It is not the same as asking questions of tradition—a healthy instinct. That may be the real problem: even those who are in confessional churches are simply not used to thinking confessionally. It is not a natural instinct. Modern America is especially unfriendly to the confessional way of thinking. So I am learning what I think is a valuable lesson in this present climate. When I am asked what justification is I recite the answer to Shorter Catechism 33.

While union with Christ is certainly the more comprehensive rubric of Pauline soteriology, we must be careful not to discount the primary place of justification by faith alone in that cluster

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=64.

of benefits accruing to the believer by virtue of that union. Justification is important in the same way that customs and passports are important to entering a foreign land. The land of heaven is a dominion to which our sin has made us foreigners. The currency of Christ’s righteousness is the only passport that will get us through the gate into that holy kingdom. So while justification is a means to an end, it is the indispensable and only way to that end, for it is the only means of entrance into the holy kingdom of God. It is the “way in,” contrary to the New Perspective’s insistence that this is not the nature of justification. It is all about getting in and staying in.

Five hundred years ago the young monk Martin Luther had been in the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt for a little over a year. It would be another decade until that meticulous Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus would publish his Greek New Testament. Shortly after this momentous publication, Luther realized that the “righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17 is not our obedience but Christ’s obedience—the righteousness of Christ imputed by God through faith alone. Through this insight Luther found true peace with God in Christ. “This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.” No wonder he referred to the doctrine of justification as “the article of a standing and a falling church” (*articulus stantis, et cadentis Ecclesiae*).

Without denying important differences between Lutheran and Reformed soteriology I believe there is a vast difference between organizing soteriology under the rubric of justification—a tendency of Luther and Lutheranism—and giving a doctrine primacy in the *ordo salutis*. Luther was, as is generally acknowledged, not a systematic thinker. However, his metaphor for justification as the “gate to heaven,” is, I think, a helpful way for us to understand the primacy of the doctrine of justification, without compromising or undermining the richness of the Pauline organizing principle of union with Christ. Nor, as has been sometimes alleged, does organizing the categories of soteriology under union with Christ necessarily undermine the primacy of the doctrine of justification, or blur the distinction between covenants of grace and works, or what is often referred to as the

law-gospel principle.

A century after Luther, during the period of the richest flowering of post-Reformation dogmatics, the Westminster divines formulated a confessional statement that brilliantly and comprehensively accounts for the fullness of the Pauline soteriology without undermining the importance of the doctrine of justification. One of the premier theologians, in what Richard Muller refers to as the first phase of “High Orthodoxy,”² Francis Turretin, agrees with Luther that justification is a “principle rampart of the Christian religion. This being adulterated or subverted, it is impossible to maintain purity of doctrine in other places.”³

Two hundred years after Luther, our American Presbyterian forefathers first met in 1706. They assumed the truth of this fundamental doctrine so beautifully and crisply summed up in Shorter Catechism #33, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” Now, three hundred years later, we are asked to consider the proposition that Luther and every Protestant after him have misunderstood Paul on this central theological topic. This is not to say that Luther or the Lutherans account for the richness of New Testament soteriology or organize their theology in a way best suited to answer the criticisms and concerns of those who are suggesting, and in some cases even campaigning for, reconsideration. It is the genius of post-Reformation formulations of the categories of soteriology—especially in terms of its specifically Pauline structure—that makes our confessional documents so important, as they give us the categories in their proper relations and emphases, that at once enable us to defend the orthodoxy of the biblical system of doctrine, answer the concerns of critics, and help us to appreciate what is helpful in

2 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to 1725*, vol. 1 (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 31–32.

3 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 633.

their reconsiderations.

The concern that the doctrine of justification will undermine the quest for holiness of life is not new. One reason for this perennial concern is its extreme importance to the Christian. But both Paul and our Confession respond clearly to this charge. While the concern not to inhibit or undermine progress in sanctification is laudable, Scripture and our doctrinal standards adequately satisfy the concern. The latter does so in a way that I believe is more biblical and cogent than other theologies arising from the Protestant Reformation.

To put it in very personal terms: it is not enough that I should enter the kingdom through the cancellation of the awful debt represented in my sins. I also need to know that that same righteousness that cancels the debt is also the ground of my being accepted in the sight of God throughout my present sojourn. Whether or not we choose to use the word “active” to describe the obedience that is now imputed to me by grace through faith, one thing is clear: if the obedient life of Christ is not the lens through which an awesomely holy God views me, I can have no confidence of his acceptance. Knowing, along the rocky pathway of sanctification, that I am accepted in the Beloved is fundamental to my motivation to practice the holy commandments of our God.

While *active* obedience is not used in our confessional documents, the perfect obedience of Christ throughout his life is clearly in view as the Larger Catechism parses the “righteousness of Christ” imputed to us in question 33 as “perfect obedience.” This is a clear reference to the covenant of works entered into with the First Adam (WSC 12; WLC 20). Thus WCF 11.1 refers to “the obedience and satisfaction of Christ.” What can this be if not the active and passive obedience of Christ? I hope to die with the same assurance as Machen, as he recognized how wonderful the active obedience of Christ is.

More important is how assurance of God’s acceptance helps me live the Christian life. The relationship of justification and sanctification is critical to understanding the uniqueness of Reformed theology. For while our entrance into the kingdom

clearly requires an imputed righteousness, the fullness of our connection with it can only be appreciated in terms of the Pauline doctrine of union with Christ. This union guarantees sanctification as necessary—not to the ground of justification—but to salvation. No one can claim Christ as Savior without the pursuit of holiness. Justification is part of the salvation revealed in Christ, not the whole of it. The passport of Christ’s righteousness is our only hope of acceptance with God, but we must actually make the journey of sanctification in order to arrive in the heavenland. As our Confession so carefully formulates that relationship: “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love” (WCF 11.2). We must, then, not shy away from preaching the necessity of sanctification, even as we declare our sure possession of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Union with Christ enables us to take the warnings of Scripture with utmost seriousness, while at the same time clinging to the righteousness that alone guarantees us present and future acceptance before God.

Every true Christian, from whatever theological tradition, wants to affirm that God’s grace in forgiveness and new life is based wholly on the free gift of Christ’s righteousness, received by faith. “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 of God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). Every true Christian at the same time wants to affirm that grace is not a license to sin, but rather a call to holiness of life. “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Avoiding the Scylla of antinomianism and the Charybdis of legalism is, I think, most consistently accomplished in the system of doctrine that we affirm: the Reformed faith, comprehensively articulated in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. It is a great comfort to be part of a confessional church. We have answers to the most important questions in life: How can I be right

with God and live faithfully before him? Our answers do not require pitting two great themes of the Bible against one another. Our Confession and Catechisms marvelously summarize the Bible’s saving truth. We are saved by the righteousness—the obedient life and sacrificial death—of the Second Adam. To compromise this is to lock heaven’s gate. But once through the gate we are saved to grow in righteousness. When it comes to defending heaven’s gate itself we should not hesitate to stand with Luther. But the Reformed system is a superior way of organizing the rest, especially when it comes to the necessary relationship between justification and sanctification. Imaging—imitating—Christ is the whole purpose of God’s plan of salvation: “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). We have Shorter Catechism 33 and 35. And there is also 38. Union with Christ is the unifying biblical topic for soteriology. This is where we should locate justification. Shorter Catechism questions 29 through 38 clearly teach the entire cluster of benefits flowing from that union. If all of the questions about justification help us to appreciate this, it is worth the effort. About these things there should be no doubt. ;

Membership Rolls and the Book of Life

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

One of the legacies of the romantic movement is the notion that formality and institutional organizations and their protocols are, by their very nature, inauthentic. That nineteenth-century seed blossomed in the countercultural revolution of the 1960s. It is now part of the currency of popular culture. The disdain for history, which character-

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=72.

izes the modern temperament, has covered the tracks of this development so that well-meaning Christians believe their disdain for membership and other church formalities is a more spiritual attitude than that of those who are requiring these forms. It comes as a shock if they learn that in holding this view on membership (and many other things), they are conforming to the world in a way that the Bible itself warns us against. The modern bias against many forms is contrary to the biblical doctrine of the goodness of the created order; and it is contrary to the punctuation of that reality by the incarnation and resurrection of our Lord. It is also a denial of our creaturely limits in space and time. Beneath the appearance of humility in these denials is a thinly veiled hubris of sinful rebellion. But how do we, as officers in the church, go about showing people how important the formality of membership is from Scripture?

While there is some growing literature on the importance of church membership, there is little or nothing, to my knowledge, about the importance of written records of membership, i.e., the roll book. This is a small but very important aspect of the session's care for the flock—keeping the written rolls of the congregation. While ministering in New Rochelle, New York in the 1980s, I became aware of the importance of immigrants' status. Since then I have witnessed the agony of those who have been denied permanent status and the jubilation of those granted such status. In either case it was the actual possession of green cards or citizenship papers that mattered. No one questions the value of formality and written documents in the case of earthly citizenship. I submit that what is true of earthly citizenship is true of the heavenly original. I believe that both the practice of belonging to God's people and the metaphors for heavenly membership undergird the practice of keeping written records of membership in the visible church.

Rolls in the Old Testament

Roll books—both actual and metaphorical—are very important in the Bible. They are the concrete record of inclusion with the visible people of

God. The genealogies of the Old Testament demonstrate the importance of such written records.

The idea of being *written* in the Lamb's book of life, while a metaphor, comes from something concrete: an actual roll book. Written records were very important in the ancient world, going back to at least the third millennium BC. By the time of the Exodus in the mid-second millennium BC, written records were an essential part of public governance. So it is not surprising then to encounter a strong emphasis on such records in the early history of Israel.

Numbers 1:17–19 (cf. 11:26) demonstrates the importance of written records during the old covenant wilderness experience of Israel.

Moses and Aaron took these men who had been named, and on the first day of the second month, they assembled the whole congregation together, who registered themselves by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names from twenty years old and upward, head by head, as the LORD commanded Moses. So he listed them in the wilderness of Sinai.

Note the language used by Moses: “registered” (**dly** *yalad*) focuses especially on the record of births.² The Septuagint translates this word with **epaxoneu** (*epaxoneō*), meaning to register or “enroll on tablets.” Then Moses “listed” (**dqP** *paqad*) meaning to number or appoint especially in a military context. The ESV is unique among translations for using “listed” here. It reflects the fact that numbering implies the requirement of written records. The Septuagint use of the verb **suntassw** (*syntassō*) in this place becomes significant for the New Testament concept of written rolls. The relative permanence of such records in the ancient world, together with the expense and difficulty of making them, adds to the seriousness with which ancient cultures treated such documentation. Finally, this written record is not optional or arbitrary; it is commanded by God himself: “the

2 The hitpael form of this verb in Num. 1:18 **Wlytyl** (*yityaledu*) may be translated “to announce themselves as born, i.e. to have themselves entered into genealogical registers.” C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols. in 1, trans. James Martin (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 3:16.

LORD commanded Moses.”

The record of the descendants of Simeon in the genealogy reiterated after the exile is similarly instructive. Consider 1 Chronicles 4:41.

These, registered by name, came in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and destroyed their tents and the Meunites who were found there, and marked them for destruction to this day, and settled in their place, because there was pasture there for their flocks.

Here “registered” is the Hebrew word **btK** (*katab*), meaning “write or inscribe on tablets.” The Septuagint translates this with the ordinary Greek word for “write” in the form (**gegrammenoi**, *gegrammenoi*) from which the English word “grammar” is derived.

The importance of the distinction between who is in and who is not in the kingdom is highlighted in Ezra 2:61–63.

Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name). These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

The noun “registration” is derived from the common root for write (**btK** *katab*, see above). The verb “enrolled” (**fxy** *yahas*) refers specifically to being enrolled in a genealogy (cf. Neh. 7:64).

The warnings of the old covenant use the ordinary Hebrew word for writing, as noted above, and express the centrality of written membership records in the holy community in the thinking of ancient Israel.

My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register

of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 13:9)

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous. (Ps. 69:28)

These stern warnings accentuate the importance of the written record of inclusion in the congregation of the old covenant people. The Psalm adds to our consideration a book (**rpse** *sepher*) in which such records were kept. Being erased from this “book of the living” is the tragic consequence of becoming an enemy of the king.

On the other hand being written in the roll book expresses the tender care of the covenant Lord for each of his people. Psalm 87:6 speaks of this blessing in terms of a roll book: “The LORD records as he registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’ ” The verb “registers” is the same general word from the root “to write” (**btK** *katab*). But the verb “records” (**rps** *saphar*, cf. Ps. 69:28 above) is from the same root as the noun “recorder” (**rpso** *opher*), which refers to an enumerator, secretary, or scribe—similar perhaps to the clerk of session in our context.

Rolls in the New Testament

The situation of the new covenant people is the same despite the dramatic change in the form and administration of the visible people of God. The governing center of the kingdom has moved from earth—the Jerusalem below—to heaven—the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:25–26; cf. Heb. 12:18–24). The disappearance of the outward forms of worship indicates the fulfillment inaugurated by the coming Messiah. This prophetic realization does not, as some mistakenly believe, call us to disparage forms *per se*. Citizenship papers prove one’s commitment and relationship to one’s country and one’s people throughout history. In the church, the written roll is an accurate way of keeping track of membership as under-shepherds who care for the sheep of Christ’s fold.

The presence of such a record in the apos-

tolic church is made plain by passages such as Acts 13:48: “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” The same concept—based on the root (**tassw**, *tassō*)—expressed by the Septuagint word **suntassw** (LXX *syntassō*) in Numbers 1 and “appointed” in Acts 13 (**tassw**, *tassō*), is used to express military order and authority in Luke 7:8. In Romans 13:1 a variation of this same root (**u̇potassw**, *hypotassō*) is used to call the Roman believers to “be subject to the governing authorities,” i.e., civil government. There is papyrus evidence for translating this word “inscribe” or “enroll.” In Acts 2:41 and 47 the idea of adding to the church (**proseteqhsan**, *prosetethēsan*) implies written records of such additions. The Liddell and Scott Greek lexicon defines the Greek word translated “added” as: to join his party, or to associate one’s opinion to another, i.e., agree with him; to associate oneself to, to come in, submit, or to give one’s assent, agree to a thing; and indicates that the word can mean “adding articles to documents.” There is an example of this in Plato.

What can “adding” in the evangelistic situation in Pisidian Antioch mean if people have not made some sort of public commitment to the visible church? How did the apostles know who was added? How can Paul tell the Corinthian church to put the sexually immoral man out of the church if he was not considered a member of the Corinthian church? In 1 Corinthians 5:12–13 Paul distinguished between those who were “inside” and “outside” of the church.

Because our ultimate allegiance has been changed by grace, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). The roll book of the church reflects this new loyalty. It is not accidental, therefore, that one important metaphor for our election is a roll book. Consider these two examples:

And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. (Dan. 12:1)

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before

His angels. (Rev. 3:5)

Finally, Hebrews 12:22–24 gives a powerful testimony for the importance of roll books:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The verb “enrolled” (**apografw**, *apographō*) is translated “registered” in the NKJV. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon gives this illuminating definition of the word: “a. . . to write off, copy (from some pattern). b. to enter in a register or records; specifically, to enter in the public records the names of men, their property and income, to enroll . . . to have oneself registered, to enroll oneself . . . **oi` en ouranoiĵ apogegrammenoi** (*hoi en ouranois apogegrammenoi*) those whose names are inscribed in the heavenly register, Heb. 12:23 (the reference is to the dead already received into the heavenly city, the figure being drawn from civil communities on earth, whose citizens are enrolled in a register).”

Our Book of Discipline embodies this biblical concept of the importance of written records of membership in the visible church. While many cultural forms are relative to a given society, such as codes of dress, other forms reflect our essential humanity, such as the need for written records of all kinds, especially the need to distinguish those who profess the true religion from the lost world. This is a good commandment of our Lord, one that expresses the commitment of the pastor and overseers of the church to care for each one of its members. Maintaining them should never be a mere matter of keeping good records, but keeping good records of membership should be an expression of the care of the Great Shepherd, through his under-shepherds, for God’s people. ;

✦ Servant Memorial

Memorial Remarks at the Funeral of Meredith G. Kline

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
August-September 2007¹

by Meredith M. Kline

He was “Dr. Kline” to students and church members, “Meredith” to colleagues and friends, but to the family he was “Hodge,” “Grandpa Hodge,” and even “Great-grandpa Hodge” to Elijah, Ezra, and Lilly. The nickname’s origin has faded from our memories; the dim myth is that it evolved from dinner banter about some hodgepodge and is probably only coincidentally related to the name of a famous Civil-War-era Princeton theologian.

God designed our dad to be a covenant theologian. David VanDrunen and Gordon Hugenburger have given you a picture of what that profession looks like. I’ll try to give some family snapshots of the personality whose book titles, like *By Oath Consigned*, can be as obscure as their content might be illuminating.

“Hodge” was a private person, a man of the study (meditating on Torah like his Jewish grandfather), an architect of ideas, who enthusiastically shared his discoveries in classroom lectures and Sunday School classes. His intellectual strength was an ability to integrate the details and the big picture as an organic whole, to perceive the beauty of truth.

Hodge wrote *Images of the Spirit*, explaining that though God the Father is invisible, we can

see the Father by looking at Jesus, the divine Son, and his human images who have been transformed by—and will be glorified by—the Holy Spirit. Similarly, elements of our dad are evident in three successive generations. Obviously in appearance; he had such a youthful look that his sons were sometimes thought to be his brothers. Uncannily, his newborn grandchildren and great-grandchildren can look like miniature Merediths.

Some of his personal traits and talents are also apparent in his offspring. When he was convinced of the legitimacy of his conceptions of biblical truth, he was a formidable force in correcting theological iniquity. Like his architect son, Sterling, who could tell a congregation’s leaders, who were shamefully treating a pastor, that their church’s foundation was strong but its pillars were cracked. Or his granddaughter, Michele, who works for the Department of Social Services, and is not afraid to tell police or derelict parents what their responsibilities are. So, too, my dad wrote minority reports to ecclesiastical courts or book reviews upbraiding distorters of the Scriptures.

Our dad dedicated his last book, *God, Heaven and Har Magedon*, to his three sons, architect, musician, and poet. He was our artistic prototype.

Like his son Calvin, the trumpet player, organist, and choir director, and most of the grandkids, who have played in bands, our dad was a musician, a violinist. He played in a Boston youth symphony, always listened to classical music at home, and even in his last conversation was trying to recall the name of a young violinist whose playing he enjoyed.

Like his son Sterling and grandson Joel, the architects, he designed and built our Philadelphia home and told the architect of the Westminster and Gordon-Conwell libraries to include some windows in their plans. He shared artistic talents and interests with his wife, Muriel Grace. He took classes at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, drew cartoons for a Boston Latin School newspaper, and at boring faculty meetings would draw sketches of his colleagues. With our mom, he was a member of the Beverly Guild of Artists. Our parents enjoyed visiting the art galleries in Gloucester and

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=54.

Rockport.

Like his son Meredith and grandson Jonathan, he was a linguist and wordsmith, as well as an unfold-er of the aesthetic form and conceptual design of the Bible. He and his friend Elmer Smick were the team that undertook the original stage of the translation of Job and Psalms for the NIV transla-tion. Our dad coined words like “endoxation” of the Holy Spirit, to parallel the incarnation of Christ, and phrases like “the Big Blaze” as the bib-lical equivalent of the cosmologist’s Big Bang, and hyphenated terms like Glory-Cloud. His writings can be slow reading.

His skill at perceiving both the trees, doing detailed exegesis of Hebrew and Greek, and seeing the whole forest, systematizing the Bible’s cov-enantal structure and the development of God’s kingdom from Creation to Consummation, are systems analysis skills passed on to son Sterling, pharmaceutical-manufacturing architect, grand-son Robert, the chemical engineer, and grandson David, the pediatric neurologist.

Hodge’s career was devoted to unfolding the grand, unified theory of Scripture. He was, how-ever, not only a hearer of the Word (in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), but also a doer of the Word. Ecclesiastes 9:7 commands: “Go eat your food with joy.” He enjoyed eating! But he wouldn’t gain weight! We would sit around the table stuffed from one helping, waiting for him to finish, not because he was a slow eater, but because he was on his third plate-full. He loved buffets. The family has joked that he put the Hometown Buffet out of business. It was gratifying to us all that during the last month of his life his tastebuds returned after being compromised by chemotherapy.

When my brothers and I were growing up in Philadelphia, we assumed Dad’s dinner conver-sation was typical Philadelphia fare. There was the expected “Boys, eat your vegetables” or the sports debating—“Bill Russell is better than Wilt Chamberlain.” (In those days the Red Sox and the Phillies were equally deplorable; the superstars played basketball.) We were unaware that no one else heard comments during devotions like “Such chiasms occur in the sanctions of Hittite suzerainty

treaties.”

Ecclesiastes 9:9 suggests: enjoy life with your wife. I mentioned that Meredith and Grace enjoyed classical music together (our mom played cello) and art activities. They even collaborated on my dad’s last book, *God, Heaven and Har Mage-don*. My mom did the cover painting of the White Mountains, which is also on the cover of today’s program. They also liked to canoe. In fact, when they were college aged, Meredith was a counselor at the boys’ camp and Grace was a counselor at the girls’ camp. After the campers were soundly asleep, Meredith would get a canoe, paddle to the girls’ camp to get Grace, and they would canoe around Lake Winnesquam under the moonlight. For many years they canoed on various Maine bod-ies of water where Deerwander Bible Conference happened to be located or on the lake across the street from their Chebacco Road house.

Hodge also got in the water. As a seminary stu-dent at Westminster in Philadelphia, he supported the family by teaching swimming at the YMCA. He taught us boys to swim in the Atlantic Ocean at Wildwood, NJ, where for many years he would take us out of school a couple days early to spend a week at the OPC’s Boardwalk Chapel, located on the beach. At Deerwander, he was the speaker in 1957. He returned again the next year and for forty more, as waterfront director (and later, staff teacher)!

Ecclesiastes 9:10 advises: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” Our father studied hard and expected his students to study hard. He was a tough grader, even after grade inflation crept in; students took his courses pass-fail.

Hodge was an ordained pastor in the Ortho-dox Presbyterian Church and had one charge—Ringoos, NJ—farmers and car dealers. He prepared sermons as if they were papers for his doctorate on the languages of Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh. It was like trying to teach Big Bang cosmology to candle-blowing kindergartners. Hodge did not feel comfortable preaching; his theater of operation

was the classroom. When he was a professor at Westminster in Philadelphia he would, nevertheless, sometimes fill pulpits. In the bedroom/study, he had three sermons in a box, as well as a chart on the wall listing the churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to indicate which sermon he preached there and when. His sermons must have been memorable. Last month's denominational magazine, *New Horizons*, mentioned the death of Ruth Grotenhuis, wife of an OPC-founding pastor. After hearing a sermon of our dad's one evening at the Boardwalk Chapel, she commented, "You preached the same sermon at our church ten years ago! It was better this time!"

One of our dad's strengths was also a weakness. His scrutinizingly analytic thought process was perfect for crafting theological systems but got in the way when he was a hospital patient. Fortunately for nurses he was never in a hospital until his eighties—he always wanted to control when they were going to help him and tried to figure out how they should be taking care of him—not characteristics of a good patient.

Over-analysis may have contributed to his being mechanically challenged. At times during his recent illness he could not figure out how to pop up the top of a water bottle, adjust his walker, or empty his Foley catheter. He never learned to type. He wrote all his books on paper just as Moses had 3,500 years ago. Grandson Jonathan entered his recent texts on the computer. It scares me now to think that my dad operated a small bulldozer around our house in Philadelphia when my parents expanded the house. There was a four-foot high mound of dirt next to the house. He tried to direct the bulldozer up the little hill but it swerved over the side. He jumped off with the motor running and ran in the house. When we lived in New Jersey, our Chevy was parked in a garage with double swinging doors. One day he opened the left door, got in the car, backed up, and pulled the right door off its hinges.

Our dad and Meirwyn Walters's dad could be confused for each other from behind, with their artistically combed-back, curly silver hair. Both men suffered with cancer. During Hodge's illness Meir-

wyn's mom, Mair, remarked that God sanctified his children through such trials. Dr. Kline believed God was sovereign but had to learn to relinquish control of his life. When he realized he could not control his catheter, he became a pleasant patient, thanking emergency room nurses, even though they had poked him repeatedly trying to get IVs into his wiggly veins.

God choreographed Hodge's life. He almost died over 50 years ago. While driving to a doctoral class he hit a patch of ice on a road near where George Washington crossed the Delaware River, swerved toward a tree, closed his eyes, and put up his arms to cushion the crash. When he opened his eyes the car was heading down the highway.

Born in Coplay, Pennsylvania, on December 15, 1922, he was raised in Dorchester, Massachusetts. He was offered scholarships to Harvard and Penn, but a woman in the Congregational Church he grew up in directed "Rev.," as he was known, to Gordon College. As he finished college he applied to Dallas Theological Seminary, but Burton Goddard directed him to Westminster. Would the artist who admired the organically integrated beauty of covenant theology have re-engineered the ugly disconnected boxes of dispensationalism?

Dave and Gordon are among our dad's theological admirers but he's had many opponents. Some of his ideas are not popular. He agreed with my atheist high school classmates who successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to eliminate required corporate prayer from public schools. He argued that the days of Genesis 1 were heavenly and not earthly 24-hour days. He wrote that the sabbath does not apply outside a theocracy. Some in the presbytery where he held his church membership wanted to bring charges against him, even while chemotherapy was emaciating him. He was kept from teaching where he had taught before and from publishing in normal Reformed channels.

Through all his professional and private difficulties he retained the sense of humor he had exhibited in the classroom. His lectures could be intricately structured and the diagrams he drew on the blackboard did not always help visual learn-

ers since they ended up looking like a Jackson Pollock painting rather than a lecture outline. One day a frustrated student raised his hand and said: "Professor Kline, I'm lost." To which our dad quickly responded, "Let me explain to you the way of salvation." It may have been a silly answer, but it reveals the focus of our dad's ministry to play a part in the construction of the Heavenly Architect's temple of eternally living, God-blessing people.

As a preschooler in a Christmas pageant, Meredith G. Kline, Grace's husband, our father, grandfather, great-grandfather, relative, or friend shouted with all the power of his little lungs, "Christ the Savior is born." For eighty years he continued to delve into and share the incredibly marvelous, glorious grace of the God who prepared him for that purpose. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, the Lord will give again. Let the name of the Lord be perpetually praised. ;

Meredith M. Kline is the son of Professor Kline and presently acting director of Goddard Library at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is completing his PhD thesis on Ecclesiastes and is a member of First Presbyterian Church, North Shore (OPC) in Ipswich, MA.

Servant Work

Lessons from the Life of an Extraordinary Ruling Elder

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by William Shishko

One of my most cherished pictures affixed to the crowded bulletin board in my study is a picture of me standing with Dr. Herbert R. Muether during one of the past General Assemblies of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I cherish the picture even more now since Dr. Muether went home to his eternal rest on the evening of December 24, 2005. Dr. Muether had served as a ruling elder in the OPC since 1963, when he was ordained to that office in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, New York. It was my privilege to serve with him from the time I began my service in Franklin Square in February of 1981 until 1999, when his membership was transferred to our daughter congregation in Bohemia—a mission church nearer to his home and for which he and his wife had prayed for many years. Following his death, I was asked to write an article for *Ordained Servant* giving some lessons that Dr. Muether's life would offer to other ruling elders. I accepted the assignment gladly, for Dr. Muether was one of the most extraordinary ruling elders with whom I have ever worked. The other elders on our session who also had that privilege over many years will most certainly agree with that assessment. I think that they, too, would commend these lessons to you:

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1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=28.

The Beauty of Reformed Family Life

My wife and, at that time, one son (we eventually had four more sons and then a daughter) got to know the Muether family (or, at least, those who were home at the time—Herb and Anne also had six children—two girls and four boys) one day when we were invited for an afternoon and for dinner at their home in Stony Brook, New York. Dr. Muether was, for many years, a professor of physics at the State University of New York in Stony Brook in Suffolk County, Long Island. It was fascinating to learn how Herb and Anne had met at Princeton University, had eventually made their way to the OPC after realizing the liberalism that had ravaged the PCUSA, had raised six children on Dr. Muether's salary on expensive Long Island (a great encouragement to us as our family grew in number!), and had thoughtfully worked through the various aspects of raising faithful children in an area dominated by secularism. But what really impressed us most was that—in everything—the things of the Kingdom of God were paramount to the Muethers. That afternoon and evening provided an unforgettable model to us of the beauty of Reformed family life—a life in which God, his Word, kingdom, and church are regarded as the most wonderful things given to us in the covenant of grace. We deemed it “regarding the supernatural naturally,” and that phrase has stuck with me ever since. Part of an elder “ruling his household well” (1 Tim. 3:4) is that, far more than following a formula, he “seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33) in everything. This was the first of many lessons that I learned from Dr. Muether and his family.

Commitment to the Church

Dr. Muether and his family traveled nearly an hour to Bible School and worship in Franklin Square every Sunday morning. In the evenings they attended a church that was more local to them simply because it was not reasonable to make another two-hour round trip on the Lord's Day. In addition, Dr. Muether would faithfully attend our monthly session meetings, usually

by taking a ninety-minute train ride from Stony Brook to a nearby railroad station. Ever punctual, he would dismiss himself from our meetings no later than 11:10 P.M. so that he could catch the last train home. Not once did I hear a complaint from him, despite having to begin teaching early the next morning after getting only a few hours of sleep. He always expressed thankfulness for a church that was committed to the Reformed faith and Reformed worship, and for the privilege of serving Christ in his church. The church, to Dr. Muether, was the most important institution on earth. That importance extended to each of its governing assemblies. Dr. Muether faithfully attended General Assemblies when he was elected a commissioner. He served as a commissioner at 21 OPC General Assemblies! Once, after I had attended a few General Assemblies in a row, I had the temerity to blurt out that I did not want to attend another one for awhile. “But you ought to want to attend every one,” he rightly chided me in response. I never forgot that necessary admonition (and the way it was given). To this day I can say honestly that I regret it if I am not able to serve as a commissioner to the General Assembly. By word and example Dr. Muether taught me (and many others) the importance of commitment to the church.

Decency and Order

For over thirty years Dr. Muether served as clerk of session in Franklin Square. We went into a period of mourning when he was transferred to the OPC in Bohemia (where he also served as clerk of session). Every session needs a Herb Muether for a clerk! The taking, writing, and approving of minutes was a sacred task in our meetings. And, in every sessional decision, we were taught to be concerned for proper procedure. The Book of Church Order provides house rules for the congregations of the OPC, and we were meant to abide by those rules (another level of Reformed family life). Dr. Muether never saw this in a stuffy or lifeless way, but as good order by which Christ’s business was to be carried out. Through his sanctified German temperament and his experienced Presbyterianism, I learned the invaluable lesson that the devil

is not in the details, Christ is! There is a true spirituality in decency and order (cf. 1 Cor. 14:40) and Dr. Muether inculcated that in me.

Pick Your Battles Carefully

From the time I began my service as Franklin Square pastor I had a difficult time with the church’s practice of using grape juice instead of wine in the Lord’s Supper. I raised the issue in my early years in Franklin Square, but Dr. Muether (who agreed with me on the issue) questioned whether it was the proper time to make that change in church life. In the midst of many other changes the church was going through he was concerned that the session’s responsibility to preserve the peace and unity of the church be honored, as well as our concern to advance its purity by ongoing biblical reformation. Later the change came—with a unanimous vote of the session and with hardly a rustle in our church life. Through that experience I learned the importance of picking battles in church life carefully, and fighting them at the right time as well as in the right way.

Quiet Boldness

Dr. Muether was not a man given to many words, but when he spoke, you listened! No ruling elder was as quick to defend a minister as was Dr. Muether, but his first concern as a ruling elder was always faithfulness to the Word of God and the honor of Christ as king and head of his church. His manner of rule could be best described as “quiet boldness.” One Sunday morning I made a statement from the pulpit that could have been construed as meaning that it was wrong for a mother to work outside the home. At the door, after the service had concluded, Dr. Muether gently but firmly told me that I had the right to my own personal convictions, but that, as a minister, I did not have the right to impose those convictions on others—especially from the pulpit. I made a full correction the next Sunday morning! This was another lesson I never forgot. Not only the lesson regarding the limits of my ministerial authority, but also the lesson about the importance of a ruling elder’s quiet boldness in the Christlike exercise of his office.

Childlike Simplicity

Dr. Muether was a brilliant man, yet he always possessed the faith of a little child (cf. Luke 18:17). With childlike trust in his “sovereign God” (his favorite title for the God whom he loved) he spoke of him and believed that, in time, he would do exactly as he promised. Out of this “peace which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7) he lived and served and modeled the Reformed faith to others. His prayers always reflected the awe of God possessed by one of his children and the simplicity of a man who did not need to persuade the Lord by many words or sophisticated arguments. Through Dr. Muether I learned that one who rules in God’s house must first show that he himself is ruled by God; and that shows itself, most of all, in childlike (but not childish) dependence upon God.

The Importance of a Godly Wife

Behind every outstanding minister or ruling elder is an even more outstanding wife! Such was true of Dr. Muether, for whom Anne was truly a “helper suitable to his needs” (Gen. 2:20). We were wont to say in Franklin Square that the only person in the church who was smarter than Herb Muether was Anne Muether. (She, among other things, had known Albert Einstein and worked on the Manhattan Project before taking on the more important work of becoming Herb Muether’s wife, keeper of the home, and the mother of their six children.) There was no doubt that Herb was the head of his home, that Anne was submissive to her husband in everything (Eph. 5:24), that she was “one flesh” with him in his love for Christ, the Reformed faith, the church, and its service, and that this was anything but stifling to this woman of great intellect and skill. I cannot begin to estimate how much this example impacted my own wife, Margaret; especially Anne’s encouraging her to pray daily for God’s saving grace in our children, and also to pray daily for godly spouses for them. Anne had prayed that we would have at least one daughter. When our Elisabeth was born (after her five brothers) we had no doubt that her middle name, Anne, would be in honor of Dr. Muether’s extraordinary wife! We too easily forget that the



Herbert Muether, Cornelius Van Til, and Anne Muether

wife of a ruling elder can be, in many ways, as important in the life of the church as the elder himself.

How I wish that all ministers could have the benefit of the friendship and co-labors of an elder like Dr. Herbert Muether. His influence on our session, the congregation, and me personally was inestimable. I will be forever grateful to the Lord for bringing our paths together for so many years of service. May this tribute be an encouragement to all who serve as church officers. Simple faithfulness to our faithful God is one of the most powerful instruments by which Christ builds his church (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2). Dr. Muether, a sinner saved by grace whom Christ formed into an extraordinary ruling elder, is a testimony to that grand truth.

William Shishko is the pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, New York. Mr. Shishko served on the Committee on Christian Education for many years.

Taking Care of Your Pastor

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by Chad Van Dixhoorn

The Problem

There are books that tell you how to take care of your children, your spouse, your house, or your dog. And certainly there are plenty of books that tell you how to look after yourself. There are titles to aid teachers in helping students, lawyers in defending clients, or pastors in caring for church members. Much harder to find, however, are books that tell us how to look after those who look after us: how to help your mother train you in godliness, six steps to your doctor's happiness, looking after your teacher, loving your lawyer. I am not confident that we would benefit from all these titles, but one book that would be useful and that I cannot find is entitled *Taking Care of Your Pastor*.

As it turns out, *Taking Care of Your Pastor* cannot be located because it is yet to be written. But it would be a book worth writing. After all, Scripture tells us to give the matter some thought when it reminds us to honor elders that rule well, but especially to honor "those who labor in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). That honor can take many forms, including respect, encouragement, affection, and obedience (2 Cor. 6:11-13). But Paul goes on to say that it also includes care for preachers and teachers. The minister who provides spiritual food is to be treated at least as well as the ox that once helped to grind grain. To the degree that we are able, we need to ensure that pastors are fed (1 Tim. 5:18). Perhaps the essence of this positive injunction is captured in congregational calls to ministers that promise a stipend that will free the pastor from worldly care and employment. Surely nothing less than this is appropriate, but I doubt if this is really enough. Having liberated our pastors from worldly employment, shouldn't we further

consider how best to help them in their spiritual employments? Just to ask the question seems to answer it: of course we need to do all that we can to lead our shepherds into greener pastures. But to ask the question also reminds us that we often struggle to deliver the basics, let alone anything beyond them.

The problem of providing for pastors already existed in the apostolic church. The author of *Taking Care of Your Pastor* would surely want to point out early in the book that proper provision was probably a problem in Paul or Timothy's circle of churches or Paul's letter to Timothy would not have mentioned it. It would also be fair to say that the problem has persisted to our own day. Many ministers are not given sufficient care. This can be seen in congregational meetings and on the floor of presbyteries or synods. I remember attending my first presbytery meeting as a visitor. I watched a seminary graduate as he was examined, and then listened as his call was discussed by the ministers and elders. The call was approved, but not without deliberation since he was called to minister in a difficult situation, with inadequate funding, and with minimal vacation. Over the past twelve years, I have heard this kind of call echoed again and again. Usually the congregation calling the candidate or minister expresses its desire to do more as soon as possible. But not always. Just recently a very well-qualified candidate in our denomination was told by his church that his was an entry-level position (his first year of ministry after a year-long internship), and so the session proposed Wal-Mart-type wages and two weeks' vacation.

In Presbyterian circles (and likely in the Reformed counterpart) elders and ministers spot a problem and wish to change the situation. But in most of these churches the presbytery (or synod) is asked to vote on the terms of a congregation's call and cannot itself adjust the terms of a call in its meeting. To ask for higher wages or more vacation requires the presbytery to send the call back to the church for revision, thus leaving the church and the candidate in limbo until the next presbytery meeting. This problem could, perhaps, be ameliorated if congregations were permitted to send a

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=76.

commission to the presbytery meeting empowered to adjust the terms of the call if the presbytery saw it to be necessary. But it would be difficult to free this arrangement of some potentially knotty problems, and the experience would certainly be torturous for the candidate listening to the discussion, or waiting in a side room as his situation is being discussed.

Some churches are already sensitive to these issues. Perhaps your church is as well. But I think many people are new to the church or new to the idea of knowing and encouraging pastors. The best solution to the ongoing problem of the care of pastors is to make sessions, search committees, whole congregations, and perhaps regional home missionaries more reflective about the needs of pastors (and their families) and the ways in which they can help them. I think that good men are more useful and happy in pulpits of churches that understand well a pastor's needs and gifts. And since *Taking Care of Your Pastor* does not yet exist in book form, I thought I would say a few practical things about pastoral care that candidates and ministers of the gospel find very difficult to say themselves.

Pastoral Care

The Pastor's Vacations

It must be acknowledged from the outset that some congregations struggle with basic provision for their pastor and his family. In some situations (including some of those mentioned above) it is not yet possible for the congregation to pay their pastor more money. In most of these cases the congregations clearly express a desire to extend themselves to the utmost and supply a better stipend as soon as they are able.

But in all of these cases (including the above) the pastor could have been helped profoundly by the gift of additional vacation. Obviously, some vacation is really a necessity. But generous vacation is indeed a gift and it ought to be considered more seriously and more frequently. Rarely, it appears, do congregations consider—or presbyteries suggest—increasing the number of vacation weeks offered to the pastor. Vacation is very important to those with stressful, public roles who are

constantly required to work under deadlines and sometimes around the clock. The need for a break is something that a pastor's family can especially be sensitive to as the husband and father is busiest on Saturday and Sunday—the very days when other families relax. Unmarried pastors feel the same pressures; they need friendship and their friends are free when they are not.

Vacation is very useful and, perhaps, unique to the church's situation, and it costs very little. To give a man on the assembly line or in the office a week's vacation, the employer needs to find a replacement at equal cost, whether \$400 or \$4,000 a week. The case is very different for ministers. Elders, deacons, and mature members can take up some of the work of ministry and hospitality that the pastor is not doing during the week. The only real cost in dollars is on the Lord's Day, for pulpit supply. Ironically, this cost is minimal, since those who fill pulpits are usually paid very little, and so for a mere \$200 to \$300 a church can afford to give a pastor an additional two weeks of vacation. Churches need to ask themselves why a pastor should have only four weeks of vacation when they could receive six. Even if pulpit-supply honorariums were to double, the cost for the church is minimal when compared to the blessing for the pastor. If the need arises, the congregation can request (preferably well in advance) that the pastor not take all of those weeks in one stretch. But the pastor's needs should be considered here too. Some men, for example, prefer brief breaks throughout the year. Others can only begin to unwind after two weeks and benefit most from one long holiday. They resemble the Toronto pastors in the first half of the twentieth century who usually took nine weeks off in the summer and filled their pulpits with preachers from the United Kingdom looking to spend a couple of months in North America (perhaps a practice which could be revived with profit).

Days Out

It may not warrant a full chapter in *Taking Care of Your Pastor*, but I would certainly be remiss if I did not also mention another way of easing

a good pastor's heavy workload during the year: days out. The idea, not a new one, is to give him a certain number of Lord's Days where he can preach elsewhere. This requires less preparation than a normal Sunday's services requires and can be something of a break for some people. It was common in Martin Lloyd-Jones's day, for example, to give ministers in Welsh Presbyterian churches thirteen weeks per year to preach in other churches. These weeks appeared to have functioned as a cross between vacation and study-leave. The practice can be useful, but I recommend that these weeks not replace vacation, for it does not give a preacher (or his family!) the opportunity of seeing and hearing someone else lead in worship, administer the sacraments, and preach God's Word.

Care of Our Pastor-Scholars

Study-Leave

Vacation and pulpit exchanges are good, and perhaps sufficient for many pastors. Nevertheless, *Taking Care of Your Pastor* would certainly remind congregations at some point that these blessings are really a minimum standard for some pastors. We ought also to weigh carefully the unusual gifts of our pastor-scholars and consider how best to encourage them in employing those gifts. I believe that it is to the great benefit of individual congregations and our own denomination to be gifted with men who have the ability to defend and further the Reformed faith with their pens. My concern is that too often such men come to long for seminary positions and not pulpits, simply because they need more time and resources to think and to write—more time than most churches offer.

I think the argument can be made that, if we wish to bless and be blessed by our local pastor-scholar (who may or may not have degrees such as the ThM or PhD), we should consider giving him a generous annual study-leave in addition to his annual holidays. Study-leave is not vacation (as any scholar's wife could tell you). Nor is it any more costly than vacation. If it proved necessary, a true scholar would rather take a cut in his salary to cover the cost of that pulpit supply than to lose out on an opportunity to use the full range of his

gifts. A few weeks of serious reading, research, and writing, perhaps even a week of teaching, can refresh and quicken the mind of a scholar and give him increased joy and serviceableness for another year of ministry. Over the centuries many good books have been produced in pastoral study-leaves. Among the Puritans, William Gouge comes to mind as one who spent his summers turning some of his sermons and ideas into books. While not quite on a sabbatical, George Walker found time to write in jail. Thomas Gataker is one of those who took few or no formal study breaks because he was often sick (and because, at least at one point, he had three assistants to help him in his ministry of writing). Further research is needed to understand the history of pastor-scholars, their vacation, and their study-leaves. Perhaps your pastor will supply a ground-breaking study on the subject during his annual study-leave.

Arguably, non-scholarly pastors should also be given study-leave. The absence of any drive for additional study does not mean that their ministries would not benefit from reading a few more books, or attending conferences, or training or seminary or Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church courses. It is worth discussing, and perhaps pressing this point with your pastor or pastoral candidate. I hope *Taking Care of Your Pastor* would give a chapter to this important and much neglected subject of shepherding and shaping your pastor.

Sabbaticals

Study-leave can be useful to read or write, to improve or prepare an upcoming sermon series, or to teach at a seminary or church in Jackson, Krakow, or London. But for those pastors who are very able, the church should also seriously consider sabbaticals. One should be able to spot a worthy pastor-scholar by the way in which he makes good use of his study-leave (if he has been granted any) and by the caliber of research and writing projects on which he is working. If the church can at all afford it—possibly by exchanging pulpits with like-minded ministers from other countries—a sabbatical should be considered every few years,

especially if you see the weeks of study-leave being used profitably. This, too, is different from a vacation. It is a time for work. But it has the additional benefit of permitting the pastor to camp near a large library or in a small cottage that facilitates the initiation or completion of larger research and writing projects. Unless he had a weak pastor's heart to begin with, study-leave and sabbaticals will only strengthen your pastor's spiritual constitution. You will not lose your pastor to the world of scholarship. You will gain his scholarship for the good of Christ's church.

Increased vacation, adequate study-leave, and regular sabbaticals (along with the more creative ideas that you may have) could aid churches in their quest for ministers who are both godly and gifted. It may aid those whose abilities need room to grow or provide someone with the time to write the first edition of *Taking Care of Your Pastor*. It is certainly my hope that these few practical suggestions will help seasoned pastors ward off that extreme weariness that causes so many to fail, and will help new pastors get a good start in their ministries. ;

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✦ Servant Word

Preaching

Why Preachers Should Read Fiction

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by A. Craig Troxel

Introduction

I love everything about weddings: the great music, the fancy clothes, the bounty of food, and the radiant smiles everywhere you look. Yet, preceding all the pomp and celebration of the gala event is that confidential privilege of a pastor, the premarital counseling sessions. Those who are engaged may be *novices*, for they cannot speak from long-proven experience, but they are also *amateurs*, as their speech and the glances they exchange can hardly contain their genuine excitement as they anticipate and talk about a new life of discovery together.² There is simply something inspiring and contagious about the fresh innocence of a young couple's new love. True, they are beginners, but their newly discovered excitement always does my heart good, and reminds me how privileged I am to do what I do as a minister and to love whom I love as a husband.

Now, when it comes to literature and fiction, I am definitely a *novice*. I am not well read. I am not

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=37.

2 A *novice* is a mere beginner, someone who has just started to learn something. Whereas, in its classic usage, an *amateur* is someone who loves something and pursues it for pleasure rather than pay.

very cultured. So, why should you listen to a beginner ramble on about the virtues of reading fiction? The reason is that I am a bona fide *amateur*. What I lack in experience and competence perhaps I can compensate for in enthusiasm and the “eloquence of sincere earnestness.” Perhaps my eagerness will encourage you to take the plunge!

Why We Should Read Fiction

The lesser reason: mining for illustrations.

Reading fiction is a helpful way to gather sermon illustrations. Often we can reach into the literary world and find that perfect metaphor or suitable character that helps us to open up our congregants' minds so as to “prime the pump” for our message. Similarly, we may refer to just the right anecdote or quip to seal a biblical point with greater clarity or added *panache*. Allow me to illustrate.

Recently, I began a sermon from a book of prophecy by referencing the famous children's book, *The Secret Garden*, by Frances Burnett. I said, that as far as I could tell, the garden symbolized the relationship between the boy, Colin, and his father, Archibald Craven. The garden, locked up ever since the tragic death of Mr. Craven's wife, suffered such neglect that it was all but dead and overgrown with weeds. Similarly, Colin was virtually locked in his room continually, suffering great neglect, and it was assumed by all that he was dying a slow death. The deteriorating garden is a symbol of the neglected relationship between the father and the son. This, too, was the case between Judah and her God. The withering Promised Land was evidence of how Judah had long neglected her relationship with her God. Its barrenness reflected her nearly dead faith in her God. Look around, God said, and you will see all the evidence you need to understand where our covenantal relationship stands.

On another occasion, in order to set up Isaiah 9:1–2, which speaks of a piercing light that will shine on a people walking in darkness, I referred to *The Fellowship of the Ring* and the scene in which Frodo is lost in Shelob's dark and gloomy lair. There he remembers that Galadriel, the Lady

of the Wood, gave him a crystal vial containing rays of light from Earendil's star, as she spoke these words: "It will shine still brighter when night is about you. May it be a light to you in the dark places, when all other lights go out." Subsequently, the vial's silver flame grows into a blazing light, like a white torch which penetrates the cloudy darkness of the cave and afflicts such brightness upon the gigantic spider that she withdraws.

A sermon illustration has to be obvious and simple, if not self-evident. For instance, the idea of the constant oppression of continual darkness clicked in the minds of my children when I likened such darkness to Narnia where it is "always winter, but never Christmas" (C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). They understood. On the other hand, I remember once trying to make a point in an adult Sunday school class about priorities. When I alluded to how much we men love to fish, I received nothing but blank stares. I polled the class and discovered that not a single man in the room enjoyed fishing. So, the illustration did not make sense to them. The same is true for allusions to literature in the middle of a sermon. The point must be obvious, or the book be well known, for the quick reference to come off clearly.

It is also important to remember that literary references, like many well-intended illustrations, can be distracting. This became clear to me this last year when I began a sermon by using an illustration from Alexander Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Apparently, in my illustrating, I exhibited such excitement about the book that over the next two weeks several people in our congregation told me that they had begun reading *The Count of Monte Cristo*. I learned two lessons from this incident. First, it showed me the persuasive power of earnestness, even when simply making a point of explanation from literature. Second, I learned that the next time I begin a sermon with an illustration I should use one from Scripture, so that in the ensuing weeks several people might come to me and tell me that they are reading the Bible!

There is no question that one benefit of read-

ing fiction is that it can provide helpful illustrations for preaching. But as noble a reason as this is, I do not think that it should be our primary reason for reading fiction. It is too utilitarian. Sermon illustrations may be a practical by-product of the preacher's reading, but this alone is not sufficient to sustain our desire to read. Furthermore, this approach also encourages a form of reading that is superficial and flat, failing to take fiction seriously as a form of art. As helpful as it is to find illustrations for our preaching, I think that there is a far more important reason to read the great works of literature.

The better reason: developing as pastors and persons.

Getting to Know Our Flock

If we are going to be effective ambassadors for Christ, then we had better know something about the people to whom we are sent. This may require us to expose ourselves to things outside the realm of our own experience and become acquainted with things beyond our own world. Literature can help us here. Reading various types and genres of literature helps to acquaint us with our flock, the "world" in which they live, and the ways in which they think. This is why fiction has been called "escapist literature" or "imaginative literature" in the positive sense of those words.

Fiction has the ability to lift us up out of our world and transport us to different places for a few moments or even hours, leading us into new worlds, giving us fresh experiences, and introducing us to unfamiliar perspectives that we would not have otherwise encountered. A skillful author enables us to feel the oppressive humidity of a jungle and the refreshing coolness of cold water, or smell the fragrant morning rain on the grass or the sickening stench of the T. rex about to devour us. Just as an author can enable us to experience these things, so also can he place us, movingly, in another person's skin, so that we sympathize with a given character's life, frustrations, and feelings. For instance, I find myself moved by the suffering of Edmond Dantés in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the bewilderment of Okonkwo in *Things Fall*

Apart, and the self-consciousness of Binx in *The Moviegoer*.

We are prone to generalize and universalize our own experience too quickly. Literature helps us to appreciate another person's unique life and situation, and in turn, encourages us to speak more patiently and intelligently in foreign settings. When I first came to my present pulpit, I discovered that most of my standard allusions and examples, understood instinctively by my friends and family in rural western Nebraska, did not translate smoothly into the suburban life of Philadelphia. (Imagine that!)

If we wish to deepen our appreciation of how our congregants think and feel, then we should pay attention to what they read, even if it is not our standard fare. Last summer Bob Meeker, one of our elders, handed me *Riders of the Purple Sage* by Zane Grey. I received it with some skepticism, wondering if it would really interest me. To be more honest, I assumed in my conceit that the book was a little beneath me, but salved my conscience with the thought that I, the noble and condescending pastor, would agree to read it simply because it was important to Bob. All my pretensions quickly fell away in the first chapter, and I was hooked. Soon after, when Bob produced its sequel, *Surprise Valley*, I nearly snatched the book from his hands as if it were Gollum's "precious"! Interestingly, and not news to Bob, *Riders of the Purple Sage* is one of the most popular westerns ever written, and even *Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia* is not too snooty to laud Grey as a "first-rate storyteller."

I was similarly provoked to read J. K. Rowling's best-selling *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone*. I wanted to see what all the fuss was about, and more importantly, why my son John wanted to read the book. So, I read it, and I read the next five! I am anxiously awaiting the last, and seventh volume. If you want to know why children, as well as adults, are devouring Rowling's books, it helps to read them. While I may not share Rowling's worldview, the "mythopoeic world" (to use another's words) which Rowling has created is dazzling and captivating. I was also driven many years ago

to read *The Color Purple*. I wanted to learn more about child abuse, since I was a social worker at the time. Surprisingly, the book also helped me to see this particular form of suffering from an angle which I could never have imagined. Similarly, when I read Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* en route to India (my wife, Carol, and I had been married for only six months), the book immediately helped me to appreciate how easily one can take his spouse for granted. This radically changed how I experienced the next twenty-one days, at a great distance from her. Likewise, a missionary might want to read a book like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for the same reason: empathy makes us more affective and credible communicators. In his article "Why Read Fiction?"³ Bob Godfrey talks about how literature can powerfully inspire us. He uses as an example *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, by Azar Nafisi (Random House, 2004). This book will move you as you learn how a small group of Muslim women were affected by the works of Jane Austin, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Vladimir Nabokov, and Henry James. The world of fiction is imaginary, but the people and lives described seem all too real. We can profit greatly from such convincing portrayals.

Growing as People

The best reason to read literature takes me back to the beginning of my thoughts, and my opening remarks about marriage. One reason that my wife and I try to get away on a date and spend some time alone is to attempt to keep our relationship fresh. We want to maintain the vitality of our love and keep it from growing stale. Similarly, I dread growing stale in my preaching. I fear even more growing stale in my Christian walk. The chief antidote to each of these ailments is to maintain *spiritual* vitality.

Now, I need to make an all-important qualification. Reading great classics of fiction will *not* maintain our hearts. It will *not* invigorate our preaching with spiritual power. It will *not* help us improve in holiness. The way these things can be accomplished is by God's Spirit ministering

3 *Evangelium* 4:3 (July/August, 2006): 1-5.

grace to us through the Word of God, prayer, and the sacraments. But good fiction can help make us more interesting people with greater scope of understanding and a richer vocabulary to articulate it. Fiction can provoke our minds and hearts to a deeper admiration of God's world. It can embolden us to greater goals, such as reaching people in their various stages of life, whether or not they are believers. Although such benefits are difficult to quantify, they are no less real. Let's be honest, brothers, we ministers are probably regarded as the least interesting of all professionals. We are generally thought of as people with the least scope and the most predictable vocabulary. There is no denying that the air can get a little stuffy in our minds on occasion and we need to throw open the windows and let a fresh breeze blow through.

For this to happen we must read literature in the manner described by C. S. Lewis as "wholeheartedly," that is, with our whole being. We have to be receptive in order to enjoy any form of art, including literature. That does not mean that we need to get carried away and abandon our Christian convictions. It simply means that we have to be willing to learn.

The incompetent and lazy "Lucky" Louis Sears in *The Ugly American* by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer helped me to be a more *faithful* and *effective* ambassador of Christ. I have similarly learned from other fictional characters, good and bad alike: Bronte's Heathcliffe, Dickens's Uriah Heep, Greene's Scobie, and Crane's Fleming. Sometimes the best way to get a good and honest look at ourselves is through someone else, even if he is a fictional character.

In a similar way, if we read fiction wholeheartedly, it can truly inspire us. It expands and animates us by showing us the starkness of truth through the back door of our imagination. While there is truth to the idea that literature is less about the "true" than the "beautiful," nevertheless, fiction can paint in our minds the shades of a character's nobility and gallantry or the hues of his hideousness and blackness. In other words, the goodness of truth and the wickedness of falsehood are often painted in starker or more alarm-

ing contrast than they would be in nonfiction or straightforward prose. In his *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien does not merely juxtapose good with evil. Rather, he enables us to sense the hideousness and repulsiveness of evil, so that we can smell its foulness, feel the sinking despair of its prey, and cringe under the ugly cruelty of its bondage. Conversely, he lifts our affections through the virtues of the fellowship and their friends, to see the pure glory of justice, the enviable bonds of friendship, and the universal and exalted honor of sacrifice. Evil is painted in very dark colors. Good is extolled in the highest with glorious tones. As I once told a friend, every time I read *The Lord of the Rings* I want to go out and do something incredibly brave. Why? Because Tolkien inspires me and emboldens me to stand for all that is righteous, true, noble, and lovely. Only God's living and active Word can convict me of my sin, assure me of God's pardon in Christ by faith, change my heart, and sanctify me in grace. But literature can help me to understand myself more fully, as well as all who walk this same middle-earth.

How You Can Get Started

I know what you are thinking: how in the world can a busy pastor read in addition to his study and preparation for sermons? I had the same question. Susan Wise Bauer gives a very practical answer: the goal is not to read a lot of novels and become culturally expert. The goal is simply to begin reading more than you are now. Even if you read only one or two books in this next year, that is two books more than you read the year before. Many of us have to start out modestly, and that is what I did. Many years ago I laid down a systematic plan with definite goals for reading theology. I figured that if I read only thirty minutes a day, in one year I could read 2,600 pages! (Assuming I read ten pages in 30 minutes each day, that adds up to 50 pages per week; and 2,600 pages in a year.) If you translate this equation for fictional works, you can digest quite a few books by just reading the books on your nightstand 30 minutes a day. It is amazing how much time becomes available when you become absorbed in a good book. Finally, to state

the obvious, if any of us simply translated the hours we spend in front of the TV into reading, we could probably read a novel per month, or more!

How You Can Get Started

Here are a few resources (listed alphabetically by author or editor) that have proved very helpful to me.

Mortimer Adler, *How to Read a Book* is well known as an overall guide to reading. He explains and illustrates important principles of reading and offers many helpful suggestions on how to read “imaginative literature.”

The Well-Educated Mind: A Guide to the Classical Education You Never Had (W. W. Norton & Co., 2003) by Susan Wise Bauer is a treasure. Not only does she give helpful insights about how different genres of literature should be read (using the Greek *trivium* as her model), but she also inserts an annotated reading list to accompany each chapter. These entries usually offer something about the plot of the particular book and a few suggestions about what to look for or pay attention to in the story.

In a similar vein W. John Campbell’s *The Book of Great Books: A Guide to 100 World Classics* (Barnes & Noble, 2000) contains comments on the backgrounds, characters, main themes, symbols, and plots of some of the world’s finest literature. For \$9.98 it is a steal for what you can learn about everything from *Frankenstein* to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Invitation to the Classics, Louise Cowan and Os Guinness, editors (Baker, 1998), lists the great authors of Western civilization along with their biographical information, brief descriptions of one of their principal works, and offers suggestions for further study.

Clifton Fadiman and John S. Major, *The New Lifetime Reading Plan*, Fourth Edition (HarperCollins, 1998), introduces and offers opinions about 133 in-

ternational authors, listed alphabetically, as well as a few of their own works. The book also contains a helpful annotated biographical list of one hundred contemporary authors.

Thomas C. Foster, *How to Read Literature like a Professor* (HarperCollins, 2003) is not your run-of-the-mill guide on how to read fiction. Some portions read more like a stream of consciousness, but it does provide some helpful insights on what to be alert for as you read.

C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1961) is indispensable on how to and how not to read literature. Also, remember his “On the Reading of Old Books,” in *God in the Dock* (Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 200–207.

John Muether, “Something Short of Redemption: The Pilgrims of John Updike and Douglas Coupland,” *Modern Reformation* 10:4 (July/August 2001), 19–23. This is a fine example of how to read fiction as a Christian by our very own OPC historian.

Bruce Murphy, editor, *Benét’s Reader’s Encyclopedia*, Fourth Edition (HarperCollins, 1996), lists authors, literary terms, genres, the world’s most important novels and plays, and even the names of the characters in various books. It is also cross-referenced.

Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Zondervan, 1985) is a wonderful guide by a living authority on Christians and literature. It is an invaluable read on why and how Christians should read literature for their improvement. ;

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The Preacher and the Poets: Some Thoughts

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by Roger Wagner

When we hear a reference to “preachers and poets,” our thoughts are taken almost immediately to the message of Paul to the Areopagus recorded in Acts 17. The apostle declared,

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

“In him we live and move and have our being”;

as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.”

Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (vv. 24–29)

Here Paul quotes from Aratus and (probably) from Epimenides of Crete, whom he also cites as authority for his low view of Cretans in Titus 1:12

(“Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”).

Most scholars assume that Paul was well-versed (!) in the learning of the Greeks (though F. W. Farrar thinks that Paul’s citations would have been so generally known in his day that the apostle might have picked up the quotations without specific literary studies). In any case, Paul here makes use of the formal parallels between the quotation from Aratus and the pervasive teaching of Scripture regarding the immanence of God: “ ‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away?’ ” (Jer. 23:23 NIV; cf. Isa. 57:15).

Building Bridges to the Audience

But why quote the poets? The apostle uses the words of the Greek poets to express the truth of the biblical revelation to build a bridge to his audience. Paul uses the poets because they are *familiar* to his audience. Their mention will evoke a response of recognition and assent. Further, the poets had an acknowledged authority for the Greeks—they were considered by many to be prophets. In earlier days, the poets claimed divine inspiration. Though the intellectuals to whom Paul was speaking would have been skeptical about such claims, the poets nevertheless enjoyed the authority of tradition. When they aphoristically set forth what was taken to be self-evidently true, as in the case of these two citations, they would have elicited a knowing nod from the audience.

Every age has its “poets”—cultural spokesmen who are acknowledged authorities and familiar voices. In some ages and cultures these poets are considered authorities in and of themselves. More often they bear the authority of tradition or consensus. It behooves the preacher to be able to make use of these “voices,” where appropriate, just as Paul used his knowledge of pagan Greek and Roman literature to build bridges to his audience.

Given the general state of American education, contemporary audiences cannot be expected to possess much knowledge of the rich tradition of poetry in their own language (not to mention poetry in translation). The illustrative quotations and allusions to the great poetic expressions of bygone

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=40.

days—evident, for example, in the sermons of the nineteenth and early twentieth century—can no longer be assumed to strike a familiar, assenting note from our hearers. Sprinkling our sermons with unfamiliar or hard-to-follow quotations simply to display our erudition defeats the purpose of effective communication.

Yet there are “poetic” voices within our contemporary culture whose familiarity prompts recognition. If the preacher is aware of them, he can speak with their voice to connect with his audience and to convey the biblical message in fresh ways, allowing his audience to understand the truth and assent to it. Appealing to them has the force of confirming the preacher’s words in the experience of the hearers.

Most of these contemporary poets are singer-songwriters—Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Bono, et al. Their music is everywhere, and people (especially young people) memorize their lyrics without even trying. (I once observed to a Christian rock singer that he had the advantage over me as a preacher because his audience knew his sermons by heart!) A biblical truth which can be paralleled by a statement from a popular poet, does not thereby gain authority (or explication), but rather is made to strike a familiar, responsive chord in the mind of the hearers.

When Paul Simon sang, “When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school, it’s a wonder I can think at all” (not very elegant, but it communicates), thousands of students knew (or thought they knew) exactly what he was talking about. Could one better express the futility of worldly wisdom—“always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7)?

Springsteen expresses the broken promises of teenage sexual sin:

Then I got Mary pregnant
and man that was all she wrote
And for my nineteenth birthday I got a
union card and a wedding coat
We went down to the courthouse
and the judge put it all to rest
No wedding day smiles no walk down the

aisle

No flowers no wedding dress.

(“The River”)

Lines like these put the warnings of Proverbs (e.g., 5:5) into contemporary dress, and they communicate powerfully to today’s audiences.

Or how about Bob Dylan’s chilling portrait of autonomous man?

Now, he’s hell-bent for destruction, he’s
afraid and confused,
And his brain has been mismanaged with
great skill.

All he believes are his eyes
And his eyes, they just tell him lies....

Now he worships at an altar of a stagnant
pool
And when he sees his reflection, he’s
fulfilled.

Oh, man is opposed to fair play,
He wants it all and he wants it his way.

(“Jokerman”)

When we move outside the doors of our church buildings (do we do that?), use of the poets of the age is also a means of building credibility with a skeptical audience. It helps persuade the audience that the preacher is willing to listen honestly to, and consider, the ideas that they hold. Too often preachers come across to an unbelieving audience as ignorant or facilely dismissive of their ideas. In fact, that is what many object to when they complain of being “preached at.” To be sure, false ideas about God, man, society, sin, and redemption must ultimately be rejected in favor of the Bible’s teaching, but it is important in speaking to “the children of this age” that we let them know that we understand their position, have considered carefully their view, and have been compelled to turn from it to Christ, not out of prejudice but for good and sufficient reasons.

Paul’s understood Athenian idolatry (v. 16),

but he did not lay himself open to the criticism of being an ignorant, prejudiced opponent of Greek ideas. He had done his homework—“as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship” (Acts 17:23). His later use of the quotations from the Greek poets had the same effect. It built credibility. Our understanding and judicious use of the cultural expressions of today can have the same effect when we address a secular audience.

Distilling the Truth into Striking, Memorable Expression

Is the tradition of English verse then lost to us in our illiterate society? No. Reading poetry has much value beyond the citation of poems as sermon illustrations.

Exposure to poetry can help us learn to think and experience life differently. It can help us develop an eye for the telling, affective detail. What reader of Wordsworth will ever look at a field of daffodils again without seeing them “tossing their heads in sprightly dance” and smiling at their “jocund company”?

Poetry can also help us cultivate what we might call an “aphoristic appetite”—*the satisfaction we find in being able to comprehend a world of experience in a brief, resonant statement*. The authors of the biblical wisdom literature were as concerned with their form of expression as they were the content. In the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes, we read of its author:

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. (Eccl. 12:9–10)

Or, as Alexander Pope put it,

True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

(“Essay on Criticism”)

Poetry has as one of its basic devices this kind of “compression.” What a wealth of human experience and emotion—love, loss, patriotism, and futility—is expressed in the lines of Rupert Brooke, who perished during “the Great War.”

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.

(“The Soldier”)

Composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein uses the famous line from Shakespeare, “Juliet is the sun,” to illustrate how this compression works to create metaphor (and poetic resonance and affect):

What if we were to construct a logical progression that would “normalize” Shakespeare's metaphor? We could say:

There is a human being called Juliet
There is a star called the sun
The human being called Juliet is radiant
A star called the sun is radiant
[hence:]
The human being called Juliet is like a star
called the sun in respect
to radiance.

Perfectly logical. Now come the transformations, which are all deletions, as you might have known; we delete all those logical but unnecessary steps that are built into the deep structure of any comparison, and wind up with our conclusive simile, *Juliet is like the sun*, which is true in one respect only, that they are both *radiant*. We then make the final, supreme deletion of the word *like*, and behold, our simile is transformed into a metaphor. *Juliet is the sun*. This is that.

(*The Unanswered Question*, 124)

The biblical “sayings of the wise” often have this aphoristic character. The sage has thought long and hard (from the perspective of “special revelation,” the truth revealed in Scripture) about a wealth of experience (“general revelation”) and then tries to convey to his student (“my son”) the *distillation* of that reflection in the form of a wise saying.

Under three things the earth trembles;
under four it cannot bear up:
a slave when he becomes king,
and a fool when he is filled with food;
an unloved woman when she gets a
 husband,
and a maidservant when she displaces her
 mistress.

(Prov. 30:21–23)

As preachers we ought to be in search of such “words of delight” in which to express biblical truth to our congregations.

Much of our labor as preachers is expository—unpacking and explaining the meaning of the statements of Scripture. But there is much value in being able also to repackage complex truths in simple, memorable sayings. For example, Philipp Nicolai has compressed the content of many a sermon on John 15 into three memorable and moving lines:

In thy blest body let me be,
E'en as the branch is in the tree,
Thy life my life supplying.

(“How Lovely Shines the Morning
Star!” *Trinity Hymnal*, Revised #515)

Even if we believe we have little aptitude for such “compression,” reading poetry can help us condition our thinking in that direction. Our sermons will be enriched if, at points of summary especially, we can succinctly express what we’ve just explained in such delightful words of truth.

Poetry Will Change You

All this sounds more utilitarian than I want it to be. In the end, I would commend the reading of poetry to the preacher, not because you are a preacher, but because you are a *man*—and a man being transformed in the likeness of Jesus, the new man. Poetry is a humane art. It is a uniquely human expression, and it makes its readers more human. As such it will also make us better Christians, since Christianity is the true humanism.

But for many of us, such reading may be a lot like eating our vegetables—we must be forced to eat them because “they are good for us” long before we develop a taste that will take pleasure in them. Poetry is an acquired taste. (Some of you may have had your first exposure from teachers that guaranteed that you would hate poetry evermore!) Appreciation only comes with exposure, and usually concentrated exposure, to accustom the reader to poetry’s pleasures.

Let me whet your appetite. Consider the religious poetry of George Herbert (1593–1633). His “Love (III)” speaks affectingly of the soul’s simple devotion to Christ, who is Love personified.

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul
 drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow
 slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack’d anything.

“A guest,” I answer’d, “worthy to be here”;
 Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 “Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth, Lord, but I have marr’d them; let
 my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore
 the blame?”

“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste
my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.

Here’s another especially for preachers, whom Herbert compares to the stained-glass windows of the church building:

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall
word?
He is a brittle crazie glasse:
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy
storie,
Making thy life to shine within
The holy Preachers; then the light and
glorie
More rev’rend grows, & more doth
win:
Which else shows watrish, bleak, &
thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
When they combine and mingle,
bring
A strong regard and aw: but speech alone
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
And in the eare, not conscience ring.

(“The Windows”)

“Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one”—how often at my prayers, or in the pulpit, has that line come to mind to remind me of my high and holy calling as a minister of the Word. And I am humbled. Here’s one more, just for fun, from Herbert’s older contemporary, John Donne (1572–1631)—the conclusion of a poem about dying, with its fears and the consolation of the gospel.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ’s cross and Adam’s tree, stood in

one place;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in
me;
As the first Adam’s sweat surrounds my
face,
May the last Adam’s blood my soul
embrace.

So, in His purple wrapp’d, receive me,
Lord;
By these His thorns, give me His other
crown;
And as to others’ souls I preach’d Thy word,
Be this my text, my sermon to mine
own,
“Therefore that He may raise, the Lord
throws down.”

(“Hymn to God, My God, in My Sick-
ness”)

For Further Reading

Last month you were encouraged to read some good fiction. Now I’m asking you to add some poetry to your reading list. You may never read theology again!

You can’t beat *The Oxford Book of English Verse* to get started. You should be able to pick up a copy of the 1919 edition, edited by A. T. Quiller-Couch, in a used book store for \$10 or so. A great investment! (You can even find it online at www.bartleby.com/101/, but reading poetry on the computer screen, except in an emergency, is no fun.) This anthology includes selections from 1250–1918 (and includes a few English-speaking Americans!). It’s great for “dipping into,” as Quiller-Couch expressed his preference for the shorter forms in his collection (if you want *Paradise Lost*, you can find it elsewhere). There is also an *Oxford Book of American Verse*, and there are “New” Oxford books of verse, but they cost \$50+ and are not so readily available secondhand).

Alfred A. Knopf has published the *Everyman’s Library Pocket Poets* series. These are wonderful little hardback books (they *will* fit in your pocket, if you wish) on individual poets (Donne, Herbert,

Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins, etc.) or interesting collections (Christmas Poems, Garden Poems, Love Poems, Poems of Mourning, etc.) and list for only \$12.50 new.

I would also recommend *A Sacrifice of Praise* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 1999), edited by James H. Trott (with an introduction by Larry Woiwode). This is an “Anthology of Christian Poetry from Caedmon to the Mid-Twentieth Century” arranged chronologically by period with some introductory notes on each section. ;

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✦ Servant World

The Soul of Frankenstein

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by James Gidley

Surely we don't need to take *Frankenstein* seriously, do we? Say "Frankenstein" and the image of a stumbling, grunting Boris Karloff, with his square forehead and electrodes protruding out of his neck, comes immediately to mind. This can be treated no more seriously than the 1931 special effects.

Such a reaction is the result of an all-too-common pitfall: the neglect of the original story in favor of watered-down derivatives. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is anything but silly. It is a novel of ideas, and the ideas that it develops are anything but trivial. They are the central ideas of what it means to be human, what it means to be made in the image of God—or not.

Yes, *Frankenstein* is a horror story, but understanding the horror is one of the entrances into the deeper meaning of the tale. Mary Shelley's own account of the genesis of the story is helpful here. In her famous preface to the second (1831) edition of the novel, she describes how she and her lover but not-yet-husband Percy Shelley were neighbors of Lord Byron at Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816. During a persistent stretch of rainy weather, the company amused themselves by reading ghost stories to each other. Being a literary crowd, they conceived the idea of having a contest to see who could write the best ghost story.

Initially, Mary was frustrated by her inability

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=49.

to come up with an idea. While she was struggling with this, the men of the company were engaged in intellectual discussions about the nature of man:

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and [Percy] Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated.² They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin³ ... Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism⁴ had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth.⁵

Having heard these discussions, Shelley later fell into a reverie and had a waking dream:

... I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the workings of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world.⁶ His

2 I.e., transmitted or imparted.

3 Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802), Charles Darwin's grandfather.

4 Named for Luigi Galvani (1737–1798), an Italian physiologist who stimulated muscle tissues in frogs to contract under the influence of an electrical current.

5 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 8.

6 Following various literary critics, I regard this sentence as more indicative of the sentiments of 1831, when England was approaching the Victorian era of dignified propriety, in religion as in everything else, than those of 1816. Yet even if this is a later

success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated⁷ would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench forever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening the curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

I opened mine in terror ...⁸

What sparked the terror in Shelley as she imagined this scene? After studying the story and its intellectual antecedents for several years now, I have come to the conclusion that it is nothing less than the horror of realizing that man is nothing more than a physical being.

To understand how the novel works out this idea, it is necessary to jettison a few myths about the story, myths that have long been propagated by theatrical productions. Myth #1: Body parts. The common image of the story is that Victor Frankenstein made his creature by stitching together parts of bodies snatched from graves, morgues, and laboratories. Of course, Mary had to be very vague about the technology involved, but what she does say points in another direction. Among many evidences of this, perhaps the most obvious and telling is that Frankenstein made the creature about eight feet tall:

As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved,

.....
sentiment layered over the original events, notice how Shelley describes God's creation: a mechanism.

7 I.e., transmitted or imparted.

8 Ibid., 9.

contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionally large. After having formed this determination and having spent some months successfully collecting and arranging my materials, I began.⁹

Where would he find body parts, which, when assembled, would result in an eight-foot tall person? The image is that of Frankenstein manufacturing the body parts out of more basic materials.

Why is this important? If Frankenstein made the creature out of human body parts, then the theme of resurrection is inevitably intruded into the story. Movie-makers have been unable to resist the implications of this theme. For example, in the 1931 movie starring Boris Karloff, the evil actions of the creature are explained by Fritz's (not Igor's) bumbling: he drops the scientist's brain that he is trying to steal from a university laboratory and has to make off with a criminal's brain. In the 1994 Kenneth Branagh version, ostentatiously entitled *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, the creature "remembers" how to play a flute because it was an ability of one of the bodies from whose parts he was made, and Frankenstein successfully patches together his bride Elizabeth after the creature kills her. In the novel, there is no such hope of resurrection, and therefore no hope of redemption. There is only creation, fall, despair, and death.

Myth #2: "It's alive!" In the 1931 movie, Frankenstein, in the presence of several skeptical observers, cries out in exultation when the creature shows signs of life. This has become the quintessential image of the mad scientist, but it is a double myth, untrue to the novel on two accounts. First, in the novel, Frankenstein is utterly alone throughout the two-year process of creation. He has no assistant, nor are there any other witnesses to his success. Second, at the moment when the creature comes to life, Frankenstein is not triumphant, but horrified. This is how Mary pictured the scene in her waking dream. Frankenstein turns away from his creature and rushes from the room

9 Ibid., 54.

in disgust and dismay. After a brief, additional encounter with the creature, he flees from the house and does not see him again for almost two years.

On first reading the novel, this is one of its most puzzling features. We have become so accustomed to the maniacally triumphant mad scientist that Frankenstein's reaction appears to be not only grossly irresponsible but psychologically inexplicable. Why, at the moment of his success, after long, arduous labor, would he be revolted at his own creation? The answer goes back to Mary Shelley's waking dream and the intellectual discussions that led up to it. If Frankenstein can create a sentient being out of physical materials, then he, too, though a sentient being, is made merely of physical materials.¹⁰ The premise of *Frankenstein* sucks us into the vortex of a creation that is subject to no higher powers than are immanent in the creation itself. Man is capable of creating himself. While many would profess to regard this as the ultimate emancipation, Shelley was quite rightly horrified by it. Her horror is all the more convincing because she was sympathetic to the underlying idea.

Myth #3: The stumbling hulk. In the 1931 classic movie, Boris Karloff never says a word. He grunts and stumbles about in uncomprehending confusion and rage. It is comforting to know that the monster, while physically formidable, is no match for human intelligence. In the novel, however, the creature learns language and educates himself by clandestinely observing a family through a crack in the wall of their humble cottage. When he meets Frankenstein again about two years after his creation, he is his intellectual equal, and, if anything, more eloquent. Shelley pulls no punches. If Frankenstein can create an intelligent being, then that being will be his intellectual match.

In discussing the novel with students, I sometimes hear the quite reasonable objection: how can Frankenstein create something that is equal

.....
¹⁰ Many scholarly critics, while typically ignoring the theological implications, have seen that there is a resemblance between Frankenstein and his creature. It is not merely a blunder that the nameless creature is usually referred to by the name of his creator.

or superior to himself? Must not the creature be inferior to the creator? Biblically, a point well taken. But Shelley was dealing with evolutionary ideas. Though it would be another 43 years until Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, evolutionary ideas were already in the air. As noted above, the Shelleys were familiar with the work of Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, who was one of those breathing such air. If evolution is true, then the superior can and does spring from the inferior. Why could it not come forth by way of invention and manufacturing rather than by way of procreation?

Another part of the horror is Frankenstein's realization that he has created something that threatens mankind with extinction because of its superior strength and at least equal intellect. This is the underlying horror of evolution, which is seldom admitted into public or academic discussion. If evolution is true, then there is no reason to think that human beings are the highest form of life that will ever evolve. Humanity is most likely destined to become extinct, like Neanderthal man, and to be supplanted by a superior species.

Mary Shelley underscores these points in the confrontation between Frankenstein and his creature that is at the center of the novel. Not only has the creature learned to speak, he has also read books. He refers most often to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He berates Frankenstein for abandoning him, in contrast to the loving care that God bestowed on Adam. He demands that Frankenstein create for him a mate, as God created Eve for Adam.

Frankenstein's creature recognizes that the God who created Adam is spiritual and benevolent. This lends a reflected glory and dignity to Adam: he too is a spiritual being, fitted for communion with God and conversation with angels. And God is good to Adam. Frankenstein, on the other hand, is a mechanic, and his creature is a machine.

By coincidence, Frankenstein's creature had come into possession of his creator's laboratory notebook and had read the story of his own creation. In contrast to the creation of Adam, the creature finds the story of his own creation to be

filthy and disgusting. Again, the underlying horror is the realization that he is merely a physical being.

Hovering over the novel is a word that is rarely used within it, and never with its theological meaning: soul. Frankenstein does not lose his soul, and no one in the novel warns him that he is in danger of losing it. Like his creature, he doesn't have one.

Because of its central theme, *Frankenstein* has a number of other theological implications, but I believe that it is the non-existence of the soul that lies at the heart of Mary Shelley's horror. True, scholarly critics do read the novel as a cautionary tale. The two main varieties of this view are the anti-technological and the feminist. In the former view, *Frankenstein* cautions against technology run amok; in the latter, *Frankenstein* warns against men trying to make babies without women. Neither view gets to the heart of the matter, perhaps because that would call our culture's predominant philosophical commitments into question.

The general antidote to Frankensteinian horror is biblical theism; the specific antidote is a recovery of a robust soul-body dualism. Human nature is composed of two parts: one corporeal, having weight, parts, size, etc.; the other incorporeal, without parts or dimensions. One is mortal, the other immortal. Ironically, one of the fashions of modern theology, even in—perhaps especially in—Reformed circles, is the denial of soul-body dualism in favor of some sort of monism, which is sometimes described, misleadingly in my view, as holism. This plays into Frankenstein's hands.

Frankenstein vividly brings to life the implications of an abstract idea that was radical in Shelley's day but mainstream in our own. It shows us that philosophical materialism is hopeless and horrifying. Shelley is also showing us that philosophical materialists, whatever their protestations to the contrary, know this. ;

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✦ Servant Truth

Paul on Justification and Final Judgment

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by John V. Fesko

Introduction²

In recent years much controversy has surrounded the exact relationship between justification by faith alone and the final judgment. Most who attempt to solve this puzzle follow a well-worn path: Paul's understanding of the law. While it is certainly important to establish Paul's understanding of the law, it seems that few take into account the nature of the final judgment itself. There appears to be an unchecked assumption regarding the final judgment, namely that the parousia, resurrection, and final judgment are separate events. Given this presupposition, it is only natural that interpreters would examine the final judgment in isolation from the other events of the last day.

It is the thesis of this essay, however, that the way to find the relationship between justification and the final judgment lies not only in Paul's understanding of the law but also in the nature of the final judgment itself. More specifically, this essay will argue that the final judgment is not a separate event on the last day but is part of the single organic event of parousia-resurrection-final judgment. In other words, the final judgment is

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=65.

2 This is material taken from a chapter by John Fesko in *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* soon to be published by P & R Publishers.

the resurrection. I will support this thesis by: (1) exploring the significance of Christ's resurrection, noting its paradigmatic and forensic nature; (2) exploring the resurrection of the church, or those who are in Christ, noting its forensic nature; (3) confirming the resurrection-final judgment as one event in connection with the resurrection of the inner and outer man; and (4) exploring the relationship between justification and the resurrection-final judgment, looking at the crucifixion and how justification relates to the "already-not-yet."

The Resurrection of Christ

Paradigmatic for the Church

Whenever one considers the resurrection, it is important to begin with the resurrection of Christ, as it is paradigmatic for the resurrection of believers. We see the paradigmatic nature of Christ's resurrection when Paul calls him "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18; cf. Rev. 1:5). Christ is, of course, the firstborn of many brothers (Rom. 8:29). The connection between the resurrection of Christ and the church is especially evident when Paul calls Christ "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20b). That Christ is the firstfruits, imagery based in the Old Testament feast of weeks (Lev. 23:9-22), means that his resurrection is: (1) prior in temporality; (2) a representation of the same quality or character; and (3) a promise or pledge of more of the same kind to come.³ In this regard, Geerhardus Vos notes that "the resurrection of Christ is prophetic of that of all believers."⁴ Given, then, the paradigmatic role of Christ's resurrection, we must explore the nature of his resurrection to understand the nature of our resurrection.

Resurrection as Forensic Declaration: Righteousness and Sonship

When considering Christ's resurrection, its

3 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1224.

4 Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory*, rev. ed. (1922; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 167.

declarative or forensic character rarely receives enough attention. Many see the resurrection as an important event, the physical raising of Christ from the bonds of death. Yet they fail to recognize the judicial significance of Christ's resurrection. In the opening verses of Paul's epistle to the Romans, we see this forensic aspect for the first time: "Concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3–4). Historically, Reformed interpreters have explained these verses in terms of Christ's ontological constitution. In other words, they posit that Christ's descending from David according to the flesh refers to his humanity, and his resurrection from the dead refers to—and is evidence of—his deity. Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797–1878), for example, argues that when Christ was "declared to be the Son of God" that "Son of God is not a title of office, but of nature, and therefore Christ cannot be said to have been constituted the Son of God." He goes on to state, "When Christ is said to be constituted the Son of God, we are not to understand that he became or was made Son, but was, in the view of men, thus determined."⁵ This is essentially the view of John Calvin (1509–64) and is also vigorously defended by B. B. Warfield (1851–1921).⁶

Geerhardus Vos has offered a more convincing exegesis of Romans 1:3–4. He takes into account the *sarx-pneuma* antithesis as representative terms of the two major epochs in redemptive history, the two-age structure dominated by Adam and Christ (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:12–21).⁷ Vos notes the paral-

5 Charles Hodge, *Romans* (1835, rev. ed. 1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 19.

6 See John Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 16–17; B. B. Warfield, "The Christ That Paul Preached," in *The Works of B. B. Warfield*, vol. 2, ed. Ethelbert D. Warfield et al. (1929; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 235–54; cf. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (1978; Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 100.

7 Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline

lel structure of Rom. 1:3–4:

genomenou (<i>genomenou</i>) descended	ōrisqentoj (<i>horisthentos</i>) declared
kata. sarka (<i>kata sarka</i>)	kata. pneuma agiwsunhj (<i>kata pneuma</i> <i>hagiōsynēs</i>)
according to the flesh	according to the Spirit of holiness
ek spermatoj Daid (<i>ek spermatos Daid</i>) from the seed of David	ex anastasewj nekrwh (<i>ex anastaseōs nekrōn</i>) by [his] resurrection from the dead

He explains that by "the twofold **kata** (*kata*) the mode of each state of existence is contrasted, by the twofold **ek** (*ek*), the origin of each. Thus the existence **kata. sarka** (*kata sarka*) originated 'from the seed of David,' the existence **kata. pneuma** (*kata pneuma*) originated 'out of the resurrection from the dead.'" Based upon this exegesis Vos concludes, that, "The resurrection is to Paul the beginning of a new status of sonship: hence as Jesus derived His sonship, **kata. sarka** (*kata sarka*), from the seed of David, He can be said to have derived His divine-sonship-in-power from the resurrection."⁸

In other words, Christ's resurrection is not merely the acknowledgement of the divinity of Christ, but rather the inauguration of the eschatological creation as well as the declaration of Christ's sonship, the royal enthronement of the Messiah (cf. Ps. 2:7). This means that the resurrection is not simply an event but is invested with

Conception of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1980), 104.

8 Vos, "Eschatological Aspect," 104; see also Gaffin, *Resurrection*, 98–112; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 10.

forensic significance. We find this conclusion confirmed in Paul's first epistle to Timothy when he writes: "He was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16; modified ESV). Though Paul does not specifically mention the resurrection, when comparing this verse with Romans 1:3–4, we see that the resurrection is in view, especially with Paul's reference to Christ being "justified" (**edikaiwqh** *edikaiōthē*) in the Spirit. Hence we may say that Christ's resurrection constituted not only his conquest of death but also his justification, the declaration that he was God's Son as well as that he was righteous. The forensic element is also present in another text dealing with the resurrection of Christ.

In Romans 4:25, Paul states that Christ was "delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Recall that Paul has elsewhere stated that, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). In other words, if Christ remains dead in the tomb, then the powers of sin and death have not been conquered and Christ's crucifixion was legitimate, for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).⁹ Concerning Christ's resurrection, therefore, Vos explains: "Christ's resurrection was the *de facto* declaration of God in regard to his being just. His quickening bears in itself the testimony of his justification."¹⁰ Once again we see the declarative, or forensic, connected to Christ's resurrection. In fact, given Paul's statements in Romans 1:3–4, 4:25, and 1 Timothy 3:16, we may say that the resurrection of Christ is not only the laying of the cornerstone of the eschatological creation but at the same time the declaration of Christ's righteousness and sonship. We must keep this dual forensic aspect of Christ's resurrection in the foreground as

9 Gaffin, *Resurrection*, 116; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, trans. Cornelius Lambregtse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 190.

10 Geerhardus Vos, *Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 151; similarly Murray, *Romans*, 156–57.

we move forward to consider the resurrection of the church, as Christ's resurrection is paradigmatic for the church.

The Resurrection of the Church

Sonship

In Romans 8:23 we read that we "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Here Paul explicitly relates the forensic category of adoption to the redemption of the body, or the resurrection from the dead (cf. Luke 20:35).¹¹ It is also important to remember that believers have the "firstfruits of the Spirit," which is essentially synonymous with the word **arrabwn** (*arrabōn*), which Paul uses to describe the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as guarantee or pledge of the believer's future resurrection (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:4). Romans 8:23 means that we will be declared sons of God by the resurrection of our bodies, when what is sown perishable is raised imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42–44). Just as Christ was declared to be the son of God by his resurrection, those who are in Christ will likewise be declared to be sons of God. Vos notes that, "Adoption' is by parentage a forensic concept; yet it fulfills itself in the bodily transforming change of the resurrection."¹² The forensic element of righteousness is also connected to both Christ's and the believer's resurrection.

Righteousness

When we consider that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), then those who are raised from the dead are quite obviously innocent of sin—they are righteous in the sight of God. This righteousness-resurrection link surfaces when Paul compares the resurrection to being clothed: "For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked" (2 Cor. 5:2–3). Paul does

11 Murray, *Romans*, 308; Vos, "Eschatological Aspect," 104, n. 24.

12 Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 152.

not want to be naked on the day of judgment; to be naked is to be in the state of shame and guilt. The resurrection of the believer, then, is akin to putting on clothing so that he or she is not found naked on the day of judgment. So, then, just like Christ, the believer's resurrection is his *de facto* declaration of righteousness because death has no claim upon those who are righteous (1 Cor. 15:55–57).

Summary

When we consider the evidence, we are led irresistably to the conclusion that the resurrection is not simply raising people from death, but rather is an event wrapped in forensic significance: for those who are in Christ, the resurrection is the declaration of their sonship and righteousness, just as it was for Christ. This is not a unique conclusion. Vos has previously stated:

In the resurrection there is already wrapped up a judging-process, at least for believers: the raising act in their case, together with the attending change, plainly involves a pronouncement of vindication. The resurrection does more than prepare its object for undergoing the judgment; it sets in motion and to a certain extent anticipates the issue of judgment for the Christian. And it were not incorrect to offset this by saying that the judgment places the seal on what the believer has received in the resurrection.¹³

Yet, we might go one step further than Vos by concluding that the resurrection of the church is not the anticipation of the issue of judgment, or the *de facto* declaration of judgment, but is *de jure* the final judgment. As Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) writes, “The resurrection of the dead in general, therefore, is primarily a judicial act of God.”¹⁴ Stated simply, the resurrection is not the

13 Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 261.

14 Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 133.

penultimate event prior to the final judgment; the resurrection is the final judgment. This proposition might cause some to recoil at first, as many consider the resurrection and final judgment as separate events, especially those coming from a premillennial (dispensational or historic) background. Yet, an exploration of the various Pauline texts concerning the nature of the last day will confirm the conclusion that the resurrection and the final judgment are one and the same.

Confirmation of the Resurrection–Final Judgment Thesis

There is confirmation of the thesis that the resurrection and final judgment are one and the same event when we consider: (1) being raised with Christ according to the inner and outer man; (2) the immediacy of the transformation of the body; and (3) the extent of the resurrection.

Being Raised with Christ: Inner and Outer Man

We must first correlate the resurrection with the fact that those who place their faith in Christ have already been raised and seated with him in the heavenly places (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 2:6). In other words, through the believer's mystical union with Christ, he is already ruling over the creation with him. Were a person guilty of sin and worthy of condemnation, he would neither be raised with Christ nor seated with him in the heavenly places. We have been raised, of course, according to our inner man. Our outer man is wasting away and awaits the redemption of the body, the resurrection (2 Cor. 4:16–5:5). The resurrection of believers, then, is simply the visible manifestation or revelation of those who are already raised with Christ. The resurrection is the raising of the “outer man” of those who have already been raised according to their “inner man.” To this end Paul writes: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). The revelation of the sons of God occurs, not after the final judgment, but at the resurrection (Rom. 8:23). What about the immediacy of the resurrection?

Immediacy of the Resurrection Transformation

The apostle Paul is quite clear that the resurrection transformation of believers is something

that occurs in an instant: “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. 15:52). The immediacy of the resurrection transformation is in contrast to at least one idea that was extant in first-century Jewish literature. In the Syriac apocalypse of Baruch (ca. AD 100), there is the pattern of resurrection → judgment → glorification. In other words, the resurrection of the dead involves no transformation of the righteous. Rather, the dead are raised in exactly the same state as they died. It is only after the final judgment that the righteous are transformed (see 2 Bar. 50:2–51:3). The pattern is clear, glorification occurs after the final judgment according to this opinion. Yet Paul clearly states that those who are in Christ are immediately transformed and receive their glorified bodies. What about the extent of the resurrection?

The Extent of the Resurrection

The extent of the resurrection is another element that confirms its final judgment status. We see in several places in Scripture that the resurrection is for both the people of God and those outside the covenant. We read, for example, in the prophet Daniel: “But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:1b–2). It appears from this statement that the resurrection is a judgment unto itself, in that as the earth yields up the dead there is already a known separation between the righteous and the wicked.¹⁵ It is not, as we saw above, resurrection → judgment → glorification but rather even before the resurrection the status of those who rise from the dead is already known. Once again, resurrection is coterminous with glori-

15 Similarly C. D. Elledge, “Resurrection of the Dead: Exploring Our Earliest Evidence Today,” in *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine*, ed. James H. Charlesworth et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 28.

fication for some, whereas judgment is coeval with resurrection for others. We find this same pattern in Christ’s teaching on the resurrection: “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29; cf. Luke 14:14). There is, prior to the resurrection, knowledge of the final outcome of history. This knowledge, however, is not simply one rooted in the decree of election but rather in inaugurated eschatology.

It is true, God has foreknowledge of who will be raised to life and death based upon his sovereign decree of election (Eph. 1:11–12; Rom. 9:1–24). Yet at the same time when we consider the two-age structure of redemptive history and that the eschatological age has begun, we must recognize that not only have the blessings of the age to come been revealed but so have the curses. Paul echoes the teaching of Christ when he notes that the propagation of the gospel has a twofold effect: salvation and judgment (2 Cor. 2:16–17). If the gospel is the in-breaking of the eschatological blessings of the age to come for those who believe, then for those who refuse to believe the gospel there is the in-breaking of the eschatological wrath of God: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).¹⁶ Based upon the in-breaking of the eschaton with the first advent of Christ, Jesus can say: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31).¹⁷

Paul also attests to the revelation of God’s eschatological wrath in the present when he writes:

16 See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 207; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 139–40; see also Bavinck, *Last Things*, 138.

17 Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 597; Ridderbos, *John*, 437–39; Carson, *John*, 442–43.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). Given the in-breaking of the eschaton, the resurrection is not the penultimate step before the final judgment but instead is the final judgment in that it visibly reveals what has come with the first advent of Christ: the righteous are instantaneously clothed in immortality, they receive a glorified body, and the wicked are raised but are naked, they are not glorified. God need not utter a word; the condemned status of the wicked is immediately evident, as is the justified status of the righteous.

Summary

If believers are already raised with Christ according to their inner man, then they simply await the resurrection of their outer man. The resurrection transformation of the body is immediate, as Paul says it takes place “in the twinkling of an eye.” This immediacy therefore precludes a commonly assumed pattern of resurrection → final judgment → glorification but instead demands that we recognize that resurrection and glorification are simultaneous events. The resurrection transformation, however, is only for those who are in Christ. The wicked are also raised but are not transformed. Given the immediacy of the transformation of the righteous and the non-transformation of the wicked, the resurrection is the final judgment in that it reveals what has already occurred with the beginning of the eschaton in Christ’s first advent, the redemption of those who are in Christ and the condemnation of those who refuse to believe.

The final judgment, therefore, is not a separate event following the resurrection but rather an aspect of the one organic event of resurrection–final judgment. This conclusion is not unique, as others have argued that the events of the last day are one. Louis Berkhof states, “All the great Confessions of the Church represent the general resurrection as simultaneous with the second coming of Christ, the final judgment and the end of the world.”¹⁸ Similarly, Hodge writes, “The general

18 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1939; repr., Grand

resurrection, the second advent, and the last judgment, are contemporaneous events.”¹⁹ Likewise Herman Bavinck observes, “The resurrection and the last judgment are intimately associated as in a single act.”²⁰ Given these conclusions, we may now proceed to explore the relationship between the resurrection–final judgment and the doctrine of justification.

Resurrection–Final Judgment and Justification

As we take these truths on the nature of the resurrection–final judgment and correlate them with the doctrine of justification, a clear picture emerges, one that is not encumbered by unnecessary tensions created by some formulations. We must consider two things, namely, the crucifixion of Christ and the already-not-yet, as we briefly formulate the relationship between the resurrection–final judgment and justification.

First, we must recognize that the crucifixion of Christ is an eschatological event, in that Jesus did not merely suffer for the sins of his people, though he certainly did that. Rather, Christ drank the cup of the Father’s eschatological wrath on behalf of his bride, the church. The wrath of the final judgment that is due to the believer is poured out in the present upon Christ in his crucifixion. In this regard, then, we can say that believers have already passed through the final judgment in Christ’s crucifixion. Vos takes the next step and explains the connection between the crucifixion and justification when he writes, “The Apostle made the act of justification to all intents, so far as the believer is concerned, a last judgment anticipated.”²¹ Therefore, the believer’s declaration of righteousness in the present has eschatological significance, as it brings the verdict of the final judgment into the

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 720–21.

19 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (1873; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 847.

20 Bavinck, *Last Things*, 132.

21 Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 55.

present.

This brings us to the second point, namely, relating justification to the already-not-yet. There are both conservative and liberal theologians who spread justification over the already-not-yet structure of redemptive history. Some argue that if there is an “already” of justification, it must be the verdict in the present, but there must also be a “not yet” of justification, which entails some sort of judgment either on the basis of—or according to—works. N. T. Wright argues that there is a present and a future justification, and that the future justification is on the basis of the good works of the believer.²² Herman Ridderbos (1909–2007), on the other hand, argues that the final judgment is not on the basis of good works but merely according to them, and that the good works are merely evidence of a faith that trusts and rests in the completed work of Christ.²³ Ridderbos’s formula is to be preferred over Wright’s, as Ridderbos preserves the *solus Christus* in justification as Paul does. Nevertheless, it seems that both Wright and Ridderbos fail to consider fully the resurrection in this equation.

Only those who are justified are raised according to their inner man. On the final day, the eschatological verdict that is passed in secret in the present, is revealed through the resurrection of the outer man. The resurrection reveals who is righteous. On the final day, when Christ returns, the righteous are immediately transformed. Again, without God uttering a single syllable, the righteous will be able to look around them and know immediately who has been declared righteous and who is wicked. There is no future aspect of justification but rather only the revelation of the verdict through the resurrection. The resurrection is our open acknowledgement and acquittal (cf. Shorter Catechism, Q. 38). Or we may say that justification is “already,” and what remains “not yet” is the revelation of the verdict that has already been passed on the basis of the life, death, and

22 N. T. Wright, *Romans, New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 580.

23 Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 179–80.

resurrection of Christ, which the believer possesses by faith alone.

Conclusion

Many contemporary explanations of the relationship between justification and the final judgment fall short because they fail to account for the judicial nature of the resurrection. They fail to see the paradigmatic nature of Christ’s resurrection and recognize that as Christ was justified in his resurrection, so, too, the believer will be justified in his own resurrection. By maintaining the all-important connection between justification and resurrection, we preserve the *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *sola fide* of justification, as believers are raised, not because of their own works, but solely because of the works of Christ. The sole sufficiency of Christ in justification is guarded because the Spirit raises dead men—those who can do nothing. As the inner man was raised, so too is the outer man. In this regard, then, with the apostle Paul not only must we look to the crucified Christ in our justification, but even more so to the resurrected and justified Messiah. ;

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✦ Servant History

The Religion of the Catechism

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by Darryl Hart

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Residents of Philadelphia and the surrounding suburbs may be unaware of two local items of interest that relate to our subject, which is the religion of the Catechism. The first of these has not likely escaped the notice of most folks in the Delaware Valley—that is the desire for a National League pennant. Our home team, the Philadelphia Phillies, has only been in the World Series four times, and not since a painful loss in 1993 to a non-American team (Toronto Blue Jays). The subject of major league baseball was on my mind while reflecting on catechesis because of discussions the Phillies provoke on local sports talk radio. On a recent show, the hosts were arguing about whether local fans are obligated to root for the Phillies. The one who said “no,” himself a Red Sox fan, reasoned that people have the right to choose whatever team they prefer. The other host, a native of South Philly, said that Philadelphians had to root for the Phillies because this was the home baseball franchise. No matter how much the other host, the Red Sox fan, insisted that this made sports-rooting an accident of birth, the Phillies fan

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=33.

insisted that an individual choosing the team of his fancy was completely arbitrary and unnatural.

Buried within this argument was a point with profound theological significance, especially about predestination, providence, and the degree to which men and women can change the circumstances into which they are born. Americans love freedom and have even fought wars to prove their affection. But Americans have also found that certain accidents of history, such as a person's sex, race, family and language, are aspects of the human condition not so easily changed by free choice. As members of modern society we have, of course, changed our view of inheriting the class and vocation of our parents. A boy whose father is an investment banker will not have to grow up and do what his father does for a living. And women today also enjoy more choices than their mothers, who were often restricted by the duties of the home. But when it comes to sports, many Americans seem to be comfortable with the idea that you inherit the team to which you were born. If you grow up in Buffalo and move to Philadelphia, you still have an obligation to root for the Bills. And don't bring up the wayward Dallas Cowboys fans living in the Delaware Valley. If they actually grew up in Texas, then that's okay, as long as they don't wear their jerseys around and flaunt their team at the Eagles' expense. But if someone, having grown up in Bucks County or Center City, is caught rooting for the Cowboys, they will endure the sort of ridicule Protestants used to reserve for Roman Catholics.

Now some may well be wondering, What on earth does rooting for the Phillies or Eagles as residents of this area have to do with the Westminster Shorter Catechism? The short answer is: a lot. The Shorter Catechism, as you probably know, was designed by the ministers and elders who attended the Westminster Assembly during the 1640s in London, to be an educational guide for children; the Larger Catechism—and boy, is it large—was intended for adults. Children at a very young age in Puritan and Presbyterian families would be expected to know and recite from memory the answers to the Catechism. I've heard the story, but cannot verify it, that Benjamin Warfield, arguably

the greatest Presbyterian theologian in American history, knew the Shorter Catechism backwards and forwards at the age of six! In other words, the Catechism was the way of passing on religion and faith from parents to children, the way that dads today pass on the rooting interests of the family by taking their sons out to Citizens Bank Park to watch the Phillies.

But as you may be aware, just as I heard that debate on the radio about whether Philadelphians are required by being born here to give their allegiance to the Phillies, Eagles, and Sixers, American Protestants have argued about whether children are required to adopt the faith of their parents, or whether children should be reared so that when they mature they can choose, like good Americans, their own religious identity, which may or may not be the one of their parents. This is a very difficult question to answer and will likely continue to spark debates among Protestants. But it is one worth considering in order to put this whole process of memorizing the Shorter Catechism into wider perspective.

Catechisms have been a device used throughout the history of the church to teach would-be church members the basic doctrines of the Christian religion. As such, catechisms generally included three basic sections: explanations of the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. The basic idea behind *catechesis* was for young people or converts—persons coming into the church—to master the teachings of the communion they were about to join, and implicitly to follow in the footsteps of those older in the faith, both living and dead. The catechism was a way for older Christians to pass on the faith to the next generation of saints. Protestants relied on catechesis as much as Roman Catholics. The Reformed churches of Europe, the German, Dutch, and Hungarian ones, all used the Heidelberg Catechism for passing on their faith to children; Presbyterians have used the Shorter Catechism.

The use of catechisms by Protestants began to change in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The reason was a new form of Protestantism that relied less upon inheriting the faith of one's parents and congregation, and

stressed the need for the individual to choose what his or her faith would be. This new form of Protestantism in the British colonies was called "revivalism." Most Protestants today regard revivalism as a good thing, not something that could in any way be detrimental. I do not mean to suggest that revivalism is without its assets. Clearly the evangelistic zeal of revivalists has been a considerable factor in the growth of Christianity since the eighteenth century. At the same time, the revivalists' call for converts to lead holy lives has injected much godliness into both the church and the public arena (though it must be said that the particular mixture of religion and politics in recent years by evangelicals has not always been a blessing). But whatever its positive contribution, revivalism undercut the religion of the catechism.

How did revivalism do this? We must go back to the spring of 1721, when the young Jonathan Edwards, who would become the greatest Calvinist theologian in American history, was a student at Yale College, and in the midst of some spiritual discomfort. He had grown up the son of a pastor, he had probably been catechized, and yet he still didn't *feel* saved. He wanted to believe but had not yet encountered God in a real, direct, or memorable way. Then sometime during that spring, Edwards encountered God and the truth of the gospel in a powerful manner. He was reading 1 Timothy 1:17, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (KJV), when the experience occurred. According to Edwards, this was "the first instance" when he remembered "that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things." He would later write:

As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never had any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up in him in heaven, and be

as it were swallowed up in him for ever! . . . From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them.²

This conversion experience became for Edwards, and for all revivalists who followed in his wake, the defining mark of genuine faith.

What does this have to do with catechism? That is the \$64,000 question. The new evangelical religion of the eighteenth century so stressed the conversion experience as the way into salvation that the catechism became irrelevant if not a hindrance. Edwards even said that the “sight and taste of the divinity and divine excellency of the things of the Gospel,” that is, experience, was more convincing “than the readings of hundreds of volumes of arguments.”³ No catechism in the history of the church has been one hundred volumes long—though if you’ve seen the current Roman Catholic catechism you might think it’s a tad lengthy. The point in Edwards’s remark is that experience matters more than thought, heart more than head, conversion more than catechesis.

This was a major turning point in the history of Western Christianity because it undermined the plausibility of the catechism. First, the shift from catechism to conversion exalted the individual over the family and the community of faith. From that point on it would be the individual’s decision that would be decisive for establishing the reliability of his faith, not the degree to which his beliefs and practices conformed to those of his parents or the church in which he or she was reared. Second,

2 Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections* (New York: American Book Company, 1935), 59.

3 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, 4: The Great Awakening*, ed., C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), “Benjamin Colman’s Abridgement, November 1736,” 125.

the shift from catechism to conversion made the individual convert’s own words the most important account of his faith, not whether he had memorized the catechism, the doctrinal statements of his church and family.

Think about this for a second. When I was a Baptist and wanted to become a member of my parents’ church, I had to go before the trustees—and eventually the whole congregation—and tell about when I walked down the aisle and accepted Jesus into my heart. But when I was received into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, I was asked a series of questions, all of which required me only to say “yes” or “no,” whether in front of the elders or before the congregation. This is obviously different from reciting the catechism in order to become a member of a church. But it does show how a church that uses the Shorter Catechism views an individual Christian’s own words. For churches that continue to rely on the religion of the catechism, words matter, and the words that matter are the ones used by the entire community, either the catechism or answering “yes” or “no” to set questions, not the person’s own account of their own experience.

One reason why conversion triumphed over the catechism was that memorizing the catechism is easy to abuse. As many of you know, you can memorize all the answers, and even the questions, and not really mean them. This is what Edwards was driving at. He wanted Christians to have a genuine faith. Merely reciting the words written by others, then, was not good enough because the student of the catechism could merely go through the motions, pass the test, but still not be a serious Christian. But someone who had had an amazing experience of divine ecstasy was much harder to find, and such experience became a more reliable guide to a credible profession of faith. What Edwards had no way of foreseeing, though, was that even conversion experiences can be faked, or that a person can go through the motions of speaking in tongues, one of the most experiential forms of revivalist Christianity. I have friends who are Pentecostal who have admitted that they pretended to speak in tongues, just as I remember kids in

my home church who walked the aisle but didn't mean it. The conversion experience appeared to be a more reliable gauge than the catechism for measuring genuine faith. But it didn't turn out that way. That is because, as the Bible says, the human heart is only known to God. All that we have to evaluate other people's profession of faith is words and actions. No church official, not even the pope, can see the true state of someone's soul.

This way of looking at the religion of conversion, as something out of sync with the religion of the catechism, is not typical among American Protestants. Especially in the press, with the recent attention to religion in American politics, the assumption has been that evangelicalism, with its revivalistic ways, is conservative both theologically and politically. "Red state" Protestants may be very conservative, but the number of those who voted for George W. Bush and know their Shorter Catechism is likely very small.

But one Reformed theologian, a Pennsylvanian to boot, did see what few American Protestants have noticed, that is, the tension between conversion and the catechism. John Williamson Nevin was born and reared in central Pennsylvania, trained at Princeton Theological Seminary, and taught at Pittsburgh Seminary for ten years before relocating to his ancestral region and teaching at Mercersburg Theological Seminary, an institution of the German Reformed Church. Admittedly, Nevin is not a household name in Reformed circles, but his analysis of revivalism and conversion has never been rivaled. Interestingly enough, Nevin actually used the words "religion of the catechism" to describe the process by which children of Christian parents grow up and inherit the faith of their mothers and fathers, pastors and elders.

Nevin diagnosed the differences between catechism and conversion in a little book, published in 1843, called *The Anxious Bench*. This bench was a famous device used by Charles Grandison Finney, the most influential revivalist of the nineteenth century, to generate greater and more intense conversions. It was literally a bench at the front of the church designated for listeners who were under conviction, where they could go to sit and receive

counsel and where leaders in the church would pray for them.

In his book Nevin contrasted the anxious bench with the catechism. He did not mean narrowly the Heidelberg Catechism, which the German Reformed Church used to rear her children in the faith. Instead, by the religion of the catechism Nevin was referring to a complete system of inherited religion which included preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, weekly observance of the Lord's Day (as in refraining from work and recreation on Sunday), visits to families by the pastor, family worship in the home led by parents, and the memorization of the catechism. This entire package of religious influences, Nevin believed, was the God-ordained means of bringing up Christian children, not some contrived service where converts might be manipulated in the blink of an eye to walk the aisle, sit in the "anxious bench," and decide to choose Christ.

Nevin was particularly sensitive to the differences between the religion of the anxious bench and the religion of the catechism because he had had first-hand experience with both. At the fairly ripe age of seventy, Nevin sat down to write about his youth, and in his memoirs he described the religion of the catechism that had sustained him as a boy. You need to keep in mind that Nevin was Scotch-Irish, not German-American, and so the church of his early years was Presbyterian. Here is how he described the devotion of his home and congregation:

Being of what is called Scotch-Irish extraction, I was by birth and blood also, a Presbyterian; and as my parents were both conscientious and exemplary professors of religion, I was, as a matter of course, carefully brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, according to the Presbyterian faith as it then stood.... The old Presbyterian faith, into which I was born, was based throughout on the idea of covenant family religion, church membership by God's holy act in baptism, and following this a regular catechetical training

of the young, with direct reference to their coming to the Lord's table.... The system was churchly, as holding the Church in her visible character to be the medium of salvation for her baptized children, in the sense of that memorable declaration of Calvin (Inst 4.1.4), where, speaking of her title, *Mother*, he says: "There is no other entrance into life, save as she may conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us from her breasts, and embrace us in her loving care to the end."⁴

So far, so good. But when Nevin left home for college at the age of fourteen, a fairly common occurrence in the nineteenth century, he was in for a rude awakening. He enrolled at Union College in upstate New York, an institution that was more New England Puritan than Presbyterian. And there Nevin discovered that the religion of the catechism was in short supply. This is how he described the difficulty he faced at college:

We had no religion in college, so far at least as morning and evening prayers went; and we were required, on Sundays, to attend the different churches in town. But there was no real church life, as such, in the institution itself.... I had come to college, a boy of strongly pious dispositions and exemplary religious habits, never doubting but that I was in some way a Christian, though it had not come with me yet (unfortunately) to what is called a public profession of religion. But now one of the first lessons inculcated on me indirectly by this unchurchly system, was that all this must pass for nothing, and that I must learn to look upon myself as an outcast from the family and kingdom of God, before I could come to be in either in the right way. Such, especially, was the instruction I came under, when a "revival of religion," as it

4 John W. Nevin, *My Own Life: The Earlier Years* (Lancaster, Pa.: Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 1964), 2.

was called, made its appearance among us, and brought all to a practical point.... It was based throughout on the principle, that regeneration and conversion lay outside of the Church, had nothing to do with baptism and Christian education, required rather a looking away from all this as more a bar than a help to the process.⁵

Are baptism, worship, and catechesis means to help lead a child to church membership and participating in the Lord's Supper, or are these practices and instruction barriers that got in the way of an intense religious experience known as conversion? What Nevin saw, perhaps because of firsthand experience, was that the religion of conversion had made memorizing the catechism, sitting attentively in worship on Sundays, and participating in family worship with parents at home irrelevant and unnecessary. The religion of conversion had replaced the religion of the catechism. For Nevin—and I think he was right—this shift was a watershed in the history of Western Christianity, perhaps as significant as the thirteenth century when the Roman Catholic church began to teach that the elements of the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine, literally turned into the body and blood of Christ.

Despite Nevin's efforts, the religion of conversion eventually beat the religion of the catechism. An important factor in this victory was the American ideal of self-determination, the individual's freedom, even right to choose for him or herself, especially in such personal matters as religion. Whether it is the make of a car, a brand of mustard, place of residence, or boyfriend or girlfriend, Americans believe something is wrong if they don't get to choose what they own, identify with, or love. For most Americans, it is as objectionable to be stuck with your parents' religion as to be stuck with your parents' choice for your date or spouse. But learning the catechism is similar to your parents choosing your dates or spouse; it is

5 Nevin, *My Own Life*, 9.

learning a set of teachings, passed on from many previous generations, that are supposed to become one's own. Some might even say that memorizing the Catechism is un-American because it denies an individual's freedom to choose his or her own religion.

Consequently, learning the Shorter Catechism is a situation similar to that of Philadelphia residents who are stuck with the Phillies as their home team. You may think that your predicament is entirely unfair. If you had grown up only fifty miles to the south you could have been a Baltimore Orioles fan. Or if you had gone to an Episcopal school you would not be *stuck* learning some 107 questions and answers from the seventeenth century.

In conclusion, let me say a few words about the apparent unfairness of the religion of the catechism, of the difficulty of being stuck with the faith of your parents. On the one hand, the Westminster Assembly that wrote the catechism believed in conversion. In other words, they believed in evangelizing those who weren't Presbyterian, and persuading those who may have been reared in a different faith to abandon the faith of their parents and become Presbyterian. Please do not misunderstand. The religion of the catechism is not always and everywhere against conversion. It is only so when conversion becomes the model for those who are born into Presbyterian and Reformed homes. One way to put this difference biblically is to say that Isaac, the son of Abraham, is the model child for the religion of the catechism. He grew up never having known otherwise than that he was a child of God. Why would you ever want to put him in a situation where he had to think about whether he was a child of God, whether he might choose the god of the Philistines or the Chaldeans over the God of Abraham? On the other side, you have the conversion experience of the apostle Paul, which was clearly a good thing. Some conversions are good when they bring people out of darkness into light. But it would not have been suitable for Isaac to undergo what Paul did on the road to Damascus.

This example gets a little complicated because of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. So let me end where I began, with a baseball

analogy. What happens if you get stuck with the Shorter Catechism the way you, by virtue of living near Philadelphia, are stuck with the Phillies? Shouldn't you be able to choose to leave the religion or baseball team of your home or school? Well, the last time I checked it was still a free country and you will likely have many opportunities to find a different catechism and a different baseball team. But imagine if you were Charles Hodge. Hodge was a famous nineteenth-century Presbyterian theologian who taught at Princeton Seminary, just north of Trenton, New Jersey. If you know much about the baseball geography of the Garden State, you know that everything north of Trenton is Yankee country, everything below is Phillies territory. Now why would Hodge, who lived where folks would eventually root for the Yankees, have to reach a point in his life where he needed to choose between the Yankees and the Phillies? How smart would that be? Why even think about abandoning a superior team for an inferior one?

Well, those who are memorizing the Westminster Shorter Catechism are learning the equivalent in the theological world of rooting for the Red Sox⁶ in the world of sports. It is the top shelf of catechisms, not simply because it is Presbyterian, but because many are persuaded that it is the one most faithful to the Word of God. If you grow up with it, you will never need to outgrow it. Like this year's version of the Phillies, the Shorter Catechism may not seem like lots of fun. But unlike the Phillies, the Catechism will never disappoint you. And some day, God willing, you will remember back to the drudgery of learning the Catechism and actually thank God that parents and teachers exposed you to a system of truth that has sustained Christians for generations and can sustain you for the rest of your life.

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⁶ The editor took the liberty of changing this reference from the Yankees to the Red Sox in order to avoid anachronism.

Pilgrimage in the Mode of Hope: *Thoughts on the Usefulness of Catechism*

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by Mark A. Garcia

Catechism and Christian Formation

It has been said that in some churches and homes the catechism is like “the grandfather’s clock that stands on the stairway landing, ‘grim and unyielding,’ defying removal, a valued heirloom, *but isn’t running anymore.*”² Most in our day would not describe catechetical material as beautiful, and so can identify with a “grim” portrait, but quite apart from literary aesthetics, we might wish to ask: is the catechism even “running anymore”? As we explore the multitude of educational options for our congregations, do we appreciate the usefulness of the catechism for the formation of disciples?

As Presbyterians, we traditionally love our catechisms, and well we should. How many believers have been encouraged by the reminder that our God is not only “almighty, knowing all things” (which on its own is not necessarily comforting) but also “most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (WLC 7)? How wonderful is that catechetical refrain, and yes, how beautiful! Similarly, the language of WSC 3 (“What do the Scriptures principally teach?”) is justly famous for the way it expresses perhaps the principal Christian concern. What can the reader of God’s Word expect to find there? We learn from

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=34.

2 Wade C. Smith, “Bringing the Skeleton out of the Closet,” *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* 12, no. 11 (July 15, 1953): 2; cited by David B. Calhoun, “Loving the Westminster Confession and Catechisms,” *Presbyterian* 33/2 (Fall 2006): 66.

the catechism that those whose end it is to glorify and enjoy God (WSC 1) will find in the Scriptures “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” This is our duty and delight, to glorify and enjoy God; recalling the language of the catechism here has helped establish many saints in their confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture for their journey in grace.

For these, and a multitude of similar reasons, we place a high premium on the truths of that Word which teaches us of our Creator and of the way of obedience that pleases him. And in this quest for faithfulness I expect that in many or even most of our churches we recognize the immense value of the catechism not only for instructing but for shaping us as his disciples. We teach it to our children, sometimes needing first to teach it to ourselves. And we do so, praying that God will be pleased to use these truths to form our children into faithful members of the body of Christ. Far from a dusty, dry exercise, we recognize that a firm hold on the grammar of the faith is important, not only for the sake of theological orthodoxy but for establishing and deepening the connectedness among members of the community of faith. We are, thus, eager to hear our children recite the answers perfectly, especially when they become able to demonstrate understanding. Yet, again, we realize even this is only a big part of a bigger picture of community formation, of the cultivation of the life of discipleship.

In using the catechism, of course, as Reformed Christians we refuse to do so to the neglect of the Word itself. No, we train disciples in the catechism because we know such training helps the church to benefit more from the study and preaching of the Bible, and thus to be shaped by that Word. This refusal to allow catechism to eclipse Scripture is an eminently Reformed concern. In his discussion of the practice of Reformed piety, historian Philip Benedict points to a seventeenth-century example of the importance of the Bible together with the catechism: “Whereas the school ordinances of Lutheran Germany rarely ordered classroom Bible reading, preferring instead the memorization of doctrinally safe catechisms,” he notes, “the authori-

ties of the Reformed parts of Hesse mandated the use of the Bible. Full editions of the Bible aimed specifically at young people were also distinctive to Reformed regions of Germany.”³ As prominent as the role of the catechism is in Reformed churches, it cannot displace the centrality of the Word of the living God. But not only are the Scriptures and catechism not in tension; there is evidence that they have always belonged together.

First Peter as Catechetical Material

In what follows I am going to take an unusual approach in my contribution to this issue of *Ordained Servant* on the catechism. Instead of examining the history or some portion of the catechetical parts of our own Westminster Standards, the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms, I want to go “behind” these documents to offer some reflections on the catechism in general—the “idea” of catechism, one might say. And in these reflections I will infer the usefulness of the catechism (or catechetical material) for the formation of God’s people from the genre and content of the first epistle of Peter.⁴

Many scholars have observed that most of the content of First Peter is elementary Christian teaching. For this reason two theories have emerged regarding its genre. What kind of letter is First Peter? How should we identify this body of basic instruction? One theory is that First Peter is a catechetical document in letter (epistolary) form. A second theory suggests that it is a particular kind of catechetical document, namely a baptismal homily or liturgy. We should note, however, that both theories see First Peter as predominantly

catechetical, whether in general or specific sort.⁵ Scholars have not reached a consensus on this question, and I will not enter into the debate here. But seeing First Peter as a catechetical letter, or perhaps better, a letter containing a large percentage of catechetical material, seems to me to be sound and beyond serious dispute.

Comparing First Peter 2:13–3:7—material concerned with submission in various contexts, such as citizen-emperor, servant-master, wife-husband, as well as the conduct of husbands toward their wives—with parallel passages in Ephesians and Colossians, for instance, we observe that there has emerged a common tradition of elementary teaching, a body of material and language commonly received and understood to encapsulate faithfully certain fundamental features of the Christian faith and ethic.⁶ Immediately preceding this material, the opening chapters of the epistle reflect a concern for similarly basic instruction, but in this case the material is more didactic and theological than ethical. However, though this material in First Peter is evidently common among early church communities, this does not mean Peter does not use it for his own purposes. As one would expect, Peter shapes his letter in a way that best reflects his own particular concerns. Though more could be said along these lines, in short, as a major example of biblical catechetical material, First Peter is a rich resource for the church’s thinking about the educational facet of her life.

Because some Christians consider catechetical teaching as a post-biblical, and in some cases,

3 Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 510.

4 Tracing the self-conscious concern in the biblical texts for theological education in connection with community formation has become a major area of investigation in biblical studies. For a representative Old Testament example, note Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). Brueggemann’s study is stimulating at points but his unorthodox doctrine of Scripture, which controls his approach throughout, renders his work ultimately unsatisfying and unhelpful.

5 For literature, see Philip Carrington’s influential proposal for First Peter as a catechetical document, *The Primitive Christian Catechism* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), and M. É. Boisnard, *Quatre hymnes baptismales dans la première épître de Pierre* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1961) for the baptismal liturgy argument.

6 The inclusion of ethical or moral content makes First Peter similar to the earliest catechetical material in the first centuries of the church. On this and related matters see the fine work of Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1: *The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). On the early catechumenate, see Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (trans. Edward J. Hassl; New York: Sadlier, 1979) and J. A. Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith: A Manual of Catechetics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959).

unbiblical tradition (perhaps a relic of Roman Catholicism), the quantity of catechetical material in First Peter, as well as its genre, should be instructive. Beyond genre considerations, however, the actual content of First Peter is most intriguing, for it suggests the kinds of theological and ethical themes that belonged to the basic truths of the faith held in common by the churches. And here is our real interest. What theological themes do we encounter here? There are many, but since our purpose is not a full study of First Peter's theology, we can highlight *pilgrimage* and the *hope of final salvation* as two of its principal themes.

Peter, Pilgrims, and Progress toward Glory

From the outset of First Peter we learn that the church is a community on pilgrimage to a heavenly, incorruptible inheritance (1:3–9). The church has this inheritance because she has been given new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Moreover, this birth is into a living hope, one which lifts the eyes of pilgrims to the salvation “about to be revealed at the last day” (v. 5 my translation). As Petrine scholar J. Ramsey Michaels notes, “This salvation is not so much something that will come to them as something to which they must go. It is the future ‘goal’ or ‘outcome’ (*telos*) of their faith (v. 9).”⁷ This future orientation sets up the dominant note Peter sounds on the subject of faith: the faith which characterizes the pilgrim community of the faithful is one that perseveres and endures through the “various ordeals” of the present (vv. 5–6, 9). “Tested and proven faithfulness will be exchanged for ‘praise, glory, and honor at the time when Jesus Christ is revealed’ (v. 7, author’s translation).”⁸ Thus, in First Peter the salvation-hope commended to believers is one wholly consistent with their pilgrim identity: it is a salvation that, though a present certainty in view of the resurrection of Christ, in an equally important respect still lies *ahead*. It is

7 J. Ramsey Michaels, “Going to Heaven with Jesus: From First Peter to *Pilgrim’s Progress*,” in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 250.

8 Michaels, “Going to Heaven with Jesus,” 251.

a salvation that awaits the faithful in Christ, that stands at the end of the journey of discipleship. As believers advance step-by-step in the path to eternal life, as we press on by faith with a view to our inheritance and salvation (1:4–5), we do so as those who are called to “marvelous light” or “eternal glory” (2:9). The end of this journey or pilgrimage will mean the sure salvation of all who belong to the Father. As a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” they are also “a people destined for salvation” (2:9 author’s translation).⁹

The motif of the Christian life as a journey or pilgrimage is a major one in First Peter,¹⁰ and so it is with good reason that Michaels has explored the commonalities between this New Testament letter and John Bunyan’s great allegory *Pilgrim’s Progress*. However, the pilgrimage theme also highlights an area where First Peter and *Pilgrim’s Progress* are discontinuous with much evangelical thinking. Michaels takes up the idea of “going to heaven when we die” and states that the problem with this notion “is not with the notion of ‘going to heaven,’ but with the qualifying clause ‘when we die.’ For in the New Testament the journey to heaven begins not at death but at the moment a person is called to discipleship.”¹¹ This is particularly the case in First Peter.

Related to the problematic idea of “going to heaven when we die” is the identification or equation of “salvation” with justification, or, in

9 Michaels (“Going to Heaven with Jesus,” 251) translates **laoj eiŷ peripoihsin** (*laos eis peripoihsin*, v. 9) as “a people destined for vindication”; cf. idem, *First Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1988), 109–10. His objections to the NRSV (“God’s own people”) and NIV (“a people belonging to God”), partly on the grounds that the preposition **eiŷ** (*eis*) has here a distinctly future orientation, is understandable, but in my view a more comprehensive reality than vindication is in view. For this reason I prefer “destined for possession” or perhaps even “salvation,” so long as our understanding of “salvation” keeps in view the comprehensively transformative-constitutive feature of the new creation and is not reduced, as it often is, only to its (nevertheless real and indispensable) forensic or acquittal feature.

10 Peter’s “appeal” in 2:11 is directed to “aliens and strangers,” an identification which, in contrast with some current scholarship, is not sociological but metaphorical. Hence the message is extended beyond the immediate audience in their situation to the church at large.

11 Michaels, “Going to Heaven with Jesus,” 249.

terms of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the moment Pilgrim/Christian loses his burden at the foot of the cross and watches it roll into the tomb. In my copy, this takes place only 41 pages into the story, with 144 pages yet to go.¹² Rather than seeing the journey to the Celestial City as the end or center of the story, Bunyan sees it as having only just begun with the lost burden, so that all that follows his encounter with the cross—the dramatic struggles, temptations, and ultimate perseverance of Christian—is far from dispensable or marginal to his journey to Zion. While he is forgiven, he is still not “fully” saved, one might say. For example, there is even a sense in which Christian, as he encounters Vanity Fair in the town of Vanity, never quite leaves the City of Destruction until he is fully and finally received into the Celestial City. One of the more sobering statements comes at this final stage of his journey, in Bunyan’s penultimate sentence, where we learn that Christian saw “that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.”¹³

We can easily discover these *Pilgrim's Progress* themes in First Peter as the apostle focuses the hope of pilgrims on that which lies ahead, and sees the Christian’s salvation story as incomplete until grace has given way to final and full glory. But beyond its nature, Peter also goes on to say something about the character of this pilgrimage. In First Peter the journey of faith is Christologically shaped. In other words, the church’s path to eschatological life bears the unmistakable impression of the Lord to whom she is united. Much like the synoptic gospels and reflecting a major theme in the apostle Paul’s letters, discipleship in First Peter involves suffering with Christ. As “Christ also suffered for [us]” so he left us “an example, that [we] might follow in his footsteps” (2:21, my translation). It appears that in First Peter suffering is not some-

12 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, The Nelson Classics (illust. by R. H. Brock; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, n.d.).

13 Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 172. The point is made in Stanley Fish, “Progress in *The Pilgrim's Progress*,” in *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), 224–64.

thing we are called to do, so much as something that we are to expect. Rather than suffering *per se*, we are called to obedience, to do good (3:13, 17). The substantial sections on suffering with—and like—Christ (2:19–25; 3:8–22) are in fact the centerpiece of Peter’s teaching on discipleship, and this adds an important feature to his pilgrimage theme. Taken together with the hope of glory, Peter’s characterization of the church as a pilgrim community on a journey to heaven that is marked by suffering with Christ belongs to the heart of his catechetical instruction.

What should we conclude from all of this? Because our intention has not been to provide a full, scholarly analysis of First Peter, we will keep our conclusions modest and focused on our chief point of interest: catechism and Christian formation. A major point to keep in view is this: Peter evidently believes the future aspect of the church’s salvation, her pilgrim identity and heavenly inheritance that together shape her self-understanding in the present, and the struggles and ordeals that mark her days of discipleship—in short, her *eschatological identity and hope*—belong to the elementary, foundational features of the faith once delivered. With this in view we can capture the aim of Peter’s catechetical or didactic material by saying that the apostle is interested in *cultivating and nurturing faith in the mode of eschatological hope*. We can say that when commending the essential threads of the fabric of the Christian faith he has in view not the immediate and the pragmatic but the long-term and the eschatological. Here, catechism, as basic instruction in points of Christian teaching, serves to shape the community of the faithful in hope of eternal life.

Reflections: Hope, Eschatology, and the Formation of a Pilgrim Community

As church officers, we ought always to ask how we might be more faithful as educators of the body of Christ. This is an important question. Education in the faith belongs to the broader goal of community formation in the image of the glorious Christ—not only intellectually (seen narrowly as the bare acquisition of correct theological lan-

guage) but ethically (in terms of obedience in all its forms). As an instructive example of the early church's perspective on the core content of the Christian confession and life, the catechetical material of First Peter presses us to examine our assumptions about basic theological instruction in our churches. In particular it appears to me that the plainly eschatological orientation with which Peter operates in his discussions of the church's identity and hope, as well as the gospel by which she lives, needs to find its way into our educational endeavors. If, with Peter (and the rest of the Old and New Testaments), we believe eschatology is the context within which we must locate the identity and hope of the church, this needs to find expression practically in our churches.

To this end I commend to you what Peter's letter suggests implicitly about discipleship or Christian formation, and in particular the catechetical or teaching *content* which this process includes. While we might be inclined to consider the "eschatological" in Scripture and theology an important but (at least functionally) peripheral part of the Christian faith (and, thus, something to be left for "advanced" or spiritually mature Christians in their special classes or reading groups), this mentality does not measure up to the evidence of New Testament faith and practice. Peter, at least, is evidently convinced that the eschatological features of the Christian faith outlined above belong not to an advanced Christian education curriculum but to the basic, foundational body of teaching with which the faithful should be instructed and encouraged. If we remember that First Peter is heavily catechetical in genre (or at least in the nature of its content), perhaps we will find here a challenge to our own perceptions about what are the truly basic, and thus most important, truths to be taught to prospective members, not to mention the congregation at large.

Perhaps a concrete suggestion would be welcome at this point. I recall profiting as a seminary student from the catechetical practice of the church of which I was a member, Calvary OPC in Glenside, Pennsylvania. During my time there, it was customary to begin the Sunday School hour

with a brief lesson from the Westminster Larger Catechism. For about a nine-month stretch, I participated in the rotation of seminarians taking this responsibility for five to seven minutes or so of instruction each Sunday. Since the Larger Catechism is a rich but generally unfamiliar document, even to lifelong Presbyterians,¹⁴ this practice established the congregation more firmly in the structure and grammar of the Reformed faith; but also, when it was combined in a thoughtful way with the patient study of the Scriptures themselves, it cultivated a reading of the Scriptures that was sensitive to its theological contours. In addition, over time it may also help the congregation develop an expectation and taste for preaching that is consistent with the Scriptures, which is no small matter! In my view, weekly lessons like these (not necessarily lengthy ones, either) which weave together the study of the Bible and the WLC are a wise and effective way to aid the community of faith in rounding out her understanding of the basic features of our biblical and Reformed tradition. This is especially the case if there is a determination to lead God's people into an appreciation of the eschatological character of our identity and hope, such as First Peter does.

In our day when the integrity of the Reformed tradition is being challenged at the most basic level by both postconservative evangelicalism and panconfessionalism—both evidently increasing in popularity—the regular and patient exposition of the Westminster catechisms in the OPC holds the promise of shaping a new generation of believers who are formed by the Word of God and appreciative of the consistency, scope, and glory of the Reformed faith. In turn, those who are truly shaped by the Word of God are, as a result, formed as faithful pilgrims on the path to their inheritance. After all, it is God himself who, as Peter tells us, having "called [us] to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen,

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14 See the fine article by Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, "The Making of the Westminster Larger Catechism," available online at http://www.the-highway.com/larger-catechism_Dixhoorn.html. This is an expanded revision of an earlier article published in *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 21:9 (October 2000): 11, 16–17.

and establish” his people (5:10). For a community of saints called to glory and “established” in this pilgrimage by God himself, there can be no higher goal in church education than to serve this glorious end. ;

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The Decline of Christianity in the West? A Contrarian View¹

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by T. David Gordon

If one is hapless enough to watch television or listen to conservative or religious (or conservative religious) radio, one hears endless rhetorical prefaces that assert the decline of Christianity in the industrialized West (or any of its sub-parts). In almost every case this narrative of decline and fall is asserted without empirical, sociological, or historical evidence, based instead on extremely limited and highly selective anecdotal evidence.³ Conservative Christians, for instance, routinely

1 This article was originally presented as a paper at “The De-Christianization of Europe: From Nicaea to Nietzsche,” a conference sponsored by the Center for Vision and Values of Grove City College, on April 12–13, 2007.

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=44.

3 Careful academic study produces a different picture. Evangelical historians Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George Marsden co-authored over twenty years ago their *The Search for Christian America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1983), in which they argued two theses quite convincingly: first, “that early America does not deserve to be considered uniquely, distinctly, or even predominately Christian,” and second, “that the idea of a ‘Christian nation’ is a very ambiguous concept which is usually harmful to effective Christian action in society” (17).

assume in their culture conversations that the 1960s were a time of rejection of Christianity and Christian “values,” after which our culture has experienced unmitigated decline.

I have often wondered how African-American Christians responded to these statements, since (if they are in their middle age or beyond) they can likely recall a time when they could not dine in restaurants with whites, could not always vote in local elections, or could not sit in the front portion of a bus. One might argue that the “good old days” of the Eisenhower administration were not all that good for African-Americans, or for American Christians (who were as segregated as their non-Christian fellow-citizens), for that matter. Since that time, our culture has realized more than ever before the biblical truth of the unity of Adam’s race, even by those who disbelieve in Adam. Our culture is more integrated, and racial bigotry and injustice are routinely decried (though still practiced discreetly in some locales). Indeed, I can say, as one reared in Richmond, Virginia in the 1950s and 1960s, that on this particular score, we are a far more Christian nation than we were when I was a child, and I am entirely delighted by the progress.

The problem with anecdotal evidence is not that it is anecdotal; almost all true human wisdom is anecdotal. We learn by observing human activity that some behaviors are just, and others are unjust. We learn injustice not ordinarily by reading philosophical treatises, but by being treated unjustly. The problem with anecdotal evidence is that it is ordinarily so partial; it focuses on one, two, or three events or actions (mediated to us and selected for us by commercial news media), and draws universal or general conclusions from behaviors that are not, in fact, either universal or general. Worse, such selective anecdotal evidence is often employed in the service of fear-mongering, declaring that we are on the precipice of the return to barbarity, moving an audience to action by stimulating emotion, rather than cautious, critical assessment. In such circumstances, critical assessment tends to disappear altogether, and if the selective, fear-mongering evidence becomes the presuppositional currency we all use, we refuse to debase the

currency by genuine critical assessment.

What I wish to suggest in this brief essay is that there is a difference, indeed a profound difference, between the decline of Christianity itself and the decline of *culture religion*; and further, that it is quite possible, if not altogether likely, that the decline of *culture religion* will ordinarily correlate with the progress of Christianity, not its regress.⁴ Christianity, if Augustine was even remotely correct, recognizes two “kingdoms” or “cities” on earth: the city of God and the city of man. When the two become confused, there may be some small improvement in the city of man, but there will almost certainly be an enormous decline in the city of God.

Christianity, while culturally cooperative in its healthier moments, is always essentially counter-cultural; it is the religion of those whose “citizenship is in heaven,” whose ultimate loyalties transcend local or peculiar cultural experiments, whose apostolic ethic demands that it resist conformity to “the world.” Indeed, authentic Christianity tends to manifest itself most authentically when it is a minority, and especially when it is a persecuted minority. By contrast, when church membership or public identity with the Christian religion becomes a means to this-worldly success and ambition, Christianity tends to lose both its vitality and its integrity. The problem with even a general “culture religion,” one that is not established by the state, is that we tend to fail to perceive the many antitheses between the city of man and the city of God. American Christianity, for instance, in its prevailing form (evangelicalism), is remarkably American: populist, egalitarian, pragmatic, anti-intellectual, anti-traditional, a-historical, individualistic, paedo-centric, sentimentalist, etc. Each of these qualifiers reflects a value that is contrary, in my judgment, to authentic Christianity, but contrary in a way that does not appear to be “worldly” in any obvious sense, because these are the values

4 I therefore use “culture religion” almost identically with “Christendom” to label that mingling of church and state in the West, whereby the fortunes of one became inextricably connected to the fortunes of the other.

of our culture.

What many historians would therefore describe as “the rise of Christianity,” I would describe as its decline. “Constantinianism” is the term that many of us, following people such as Jacques Ellul, use to describe the promotion of Christianity through the powers of the state.⁵ While the medieval era witnessed the rise of Constantinianism and Christendom, one may fairly challenge the notion that the medieval era witnessed the rise of Christianity, and indeed may with good reason describe this as Christianity’s decline, not its rise. If this is right, then what many decry as the “decline of Christianity” is merely the decline of Constantinianism, which is perhaps the best thing that could ever happen to authentic Christianity.⁶

Indeed, if there is any real evidence of Christianity’s decline in the West, the evidence resides precisely in the eagerness of so many professing Christians to employ the state to advance the Christian religion. That is, if Ellul’s theory is right, the evidence of the decline of Christianity resides *not* in the presence of other religions (including secularism) in our culture, but in the Judge Moores, the hand-wringing over “under God” in the pledge of allegiance, and the whining about the “war on Christmas.” If professing Christians

5 Cf. Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), and *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). There are some who use the term “Constantinianism” more generally, to indicate that believers, informed by a biblical view of humanity and justice, are more likely to be able to frame a just and lasting republic than nonbelievers, and/or that it is the special duty of believers to attempt to influence their respective cultures for good. This more general definition describes a situation that is less problematic, though I still disagree. Of course, thorough critiques of Constantinianism have tended to come from Anabaptist authors, such as John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). But I will argue below that anti-Constantinianism is a distinctive contribution of American Presbyterianism.

6 My judgment on this matter is somewhat typically Protestant; many Roman Catholic friends would assess the matter differently. The Vatican is, after all, a state, and there was a time when Popes appointed monarchs. “Christendom,” then, tends to be more favorably assessed by Roman Catholics than by Protestants. Cf., for example, Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

believe our religion is advanced by the power of the state rather than by the power of the Spirit, by coercion rather than by example and moral suasion, then perhaps Christianity is indeed in decline. If we can no longer say, with the apostle Paul, “the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly,” then Christianity is indeed in decline. If we believe we need Christian presidents, legislators, and judges for our faith to advance, then we no longer believe in Christianity, and it has declined. Christianity does not rise or fall on the basis of governmental activity; it rises or falls on the basis of true ecclesiastical activity. What Christianity needs is competent ministers, not Christian judges, legislators, or executive officers.

The apostle Paul was apparently quite content with the Roman magistrate not being a Christian believer. He encouraged the believers at Rome to submit to such a magistrate, in part because even this ruler, without the light of the law of Moses or the teaching of Christ, would be a “terror to evil conduct,” and as such, was a “minister of God for your good” (Rom. 13:3–4). Paul appealed to the magistrate only for his rights as a Roman citizen; he never asked for any special dispensation as a Christian (Acts 25:11; 28:19).

As American Christians, thinking about these matters in the early twenty-first century, we would do well to remember the American Christians during the time of the founding of our Republic, who only desired from the state the protections other citizens had, nothing more nor less. The only relation between state and church these founders desired was one of toleration and equal protection; that the state would permit the free assembly of peaceable citizens for either religious or non-religious purposes, and would permit, in this sense, the free exercise of religion. The relation of state and church, as conceived by the Continental Congress, was minimal. This minimalist approach has met with two hostile reactions since the 1960s: denial, and on other occasions disapproval.

Those who deny the minimal relation continue to argue that ours was/is a “Christian nation,” without citing any convincing historical evidence. Sometimes this is done by confusing the theocratic

Massachusetts Bay Colony with the Republic as a whole. Other times this denial takes the form of quotations of individuals associated with the founding (e.g., John Witherspoon) who professed Christian faith. Neither of these will survive critical inspection, however. Massachusetts, for instance, was but one of the thirteen colonies eventually represented at the Continental Congress. William Penn’s religiously free Pennsylvania was also there, and was given the same enfranchisement as Massachusetts. Since Pennsylvania was practically founded as a refuge for religious dissidents, we can be sure that its representatives would have approved of no theocracy, and of no establishment. Similarly, quoting individuals like Witherspoon does not prove that ours was a Christian republic. It merely proves that Witherspoon was a professing Christian. I am a professing Christian also, but I am writing with all the zeal I can muster against the idea of establishment or theocracy. I am a professing Christian and a professing anti-Constantinian, and, therefore, my profession of faith does not imply that I am Constantinian.

Perhaps the language of “Christian nation” is itself confusing, and should disappear altogether, to be replaced by a choice of two expressions: “Christian republic” and “Christian culture.” These terms would bring clarity to the discussion, because I, for instance, would have little objection with saying that late eighteenth-century America was, largely speaking, a Christian culture. It was a culture influenced not only by the Constantinian West in general, but by Anglican and Puritan England in particular, and among its major intellectual influences (though by no means restricted to it) was Christendom. Its other major intellectual influences were both distant and recent: Athens and the Scottish Enlightenment. Thus, it was a culture that was “Christian” in the sense that the prevailing choice of religious people was Christianity, and in the sense that all members of the culture were familiar with the basic truth-claims and ethical principles associated with it.

This “Christian culture,” however, was self-consciously *not* a Christian republic. The framers appear to have gone out of their way to

exclude any explicitly Christian sentiments in the documents themselves. Students of the Constitution, for instance, have found many phrases and clauses that are borrowed, word for word, from David Hume and John Locke, and the conceptual indebtedness to the British Enlightenment is greater still.⁷ Yet there are no similar phrases from the Christian Scriptures or creeds. Considering the profound literary influence the Bible had on the colonies, it is a remarkable historical fact that a few biblical phrases did not leak into the document accidentally. The framers were careful to protect religion's free exercise, but they were equally careful to avoid establishment.⁸

Some do not deny the minimal relation between state and church in the early Republic, but they nevertheless disapprove it, and dismiss it as an undesirable concession to secularists such as Thomas Jefferson. This theory is plausible, in the general sense that the founding documents required a great deal of compromise among the colonies, not the least of which touched upon slavery. But it is only plausible, and not historically accurate. The opponents of establishment were as often religious as irreligious. Some, such as the Baptist Roger Williams, or Pennsylvania's William Penn, are well-known. Others are less so, and I'd like to mention the example of American Presbyterians in the early pre-republic, not only because their history is less well known, but because my institution, Grove City College, has historically been associated with American Presbyterianism.

The American Presbyterian Opposition to Constantinianism

Three distinct historical events in the eigh-

7 Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003); Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002).

8 Those who wish to study the actual historical question are encouraged to consult the aforementioned *The Search for a Christian America*, ed. Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden.

teenth century reveal the consistency and clarity with which anti-Constantinianism began to emerge among American Calvinists: the original 1729 Synod of Presbyterians, the Adopting Act of 1787–88, and the overtures of Hanover Presbytery to the Virginia Legislature from 1776 to 1785. In each of these acts there is an unmistakable and deliberate departure from Constantinianism. Let us examine each briefly to demonstrate the point.

In 1729, the first Synod of Presbyterians met to establish a connectional Presbyterian government in the colonies. As they discussed the terms of ministerial membership, one of the questions that arose was what to do with ministerial candidates who objected to the Westminster Confession of Faith (and Larger and Shorter Catechisms) regarding the relationship of the civil magistrate to the church. The original 1647 edition of these standards stated that it was the magistrate's duty to promote the true religion, and to see to it that the sacraments and Word of God were rightly administered in the churches in his realm. Many ministers in the colonies considered this to be an error, and the 1729 Synod deliberated what to do with such ministers and took an action that expressly admitted such men who had scruples with the Westminster standards on this point. William E. Moore⁹ quoted the Synod's opinion on the matter:

The Synod of New York and Philadelphia adopt, according to the known and established meaning of the terms, the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confession of their faith, save that every candidate for the gospel ministry is permitted to except against so much of the twenty-third chapter as gives authority to the civil magistrates in matters of religion. The Presbyterian Church in America considers the Church of Christ as a spiritual society, *entirely distinct from the civil government*, having

9 *Presbyterian Digest*, 1886: 50, emphasis mine. For a full discussion of this matter, cf. also Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church* (1840), Part One, Chapter Three, 127–215.

a right to regulate their own ecclesiastical policy, *independently* of the interposition of the magistrate.

American Presbyterians retained the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as their creedal standards, but the actions and minutes of their meeting clearly indicate their difference of opinion with the Westminster Assembly on this point.

In 1787 and 1788 the American Presbyterians went even further. The Synod of Philadelphia and New York modified the Westminster standards regarding the authority of the civil magistrate, to remove the authority granted the magistrate by the 1647 edition of the standards. Several modifications were necessary, and among them were these. Chapter 20.4 was modified as follows, by removing the italicized words from the 1647 edition: “And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation ... they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church, *and by the power of the civil magistrate.*” The Synod still retained the right of the ecclesiastical authorities to initiate process against such individuals, but it took from the civil magistrate any power to proceed against them in any way. This change was deliberate, and it reflected the belief, already present in 1729, that the American church not only did not consider it *necessary* to use the power of the state to penalize religious errors, but that it was *erroneous* to use the power of the state to do so. The second change made in 1788 regarding chapter 23.3 of the Confession is best disclosed by presenting both the 1647 and the 1788 editions in parallel columns:

1647

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the

Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses of worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.

1788

Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest in such a manner, that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging, every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth, should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretence of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

What is evident here is the deliberate removal from the sphere of the magistrate’s powers formerly

considered to be his. It is now inappropriate for him to “in the least, interfere, in matters of faith,” whereas previously it was his “duty” that “all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed.” Then, in language that would appear in the legislatures of a number of colonies as well as in the documents of the emerging Republic, the Synod asserted that “no law of any commonwealth, should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination.” And further, they asserted that the magistrate has the positive duty “to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretence of religion, or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury, to any other person whatsoever (emphasis mine).”

The third change made to the Westminster standards in 1788 was made to the Larger Catechism, Q. 109:

What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; *tolerating a false religion*; the making any representation of God...

The italicized words were removed in 1787. The clause in question, “tolerating a false religion,” referred to an act of the magistrate, not to an attitude. In the eighteenth century “tolerating” was not a reference to an individual’s attitude, but to the magistrate’s action. Various “Acts of Tolerance” had been part of the legislative history of both England and the colonies, and the verb referred to whether the magistrate would permit false religion within his realm or whether he would suppress false religion by the coercive powers of his office. Obviously, the Synod still considered it a sin for an individual Christian to approve of (“tolerate” in the attitudinal sense) false religion or idolatry, but they expressly determined that it was no sin for the magistrate to permit false religion within his realm. Philip Schaff recognized that the American

Presbyterian churches thereby accomplished *de jure* what many European churches had begun to do *de facto*:

The objectionable clauses in the Confession and Larger Catechism have been mildly interpreted and so modified by the Presbyterian Churches in Europe as to disclaim persecuting sentiments. The Presbyterian Churches in the United States have taken the more frank and effective course of an entire reconstruction of those chapters, so as to make them expressly teach the principle of religious freedom, and claim no favor from the civil magistrate but that protection which it owes to the lives, liberties, and constitutional rights of all its citizens.¹⁰

These historical actions were not compromises; they were the consistent expression of a clear theological vision that became the prevailing opinion among American Presbyterians. Note, for instance, what Charles Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary said:

The New Testament, therefore, does not teach that the magistrate is entitled to take care that true religion is established and maintained; that right men are appointed to Church offices; that those officers do their duty; ... If to this it be added that experience teaches that the magistrate is the most unfit person to discharge these duties; that his attempting it has always been injurious to religion, and inimical to the rights of conscience, we have reason to rejoice in the recently discovered truth, that the Church is independent of the state, and that the state best promotes her interests by letting her alone.¹¹

10 *Creeks of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 reprint of 1931 ed.), vol. I, 799–800.

11 *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Scribners, 1878), 118–119.

Robert Lewis Dabney, Hodge's contemporary who taught at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, echoed Hodge's thoughts:

All acts of religious intolerance are inconsistent with the relations which God has established between Himself and rational souls. ... The separation and independence of Church and State was not only not the doctrine of the Reformation. No Christian nation holds it to this day, except ours. ... The ends of the State are for time and earth; those of the Church are for eternity. The weapon of the State is corporeal, that of the Church is spiritual. The two cannot be combined, without confounding heaven and earth. ... No man is to be visited with any civil penalty for his belief, as long as he does not directly infringe upon the purpose of the government, which is the protection of the temporal rights of his fellow-citizens.¹²

It is, therefore, not surprising that two generations later at Princeton Seminary, J. Gresham Machen said a similar thing:

... the principle of voluntary association ... is at the very roots of human liberty. But with that right of voluntary association goes insistence upon *the most complete tolerance* on the part of the State (which is an involuntary association) over against all other bodies, religious or social or whatever they may be, no matter how deleterious to the common welfare some men may think that they are.¹³

A third and final example of the American Presbyterian resistance to Constantinianism is found in the overtures of the Hanover Presbytery to

12 *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985 reprint 1871, 1878 eds.), 877, 880, 879.

13 Address before the Sentinels of the Republic, Washington, DC, January 12, 1926, printed in *Education, Christianity, and the State* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1987), 85, emphasis mine.

the Virginia legislature over a period of roughly a decade.¹⁴ Here in Thomas Jefferson's Virginia, we discover that Hanover Presbytery, not merely the secularist Jefferson, also desired the civil authorities to tolerate religious difference, and even to afford civil protection to Muslims. Jefferson and others may have thought such separation of state and church was essential to the health of the *state*; Hanover Presbytery considered such separation essential to the health of the *church*.¹⁵ On October 24, 1776, the Hanover Presbytery overtured the Virginia legislature in words that included these:

We beg leave farther to represent that religious establishments are highly injurious to the temporal interests of a community. ... such establishments greatly retard population, and consequently the progress of arts, sciences, and manufactories. ...

Neither can it be made to appear that the gospel needs any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our blessed Saviour declares his kingdom is not of this world, he renounces all dependence upon State power, and as his weapons are spiritual, and were only designed to have influence on the judgment and heart of man, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in the quiet possession of their unalienable rights and privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the Apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish in the greatest purity by its

14 Hanover Presbytery sent five pertinent overtures to the Virginia legislative assembly. The first was presented on October 24, 1776, and the last was presented in August of 1785. The text of the five overtures is contained in Charles F. James, *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia* (Lynchburg: J. P. Bell, 1900), 222–40.

15 And their arguments prove that the so-called doctrine of the "spirituality of the church" was not a late nineteenth-century development among Southern Presbyterians to counter Federal abolitionism. Cf. the famous/infamous essay by Jack P. Maddex, Jr., "From Theocracy to Spirituality: the Southern Presbyterian Reversal on Church and State," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54 (1976): 438–57; and the thorough refutation of Maddex by Preston D. Graham, Jr., *A Kingdom Not of This World* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

own native excellence and under the all disposing providence of God. We would humbly represent that the only proper objects of civil government are the happiness and protection of men in the present state of existence, the security of the life, liberty and property of the citizens, and to restrain the vicious and encourage the virtuous by wholesome laws, equally extending to every individual.¹⁶

It might be tempting to dismiss this plea for disestablishment as little more than a plea for the freedom of Presbyterians to practice their own religion without molestation of the state. But such a dismissal is inappropriate here, for two reasons. First, historically, Samuel Davies (the founding member of the Hanover Presbytery, who died in 1761) had already secured such liberty. In 1740 he met with the governor of Virginia and was granted, by the legislature, the first license to preach ever granted to a dissenting minister in Virginia.¹⁷ In 1753, Davies traveled to England, where he preached to King George II, and where he requested that the Act of Toleration be extended to the colonies, and was granted his request. Thus, the Presbyterians in Virginia, in 1776, had already enjoyed freedom to practice their religion for over four decades, and their petition cannot be dismissed as merely an effort to attain such freedom.

The second reason not to dismiss this petition is because of the rationale supplied. Note that Hanover's overture included anti-Constantinian theological sentiment: "Neither can it be made to appear that the gospel *needs* any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our blessed Saviour declares his kingdom is not of this world, he *renounces all dependence upon State power*, and as his weapons are *spiritual*, and were only designed to have influence on the judgment and heart of

16 James, *Documentary History*, 223–24.

17 A brief, accessible introduction to the life of Davies has been written by Thomas Talbot Ellis: "Samuel Davies: Apostle of Virginia," in *Banner of Truth Magazine*, no. 235, April 1983.

man, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in the quiet possession of their unalienable rights and privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the Apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish in the greatest purity [emphases mine]." Hanover's overtures to the Virginia legislature were not merely or primarily motivated by pragmatic concerns, but by theological and religious concerns. They would have agreed entirely with what the Presbyterian Stuart Robinson said nearly a century later, that "the conception of a use of religion for state purposes is Pagan in its origin, and, therefore, impossible, in any form of it, to be actualized under Christianity."¹⁸

And we must finally note that Hanover Presbytery was not merely seeking freedom of religion for various denominations of Christians. They rightly understood that there was no logical argument for establishing Christianity that would not also be equally cogent for establishing Islam: "Certain it is that ... there is no argument in favor of establishing the Christian religion but what may be pleaded, with equal propriety, for establishing the tenets of Mohamed by those who believe the Alcoran."¹⁹ Hanover Presbytery in Virginia embraced the same religious doctrine of the spirituality of the church that had been articulated by northern Presbyterian synods in 1729 and 1787.

Mr. Jefferson believed the separation of church and state produced a better state; Hanover Presbytery, following their northern Presbyterian colleagues in 1729, thought it produced both a better state and a better church.²⁰ American Presbyterians, therefore, joined other religious and secular individuals in separating church and state.

18 Appendix D, "Relation of the Temporal and Spiritual Powers Historically Considered," in Robinson's *Discourses of Redemption* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1866), 476. Cf. also Robinson's "Note to Discourse IV: Of the Place of the Church in the Revealed Scheme of Redemption" in the same volume, 453–70.

19 James, *Documentary History*, 223.

20 Mr. Jefferson, while a flawed and sometimes inscrutable individual, accomplished many things in his rather full lifetime. To his great credit, among all his accomplishments, he chose to have only one inscribed on his tombstone: "Thomas Jefferson, author of the act for establishing religious freedom."

Such separation cannot be dismissed as a secularist movement alone, since the arguments were also religious.

Contemporary Constantinians

Contemporary Constantinians conveniently overlook the religious arguments, and often dismiss the separation of church and state as incipiently secularist, but the arguments and actions of Presbyterians in the eighteenth century (and their nineteenth-century commentators) refute such ideas starkly. Presbyterians before and during the early Republic argued on scriptural and theological grounds for the complete separation of church and state. They frequently cited the dictum of Jesus, that “My kingdom is not of this world,” and quoted his statement to “render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” They cited the apostle Paul’s insistence that “our citizenship is in heaven,” and argued that the only service that pleases God is that which is freely offered from the conscience. If contemporary Constantinians wish to disagree, they have every right in a free society to do so. However, they are not free to ignore history, nor are they free from the obligation to counter theological reasons with theological reasons, and scriptural argumentation with scriptural argumentation.

Curiously, the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of Constantinianism among Presbyterians on both the left and the right. On the left, Jack P. Maddex vigorously objected to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church in the 1970s, and many (if not all) conservative Presbyterians at the time disagreed. Indeed, when the Presbyterian Church in America was founded in early 1973, one of its stated grounds for leaving the PCUS was the political meddling that was so common in Maddex’s communion. But in a very brief time most of the PCA appears to have forgotten its heritage, since its General Assembly has taken up, discussed, and even issued deliverances on such political issues as women in the military. And among its most prominent ministers was the late Dr. D. James Kennedy, whose God-

and-country preaching was notoriously Constantinian. I suppose what is good for the liberal goose is good for the conservative gander, but I believe Constantinianism is bad for all geese.

A Naked Public Square?

Few misunderstandings are more common than the notion that separation of church and state implies a “naked public square.” Separating the institutions of church and state does not, in and of itself, have any consequences at all for the public square. Individuals in a free society may speak their mind on all issues of public consequence, and may promote their views by any arguments they choose. Abraham Lincoln was perfectly free to saturate his Second Inaugural Address with biblical themes and quotations. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was entirely free to address public policy with the teachings of Holy Scripture, including such well-known Christian ethical principles as the Golden Rule. Such reasoning may well fall on deaf ears, of course: Why should individuals who do not acknowledge the Christian Scriptures as a source of moral or religious truth be persuaded by appeals to them? But in a free society we are free to articulate unconvincing as well as convincing arguments, prudent as well as imprudent reasoning, and ineffective as well as effective rationales. My own opinion is that religious reasoning is not very effective in persuading individuals in a postmodern culture, but such talk is entirely permissible in a culture that separates church and state.

Whither Christianity in America?

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that if Christianity is waning in America, it is not because there are secular people in America, or people of other religious persuasions, since such individuals have always constituted a substantial portion of our culture. If Christianity is waning, the evidence of such decline is that religious people themselves have lost confidence in God’s ability to promote his worship without the coercive power of the state. If religious people themselves prefer Caesar’s sword to the sword of the Spirit, if religious people disbelieve in the power of the Christian gospel to

compete on a level playing field, and if religious people no longer believe that Christ's example and words have the power to attract people to him, then perhaps Christianity is indeed in decline. But the decline has nothing to do with an assault from without, and everything to do with unbelief from within.

There has been some decline in cultural religion in the United States over the last two centuries. A secularist like Thomas Jefferson knew the tenets of Christianity, was familiar with the Bible, and understood the influence of each on the culture, and appealed to such influence when it suited his purposes. Secularists in the early twenty-first century may be less familiar with Christianity or the Christian Scriptures than Jefferson, and may be more thin-skinned about appeals to them in the public square. But true Christianity still exists in the churches; and, more importantly, where it may be in decline it is almost never due to persecuting pressure from without, but to weak faith from within. My greatest fear is not the decline of *cultural religion*, since the presence or absence of it strikes me as having almost nothing to do with the vitality of true Christian faith and practice anyway. My fear is that those who fear the decline will resort to employing the coercive power of the state to rescue and/or preserve *cultural religion*; a resort that will, in my estimation, damage the evangelistic cause of true Christianity profoundly. ;

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Church and State in Historical Perspective

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The relationship between church and state has often been a zero-sum game—the church wins, the state loses; the state wins, the church loses. The Reformation, at least in its ultimate outworking, made two things clear regarding church/state relations: the church and the state are distinctive institutions and neither is over the other. In other words, because each has its own proper place under God, the church need not flourish only at the expense of the state and vice versa. To be sure, biblical religion had made clear, in both testaments, that church and state are distinctive (even in the Old Testament, priest and king were separate offices). A heresy like Islam, however, blurred the distinction and the Roman Catholicism of the Middle Ages came to claim that, while distinct from the state, the church is over the state. *Caesaropapism*, contrariwise, asserted by rulers in the West and East, especially the latter, claimed that the state is over the church. Luther and Calvin, as well as the other Reformers, distinguished church and state (as had, most notably, Augustine earlier), and taught that both were under God.²

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=43.

2 See Wolfgang Huber, "Church and State," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 1 (published jointly, Grand Rapids and Leiden: Eerdmans and Brill, 1999), 502–8: "The Reformation churches never achieved a unified doctrine of the relation to the state, but the distinction between God's spiritual and secular government was a basic insight to which they always appealed." Huber proceeds to relate that, though Luther had a two kingdom doctrine, he never worked out the distinction comprehensively and that Zwingli and Calvin "agreed with Luther in differentiating the two realms but added a new emphasis" that had concern for Christ's "rule even in the political sphere" (507). On the other hand, David VanDrunen has argued that Calvin held a more vigorous than previously understood two-kingdom view: see his "Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 3 (2004): 503–25; and his "Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Trans-

What remained, and remains to this day, a source of contention, even among the Reformed, is the precise relationship of church and state to each other.³ Some argue that the state is to be transformed in every place into a Christian state;⁴ others contend that the state is a separate kingdom from the church and is not under the Bible's rule, as is the church, but is guided by natural law.⁵ This essay examines the shape of church/state relations historically, seeing how the two are separate institutions, both under God, with one not ruling over the other. Additionally, it analyzes briefly both the transformationist and two-kingdom models of church and state, seeking perhaps a modest third way, stemming from a right understanding of the spirituality of the church.

The Distinction of Church and State

The distinction of church and state is seen, first of all, in Scripture itself. In the Old Testament we see the beginning of the church in Eden (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 8.6;

formationist Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (2005): 248–66.

3 The diversity on this question within the Reformed faith in contemporary America ranges, on the one end of the spectrum, from D. James Kennedy, who, in his *What If America Were a Christian Nation Again?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) argues for a the recovery of a lost "Christian America," to Darryl G. Hart, on the other end of the spectrum, whose *Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006) serves, according to the publisher, as a "ringing rejoinder to those who would link religion and politics."

4 Some of the more recent key transformationist authors and texts in this regard are Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984); and Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (1959; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

5 There has been a mini-renaissance of late in the recovery of both two-kingdom and natural law theories in Reformed theology. Good examples of this may be found in Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) and David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006), esp. chs. 3–4.

25.1–2), along with the institution of the family (Gen. 2–3). The state makes its explicit appearance after the Flood, with God instructing Noah in the establishment of rudimentary government (Gen. 9). While in Israel a much closer tie between church and state exists after the covenantal development at Sinai (Ex. 20) than in the patriarchs' time, a distinction remains: there is a ruling class, particularly with the development of the Davidic kingship (2 Sam. 2), which is separate from the priestly class, the Levites. Israel does have, during this time of the *national covenant* (as that period is called by some writers), a theocracy of sorts, but not the kind, as in many other theocracies, in which the priestly class was the ruling class (though the Levites had some functions that may be said to be civil). During this time, Israel had not only the moral law but also a fairly full judicial law, together with the ceremonial law, revealed by God for the regulation of all of life.

This detailed legal code is variously constructed by Reformed writers. Some see it as a kind of "intrusion ethic" (to use Meredith Kline's term), pointing to the eschaton and not suited for the nations, civil society being governed by natural law.⁶ Some, on the other end of this spectrum, maintain that the civil law applies to all the nations as they are Christianized in the New Covenant era.⁷ Many Reformed theologians, while not adopting either of these approaches explicitly—i.e., the two-kingdom or the transformationist—simply settle for what all confessionalists agree upon from WCF 19.3–4: Israel in the Old Testament was the church under age, with the ceremonial law being fulfilled in Christ and the judicial law expiring with Israel, except for its general equity (which is variously constructed). The moral law given to Israel at Sinai

6 VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, 26–32.

7 In addition to the transformationists cited in note 1 (above), there are a number of Christian reconstructionists who also believe in a thoroughgoing Christianization in which not only the moral law but also the judicial law of Israel finds expression in the laws of nations and states. For prime representatives of this position see Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977) and R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

is the fuller expression of God's will that he began to reveal to man in the Garden of Eden before man's fall (WCF 19.1–2). This moral law binds all forever, although "true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned" (WCF 19.5–6). The moral law's precise role in civil society, however, remains disputed among Reformed thinkers.

Fallen man knows this moral law both through general revelation (Rom. 1:18 ff.; 2:14–15; Ps. 19:1–6) and special revelation (Ps. 19:7–14), though the latter is necessary for a proper understanding of the former, given man's sin and his "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). Because of common grace, even where special revelation may be absent, unregenerate man is able to make some use of this natural law, albeit twisted. Because of the antithesis, unregenerate man perverts natural law apart from the guidance of special revelation. Since general revelation was never sufficient—even before the Fall man needed, and had, a word from God—special revelation is even more necessary after the Fall, not only for man's salvation, but also to testify explicitly to the truth seen in general revelation that unregenerate man distorts.

Still unanswered, however, is the question of the precise relationship that the church as an institution ought to maintain with the state. In Israel, as stated above, it was close, yet still distinct. When Uzziah sought to enter the temple, even though he was king, his not being a Levite was immediately an evident problem: he was struck with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–23). Uzzah also encountered trouble by intruding into the prerogatives of the priesthood. He suffered death when he, though not a Levite, sought to touch the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6:5–11). God did not intend for those holding civil office or no office whatsoever to intrude into the sole prerogatives of the Levitical priesthood.⁸

8 In fact, that only the Levitical priests could offer atoning sacrifice was so firmly entrenched in Israel's psyche that the book of Hebrews serves as a necessary apologetic for the propriety of someone from the tribe of Judah offering sacrifice. The Book of Hebrews, then, is an argument as to how a non-Levite may properly offer a sacrifice: Jesus may do so because he is of a previous

Clearly, the distinction continued into the New Covenant era in which the church, previously limited largely to a certain people in a certain place (ethnic Israel in her land), universalized, finding herself thrust into the nations, primarily the Roman Empire. Thus the church, as it spread out from Pentecost, witnessed in the book of Acts and during the time of persecution, up until the conversion of Constantine and his declaring Christianity legal in the Edict of Milan (313), had no choice but to see herself as separate from the pagan states into which she came. Of course, our Lord had declared both that his kingdom was not of this world—demonstrating the spiritual character of it—and that we are to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, showing that we are to have proper respect for, and submission to, civil governors (John 18:36; Matt. 22:21).

The New Testament church, particularly, was established with its own oracles, officers, and ordinances that were separate from the state and often seen as a threat to the state, prompting the apologists to respond variously, with some seeking to show the commonalities of paganism and Christianity (e.g., Justin Martyr and Origen), with most, like Irenaeus, showing commonalities and differences, and with a third class highlighting antithesis (e.g., Tertullian and Tatian). Perhaps the conservative Romans who feared that the Christians weren't good Romans—charging them not only with cannibalism, incest, atheism, and the like, but also looking suspiciously at their non-attendance at the games, circuses, and theatre (all places of debauchery)—were right in concluding that the church threatened the Roman way of life, helping bring it finally to an end. Thus the church in her separateness was neither innocuous nor hidden but salt and light, a city upon a hill, calling the nations to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:13–16; Acts 17:30; 20:21).

The Confusion of Church and State

Confusion about church and state as distinct

and superior order to that of Levi—the order of Melchizedek—the superiority of the latter to the former being seen in Levi paying tithes to Melchizedek in the loins of Abraham (Heb. 7).

institutions that are both under God (one not being over the other) arose in the ancient church with—and following the conversion of—Constantine. Constantine declared Christianity to be legal, exempted the clergy from taxes, restored much confiscated property, and did other things both proper and beneficial for the church. But he sought to intermeddle in her affairs as well. And this continued in the fourth century under his successors, who were in turn Arian and semi-Arian, and who sought to impose such views on the church. While we may be thankful for the orthodox Theodosius I restoring Nicene Christianity, his edict *Cunctos Populos* (380), declaring Christianity to be the sole religion, only heightened the place of the emperor in the life of the church.

Particularly in the Eastern part of the Empire, the emperor, as the strongest single figure, tended to rule in both state and church, calling councils and deciding theological controversies. In the West, with the weakening of the empire, and then its fall in 476, the bishop of Rome became the single strongest figure, taking to himself many civil as well as ecclesiastical prerogatives. While Pope Leo the Great (r. 440–461) may, in negotiating with Attila the Hun, have rendered service that no one else in Rome at the time could have, the effect of his and his successors' intermeddling with civil affairs not only worsened relations with the Eastern church but also rendered the Western church less faithful and useful than before.

The fall of the Western Empire proved troubling to many. Had not Eusebius declared the triumph of Christianity in the conversion and victories of Constantine? If the church had conquered Rome, how could the now-Christianized Roman Empire fall? Some alleged that Rome had fallen because she had abandoned the old pagan ways and embraced this troubling thing called Christianity. Augustine wrote *City of God* (413–426) to answer this charge and to assert that the City of God (the righteous in Christ) is not dependent upon the City of Man (the ungodly). Kingdoms rise and fall in this world: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, just to name a few. But the City of God, manifested primarily in the church,

is eternal, and Rome's demise did not, Augustine argued, entail the City of God's demise.

Augustine's mentor Ambrose had also distinguished the church and state in a time when it was being confused, but perhaps only to assert the power of the church over the state. Ambrose believed that Emperor Theodosius had acted with undue harshness in putting down a revolt in Thessalonica in 390 and excommunicated him, telling him that even the emperor is not over the church but is in the church. To be sure, the penitent Theodosius acknowledged that he was in—but not over—the church and that, even though emperor, he was bound as a Christian to conduct himself in a godly manner.

Certainly preachers ought to call their parishioners to obedience to the commands of Christ in every area of their lives. Such an assertion, however, does not decide whether Ambrose was competent to determine that Theodosius had acted with excessive force. Similarly, while it may be right for Augustine to specify the conditions under which just war may be waged, who determines whether any given war or offensive action is just? Is it solely the prerogative of the ruler, and what if he is wrong? Is the church competent as an institution to make such a judgment? These are the kinds of problems that remain unsolved among us, having to do with the particular relationship that the church and state ought to maintain with one another and that are not easily answered by any of our existing models (transformationist or two-kingdom).

Perhaps the most striking confusion of church and state as institutions occurred in Islam. John of Damascus (675–749), along with other medieval theologians, rightly regarded Islam as a Christian heresy that denied, among other things, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. In its take on monotheism, Islam could not account for any distinctions whatsoever—as orthodox Trinitarianism alone can account for the reality of the one and the many—and thus posited a radical oneness for all of creation, with everything ultimately collapsing back into Allah, subject to his whimsy, all reducing to voluntarism. Certainly on this schema there could

be no distinctness of the institutions of church and state, Islam claiming to be a comprehensive worldview that addressed all of life from the Quranic viewpoint.

Many today fail to understand that the separation of church and state that we take for granted in the West is a distinction that is utterly foreign to, and seemingly incapable of being grasped by, Islam. Some Christians who lament the secularization of the West confuse that with the separation of church and state. I believe that the former is a result of the Enlightenment, primarily, and the latter a child of the Reformation, to be celebrated and not mourned. All this is lost on Islam, though, which sees any separation between religion and politics as an abomination, a position that we must be careful not to identify with but rather avoid.

Further medieval confusion may be seen not only in a confrontation like that between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV at Canossa in 1077, but also in the relationship between the church and state maintained in the Crusades (beginning in 1095) and in the Investiture Controversy (settled in 1122 by the Concordat of Worms). In the Crusades, we might question the church's urging the state to take up arms in the cause of the Cross, and in the Investiture Controversy we might question the claim of the king to invest the bishop with mitre and staff, the symbols of episcopal office (although we might question, as well, the propriety of a centralized church claiming the right to install "its men"). This all came to a head in the papacies of Innocent III (r. 1198–1216), whose papal powers were at their zenith, and Boniface VIII, who issued *Unam Sanctam* in 1302, in which he claimed that the pope possessed all power and ruled over both the secular and sacred kingdoms. By such an assertion Rome had fallen prey to a version of the Islamist heresy: the utter domination of the civil power by the religious authorities and the failure to distinguish properly church from state.

Reformation Clarity on the Church and State Question

While the Reformation addressed far more than ecclesiology, having a particular concern

about soteriology—especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone—ecclesiological issues were significant. Prominent among the ecclesiological issues was the question of the distinctness of the church and state and the relative authority of each with respect to the other. Not only did the Reformers seek to throw off the usurpation of the bishop of Rome over the whole church, but those rulers who supported the Reformation also sought to resist the tyranny of the one that many of them contemptuously dismissed as a mere "Italian prince." In this process of rejecting the claim of the papacy in *Unam Sanctam*, that the church's sword is to be exercised under the authority and at the direction of St. Peter's keys, many Reformed princes went the opposite direction and embraced what ultimately came to be a form of Erastianism, in which the state is over the church.

This reversal witnessed in the Reformation was promoted by a number of things, including the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, in which Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism was established in a territory, depending on the ruler's religion in that territory, the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* (a privilege not formally extended to Calvinism in the Holy Roman Empire until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War). One of the practical effects in Protestant lands of the state assuming power over the church was that the power of excommunication was taken out of the hands of the clergy and placed in the hands of civil governors. Calvin experienced this in Geneva in 1538 when he vainly sought to keep those whom he judged unworthy from the Lord's Table, only to be overruled by Geneva's civil rulers. Though brought back from his three-year exile and ultimately granted some of the ecclesiastical modifications that he sought, Calvin continued to battle with the Genevan town officials, who continually meddled with ecclesiastical affairs.

It is perhaps understandable why the Genevan officials, and those in a host of other towns, cantons, provinces, etc. of the Reformation, did not trust the clergy with the power of excommunication and other forms of church discipline. Church discipline had previously been so misused, being

heavily politicized. Even in the ancient church, Athanasius's Arian opponents (many in the imperial courts) and Chrysostom's local and Alexandrian opponents shamefully abused church discipline to persecute these godly men. In the Middle Ages, many became quite cynical about the papal abuse of church discipline, recognizing that the pope often used discipline, even interdict (ecclesiastical censure of an entire region), to punish his opponents. Many Reformational rulers apparently thought that something as important as church discipline, especially such a heavily politicized use of church discipline, could scarcely be left to the clergy but ought to be in the hands of the civil governors. Thus, many Reformed princes went in the opposite direction from Rome: they did not argue that the church is over the state; rather, contra Rome, they adopted the old *Caesaropapism*—the state is over the church.

Calvin, in insisting on the right of the consistory to admit to the Lord's Table, obviously saw the church as distinct from the state, though their precise relationship in his thought remains unclear. He affirmed that there were two kingdoms, but what he means by this is arguable. Luther in theory affirmed a clear two-kingdom model but in practice not only allowed the prince in an emergency situation to reform the church (as in his *Address to the German Nobility*) but also gave the state ultimately more authority over the church than his theory would ever warrant, perhaps because he feared further peasant revolt and anarchy and figured a strong state to be a small price to pay for peace and security.

Luther, in affirming that all Christians have a vocation, and in his always speaking of Christians living vigorously as Christians in the temporal kingdom, may escape some of the charges of dualism brought against his position (as is also brought against Aquinas's upper/lower grace/nature paradigm, though Luther's position was two kingdoms side-by-side, both under God). Calvin, as noted above, along with Luther, distinguished civil and spiritual government (*Institutes* 3.19.15; 4.20). Such kingdom distinction, then, was not their chief difference with respect to this question;

rather, the real difference between Luther and Calvin lay in Luther's subordination of the kingly office of Christ to his priestly office and the effect that had on Luther's view of church and state.

A Modest Proposal for Church and State

Ethicist Nelson Kloosterman has raised the question as to "what benefits accrue to relating human politics (indeed, all of society with its cultural institutions) to Christ's kingship?" Kloosterman answers that "we obtain a better sense of the unity between the spiritual and worldly kingdoms" and that "we are in a better position to give an account and rationale for the diversity and integrity within and among the worldly and spiritual kingdoms." He further opines that "perhaps it is better, then, not to speak of two kingdoms but rather of various offices." Where would one assign the family—to the worldly or spiritual kingdom? "Far better," Kloosterman concludes, "to speak of various offices each of which demonstrates its own unique manner of service and rule. A prince, a father, an employer, a minister—all of them rule but in very different ways. We must speak in a more pluriform fashion than Luther did. No one office is more or less worldly or spiritual than another, but all have been integrated and ordered in Jesus Christ."⁹ This seems one fruitful way of slicing the difference between the two prevailing models.

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9 This paragraph quotes from an unpublished classroom lecture in which Kloosterman had previously challenged an approach, on the one hand, that makes an appeal directly and exclusively to the Decalogue for matters of public policy and cultural values, and a stance, on the other hand, that claims the sufficiency of natural law to supply the necessary warrants for public policy and its underlying values, calling instead for a third way: namely, "employ and apply fundamental principles of morality and justice furnished in Scripture and confirmed and illustrated in natural law." I agree with such an approach because, as noted earlier, man, in his sinfulness, has a propensity to twist the natural law, seen particularly now in our post-Enlightenment world in which reason is almost always constructed as autonomous (this point helpfully developed by K. Scott Oliphint in *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006], esp. 7–13, which demonstrate the differences in constructing natural law before and after the Enlightenment). Because of such twisting, Scripture is needed to give content to what it means to "do unto others as you would have others do unto you." The "Golden Rule" is a universal dictum that must be given proper content or it becomes meaningless when abstracted from the Word.

Further, I would observe, it is in the American experiment, not in the ruthless secularization that it shares with the West broadly, but in its proper distinguishing of church and state, with neither over the other, that we find the Reformation promise of the distinction and equality of the two domains coming to some fruition.¹⁰ Something as simple as Charles Hodge's understanding of the spirituality of the church is key in this regard. Hodge understood that the church in its essence is a spiritual organism that manifests itself in a spiritual organization, *gemeinschaft* giving rise to *gesellschaft*. Hodge crossed swords on this point with the great Southern theologian, James Henley Thornwell. Both agreed the church was spiritual. Where Hodge differed with Thornwell was on the precise meaning of the spirituality of the church.¹¹

Thornwell argued that the church is purely a spiritual body and must not meddle with any secular or political matter. Hodge agreed with this, inasmuch, as he wrote, "There is indeed a sense of the words in which the church has nothing to do with politics. She has no right to pronounce judgment on purely secular matters, or upon such questions which ordinarily divide men into political parties." Thornwell had, arguably, developed the doctrine of the spirituality of the church as he had so that the church would not condemn chattel slavery as practiced in the ante-bellum South. Although he had defended Southern slavery as biblical, Thornwell argued against those in the church who would condemn slavery as unbiblical and call for Christians to repent of slaveholding. He argued that it was a violation of the spirituality

10 So much must go unsaid here about the establishmentarian principle, particularly in England and Scotland, and how it fared in America, especially in the Presbyterian context (from the Adopting Act of 1729 to the confessional revision of WCF 20 and 23 in 1789). For the former, see the articles on "Church and State," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 179–82; for the broader American context, see "Church and State, Separation of," *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Daniel G. Reid, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 266–69.

11 The next four paragraphs are a description of the Hodge/Thornwell debate on the spirituality of the church, taken from my preface to the 2001 reprint of Charles Hodge's *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Westminster Publishing House), viii–ix.

of the church for the church to condemn slavery and, thus, insert itself into what he claimed was a political question.

Hodge, however, objected to the notion that "the action of the state, however inconsistent with the Word of God, could not be testified against." In fact, Hodge maintained that this "new doctrine" of the spirituality of the church (as developed by Thornwell), placed a "muzzle" on the mouth of the church, keeping the church from "exercising one of the highest and most important prerogatives." Hodge was satisfied with the statement adopted by the 1860 General Assembly that addressed the spirituality of the church in a balanced fashion: the church "disclaimed all right to interfere in secular matters" while at the same time "asserted the right and duty of the Church, as God's witness on earth, to bear her testimony in favor of truth and holiness and against all false doctrines and sins."

That Hodge was sane and balanced on the question of the spirituality of the church as taught by Thornwell can be seen in his opposition to the Gardiner Spring Resolutions, the adoption of which in May 1861 led to the withdrawal of the Southern brethren from the Old School Church. Dr. Gardiner Spring of New York City had introduced resolutions at the 1861 General Assembly, calling for, *inter alia*, the erection of a committee "to inquire into the expediency of this Assembly making some expression of their devotion to the Union of these States and loyalty to the Government." These resolutions, which ultimately affirmed that the church must do all in its power to "strengthen, uphold and encourage" the U.S. Government (including the newly elected Lincoln administration), passed by a vote of 156–66, with Charles Hodge leading the charge against the adoption of the Gardiner Spring Resolutions.

Hodge, in the protest that he submitted to the Assembly of its actions, wrote: "We [who protest the Gardiner Spring Resolutions] deny the right of the Assembly to decide the political question, to what government the allegiance of Presbyterians as citizens is due, and its right to make that decision a condition of membership in our church." He later

further amplified his opposition to the Resolutions: “Those who resisted the action of the Assembly were themselves . . . loyal to the Constitution [of the United States] and the Federal Government. . . . Why then did they refuse to avow [the Spring Resolutions] in and through the General Assembly? For the same reason that they would refuse, at the command of an excited multitude, to sing the “Star Spangled Banner” at the Lord’s Table. They refused because in their judgment it was wrong and out of place. . . . The General Assembly had no right to decide the political question as to what government the allegiance of Presbyterian citizens is due.” Here, in the totality of Hodge’s position, one may see the true doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

Perhaps it is best to end by re-focusing more sharply on the distinction of the church and state by examining the nature and limit of the relative powers of each. In brief, the state wields the sword and the church exercises the keys (even as the family the rod). It is given to the state to maintain order in civil society, being an encouragement to those who do good and a terror to those who do evil (Rom. 13:1–7). It is given to the church to evangelize and disciple, in short, to address that which pertains to the spiritual lives of its members and to maintain biblical doctrine, government, worship and discipline among them (Matt. 28:18–20). The church gives expression to her doctrine in her confessions of faith and catechisms and to its government, worship, and discipline in her church order, which includes a form of government, book of discipline, and directory for public worship, all of which serve as reflection on and application of the Word of God. Our Form of Government (FG) in its opening chapters (1–4, especially) clearly sets forth these things about the nature and exercise of church power, especially chapter 3.

In distinction from the nature and exercise of church power in the Roman Catholic Church, “all church power,” according to FG 3.3, “is only ministerial and declarative.” The Roman communion views church power as magisterial and legislative, and the Roman church claims the right to “bind

the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority,” (FG 3.3) there being no necessity that “all . . . decisions should be founded upon the Word of God” (FG 3.3). In distinction from the nature and exercise of state power, “all church power is wholly moral or spiritual. No church officers or judicatories possess any civil jurisdiction; they may not inflict any civil penalties nor may they seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security” (FG 3.4). Here we have the clear distinction of church and state and the relative authority of each under God. A few modest comments about how the two might relate to one another have also been offered. Let me conclude by observing that of all that we have worked out in our theology, the precise relationship that the church and state bear toward one another warrants continued work and prayer. ;

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✦ Servant Exchange

A Biblical Case for Natural Law: A Response Essay

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by Nelson D. Kloosterman

A Biblical Case for Natural Law, by David VanDrunen. Studies in Christian Social Ethics and Economics, No. 1. Grand Rapids: Acton Institute [2006], 75 pages, \$6.00, paper.

Introduction

This response expands upon material published in *New Horizons*, June 2007. Since that review of Dr. VanDrunen's monograph omitted any detailed exploration of the exegetical and theological nuances of a Reformed response to his work, I am grateful for this opportunity to expand and deepen that analysis in these pages. Once again, however, space limitations compel me to be far more concise than I wish. This essay has two parts; the first offers an exegesis of relevant key texts, while the second provides a theological analysis of VanDrunen's two-kingdom proposal.

1. Biblical Interpretation

Romans 1:18–21

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things

that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Of central relevance is the key phrase, “who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Here “suppress” means to hold in restraints, to hold under. The phrase “the truth” (with the article) refers to all that is really true, to the inner essence of things—not simply to truth about God, but to all truth, in every area and in every respect, especially in its essential interrelatedness. The phrase “by unrighteousness” suggests that various forms of unrighteousness are used to enwrap and smother the truth, to push it down, so that people do not come to know the inner essence of things.

The apostle continues by saying that “what can be known about God” is manifest. The adjective “manifest” indicates the objective visibility or knowability, without including the suggestion that what is manifest is also subjectively observed, seen, and known (on a cloudy day, the sun is really visible, but not to those on the ground). Subjective seeing and knowing depend in part on the disposition of the person as spectator. The context suggests that people have in a sense observed this divine revelation, but have nonetheless failed to give it proper attention, and therefore have not come to the true knowledge and acknowledgement of God. God has indeed given revelation, but by their culpable inattention and sinful stubbornness, people have not allowed it to bring them unto the proper knowledge and worship and service of God.

Further explanation appears in vv. 19–20. The content and scope of divine revelation in nature are identified: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.” God's attributes are imprinted on the whole cosmos, such that things are knowable as having been created by God's almighty power and wisdom. God has revealed himself (v. 19), so that his divine majesty is knowable when the works of his hands in the creation and governance of the world are ruminatingly beheld (v. 20). But unregenerate man refuses to be led by them unto the

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=77.

proper exaltation of God (v. 21). When the apostle observes that “their foolish hearts were darkened,” this darkness and folly point to human depravity whereby the unregenerate person does not and cannot properly relate what must be connected, or reason properly, or rightly perceive the essential relationships among reality.

Summary: On the basis of this passage, then, my disagreement with contemporary post-Enlightenment Reformed advocacy of natural law is both epistemological and ethical. I deny that unregenerate sinners can derive a true code of morality from creation. The mind of the unregenerate person is darkened by sin, perverted by rebellion against God, and incapable of apprehending divine truth about right and wrong. Natural revelation communicates truth about God, about right and wrong, and about oneself; nevertheless, special revelation is absolutely required (positively) to apprehend these truths, and (negatively) to correct inevitable misapprehensions drawn by fallen creatures from natural revelation. In its doctrines of creation and human depravity, Scripture teaches that natural law can never (nor could ever) be rightly apprehended apart from special revelation. Second, as to the ethical objection, the will of the unregenerate person is incapable of conforming to a true code of morality derived from creation, since the natural man cannot, does not, and will not do what he in some measure senses to be good and right, since he actively suppresses all truth in unrighteousness.²

Romans 2:14–16

“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

Here, “nature” is contrasted to “law,” the latter referring in context to the written Mosaic law.

² See Peter J. Leithart, “Natural Law: A Reformed Critique,” *Premise*, vol. III, no. 2 (1996).

Interpreters frequently think Paul is invoking Stoic ideas that had passed through the Judaism of his day. The Stoics taught the existence of natural law, which by virtue of nature supposedly applies to all people and is essentially unchangeable.

From Paul’s argument, however, it seems clear that, for him, “nature” is not the source of any moral norms, of which then the law was supposedly the objectification. Rather, precisely the reverse was the case: this doing “by nature” (note the Greek dative noun) what the law requires indeed demonstrates the power of the law. Therefore, nature does not and cannot function here as an independent source of “increated” or “innate” moral knowledge of God and his will. Paul is speaking here simply of a *doing* “by nature” or doing naturally that which the law demands; the phrase could almost be rendered: “doing spontaneously.” Paul is not introducing here a notion of natural law alongside the Mosaic law. He argues that the pagans do by nature the things which the law requires, even as the Jews themselves know these things.

It is crucial to observe, regarding v. 15, that Paul does not say that *the law* is written upon the hearts of Gentiles. This is a common misinterpretation, and leads interpreters in turn to misconstrue the teaching of Jeremiah 31:33, which speaks of the Holy Spirit writing God’s law on the human heart—something that can be predicated only of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Rather, the apostle says that the work of the law is written on their hearts—referring to “the things of the law” stipulated in v. 14. The “work of the law” is best seen as referring to the moral commands contained in the Mosaic law (Berkouwer,³ Moo, Schreiner). Paul is pointing out that the Gentiles know the commands contained in the Mosaic law. This matter is expressed well by Henry Stob, who observed that since it is not the law, but the work of the law, that is written on the human heart, Paul is indicating that “in the consciousness of the unregenerate an effect of the law’s ‘operation’ is registered.”⁴ The

³ G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, in *Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 178, 180.

⁴ Henry Stob, “Natural Law Ethics: An Appraisal,” *Calvin*

law of God makes its existence felt in the minds of the unregenerate, engendering an awareness of good and evil, a perception of some of the law's demands, and a certain capacity for evaluating their own conduct in terms of this awareness.

Rather than follow those who argue that Paul was borrowing concepts from surrounding cultures, on the basis of Romans 2:14–15 we would reverse the direction. That which we find in God's law written upon stone tablets and deposited in "the law and the prophets" is precisely what we rediscover among pagans, because it is the work of precisely that law, the work which they received from God written in their hearts. Calvin's assertion that the moral law is nothing other than a testimony of the law of nature which God engraved on the hearts of people,⁵ we would formulate in the opposite direction: that which God engraved on the hearts of people is nothing other than a testimony of the moral law.

Summary: We will not misconstrue the "work of the law" which we discern everywhere in the world if we move from that work to the law itself—ending up not with natural law, but with the Bible. For there we find the hermeneutical key with which to interpret any good and any virtue which we encounter in the world around us. The universal is clarified by the particular, the general by the special, the human by the Christian—and not the other way around. By contrast, much contemporary approval of post-Enlightenment natural law ethics moves in the reverse direction, employing the *lex naturae* as the hermeneutical key for understanding the *lex scripturae*.

2. Theological Analysis: Two Kingdoms

Following Augustine, Luther divided humanity into two groups: those who belong to the kingdom of God, and those who belong to the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of God, over which Christ rules as King, is not of this world

Theological Journal 20, no. 1 (April 1985): 63. 5
John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 1559, repr., Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.20.16.

(John 18:36–37). In the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ through his Spirit rules by the Word, while in the kingdom of the world, God the Father rules by the sword. According to Luther, these two kingdoms must be carefully distinguished from one another. The gospel governs the spiritual kingdom; the law governs the worldly kingdom. Faith operates within the spiritual kingdom; reason operates within the worldly kingdom.

This duality is closely related to Luther's soteriology. In the spiritual kingdom we receive the righteousness which frees us from our sins, only through the work of Christ, which we receive entirely passively—through faith alone. This is the *iustitia fidei*, the righteousness of faith. But another kind of righteousness does involve our works, one which in no way functions as the basis for our salvation, but one which permits us to be busy in the world and to benefit our neighbor. Luther termed this "civil righteousness," *iustitia civilis* or *iustitia politica*. *Iustitia fidei* operates *coram Deo* (before God), while *iustitia politica* functions *coram hominibus* (before men). The former is an internal, the latter an external righteousness. Faith directs us to look above, while love impels us to look around. The *gospel* functions in the spiritual kingdom, and the *law* functions in the worldly kingdom. In order to safeguard the *sola fidei* of salvation, Luther distinguished these two realms sharply. He broke with the higher-lower paradigm of grace-nature, and replaced it with the two kingdoms alongside one another, both under God.

Critics of Luther's two kingdom doctrine have alleged that it has led to a dualism, to an autonomous ethic in the worldly kingdom, and to a double morality (one Christian, the other secular). Although there may be some validity to these criticisms, we must nevertheless acknowledge that Luther's emphasis on *vocation*, on the Christian's task *in the world*, ought to have rescued his doctrine from such abuses. Although he distinguished these realms, he never hesitated to speak of Christians living in the worldly kingdom as *Christians*. Moreover, when Luther insisted that temporal and physical life must be subject to the dictates of reason, he meant that one cannot

build a house or rule a nation simply with an open Bible. This seems acceptable, as long as reason is not declared to be autonomous reason—and we must remember that Luther lived and taught before the Enlightenment! Luther tied the exercise of reason closely to Scripture. Mankind, said Luther, has nothing better than the law of God which enlightens and directs human reason.⁶

So Luther distinguished sharply between *iustitia fidei* and *iustitia civilis*, between gospel and law, between faith and works, between faith toward God and love toward neighbor. Despite these sharp distinctions, however, Luther saw all of these as indissolubly connected in the Christian life. The righteousness of faith is the foundation, cause, and origin of all human righteousness manifested in life. Luther's view of Christian political life was Christocentric.

But Luther stopped short of saying that the reins of the worldly kingdom rest in the hands of Jesus Christ. The sword of the civil kingdom does not fit with Christ's *modus operandi*. Christ serves, but does not rule, in this kingdom. If there is any "ruling" in the worldly kingdom, it is a rule by love. The kingdom of Christ, the spiritual kingdom, is the kingdom of the Crucified One. His regime is marked not by divine power, wisdom, and majesty, but by incarnation, by suffering, and by dying. Luther avoided using the phrase "the lordship of Jesus Christ," and subordinated the kingly office of Christ to his priestly office.⁷

When you read Calvin's *Institutes*, you will discover that this Genevan reformer stood entirely with Luther in distinguishing between spiritual and civil government (3.19.15; 4.20). One important difference between Calvin and Luther, however, is that Calvin developed more systematically what he saw to be the goal of government: "in short, that a public form of religion may exist

6 Martin Luther, WA 40, 1, 306, 5ff.: homo non habet maius in terris quam legem, quae illuminat et dirigit rationem humanum. For the analysis offered above, see J. Douma, *Politieke Verantwoordelijkheid* (Kampen: van den Berg, 1984), 76.

7 E. Mülhaupt, "Herrschaft Christi bei Luther," in *Reich Gottes und Welt*, ed. H. H. Schrey (Darmstadt, 1969), 435; for discussion of this thesis, see J. Douma, *Politieke Verantwoordelijkheid*, 77–87.

among Christians, and humanity among men" (4.20.3).

In following Calvin rather than Luther on this point, we may ask: What benefits accrue to relating human politics (indeed, all of society with its cultural institutions) to Christ's kingship? Here is our answer: (1) we obtain a better sense of the unity between the spiritual and the worldly kingdoms; (2) we are in a better position to give an account and rationale for the diversity and integrity within and among the worldly and spiritual kingdoms. Within both kingdoms there is service and dominion, both of which have been demonstrated in their essential unity through Jesus Christ himself!

Perhaps it is better, after all, not to speak of two kingdoms, but rather of various offices. Parents, for example, exercise both worldly and spiritual power over their children. Illustrative of the problematic two-kingdom construction being advocated by VanDrunen is the question: *To which of the two kingdoms, worldly or spiritual, must we assign marriage and the family?* It would be far better to speak of various offices (husband, father, citizen, employer, etc.), each of which demonstrates its own unique manner of service and rule. A prince, a father, an employer, a minister—each of them rules, but in very different ways. We must speak in a more pluriform fashion than Luther did. No one office is more or less worldly or spiritual than another, but all have been integrated and ordered in Christ Jesus.

What Then of Morality and Virtue among Unbelievers?

In his 1985 essay Henry Stob made the important observation that the law of God is one, it is single, it is unitary. It is constant and universal because it reflects God's self-consistent being and unchanging purpose. "It is because the moral law is singular that there is the amount of agreement that we do in fact observe in the moral judgments and practices of people everywhere."⁸ This means, among other things, that when Christians enter the public square to proclaim and defend that unitary

8 J. Douma, *Natuurrecht—een betrouwbare gids?* (Groningen: Vuurbaak, 1978), 67–68.

law of God as it has been most fully, clearly, and authoritatively revealed in Scripture, they should not think they are defending some “special” or “private” law, but rather they are setting forth something suited to all human beings by virtue of their creation by this God.

Why have Reformed theologians (and the Reformed Confessions) continued to speak of natural light, natural law, and innate law? Because of the existence among unbelievers of a certain regard for righteousness, justice, and love. Scripture itself observes such inclinations among unbelievers (Abimelech of Gerar, Gen. 20:4; Sergius Paulus, Acts 13:7; Felix, Acts 24:11; the kindness of Julius, Acts 27:3; the hospitality of Publius, Acts 28:7). Scripture contains guidelines pertaining to marriage, family, and treatment of servants that have much in common with extra-biblical instruction (which is not yet to say that Scripture writers “borrowed” from extra-biblical writers for their content). Jesus even indicated that often the children of this world show more wisdom than the children of light (Luke 16:8).⁹

All of this is related to the matter of the continuation of the *imago Dei* after the Fall. Is the unbeliever still the *imago Dei*? Along with many Reformed theologians, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. replies with a “yes and no.” He makes a remarkable claim regarding the negative mode and functioning of the *imago Dei*:

But, apart from that [regenerative] working of the Spirit, being the image in no way alleviates or extenuates human sinfulness; being the image is the presupposition for being a sinner. The unbeliever remains the image of God, entirely, but only “in a negative mode.” Every single capacity enjoyed as an image-bearer is engaged in rebellion against God.¹⁰

Gaffin’s evaluation of the heart-orientation of

9 Ibid., 59.

10 Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6–16,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 121 (103–124).

unbelievers reflects John Calvin’s comments on 1 Corinthians 1:20 and 3:19 (these comments have been omitted for space reasons, but they are truly important).¹¹

Some Calvin interpreters who seek to delimit the place and function within Calvin’s theology of natural theology and natural law will begin by saying: *not unto salvation*; such knowledge is not *spiritual* knowledge; such natural capacity and knowledge cannot save. Natural law has its limits; it cannot get one to heaven. But that does not at all render it unusable as the moral standard for the civil kingdom.

The reader will certainly find these caveats and limitations in Calvin’s comments on 1 Corinthians 1:20. But reread Calvin on this passage, and notice that these caveats are followed immediately and directly with this evaluation:

It is also true, in other ways, that apart from Christ every branch of human knowledge is futile, and the man, who is well grounded in every aspect of learning, but is yet ignorant of God, has nothing. Furthermore, this must also be said, in all truth, that these fine gifts of God: quickness of mind, shrewd judgment, liberal sciences, knowledge of languages, all are in some way spoiled, whenever they fall into the hands of ungodly men.¹²

The problem, then, is not simply that natural knowledge cannot lead to knowledge of God in Christ—concerning this we agree with contemporary Reformed natural-law–two-kingdom advocates—but the problem is also that unbelieving man always abuses even the natural knowledge he possesses. Unless—and until—these gifts become subject to the Word and Spirit of God, they must be looked upon as vain and empty. This is the unequivocal teaching of the Reformed Confessions, especially Canons of Dort III/IV.4, West-

11 John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1960 [reprinted 1989]), 38–39, 81.

12 Ibid., 39.

minster Confession 6.4, and Westminster Larger Catechism Q/A 96.

Excursus: A Case Study in a Reformed Application of Natural Law¹³

For some time now, Dr. VanDrunen has been pleading for the reconsideration of natural law theory. He is concerned to teach Christians how to make arguments in the public square about moral and political issues. VanDrunen argues that the moral standards of the natural law are known to every person, whether believer or unbeliever, to such an extent that most people would admit that murder, stealing, and lying are immoral.

Of all the contemporary public moral debates which could serve to illustrate the validity of appealing to natural law, surely legalized abortion is the preeminent issue. Let us observe how such an appeal to natural law could work, according to VanDrunen, who summarizes his position this way:

As observed above, *nearly everyone*, at *some level*, believes that life is valuable and therefore that lethal violence against others should be prohibited by law. *Most people* would also agree that this applies, *perhaps especially*, to those who are weak and unable to defend themselves. Based upon such convictions, people *today overwhelmingly* condemn infanticide as a terrible crime. Beginning from this *widespread* acknowledgment of natural law truth, we could attempt to show how these proper moral sentiments are inconsistent with a pro-choice abortion position.¹⁴

The italicized qualifiers are important to VanDrunen's position: nearly everyone, at some level, overwhelmingly agrees, on the basis of widespread acknowledgement, that infanticide is wrong.

13 David VanDrunen, "Natural Law and Christians in the Public Square," *Modern Reformation* 15, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 12-14.

14 VanDrunen, "Natural Law and Christians in the Public Square," 14; italics added.

But, really, how universally accessible and how functionally reliable is this "natural truth" when there are numerous societies throughout history that have practiced infanticide, even as a religious gesture?! Moreover, by what objective, transcendent, trans-cultural, and trans-historical standard are the moral sentiments which VanDrunen affirms (respect for life, aversion to violence, and defense of the weak) judged to be proper at all, whether by the social consensus or by VanDrunen? In other words, how can we know *which* social consensus to accept as normative?

His concluding encouragement is this: "Based upon the social consensus that infanticide is immoral, then, a compelling argument can be made, based upon observation of the natural process of fetal development, that life should be protected from conception on."¹⁵

This crowning sentence clearly embodies exactly what Reformed opponents of post-Enlightenment natural law theory have warned against.

Twice within the same sentence, we read that moral argument in the public square can be "based upon" something: (1) "the social consensus that infanticide is immoral," and (2) "observation of the natural process of fetal development." Here we have two fallacies within the same sentence, namely, the *sociological fallacy* and a form of the *naturalistic fallacy*. The former fallacy is committed by arguing from majority opinion to moral evaluation (social consensus is the basis for judging infanticide to be immoral), while the second arises when arguing from what "is" to what "ought" to be (the natural process of fetal development is the basis for judging infanticide to be immoral). What makes both of these statements fallacies is that they move from description to prescription.

Social consensus and natural process are unstable, varying, or open to differing interpretations. Some have derived from nature the notion that women should perform military duty alongside men, since nature teaches us that female animals fight ferociously to protect their offspring. Others argue from the behavior of bees in defense of

15 VanDrunen, "Natural Law and Christians in the Public Square," 14.

human communal living without private property. Others appeal to the order of bee colonies to defend the principle of monarchy. Nature teaches virtue, it is claimed. But nature also teaches vice, when we observe the negative behavior of animals. Some animals eat their offspring, rather than defend them.

What, then, qualifies “natural” behavior as virtuous or vicious? Answer: we come to nature with our previously endorsed scale of values. Because industry is already considered a virtue, we exalt those creatures that display it. Because monarchy is already thought preferable to aristocracy or democracy, bees are a good moral example. It is simply not the case that people “read nature” objectively, but rather they engage in circular reasoning.

Someone could construct a “compelling argument,” analogous to VanDrunen’s case against abortion, in order to defend legalizing homosexual marriages. Here it is: “Based upon the growing social consensus that homosexual intercourse is morally acceptable, and based upon observation of the personal physical and emotional satisfaction derived from such a practice, every consensual form of homosexual expression should be legalized and afforded every civil protection.” Why not?

With deep concern, and with all due respect, I ask: Is this, then, the best moral argument that natural law can supply to us Christians who must work and witness in the public square alongside unbelievers blinded by sin and rebellious in heart?

Conclusion

Dr. VanDrunen’s monograph provides us all with an opportunity to converse about some very important issues involving our use of moral argument, the church’s function within culture, the nature of the Christian’s public testimony and cultural engagement, and the like. During recent decades, we’ve been offered an array of programmatic answers, including Greg Bahnsen’s theonomy, Reinhold Niebuhr–style cultural transformationalism, the Christendom of Christian Reconstruction, the modern Anabaptism of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, and now VanDrunen’s NL2K.

In contrast, with his teaching in the areas of apologetics, epistemology, and ethics, Cornelius Van Til has shown us the mistaken assessments and answers supplied by non-Reformed thought, including those proffered by a coalition of Roman Catholic and post-Enlightenment theorists who have joined together in denying the absolute necessity of special revelation for properly apprehending and rightly using general revelation. Somehow, Van Til’s enduring contribution needs to be integrated into this conversation.

So, let the conversation continue! ;

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VanDrunen in the Hands of an Anxious Kloosterman: *A Response to a Review*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by David VanDrunen

Authors are of course grateful when people read their books and consider their ideas worth discussing. Though it is disappointing that Professor Kloosterman has taken such a decidedly negative view of my little monograph, insofar as he is indirectly encouraging the Reformed community

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=78.

to think about natural law and the two kingdoms again after a century of neglect, I cannot be too displeased. In fact, far from his many critical remarks being a discouragement, the fact that a professor of ethics at a Reformed seminary can react so vehemently against *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*—and for the reasons that he indicates—offers additional evidence that a sustained effort to revive serious reflection on the Reformed natural law and two kingdoms doctrines is a worthwhile endeavor.

In his review article, Kloosterman does not exactly critique the argument found in my monograph. Instead, he critiques his own reconstruction of what he thinks my “programmatically answer” is to the question of Christianity and culture, termed “VanDrunen’s NL2K.” Kloosterman’s reconstruction is a rather distorted and caricatured interpretation of what my own views and my larger research project are all about. At the beginning of his *New Horizons* review he made sure to inform readers that I received my Ph.D. from Loyola University Chicago and that my monograph was published by the Acton Institute, a “Catholic-Protestant think tank” (which, as far as I know, is not the way that Acton describes itself), obviously a not-so-subtle attempt to alert unwitting readers to my crypto-Roman Catholic propensities. In this *Ordained Servant* review article, Kloosterman adds the specter of the “post-Enlightenment” situation, against whose wiles Van Til’s apologetics has not sufficiently inoculated me. What constitutes this pernicious blend of Roman Catholicism and post-Enlightenment philosophy that apparently poses such a threat to Reformed Christianity? Kloosterman seems convinced that it involves “deriving a true code of morality from creation” without the help of Scripture, while denying or at least grossly underestimating the effects of sin upon human knowledge and ethics. Furthermore, it entails committing some basic logical blunders, the sociological and naturalistic fallacies, that your middle school children should be capable of debunking. If this is indeed what I have set out to do, I for one can hardly blame Kloosterman for coming to the aid of the OPC to warn it against the naïve “programmatically answer” of one of its own ministers.

Reconsidering the Historic Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Doctrines

Given the nature of Kloosterman’s remarks in my own church’s periodicals, I hope readers will indulge a few autobiographical comments in response. I think that they will be helpful in regard to the “conversation” that Kloosterman wishes to “continue.”

My interest in issues related to law and theology, church and state, Christianity and culture, date back a number of years. It was sharpened during my studies at seminary and law school, as I wrestled with questions regarding a proper Reformed approach to various social matters. In my own upbringing and later training in both Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian churches and schools, I heard little if anything about natural law or the two kingdoms, and much that I did hear about a variety of other things predisposed me to react negatively to such ideas. But, as I did some reading in the earlier Reformed tradition, I began coming across references to these concepts, and in a positive rather than negative way. I looked in vain for any significant secondary literature that provided an analysis of what happened, such that these doctrines that formed an important part of Reformed social thought for several centuries could be viewed so negatively in contemporary Reformed circles. It seemed to me that this was a study that needed to be written, and thus approximately four years ago I decided to undertake this as my primary scholarly project.

I should say at this point that my chief long-term concern is not historical, but the constructive development of a biblically, theologically, and ethically sound approach to the Christian’s life in the broader culture. But I was and remain convinced that, as a minister in a confessionally Reformed church and a professor at a historically Reformed seminary, I have an obligation to understand well my own tradition’s reflections before offering anything like a “programmatically answer” to a nearly two-thousand-year ongoing debate among thoughtful Christian people. To Professor Kloosterman I would say that I certainly have not (yet?) provided such a “programmatically answer.” The two

of my writings that he cites, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* and an article in *Modern Reformation*, are very short pieces, written in response to specific requests, and presented in a non-scholarly manner. This is not to make any excuses for them, since nothing that Kloosterman has written causes me to regret anything in them. But they were somewhat extraneous to my primary research project. My primary project has been historical, and I have been presenting the preliminary results of my research in a series of articles in peer-reviewed, scholarly journals. I do not know whether Kloosterman is familiar with these, but I will list them in a footnote so that readers may look at them if they wish.² I have incorporated the material in these articles, along with a great deal of other material, into a book manuscript that I have recently finished drafting and which I hope to complete editing soon. The publishing process can be very slow, so it will not appear in published form for a while yet. But it will constitute the first study that I am aware of that offers an explanation and interpretation of the development of the natural law and two kingdoms doctrines in the Reformed tradition from the Reformation to the present.

I sincerely hope that Kloosterman, in the in-

2 "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions" (forthcoming, *Calvin Theological Journal*); "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition" (forthcoming, *Journal of Church and State*); "The Importance of the Penultimate: Reformed Social Thought and the Contemporary Critiques of the Liberal Society," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 219–49; "Natural Law in Early Calvinist Resistance Theory," *Journal of Law and Religion* 21, no. 1 (2005–06): 143–67; "Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no.1 (2006): 77–98; "The Two Kingdoms: A Reassessment of the Transformationist Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005): 248–66; "The Context of Natural Law: John Calvin's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," *Journal of Church and State* 46 (Summer 2004): 503–25. See also "The Role of Natural Law in the Westminster Confession and Early Reformed Orthodoxy," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, vol. 3, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (forthcoming, Mentor); and "Natural Law and the Works Principle under Adam and Moses," in *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen (forthcoming, P&R).

terests of his wish to converse about these matters, will read this book carefully. He and all other readers will have every right to augment, modify, and critique my conclusions according to their own lights. Though my manuscript is rather lengthy, it is certainly not comprehensive. But if Kloosterman and others wish to argue that natural law and the two kingdoms are not historically Reformed doctrines, they will at least have to face a large body of evidence in need of explanation or refutation. Among the sixteenth- through nineteenth-century Reformed writers that I consider are John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Jerome Zanchi, John Knox, Theodore Beza, Johannes Althusius, Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, John Owen, Francis Turretin, John Cotton, Samuel Davies, Stuart Robinson, Charles Hodge, James Thornwell, and Abraham Kuyper. *All of them* defended versions of the natural law and/or two kingdoms doctrines. Even if I am as wrong as Kloosterman thinks me to be in desiring a reconsideration of natural law and the two kingdoms in contemporary Reformed doctrine and practice, there is at least some comfort in the company that I am trying to keep.

Admittedly, the twentieth century was quite barren ground for the Reformed natural law and two kingdoms traditions. I do not wish to give away too much of the story that my book will tell, but I believe that figures such as Karl Barth and Herman Dooyeweerd played a very important role in fostering the negative climate toward natural law and the two kingdoms in recent Reformed circles (I assume that Kloosterman feels little affinity for Barth; I do not know what he thinks of Dooyeweerd, though he does cite very favorably Henry Stob of Calvin College and Seminary, one of the most important popularizers of Dooyeweerd for an American audience). A respected figure for me and probably most others who read *Ordained Servant*, Cornelius Van Til, will also be considered toward the end of my book.

This book that I am completing is not meant to suggest that I agree with everything that Reformed theologians wrote about natural law and the two kingdoms before the twentieth century. Those who read the book can draw their own con-

clusions about what they find attractive and what not. I believe, to mention a few examples, that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians were wrong to defend civil enforcement of religious orthodoxy, that traditional Reformed natural law and two kingdoms doctrine could be much better integrated with and articulated in terms of classic Reformed covenant theology, and that Van Til's analysis of believing and unbelieving thought should have a place in our understanding of cultural life. Not immediately, but in the near future, if God gives the strength, desire, and opportunity, I plan to write a sequel designed to present a biblical and theological account of how the natural law and two kingdoms ideas might be revived for contemporary Reformed doctrine, piety, and social thought, along the lines of such considerations. *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* does provide a concise look at some things I have in mind to do in this future volume, though there is much more that I hope to consider as well.

Some Comments in Reply to Kloosterman

That is enough about my current research and future plans regarding natural law and the two kingdoms. I am basically content to let what I have already published, and will publish in the coming years, speak for itself in answer to Kloosterman's charges. But several brief, specific responses to his review article and then a general observation may be helpful before I conclude.

First, Kloosterman finds major fault with me for failing to remember that the unregenerate are "darkened by sin, perverted by rebellion against God, and incapable of apprehending divine truth about right and wrong." Readers should know that in *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* I write that "this beautiful picture of God's design of the world and human image-bearing has been devastated by the fall into sin described in Genesis 3. No investigation of the contemporary relevance of natural law can ignore this grim reality.... Contemporary use of natural law cannot ignore the grave consequences of sin upon human knowledge and the reception of natural law" (14–15). I cite in support not only verses such as Genesis 6:5, Jeremiah 17:9,

and Ephesians 2:1, but also Romans 1:18–32, one of the two passages that Kloosterman tries to use against me. Whatever the differences between Kloosterman and me, the devastating effects of sin on unregenerate humanity is not one of them. Yet, if wickedness is the only category by which we analyze non-Christian behavior, we are sure to distort the full picture. Presumably when Kloosterman pulls out of his driveway on the way to work every day, his non-Christian neighbors do not lean out their windows and try to shoot him and then, after he has made his narrow escape, rush to his home to assault his family and loot his goods. Most non-Christians, most of the time, pursue law-abiding lives. In fact, many of my own non-Christian neighbors are often more kind, patient, and considerate than I am, and all of them are better than I am at one cultural activity or another. I suspect the same is true for Kloosterman and his neighbors. The same John Calvin who had such a stark view of the effects of sin expressed great amazement and appreciation for many of the cultural accomplishments of pagan humanity. Later Reformed thought developed the doctrine of common grace to help to explain such things. At one point in his review article Kloosterman seems to admit all of this, noting the "existence among unbelievers of a certain regard for righteousness, justice, and love." Yet, for some reason, Kloosterman suspects me of great mischief when I seek to work with such truths. I will return to this point in a moment after I try to clear the air of another accusation.

Second, then, in both his July 2007 letter to *New Horizons* and in this review article in *Ordained Servant*, Kloosterman plays what I call the Van Til card. He groups me in a "coalition of Roman Catholic and post-Enlightenment theorists" whose views on general and special revelation Van Til has shown to be mistaken. I cannot help but think that Kloosterman is playing to his audience: he knows that most OPC officers are Van Tillian, so if he can paint me as a non-Van Tillian he will raise additional suspicion against me. Well, I have stated publicly numerous times and have put into print at least once that I hold to a Van Tillian, presuppositional view of apologetics. I explained

to my presbytery at my ordination exam that my apologetical view is Van Tillian. I am not a professor of apologetics, but if anyone has evidence that I have ever published or taught in the church or classroom a different apologetical position, then he should present it to me for my reconsideration. But, I will say again that I do not teach courses in apologetics, and *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* is not a book on apologetics. These are significant facts. Apologetics is important, but it is not everything. Van Til was an apologist and he wrote books on apologetics. Van Til was not a social theorist and he made only occasional and usually passing comments on broader issues of the Christian's responsibilities in daily cultural affairs. Van Til's task in, say, *The Defense of the Faith* and my task in *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* are two very different things. I see no reason why one cannot be Van Tillian in apologetics and think that natural law should have an important role to play in the Christian's daily cultural work. Van Til emphasized that we should never view nature as an autonomous or neutral realm; the Reformed natural law tradition, which always affirmed that the natural law is God's law, did not view nature as autonomous or neutral. But if one tries to apply Van Til's *apologetical method* to every aspect of the Christian's daily cultural work, there is trouble brewing, I fear, and I do oppose that sort of move (a move that Van Til himself made on occasion). A few more comments may explain what I mean here and in the previous paragraph.

Van Til's apologetics involves exposing the rotten foundations of non-Christian thought, showing how unbelievers must borrow truths that Christianity teaches in order to make whatever sense of the world that they have, driving those who reject the triune God to greater epistemological self-consciousness of what they are doing. This is a necessary endeavor for Christians in the world, especially for those like Van Til who are called to be professors of apologetics. But apologetic confrontation with unbelieving thought is not the only kind of interaction that Christians have with unbelievers. Christians are called not only to break down every pretension that sets itself up against

Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), but also to live lives *in common* with unbelievers in a range of cultural activities. Christians may and even should make music, build bridges, do medical research, and play baseball with unbelievers. Believers are called to live in peace with all men as far as it lies with them (Rom. 12:18), to pray for the peace of the (mostly pagan) city in which they live (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1–2), and to interact in the world with people whom they would not admit to membership in the church (1 Cor. 5:9–11). There is a place for a believing musician to explain to an unbelieving musician that music is meaningless unless the triune God exists, but when they are rehearsing together in the community orchestra such a Van Tillian apologetic confrontation would be highly inappropriate—the task at that time is *cooperation at a common cultural task*. The same thing is true in regard to working on a construction site with non-Christians or grilling burgers with an unbelieving friend at a neighborhood cook-out or thousands of other ordinary endeavors. To try to put it briefly, we have different sorts of encounters with unbelievers at different times. Sometimes we have opportunity to engage in apologetic discussions, in which our *modus operandi* is confrontation and exposure of the futility of unbelief (though always in love). Other times (and probably most of the time for the ordinary Christian who is not a professional apologist) we have common tasks in which to engage alongside unbelievers, in which our *modus operandi* is trying to find agreement and consensus so that shared cultural tasks can be accomplished as well as possible in a sinful world.

It is this latter situation that I addressed in *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* and in the *Modern Reformation* article that Kloosterman attacks. This fact, among many other considerations, demonstrates the absurdity of Kloosterman's claim that I commit the sociological and naturalistic fallacies. Do I, according to his own definitions, argue “from majority opinion to moral evaluation (social consensus is the basis for judging infanticide to be immoral)” and “from what ‘is’ to what ‘ought’ to be (the natural process of fetal development is the basis for judging infanticide to be immoral)?”

I invite readers to peruse my *Modern Reformation* article and judge for themselves, but I might point out this quotation: “Christians should generally be skeptical of arguments that rest upon simple appeal to what is or feels ‘natural.’” Or this: “Natural law cannot be defined in terms of what most people feel is natural most of the time.” I do not remember what my thought processes were as I wrote this article, but it sounds to me now as though I was warning readers against precisely the naturalistic and sociological fallacies.

What I was doing in this article was trying to help ordinary Christians think about how to interact with unbelievers in their common, daily, mundane tasks in which moral concerns are raised (not instructing people how to engage in Van Tillian apologetical confrontation). What if I am having a friendly conversation with my neighbor across the fence and she tells me that she is thinking about having an abortion, or that she wants to support a bill before the state legislature that would make abortions easier to secure? And what if (and is the case for most of us) my neighbor is not a Christian and does not accept Scripture as a moral authority? Do I tell her that if she does not submit to the Scriptures then she has no right to participate in the political process? That would be neither factually true nor biblically sound. Do I tell her that if she does not believe in Scripture then she might as well go and have an abortion because there is no other moral reason for her not to do so? I would first of all wish my neighbor to put faith in Christ and believe the Scriptures. But even if she does not, I still would rather she be pro-life in her voting and personal behavior, not because in doing so she understands the “inner essence of things” or “all truth, in every area and in every respect, especially in its essential interrelatedness” (to borrow Kloosterman’s phrases), but for the sake of a relative social peace and justice. And thus in my *Modern Reformation* article I offered a few suggestions for how one might deal with such a neighbor. In capitalizing on the fact that she is probably opposed to infanticide I am hardly saying, as Kloosterman unbelievably claims about me, that if most people think infanticide is wrong then it

is. I am simply recognizing that she has “a certain regard for righteousness, justice, and love” (again, to borrow Kloosterman’s own description of unbelievers), and trying to use her regard for justice concerning infanticide to prick her conscience concerning abortion. I envisioned dealing with a particular person or people in a particular cultural setting and suggested a few ways of making moral appeals in a civil way *even if they have resisted apologetical and evangelistic appeals*.

In light of all of this, let me answer briefly a few of Kloosterman’s questions and objections. Kloosterman asks, for example: “Is this, then, the best moral argument that natural law can supply to us Christians who must work and witness in the public square alongside unbelievers blinded by sin and rebellious in heart?” My answer: I don’t know, probably not. I have never suggested that this argument was the best possible. I would welcome most gladly better natural law arguments against abortion. I invite Kloosterman to make a better one—unless he is content to send his neighbor to the abortion clinic if she will not heed his appeals to Scripture or his transcendental argument for God’s existence. Kloosterman also asks: “By what objective, transcendent, trans-cultural, and trans-historical standard are the moral sentiments which VanDrunen affirms (respect for life, aversion to violence, and defense of the weak) judged to be proper by all, whether by the social consensus or by VanDrunen? In other words, how can we know *which* social consensus to accept as normative?” My article already provides an explicit answer to his question: “For Christians, it would seem most helpful to begin not with the feelings of sinful human beings, but with that which Scripture teaches is revealed in the natural law.” Kloosterman also objects to what he thinks is my claim that “unregenerate sinners can derive a true code of morality from creation.” My answer: I never said that. In fact, I expressed sentiments in just the opposite direction: “Natural law certainly does not reveal to the conscience a detailed public policy.” Offering suggestions about how to prick the consciences of unbelievers concerning things that they already know to be right and wrong is not the same thing

as claiming that unbelievers can construct infallible codes of morality from nature.

There are many more things that Kloosterman said that I might respond to, but I must address just one more before making some concluding remarks. Kloosterman says: “Illustrative of the problematic two-kingdom construction being advocated by VanDrunen is the question: *To which of the two kingdoms, worldly or spiritual, must we assign marriage and the family?*” He apparently thinks that he has me locked on the horns of a hopeless dilemma, but I reply unambiguously: to the “worldly” kingdom. Marriage and family are part of the original creation order, they have been sustained by common grace, and my unbelieving neighbors’ marriage is just as valid in the sight of God and society as mine. Christ’s redemptive work is not the origin of marriage. The church did not establish the bearing of children. Marriage and family are institutions common to believers and unbelievers alike. The church recognizes these institutions, commends them, and gives some general instructions about them, but it does not create them.

Conclusion

To conclude, I raise for readers’ consideration not only that natural law and the two kingdoms are historic Reformed doctrines, but that they are part of the warp and woof of the Reformed system of doctrine. In classic Reformed theology, distinctive Reformed doctrines such as the Sabbath and the covenant of works were articulated with explicit reference to natural law. In classic Reformed theology, Reformed doctrines such as the regulative principle of worship and even justification were expressed with intimate relation to the doctrine of the two kingdoms. Perhaps that sounds preposterous, but it is true, as I hope to explain in some detail in the future. Is it any coincidence that the past century—precisely the time period in which natural law and the two kingdoms have largely fallen into disuse in Reformed circles—has witnessed serious erosion in commitment to the Sabbath, the regulative principle of worship, the covenant of works, and justification in Reformed churches? Or,

to add another wrinkle, is it a coincidence that in the past couple of generations so many Reformed people have been tempted to embrace the theonomic movement and the majority that has resisted has offered for the most part only tepid and insipid alternatives? I do not think that it is in any sense a coincidence.

To put it one more way: Has the century of Reformed distaste for natural law and the two kingdoms been a golden age for confessional Reformed Christianity? I doubt many readers of *Ordained Servant* would think so. Our contemporary denominations that seem most serious about historic, confessional Reformed Christianity are small splinters off much larger bodies that have gone in different directions. Confessional Reformed Christianity has truly become sideline rather than mainline. Are our Christian primary and secondary schools and colleges, so many of which proclaim the neo-Calvinist vision of transformation and worldview cultivation and dismiss the two kingdoms idea as “dualistic,” stronger theologically and academically now than they were some generations ago? My interaction with the kind of people who read *Ordained Servant* leads me to guess that a great many of you would answer no (which is why a great number of you homeschool your own children).

I realize that natural law and the two kingdoms seem like novel and suspicious doctrines to many Reformed people today. But turning against these ideas, I am convinced, has been to the detriment of Reformed doctrine, piety, and life in the world. Resist the attempt to revive these doctrines if you must, but a “conversation” about them will not be productive, nor even very conversational, if it puts these doctrines in a misleading and pejorative light and caricatures their defenders before the conversation has really begun. ;

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✦ Servant Humor

From the Back Pew

Eutyclus II continues the tradition of Eutyclus I, Ed Clowney's pen name in the initial issues of *Christianity Today* (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutyclus (and His Pin)*: "Eutyclus was summoned to his post as a symbol of Christians nodding, if not on the window-sill, at least in the back pew." Like his namesake, Eutyclus II aims at "deflating ecclesiastical pretense, sham and present-day religiosity." This nom de plume will remain a cover for this ecclesiastical sleuth—to maintain his anonymity, and thus his freedom to poke fun.

Presbyterian Prayer Book

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
April 2007¹

by Eutyclus II

American Presbyterians have never been comfortable with reading prayers or prayer books. This stands in contrast to the Dutch Calvinist tradition which has included written prayers and liturgical forms in most of their hymnbooks and psalters. The old Christian Reformed Church psalter-hymnal, for instance, includes prayers for before and after meals, before and after church assemblies, the sick, and for various parts of the worship

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=42.

service. Although these prayers are undocumented, many believe that they originated with John Calvin. Most of these prayers are also included in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches' Anglo-Genevan Psalter.

Presbyterians, however, left written prayers behind in the seventeenth century, a dismal century for the theological descendents of John Calvin. At a time when the former monarchical dynasty of Scotland, the Stuarts, tried to unify Ireland, Wales, and Scotland under British rule, Presbyterians acquired a healthy dose of distrust for the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. This was understandable since formal liturgies were synonymous with political persecution by kings who either flirted with Roman Catholicism or had no use for Presbyterian faith and practice.

Contemporary Presbyterians may not know the history, but each Sunday they sit in pews stocked with hymnals that reflect this background. Whether they sing from the old *Trinity Hymnal* or the newer version, American Presbyterians use books that apparently include no formal or written prayers. The old *Trinity Hymnal* included forms from the OPC's Directory for Public Worship to be used for ordination, baptism, or the Lord's Supper. And both hymnals include selections from the Psalms for responsive reading. But the Continental Reformed practice of including prayers and liturgical forms is lost on American Presbyterians. The reasons for this are bound up with the history of antagonism between Presbyterians and Anglicans in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

But seldom noticed in this development of hostility to prayer books is the accompanying change in understanding of song. Whether Presbyterians recognize it or not, song has long been regarded as a form of prayer. Calvin, for instance, believed the worship service included three parts, word, sacrament, and prayer. Since Genevans only sang psalms, their singing might qualify as the word. But Calvin actually taught that song was properly a form of prayer, which was also his reason for insisting that the church sing from God's inspired prayer book, the Old Testament Psalter.

So whether we know it or not, Orthodox

Presbyterians do in fact have a prayer book, and it is the *Trinity Hymnal*. Or at least that is one way of looking at it. Other reasons for singing are not immediately obvious, except perhaps for having the congregation sing just before the sermon, a practice that suggests as much the need for the congregation to rise and stretch their legs and lungs before hunkering down in their pews for at least a half hour while the pastor expounds the word.

In which case, if song is a form of prayer, why do we allow people to write our prayers (read: hymns) whom we would not allow in our pulpits to lead the congregation in prayer? For starters, our hymnals include some creations by women, which raises some difficult questions about gender and office. But not every male hymn writer is kosher either. The most popular hymn writer for English-speaking Protestants is Charles Wesley, the brother of John Wesley. Charles Wesley composed over 6,000 hymns in his life. Presbyterians may not use as many of Wesley's hymns as the Methodists, but in both editions of *Trinity Hymnal*, Wesley is the author with the most compositions. (The second is Isaac Watts; the third is Horatio Bonar.) Many of Wesley's hymns are generally acceptable, though the hymnal's editors would sometimes have to alter words to excise a non-Calvinistic conception of the Christian life. "Christ, whose glory fills the skies," for instance, is Wesley's most popular hymn among Presbyterians and is as good as the eighteenth-century Methodist could get.

But if Wesley would not pass the muster of presbytery for licensure or ordination, why do we let him lead our congregations in prayer? This is one of the curiosities in American Presbyterian practice that stems from the liturgical and political contests of seventeenth-century England and Scotland. I sometimes think that the way to settle the differences of opinion in contemporary worship over music is by insisting that everyone sing only psalms. This was the practice of most Protestants (except Lutherans) until the eighteenth century. And it would succeed in quieting the disputes over congregational song by making *no one happy*. Gone forever would be the debate over "traditional" hymns versus "contemporary" praise songs.

Presbyterians would simply be stuck with the "ancient" forms of song sung by previous generations of saints. But even if exclusive psalmody is not an option, if Presbyterians could spend more time thinking about song as a form of prayer, they might have a keener appreciation and concern for what they do sing each Lord's Day when the saints assemble to sing praise and thanksgiving to the God of their salvation. One way to start, is by accepting that Presbyterians really do believe in prayer books—they simply refer to them as hymnals. ;

Feeding the Soul or Tending the Body

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Eutyclus II

It is generally a good thing that Americans have recently become more health conscious. As a graying boomer myself I am giving belated attention to the care of my body. This includes the consumption of nearly all of the recommended daily amount of H₂O (which, if you did not know, is a staggering eight to twelve glasses a day). Nature's elixir fights off cancers, flushes out wastes, reduces body aches, and aids digestion. Water, and more of it, is good for the body.

But can't we find two waking hours each week when we limit our intake for higher purposes? Apparently not, according to an increasing number of evangelical Christians, including Reformed worshipers, for whom bottled water is as important to tote to worship as a *New Geneva Study Bible*. This is but the most conspicuous feature of a spiritually unhealthy trend. It seems that we are making it our duty to become as physically comfortable in worship as possible. Bring some liquid consumable (including coffee for those who can't wait for the fellowship hour that follows), slide the sunglasses

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=58.

to the top of the head, take off your shoes—settle back and worship. All of that and more I have recently witnessed from my OPC back pew.

Cross-bearing in the Christian life may sanctify us through the suffering of our mortal bodies, but apparently not in worship. This seems to be a burden that we will no longer abide. Gone is the sanctifying austerity of hard, wooden pews. I don't mean to suggest that churches must go to lengths to make worship physically taxing. (I happen to like air-conditioning.) But there is some incoherence introduced when one confesses one's only comfort in life and in death all the while maximizing creature comforts.

The problem doesn't end here, of course. Consumption of liquids begets other bodily needs, and I've noticed that the, err, pit stops among parishioners are on the steady increase. Growing up in a sterner age, I was taught to take care of business before you entered the Lord's presence, and as a parent I've learned that you can condition children in this way at a rather young age. But such discipline is dismissed today as "unnatural" and, thus, repressive. The body must not suffer for the nourishment of the soul.

Even here, I am struck by the spontaneity of these potty breaks. Calls of nature formerly required the artful exercise of a discrete exit that minimized its effects on others' worship. Now the sovereignty of the bladder insists on walking out at any point in the service.

Lest I be confused for a purist, let me confess that I am not above the point of popping a Queen Wilhemina mint. My sojourn in the Continental Reformed circles established the ritual of taking a *Dutch aspirin* in the middle of the sermon. I reckon it a ministry to the folks I will fellowship with after the service. And it seems a far cry from the well-equipped worship tote bag of today that often resembles the aftermath of successful trick or treating. (And while I'm at it, remember too, baby boomer readers, how you could not chew gum in school, much less get away with it in worship?)

Don't get me wrong. I am not accusing anyone of having their god as their belly (or their bladder). Paul's reference is not to worship slack-

ers. But I do wonder whether the mind can be set on heavenly things when the body beckons for constant care and attention. ;

You Know, for Kids!

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Eutyclus II

In a recent online debate over the Federal Vision, the question was posed: What was the problem in the Reformed Faith that Federal Visionists sought to resolve? Peter Leithart responded that it was high time that the Reformed church fully acknowledge the covenant status of her children (read: paedocommunion). Whether or not he identified a real solution to a genuine problem, Leithart's post, entitled "For the Children," leaned heavily on a deep theme in contemporary American Protestantism, a sentiment succinctly expressed by Norville Barnes from the Coen brother's screwball comedy, *Hudsucker Proxy*: "You know, for kids!"

About twenty years ago, many sociologists and pollsters were predicting that baby boomers had left mainline churches for good. However, those number crunchers were proven wrong, and now they are changing their tune. Boomers have become "boomerangs," and they are returning to church in large numbers. Why is that? You know, for kids!

Children are motivating a lot of decisions for churchgoers today. Graying boomers themselves may be squishy in their commitment to absolute values, but neither do they want a purely relativistic environment for their children. Their search for some moral rootedness for their children has led them on a pilgrimage back to church, which suddenly becomes an important feature of their lives. A recent Gallup survey indicated that nine out of ten Americans say they want religious training for their kids. Another survey found that boomers are

3 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=82.

nearly three times more likely to return to church if they have children.

The priority of children has prompted arguments for leaving church as well as for rediscovering church. In a recent article in the liberal *Presbyterian Outlook*, a minister warned against leaving the mainline Presbyterian Church for trite reasons, and he suggested that the conservatives who were concerned about human sexuality resembled ancient Donatists with their quick-trigger exoduses. But he withdrew from making this a universal principle by conceding that some may be leaving for legitimate reasons. "A couple may want to find a more suitable church for their children." These folk, he reasoned, should not be forced to stay put. So homosexual clergy is trivial, but a well-oiled youth program is valid. *You know, for kids!*

Look up any manual for church growth and you are sure to discover that a key for success is a quality youth and children's program. Well-documented pressures on the contemporary family are making parents all too eager to outsource the covenant nurture of their kids: the growing divorce rate, working mothers, single parent families, blended families, *yadda, yadda, yadda*. Train an army of workers to provide the highest quality youth ministry possible, and watch your attendance explode. Build the better youth program and they will come.

And therein also lies the rationale for children's church. Let's excuse our little tykes from the most boring aspect of worship. Thankfully, this is rarely seen in Orthodox Presbyterian circles, though regrettably it has caught on in other former bastions of Reformed orthodoxy, like the once robust Christian Reformed Church. Ultimately, the offense in the concept of children's church lies less in presuming our young kids need it than in the arrogance of adults presuming that they don't. Henry Coray once observed, when he was Cornelius Van Til's pastor, how the famed theologian would sit in church spell-bound, ready to receive the word of God with the eagerness of a child.

Paedocommunion aside, perhaps Leithart may have a point when he wonders whether Reformed parents really believe that the means of grace are

effectual. The means of grace are, you know, for kids. They are given for those who come with the childlikeness that our Lord commended. Perhaps our churches could do worse than to borrow from another contemporary salesman and promote their services for "children of all ages." ;

✦ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

On Being Presbyterian: Our Beliefs, Practices and Stories

by Sean Michael Lucas

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
June 2007¹

by Darryl Hart

On Being Presbyterian: Our Beliefs, Practices and Stories, by Sean Michael Lucas. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006, xv + 271 pages, \$14.99, paper.

How can I recommend a book that shows believers how they can join a Presbyterian church other than the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? This is more than the impasse of a book reviewer. It is the dilemma of reconciling the general with the particular, Presbyterianism in the abstract with Presbyterianism embodied in a particular denomination.

To understand this predicament, readers need to know that Sean Michael Lucas's new book, *On Being Presbyterian*, is a welcome addition to the idea of Presbyterian identity. As the subtitle indicates, the book is divided in three sections devoted to beliefs, practices, and stories. The first covers

divine sovereignty, the doctrines of grace, the high points of covenant theology, ecclesiology, and the sacraments. In the second section on practices, Lucas devotes attention to the characteristics of Reformed piety, Reformed worship, and Presbyterian ecclesiology. The last part on stories is a fairly brief survey of Presbyterian history from the time of Knox's Scotland to the present. (Lucas examines the history of the OPC even-handedly in one of these chapters.) This division of the subject of Presbyterianism is not without difficulty. An editor might well have suggested that Lucas put ecclesiology and sacramental theology in the section on practices. To separate the sacraments (beliefs) from worship (practices) could be confusing.

Even so, Lucas's larger point is well worth considering. He is concerned about recovering Presbyterianism as an identity, not merely as a denominational label, system of theology, or form of church government. As such, he argues that in addition to theology, both history and religious practices define Presbyterianism. But his argument is much more personal. Lucas is not trying simply to identify the Presbyterian branch of Western Christianity; his purpose is pastoral because he wants this Presbyterian identity to stick in real people, for it to become a way of life. Our personal stories and family histories have a great influence in defining us. So do our practices or habits, certain things we do simply because of who we are. Lucas does not diminish the importance of theology, and the section on doctrine is the longest part of the book. But for too long conservative Presbyterians—probably since the fundamentalist controversy in the 1920s—have regarded doctrine as the glue that would hold them together. They paid insufficient attention to the place of history as well as the relation between faith and practice in either passing on the faith to their children or enfolded new members into the Presbyterian way. As Lucas explains in the preface, American Presbyterians are facing an identity crisis. "Many of our church members, and even some officers, do not have a solid understanding of what it means to be Presbyterian. In exchanging one church for another, they have not yet learned the narratives, distinctives,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=50.

and practices of their new spiritual home. As a result, our members often find themselves somewhat at a loss to explain to their friends and family why they belong to a Presbyterian church” (xi).

This book would be highly useful to hand to new members or those seeking membership in an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation. Except that the book winds up instructing readers how to join the Presbyterian Church in America. “Now, perhaps you have been reading these pages,” Lucas writes in the epilogue, “because you are considering membership in a Presbyterian church, particularly in a church that belongs to the PCA.” From here Lucas goes into procedures from the PCA’s Book of Church Order and the specifics of membership vows. Then he concludes in the following manner: “I would invite you to join us on the journey of becoming Presbyterian.” The first person plural here clearly refers to the PCA. Now, of course, the PCA is the OPC’s sister denomination and joining her would not be a mistake. But by concluding this way—Lucas also begins the book with the admission that he writes as a pastor in the PCA—he has significantly limited its usefulness to denominations like the OPC. In fact, by highlighting a specific denomination within Presbyterianism, Lucas likely hurt the chances that his book would be read and recommended by Orthodox Presbyterians. The point is not that the OPC is better than the PCA. It is that no church would allow representatives from another denomination to recruit its members to join another church.

Why did Lucas write his book this way? One reason is the admirable one that he is a churchman and wants to assist the life and witness of the PCA. Another, less commendable, is a certain confusion about the relationship between the abstract and the concrete. In his introduction, Lucas writes something different from the desire he expresses in the conclusion. “The most important thing is not that your identity is Presbyterian,” he explains, “but that your identity is shaped by Jesus Christ” (11). This is indeed a seemingly noble sentiment, but it abstracts Christianity in two unhelpful ways. First it isolates church membership from being united to Christ, a dangerous move if the Westminster

Confession of Faith is right when it affirms that the visible church is the “kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” Second, and in a similar way, Lucas’s notion of identity in Christ being more important than Presbyterian identity abstracts Christianity from Presbyterianism. If Presbyterianism (or Reformed Christianity), as the OPC has long contended, is the most consistent and fullest expression of Christianity, to suggest that the *generic faith* is as good as the *particular faith* ironically misses the genius of Presbyterianism. Perhaps if Lucas had sorted out the relationship between Christian and Presbyterian identities he might have seen a way to describe Presbyterian identity without favoring one denomination over another. ;

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Sent: The Essential Guide for Email in Office and Home by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Sent: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home, by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007, 247 pages, \$19.95.

Have you ever inadvertently sent a confidential email to the wrong person? When church officers do this it can be disastrous. David Shipley and

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=81.

Will Schwalbe will help church officers avoid such pitfalls. The authors are genuine media ecologists—observing the nature of the medium of electronic mail and insightfully assessing its benefits and liabilities, with recommendations on how to embrace the former and avoid the latter: “Seven Big Reasons to Love Email” (17–20); and “Eight Reasons You May Not Want to Email” (22–29); “Seven Big Reasons to Use the Telephone Instead of Email” (42–43). The book is full of memorable rules of thumb such as reminding us that the telephone is often more efficient; always more personal.

This is a long-overdue book of etiquette for email users. Shipley and Schwalbe demonstrate a keen perception of the unique “messages” built into every medium. For instance, “We remember that letters are permanent and so tend to use our best spelling and grammar.” And “We also email fast—too fast” (10). Email’s lack of face-to-face perceptions tends to undermine “social intelligence” (11). There can be no doubt that the authors have read Marshall McLuhan. “*How you send something can have a profound impact on what you’re sending. Your method of delivery sends a message of its own*” (15). “It’s really a matter of taking the time to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each form of communication before committing to one” (16).

As fans of humanity, Shipley and Schwalbe are high on the personal, and sometimes with a nice touch of humor: “Don’t forget to show up sometimes” (50). The golden rule of communication technologies is: “Never do anything electronically that you would want others to do to you in person” (51).

Shipley and Schwalbe are also fans of good form. They pay attention to the details of good email correspondence, with an eye for protecting reputations, feelings, privacy, and old-fashioned good manners. The ease and speed of email tend to foster sloppiness and breed informality. Thus, extra caution is necessary. This book is full of things we tend to ignore, like the subject line. “The Subject line is the most important, most neglected line in your email” (78). Using concise,

specific information makes your email stand out from the mob. And above all, remember that everything you send is potentially permanent and potentially public.

I used to think that the “Hi” or “Hello” so many people use as a greeting, whether or not they know you, was a new form I needed to adjust to. Not so! “Dear” is still preferred, unless you are on very familiar terms. As it turns out, many of the things I learned about letter writing in school still pertain to email, at least when it comes to initial contacts. On the other hand, with the proper header, an exchange may be efficiently carried on with single sentences, phrases, or words. This is a benefit of the efficiency and speed of email.

Another important matter of form is good grammar. Again, the informality of email tends towards poor grammar. The authors have high regard for the nuances of language as tools of communication. Poor grammar and misused words reflect poorly on you, and detract from the effectiveness of your message. This has not changed with technology.

Even sages, however, have blind spots. Shipley and Schwalbe are far too sanguine about instant messaging (IM)—and a related subject: multitasking, a euphemism for trying to work with multiple distractions. The lack of concentration in our work is not only proving a very inefficient use of time, but often an ineffective one. Quality work in many fields is on the wane. The authors do offer a helpful distinction between many conflicting tasks, like checking email during a meeting and sending a document pertinent to the meeting during the meeting. Fair enough, but I remain a skeptic.

Shipley and Schwalbe conclude with two memorable aphorisms: “Think before you send. Send email you would like to receive” (222). Loaded with sagacious advice for the everyday email user, this is a must-read for sessions and diaconates. It will save you lots of grief. Miss Manners could not have done better. ;

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Review Articles

Scholar of the Heavenland

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Yong H. Kim

God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos, by Meredith G. Kline. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006, xv + 293 pages, \$31.00, paper.

This octogenarian's final book culminates his lifelong study of the Word of God. *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* delightfully portrays God and his glorious plan for his bride, the church. Kline does this by leading us on a journey through the Bible and, in particular, the story line of *Har Magedon*, the mountain of God. For God's enemies, this mountain is a place of gathering for the eternal judgment of God, but for God's people, this mountain is a place of gathering for the heavenly banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb. Faithful to the Bible's central message, Kline helps us to see the beautiful love story of God, explaining the history of God's redemption, how God through his Son, Jesus Christ, accomplishes the eternal heavenly reality for his people through judgment and blessing.

Kline defines the meaning of "Har Magedon." The Hebrew word "Har" means "mountain." Explaining that John supplies the meaning of Hebraistic terms in the immediate context, Kline shows how Revelation 16:16 provides the meaning of "Har Magedon" as "the mountain of Gathering." "And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon" (Rev. 16:16 NASB). Then by connecting Isaiah 14:13

and Psalm 48:2, he further shows that Mount Zion or Jerusalem is the mountain of Gathering, the Har Magedon. In Isaiah 14:13, the "mount of assembly" or the "mount of gathering," is appositional to the "far reaches of the north" or "heights of Zaphon." And in Psalm 48:2, "Mount Zion" is appositional to the "far north" or again, "heights of Zaphon." Thus, Mount Zion or the city of Jerusalem is the Mount of Gathering, the *Har Magedon*.

In the Garden of Eden, we see the first *Har Magedon* battle in the "earthly arena." The first Adam had to perform perfectly the will of God to earn for himself and his posterity the consummated sabbath of the kingdom of God. This arrangement is what we call the covenant of works. In Ezekiel 28:13-14, God addresses an arrogant king. And there God says to him, in verse 13, "You were in Eden, the garden of God," and in verse 14, "you were on the holy mountain of God." By putting these verses together we are able to conclude that the Garden of Eden was the mountain of God. Then at the Mount of Gathering, in the Garden of Eden, we see the *Har Magedon* battle between the first Adam and Satan. This is the continuation of "the *Har Magedon* conflict that had erupted in heaven" (68) between God and Satan. But the first Adam completely failed, and with him, all mankind fell into sin. Perhaps Satan thought that he had won. However, the *Har Magedon* battle continued.

The *Har Magedon* battle has continued, but now God's people have a new representative, our Lord and Savior, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He will crush Satan's head and cast him down to Hell. But no longer through a covenant of works would God's people inherit the kingdom of God. A new covenant was needed, the covenant of grace, which would depend upon the eternal covenant made between the Father and the Son. "It is through his fulfilling of his probation assignment as Servant in his eternal covenant of works with the Father that the Son is entitled to be the Mediator-Lord of the Covenant of Grace" (74). It is here in Kline's discussion of the covenant of grace that we see one of his most welcomed statements, "The overarching Covenant of Grace ... was to unfold

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=56.

in several pre-messianic administrations (including the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants) and have its full, culminative expression in the New Covenant.” He does not describe the Mosaic covenant as exclusively a covenant of works. “Carrying forward the Abrahamic Covenant as they do, both the Old and New Covenants are, like it, administrations of the Covenant of Grace” (96). Of course, “at the same time the Scriptures indicate that in the Mosaic economy there was superimposed as a separate second tier on this foundation stratum of gospel grace a works arrangement” (96).

In chapters 9 and 10, Kline shows small *Har Magedon* battles from Noahic, Abrahamic, and Davidic Covenants in which Noah, Abraham, and David were types of Jesus Christ, the Guarantor of the New Covenant. That brings us to chapter 11, the last chapter of the book, “*Har Magedon* in the Messianic Finale” (145). As a transition from “the old typical pattern to the New Covenant stage of the *Har Magedon* warfare” (145), Kline uses the visions of Daniel, especially the vision of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9. The figurative seventy weeks are the duration from the time of Daniel to the final consummation of the kingdom of God. In Daniel 9:25, we learn that “from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.” And verse 26 tells us that “after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off.” Thus, our Lord’s death to the final consummation of the kingdom of God is one week. “Yet in the unfathomable wisdom of God this cutting off of the Messiah is the legal basis for the New Covenant; his blood is ‘the blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ ” (150). But in verse 27, we also learn that “for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering,” which points to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. So the church age currently is in the last three and a half days. We see again in the book of Revelation that three and a half years are a “symbolic period which we will be identifying with the interim leading up to the antichrist crisis and the second advent of Christ” (153). This interim is the church age. It is the thousand-year kingdom era, but it is

also a time of “persecution for the covenant community” (166).

We see the same thing in Revelation 11, where the church is symbolized as two witnesses. In verse 7 we read, “And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them.” And in verses 11a and 12b we read, “But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet.... And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.” Here we see how the church of Christ is called to be like her Lord, imitating her Lord. The church as a whole lives out the very life of her Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ died on the cross and just as He was resurrected from the dead, the church is pictured to live the same life as her Lord. The life of the church is patterned after her Lord—suffering here on earth, entering glory in heaven. “Whether viewed from the earthly (3 1/2 years) or heavenly (thousand years) perspective, the interim history of the church militant is a martyr age in the double sense of the church’s witnessing to Christ and suffering for Christ” (179).

“The Gospels reveal Jesus in the process of fulfilling the primal prophecy of Genesis 3:15. He appears as a divine warrior locked in mortal combat with the devil” (159). Yes, the *Har Magedon* battle did not end in the Garden of Eden. Jesus is successful in his defense of *Har Magedon* (159). And “only by the passive obedience of his submission to the Cross can Jesus silence Satan, the accuser of the brethren. The crushing of the serpent’s head by the messianic seed of the woman is at the cost of the bruising of his heel” (160). “Ratification of this final administration of the Covenant of Grace took place on the cross; Jesus’ blood shed there was the blood of the new covenant” (162).

Kline’s treatment of Revelation 20 is very helpful. He begins by looking at Matthew 12:28 where Jesus says, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Jesus signals the coming of the kingdom of God then in verse 29, “Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder

his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.” Kline then moves to Revelation 20, saying, “And again, here even more clearly, there is a curtailment of Satan’s previous world-wide success as a deceiver of the nations. This restriction of his evil influence is symbolized as a binding and imprisoning of the dragon in the locked and sealed Abyss (Rev. 20:1–3, cf. v. 7)” (161). Jesus is then the stronger warrior who plunders Satan, rescuing his people (161). Jesus’ binding of Satan will last a “thousand years,” throughout the church age. “The millennium begins at the first advent. . . . The millennium ends at the antichrist crisis and the return of Jesus to execute final judgment on Satan’s forces at the final battle, the battle of *Har Magedon*” (172). Indeed, in Revelation 20:7 we read about the release of Satan from his prison after the thousand years. Satan will “come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle” (Rev. 20:8). When his forces surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city, Jesus our Lord will return to judge Satan’s forces. “This antichrist episode is a resumption of Satan’s challenge to the Lord of *Har Magedon* in Eden in the beginning, conspiring to overthrow him and to seize the cosmic throne on the heavenly mount (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4)” (181). “The outcome of this battle of the great day, the battle of *Har Magedon*, is the triumph of Christ, the salvation of the saints, and the doom of Satan and all his evil followers” (179).

I would like to conclude by commenting on Kline’s understanding of the Lord’s Day observance during the church age. His understanding of worship on the Lord’s Day and its significance is a brilliant witness to biblical teaching. However, he believes that observing the entire Lord’s Day as a holy day is no longer the will of God for us who live in the New Testament time. This is the one matter in the book with which I have serious disagreement. Kline argues that, since the work of God during the six days of creation was a “holy kingdom-establishing activity,” the work of Israelites during the six days must be the same. “This means that sabbath observance requires a

theocratic as well as a covenantal setting, that is, a setting in which culture as well as cult is holy kingdom activity” (190). And we see only two historical situations that would fall into that category: Eden and Sinai. “In the New Covenant era . . . in which the common grace principle is uniformly operative, the theocratic context prerequisite to the six-work-days component of the sabbath ordinance is missing” (190). Thus, the cultural activities of God’s people in the New Covenant are not holy kingdom activities, they are common grace activities (194). So now “only one day then has a special significance in the covenant week under the New Covenant” (194). The covenant week under the New Covenant is “no longer a cultural-cultic sabbathal week” (196). Thus, we cannot identify the sabbath with the Lord’s Day. “And this means that contrary to traditional Sabbatarianism the distinctive first day of the new, dominical week is not a modified residue of the sabbath day of the fourth commandment, governed by the rules for sabbath observance, such as the prohibition of various non-cultic activities” (196). Thus, the first day of the week is not the Lord’s Day, as in the whole day set apart for us, but “simply the set time for believers to come together to meet with the Lord” (194). The Lord’s Day of Revelation 1:10 is not the first day of the week but the Day of the Lord. But this Day of the Lord has an “already” and a “not yet” aspect. “It was inaugurated as the first advent of Christ through his resurrection and ascension. . . . There will be a climactic finale” (192). “But ‘the Lord’s day’ of Rev. 1:10 refers to the already realized heavenly enthronement of the Lord Jesus” (193).

Kline argues that the “prohibition of various non-cultic activities” is exclusive to theocracies. The question that may be raised then is this: Did Abraham, in a non-theocratic era, observe the sabbath, the whole day, as a holy day? Kline deals with this question in one sentence, “If there was sabbath observance in other covenantal contexts in redemptive history before the Law (e.g., the patriarchal community), it would be due to the presence there of an earthly altar perceived as a symbolic mountain of God, a stylized *Har Magedon*” (190).

To me, this response may actually be used to argue that the patriarchs did in fact observe the sabbath as a holy day. In fact, God Himself made the sabbath day holy in Genesis 2:2. This setting apart of the whole day was first done at creation, not originally through Moses. Exodus 31:16–17 attests to the eternal significance of the sabbath, calling it a “covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel.” Consequently, both the sabbath and the Lord’s Day point to the same heavenly reality. In the Old Testament, the week was structured so that the pattern for life was to look forward to the eternal rest of God. But in the New Covenant, because that rest has been accomplished spiritually by our Lord Jesus Christ, the week is structured to begin with that rest. The six days of work that follow are to be lived in terms of that rest which has already been accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ. Having said all that, I truly believe that Kline’s motivation in arguing his point was to obey God. He was driven by the truths that he saw in the Bible. But I lament the fact that there will be people who may misuse what Kline has said to justify their sinful desire to use the holy day for their selfish, worldly interests.

Even for those who do not agree with all of Kline’s points, this Christologically focused book is a must. He reminds us that the word of God is indeed sweeter than honey. Let us pray that God would continue to bless his church with people like Kline. ;

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Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South

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by Danny Olinger

Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South, by Ralph C. Wood. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004, xii + 272 pages, \$15.00, paper.

Ralph Wood’s *Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* reads much like O’Connor’s fiction—jarring, uncomfortable at times, penetrating, powerful, and nearly impossible to put down. The book is a study of O’Connor’s work as it bears on the life of the contemporary church and one of its regional cultures, the South. Wood’s premise is that O’Connor’s literature has supreme value for the church because in it “she was willing to slay certain things that seem to be good—the seemingly necessary modifications of the gospel that would make it fit modern needs and thus ensure its success” (11).

Wood argues that O’Connor was attracted to writing about her native South for the same reason that H. L. Mencken ridiculed it as the “Bible Belt”—Southerners still took God and religion seriously. The title of the book comes from O’Connor’s often repeated words: the South, while hardly Christ-centered, “is most certainly Christ-haunted” (37). For O’Connor, a person could scarcely live in the South without being affected by Christianity—usually of a fundamentalist Protestant stripe. Even for those hostile to Christianity, or for the nominal Christian, Southern culture was permeated by Christ. O’Connor thought such a Christ-haunted region was preferable to the alternative, but she was not naïve about its weaknesses. She exposed over-zealous unbelievers, who turned against the church, as well as smug half-believers,

² http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=38.

who were no believers at all. Consequently, according to Wood, her work “constitutes a massive assault on Christian presumption, even as it serves as a splendid summons to skeptics, half-believers, and unbelievers alike to join the glad way of the gospel” (x).

This is why O’Connor admired Southern fundamentalists. Disenfranchised, mocked as primitive and ignorant, and passed over by cultural elites, they knew what they believed, and what they believed was the supernatural power of God and the Bible. Wood writes, “She saw that Southern Fundamentalists held fast to twin realities often abandoned by Christians and secularists alike: an unembarrassed supernaturalism on the one hand, and a deep veneration of Holy Scripture on the other” (35). These downtrodden Christians were radical in their faith, and for O’Connor, who was less concerned to preserve Southern civilization than to reclaim Christian radicalism (4), they were perfect protagonists for her stories.

Explaining that she knew she was writing to an unsympathetic audience, Wood expertly lays out O’Connor’s writing method. O’Connor wrote violently (“to the hard of hearing you shout” [219]), and yet with utter precision (“a story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is” [7]).

The theme of her stories was constant, the desperation of life apart from grace and the utter need to face the reality of God in Jesus Christ. Wood comments, “In most of O’Connor’s stories the central characters undergo a painful confrontation with their own pride and presumption, behold themselves in the blinding light of divine grace and, if only at the last moment of their lives, come to radical conversion” (217). Wood notes that O’Connor’s overtly redemptive writing led critic Robert Drake to declare “Jesus is the real hero of O’Connor’s fiction” (159). O’Connor herself admitted “the best of my work [sounds] like the Old Testament would sound if it were being written today” (159).

Wood unpacks O’Connor’s stories in a way that demonstrates her larger religious point. Power-

ful chapters include, “A Roman Catholic at Home in the Fundamentalist South”; “The South as a Mannered and Mysteriously Redemptive Region”; and “Demonic Nihilism: The Chief Moral Temptation of Modernity.”

The book’s tone is set by Wood’s treatment of O’Connor’s most famous story, “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” in the opening chapter. Wood approaches the story by contrasting the Grandmother with “The Misfit.” The Grandmother confesses faith, but lives as if God does not matter. She is well-meaning, but self-serving and concerned primarily with appearances. “Her life rests on nothing more solid than her desire for respectability. She wears a hat and gloves when traveling so that, if found dead beside the road, she will be recognized as a lady” (39).

Opposite her is the murderous Misfit, whose “unbelief is as thoughtful as the Grandmother’s piety is unreflective” (41). The Misfit believes there are two options in life, not religion and science, but the gospel and nothingness. His choice is nothingness, and he lives out his creed by destroying everything in his path. Yet, when he speaks, he clearly formulates the gospel he opposes. He is angry that Jesus raised the dead, for resurrection means that Jesus is either incarnate God or a fake. For The Misfit, there is no third option concerning Jesus. There is also no third option to the gospel and nihilism. “From the fundamentalist sermons of his Baptist boyhood, The Misfit knows that he must either gladly embrace or bitterly reject Jesus’ invitation. There is no safe middle way, no accommodating alternative to the drastic extremes of belief and unbelief, no bland neutrality between Jesus Christ and absolute nothingness” (41).

When The Misfit and the Grandmother meet, it highlights O’Connor’s paradigmatic clash between demonic nihilism and smug half-belief. The Grandmother is willing to abandon Christ to save her earthly life. Wood observes, “She is a practical atheist. When faced with the threat of death, therefore, she is willing to deny her faith in an attempt to save her life. The Grandmother is a woman who lives by her own lights, though they provide little illumination of her sinful condition. She is

O'Connor's portrait, not of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, but of the average Christian soul living amidst the compromises and deceptions of ordinary life" (40).

When the Grandmother finally tells the truth and says to The Misfit, "You're one of my children," The Misfit kills her. The truth that she speaks is that "she is not a good woman; he is not a good man; they are in terrible trouble, and they both need radical help" (39). The Misfit then speaks the truth about the Grandmother, "She would of been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (39). This is a clear articulation of how life must be eschatologically focused.

Also very powerful is Wood's analysis of O'Connor's most controversial story, "The Artificial Nigger," in the chapter "The South as a Mannered and Mysteriously Redemptive Region." Wood informs us that this rarely taught story was O'Connor's personal favorite because it gives "the fullest fictional embodiment to her firmest convictions about both race and religion" (153). It is also the one story in the O'Connor corpus in which "she instructs herself and her readers in the meaning of the gospel" (153).

Wood writes that when O'Connor submitted the story to the *Kenyon Review* in 1955, the editor returned it to her. The editor requested a new title without the odious word that appeared in her submission. She refused. To lose the chosen title would rob the story of its real power, "the power to invert racist intention into antiracist redemption" (144).

A grandfather, Mr. Head, plans a train trip to Atlanta to expose his grandson Nelson to Negroes and the big city, hoping that Nelson will repudiate both forever. The pair arrives in the city and circle leftward—a literary reference to Dante and the sinister spiral into hell. Nelson loses his way in the black ghetto and cries out for help, only to have Head hide from him. When Head does appear, he denies any connection with the boy, a repeating of Peter's denial of Jesus. Head recognizes his treachery and tries to smooth things over with Nelson, but it is too late. There is a sin problem not only between races but between the nearest of kin. The

grandfather betrays the boy in his time of greatest need in the strange streets of Atlanta, and the boy refuses to forgive. Rather, his hatred of Head grows to match Head's hatred of others.

Together they wander into a white suburb where they encounter "an artificial nigger," a cast cement Negro statue, in the lawn of a house. This "artificial nigger," however, is missing the typical images of black servitude, holding a lantern or a horse's reins. Instead, he holds a piece of old watermelon. Watermelon brown, eye chipped out, and lurching forward, he gives a miserable appearance. And, beholding this pitiful figure, the two are changed. Wood comments,

Though meant to signal the proud triumph of whites over blacks, the scornful effigy becomes a sacrament of reconciliation to these mutually sinful kinsmen. The crimes they have committed against each other begin to melt away in the presence of this inhabited Cross. (148–49)

O'Connor makes this reference to Jesus and the cross clear in the story itself. In what Wood calls one of her "most controverted passages," she writes,

He (Head) stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw that no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise. (149–50)

O'Connor chose to explain what the action

of mercy means, instead of simply dramatizing it, and she chose to do so using theological language. Wood defends these choices: “O’Connor has made clear from the beginning that Nelson and Mr. Head are engaged in a struggle whose proportions are absolute, and that their lostness at the end is metaphysical rather than geographical” (150).

The story also illustrates O’Connor’s conviction that the gospel alone has the power to reconcile black and white, old and young. That gospel is shocking and scandalous; its Savior is an offense and a stumbling block, even grotesque, but it has the power to change lives. Wood comments,

Her “artificial nigger” thus becomes the ultimate antiracist emblem. It reveals something far more profound than the evident evils of slavery and discrimination. It discloses the subtle grace inherent in suffering that can be redemptively borne because God in Christ has borne it himself. (153)

Integration is not the ultimate solution to the problem of racism; the ultimate solution is the gospel of reconciliation. Wood concludes, “Flannery O’Connor was not a racist, either politically or theologically. I maintain, on the contrary, that she was a writer who—though not without temptation and struggle—offered the one lasting antidote to racism” (94).

An excellent treatment of O’Connor’s obsession with nihilism and its destructiveness is found in Wood’s analysis of O’Connor’s acclaimed first novel, *Wise Blood*. In *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes takes nihilism to its logical extremes and preaches a gospel of nothingness (since anything worth believing must also be worth evangelizing) in his self-invented “Church without Christ” (168). This is the new American gospel and church, even though the church only has Motes as a member. Wood observes,

He announces the new American gospel with consummate complacency: “Nobody with a good car,” declares Hazel Motes,

“needs to be justified by Jesus” ... Motes’ broken-down Essex is indeed his deity: he sleeps in it, preaches from it, and relies on it to escape from all obligations that are not of his own choosing. (15)

It is his pulpit, his residence, and his instrument of death. But, as Wood notes, “Hazel Motes’s life of murderous self-justification ends, appropriately, when a patrolman destroys his automobile idol” (169). He looks away from himself for the first time and radically repents, blinding and cutting himself to show gratitude “for the salvation that has already been won for him at the Place of the Skull” (169). “Motes has stumbled backward out of his nihilism and into what St. Paul calls ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21)” (189). Violent nihilists do not seize the kingdom of heaven; rather, it is graciously given to the unsuspecting.

Wood, however, does more than interpret O’Connor’s literature. He also comprehends her strong convictions that ran contrary to social convention. He explores O’Connor’s belief that manners—not mere politeness, but the formal gestures that both bind and separate people—were important. She believed “that the social manners of the South, despite their many deceptions and hypocrisies, could sometimes serve as a reflection of God’s own incarnate love” (129). Manners “constitute a code of conduct that summons us to treat others with dignity and respect” (124). They are in some respects a secular acknowledgement of original sin.

But, manners could only play a supporting role for O’Connor. They could never be a substitute for faith. Part of the power of O’Connor’s writing is seen in the fact that “she sought a rough artistic manner that would convey the unmannerly matter of her faith” (126). Her lady villains, such as the Grandmother, insist on decorum, but it is a decorum that hides a dark soul. Wood maintains that manners for O’Connor in the end could not suffice because the gospel the church proclaims “calls for reconciliation rather than toleration” (4).

Wood also points out how much O’Connor

resisted and countered the emerging consensus of American civil religion. The temptation before the contemporary church is to sacrifice the distinctiveness of the gospel and put it in the service of other things. The subordination of the theological to the political “creates Puritanism without transcendence, without sense of sin or judgment” (20). National identity trumps faith, and the result is the impossibility of a supreme love of God. One cannot love God supremely in civil religion, and little else matters to O’Connor. Wood writes, “Her fiction is fierce and violent because it seeks to show what it is like for her characters, if only at the last minute, to love God absolutely” (30).

The most significant flaw in the book is Wood’s attempt to make O’Connor Barthian in her view of Scripture and preaching. He cites a review O’Connor wrote in which she says, “I distrust folks who have ugly things to say about Karl Barth. I like old Barth. He throws the furniture around” (10). However, Wood provides little evidence that O’Connor saw the Bible in a Barthian sense. Given her pre-Vatican II Catholicism, it is more likely that O’Connor saw the Bible as the very Word of God (contra Barthianism, which maintains that Scripture is not the written Word of God but may become the Word of God in proclamation, so far as God allows).

Wood also makes occasional poor theological pronouncements. The most egregious is his declaration, without scriptural support, that suffering and death are unrelated to the Fall and are coeval with human existence.

Although Wood’s theological flaws must be acknowledged, they do not overwhelm O’Connor’s voice or the great value of the book. For those interested in reading and understanding O’Connor, this is the best guide available. But, here also is a book that transcends literary categories as Wood does force the Christian reader to consider the effect of the church’s compromise with the philosophical and cultural trends of the day. O’Connor wanted nothing to do with half-hearted belief. Wood is right in questioning whether the contemporary church believes the same today. ;

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Covenant Theonomy

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by Bryan Estelle

Covenantal Theonomy: A Response to T. David Gordon and Klinean Covenantalism, by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2005, 241 pages, \$19.99, paper.

Disagreement can be a great achievement. T. David Gordon and Kenneth L. Gentry definitely disagree. They disagree over reconstructionism, or Theonomy, which denotes a “theological, social, political and ethical movement calling for the transformation of civil society along biblical lines modelled upon the Mosaic (OT) civil polity.”² Gordon wrote in 2002, “I am friendlier to Theonomy than Calvin was: he thought it was ‘perilous, seditious, false, and foolish.’ I think it is perilous, false, and foolish; but I don’t consider it seditious.”³ Gentry, a spokesperson for the reconstruction movement, as is apparent from his current day job (research professor in theology at Christ College in Lynchburg, Virginia, and an instructor at Bahnsen Theological Seminary), has offered a rebuttal to Gordon’s lengthy critique of Theonomy since Gentry thinks that it has had significant influence (42).⁴

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=45.

2 R.S. Clark, “Reconstructionism,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. Jack Campbell, Gavin J. McGrath, and C. Stephen Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 601–2.

3 T. David Gordon, “Response,” *Modern Reformation* (May/June 2002): 48. This clarification to Gordon’s original article, “The Insufficiency of Scripture,” *Modern Reformation* (Jan./Feb., 2002): 18–23, is strangely missing from Gentry’s book.

4 T. David Gordon, “Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (Spring, 1994): 23–43.

The book consists of five chapters: chapter 1 introduces the primary occasion and motivation for writing the book, an eleven-year belated response to Gordon’s article, although it quickly becomes evident that others (e.g., Meredith G. Kline, the editors of *Modern Reformation* and *Westminster Theological Journal* [WTJ]) are in the gallery as well (as the subtitle indicates); chapter 2 interacts with Gordon’s argument, specifically what Gentry calls “the argument from necessity”; chapter 3 deals mostly with the crucial issue in the debate over the meaning of the important passage in Matthew 5:17–21; chapters 4 and 5 address differences in the broader issues of covenant theology; chapter 6 forms the conclusion with a summary of the contents of the various chapters and the final summary of Gordon’s critique, which Gentry suggests is a “wholesale failure” (227).

Gentry’s book is organized around a response to the three issues of Theonomy that Gordon discussed in his WTJ article. The first issue in Gordon’s article, “argument from necessity,” essentially means that “we need to know how to function in the civil arena, and therefore the Word of God must provide us with such instruction.”⁵ This issue is taken up by Gentry in chapter 2, although since the “sufficiency” issue was raised in chapter 1, implicitly Gentry’s critique first came up there. Gentry’s primary criticism here is that Gordon misrepresents Theonomy (including Bahnsen himself, whom both writers admit is recognizable as the best representative of the movement). Gentry claims that the argument which Gordon wishes to criticize, i.e., “the argument from necessity,” is not an argument “promoted by any published advocate of Theonomic Ethics” (223). This is a serious charge, if true, since peer-reviewed journal articles, such as Gordon’s WTJ piece, entail carefulness on the part of the author and editors. They must ensure that other ideas are represented fairly despite possible disagreement, and that authors refrain from *ad hominem* or personal attacks.

Unfortunately, Gentry’s potentially devastating point here is not a needed corrective: quite the contrary. Gordon had discussed these issues in the

5 Gordon, “Critique of Theonomy,” 25–26.

academic article in *WTJ* and later in a forum on the sufficiency of Scripture in *Modern Reformation* magazine. Gordon's real point in his earlier *WTJ* piece, and later written up in more popular form in *Modern Reformation*, is that Theonomy is a good illustration of the misunderstanding of the "primary purpose" of Scripture. Gordon himself (and the editors at *Modern Reformation*) admitted that the discussion about Scripture's sufficiency could have been better framed in the language of "primary purpose" of the Scriptures rather than "The Insufficiency of Scripture" and that this would have avoided some false dichotomies and needless provocation, and helped readers embrace the fundamental point and needed corrective that Gordon was attempting to make.⁶ Unfortunately, it seems that Gentry is among those who missed the point. Since the clarification to the original article is not quoted anywhere in the book, so far as this reviewer could see, perhaps Gentry did not read it, or if he did, I am mystified at his not including it in his overall analysis of Gordon's critique.

In my opinion, raising the issue of the correct understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture, or, as put in the later published material, the "primary purpose" of Scripture, is not an insignificant or unrelated matter with respect to a biblical evaluation of Theonomic ethics. Rather, a proper understanding of the primary purpose of Scripture, along with correctly discriminating the applicability of the theocratic judicial laws to later epochs in the civil sphere, is integrally related to the issues raised by Theonomy, with respect to a possible overextension of the concept of the sufficiency of Scripture.

Chapter 3 raises the key issue of the interpretation of Matthew 5:17–20, which all parties recognize as a crucial passage in understanding the role of biblical law during the New Testament age. At issue is the understanding of Matthew 5:17 in its larger context and the communicative intention of *abolish* (**kataluṣai** *katalysai*) and *fulfill* (**plhrwsai** *plērōsai*). Gentry accuses Gordon of not paying attention to the scriptural context here (57), again, a serious accusation, if true, to levy at a thoroughly trained professor of Greek and religion

6 See Gordon, "Response," esp. pp. 48–49.

and New Testament scholar practicing his own craft.

Gentry emphasizes that the Sermon on the Mount is intensely focused on ethical concerns and obligations and in this respect he faithfully represents how the majority of interpreters have understood the Sermon on the Mount.⁷ However, Gentry's understanding of this important passage is deficient, as is his use of the secondary sources. In particular, his deficiency in quoting certain authors is interestingly something for which he faults Gordon!

For example, in his defense of Bahnsen's exegesis of this passage, as well as his position that Jesus is *confirming* the law and the prophets (his take on translating **plhrwsai** *plērōsai*), he says Hagner's commentary "goes on to observe that 'prophets' is added 'in the first instance [to] refer to the further stipulation of the requirements of righteousness, i.e., of the will of God.'" ⁸ However, simple research will reveal that Gentry has botched the quotation: the actual quote has been lifted inappropriately from its context. This is the case because the quote is actually embedded in a concessive clause, "*Although* [emphasis mine] the 'prophets' here may in the first instance refer to the further stipulation of the requirements of righteousness, i.e., of the will of God . . . an added dimension with the implication of fulfillment is introduced by these words."⁹ This gives the sentence its correct emphasis.

Indeed, Hagner himself, whom Gentry quotes tendentiously, correctly understands that the issues raised by this crucial passage cannot be solved by mere word studies alone but must be understood with deference to the larger context, particularly verse 18 and verses 21–48.¹⁰ Hagner continues:

7 See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 30.

8 Gentry, *Covenantal Theonomy*, 57 (quoting Hagner).

9 Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Waco: Word, 1993), 105.

10 *Ibid.*, 105.

Since in 5:21–48, Jesus defines righteousness by expounding the true meaning of the law as opposed to wrong or shallow understandings, it is best to understand [plhrwsai plerosai] here as “fulfill” in the sense of “bring to its intended meaning”—that is, to present a definitive interpretation of the law, something now possible because of the presence of the Messiah and his kingdom.¹¹

In other words, for Hagner, “the way in which the law retains its validity for Matthew is in and through the teaching of Jesus.”¹² This is correct, I believe.

This discussion demonstrates a fundamental astigmatism regarding a correct reading of Matthew 5:17–20 by Theonomists. By insisting on a translation of plhrwsai (plerosai) as *confirm/ratify*, they simply miss Matthew’s point. To the original auditors of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, the most jarring message would not necessarily have been the new teachings, although Jesus’ penetrating reading of the law, the demand for perfect obedience, and the application of the law would no doubt have found its mark, but the real surprise is the teacher Himself. This fact was driven home to the present reviewer when he was reading a Jewish author on the Sermon on the Mount years ago, not a Christian interpreter:

Yes, I would have been astonished. Here is a Torah-teacher [referring to Jesus] who says in his own name what the Torah says in God’s name. It is one thing to say on one’s own how a basic teaching of the Torah shapes the everyday . . . It is quite another to say that the Torah says one thing, but I say . . . , then to announce in one’s own name what God set forth at Sinai. . . . For what kind of torah is it that improves upon the teachings of the Torah without acknowledging the source – and it is God

11 Ibid., 106.

12 Ibid., 107.

who is the source of those teachings? I am troubled not so much by the message, though I might take exception to this or that, as I am by the messenger.¹³

Hagner emphasizes that “Jesus’ words stress [commenting on ‘not one iota or mark’] that the law is to be preserved not as punctiliously interpreted and observed by the Pharisees (although the language apart from the context could suggest such a perspective) but as definitively interpreted by Jesus the Messiah.”¹⁴ Gentry seems to miss this in the midst of his criticism of Gordon.

There is a third area which Gentry identifies in his criticism of Gordon: his understanding of covenant theology, which Gentry and Gordon consider of the utmost significance. Particularly at issue here is not only the broad systemic understandings of covenant theology generally, but necessarily the confessional implications more narrowly, especially Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 19. At issue here are the topics of covenant continuity vis-à-vis discontinuity between old and new covenants and the reality of legal elements in relation to gracious elements in Sinaitic covenant.

Underlying the issue of discontinuity in covenantal administration is what Geerhardus Vos calls the “principle of periodicity,” something essential for a proper hermeneutic of Scripture. Vos writes that this “principle of successive Berith-makings (covenant-makings), as marking the introduction of new periods, plays a large role in this [the organic, progressive nature of Scripture], and should be carefully heeded.”¹⁵

What this means for the application of God’s law is exactly what Calvin wrote in his own demonstration of biblical exegesis. Contrary to Gentry’s repeated claim for continuity between not only the moral law and its modern application but also the judicial laws of the Old Testament and their mod-

13 Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus: An Intermillennial, Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 30–31.

14 Hagner, *Matthew*, 106.

15 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 25.

ern application to present day civil society, Calvin in his understanding of the law and its applications was more nuanced. The reader should consider, for example, two brief citations from Calvin, *Institutes* II.7.15 and II.7.16.

For Christians, no longer under the Old Testament dispensation, according to Calvin, “the moral law now no longer condemns us, because of Christ. Though it retains the power to condemn, its use is not to condemn, but to point to Christ. So the moral law is not abolished in use, but in effect, or in one of its effects.”¹⁶ On the other hand, according to Calvin, “the ceremonial laws were indeed abrogated in use, but not in effect.”¹⁷

Consider now, Paul Helm’s summary after a careful discussion of these passages of Calvin. Helm makes a similar point to the one cited by Vos above but with specific application to God’s law and ethics:

What these nuances reveal is that Calvin’s approach to ethics, or the part played by the revealed law of God in ethics, is heavily influenced by his understanding of the progress of revelation and of the successive eras of God’s unfolding redemptive purposes. This makes a straight comparison between his views and those of the Medievals, who understood divine law in a rather more formal and abstract way, somewhat difficult.¹⁸

Scripture itself, as well as Reformed luminaries such as Calvin and Vos, have maintained the importance of recognizing the principle of periodicity for a correct understanding and application of biblical law.

Simply stated, the issues are more complicated than Gentry portrays. Lacking sensitivity to the progress of redemption, an indigenous principle revealed by Scripture itself, Gentry has misunder-

16 Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford, 2004), 351.

17 *Ibid.*, 351.

18 *Ibid.*, 351–52.

stood the function and application of Old Testament law to the ethical sphere of the civil realm today.

Leaving aside other possible reasons for this astigmatism, just as a fuller understanding of Matthew 5:17–20 would have led Gentry to a more refined and accurate understanding of the law’s function for today, so Gentry’s facile discussion of the continuity/discontinuity aspects of biblical law is necessarily superficial and, therefore, deficient not only in its description but its prescription for ethics. He should have said much more in some areas and much less in others.¹⁹

This Theonomic confusion on this point in turn leads to an inadequate understanding of the Westminster Confession, as one would expect (see WCF 19.3–4). Gentry wants to make much of the distinction between the ceremonial laws being “abrogated” vis-à-vis the judicial laws merely “expiring” together with the state of that people, i.e. Israel. In keeping with his Theonomic assumptions, he desires to soften the latter word in comparison with the former used by the Divines. Although the qualifying statements in 19.4 are perfectly clear for the purpose of “freighting” the language of “expire” correctly, perhaps some further confessional exegesis will clarify since the word “expire” is used nowhere else in the Westminster Standards.²⁰

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is helpful here. The legal connotations of “expired”

19 Compare, for example, Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2 (trans. George Musgrave Giger; ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 167: “Although the best and wisest laws (as far as the state of that people was concerned) were sanctioned by God, it does not follow that on this account they ought to be perpetual. God, from positive and free right, could give them for a certain time and for certain reasons, to some one nation, which would not have force with respect to others. What is good for one is not immediately so for another.”

20 I have in mind especially, “not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.” The reader should see A. Craig Troxel and Peter J. Wallace, “Men in Combat over the Civil Law: ‘General Equity’ in WCF 19.4,” in *WTJ* 64 (2002): 307–18. Also see Sinclair B. Ferguson, “An Assembly of Theonomists? The Teaching of the Westminster Divines on the Law of God,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (ed. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 315–49.

seem to be the most apt choice: “to cease, come to an end, die out, become extinct.”²¹ In other words, the judicial laws of Israel “ceased, came to an end, died out, became extinct,” with that political body, i.e., Israel, “not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require” (WCF 19.4). It seems strange to me, in light of Gentry’s derelictions from the plain meaning of the WCF, that he repeatedly criticizes Gordon’s having taken issue with the Westminster Standards. However, anyone who would carefully read Gordon’s clarifying response to the first *Modern Reformation* article will note his very cordial attachment to the WCF and some fine, nuanced confessional exegesis as well despite his criticisms of the confession at points. Gentry’s argumentation with respect to WCF 19.3–4 is strained at best, and more probably cuts deeply across the logic of at least chapter 19 of the Confession.

Conclusion

If disagreement can be a great achievement, then this book may offer some *slight* help in further clarifying what differences really exist between Gentry and Gordon. Nevertheless, the previous emphasis on slight is deliberate and the reader will have to judge whether investing the time, let alone the money, is worth the read. T. David Gordon has written, “Theonomy is a serious and significant departure from the Reformed tradition’s formal and material principles; as such, it must be carefully evaluated and refuted, not dismissed outright.”²² To me, Gentry’s book, an attempt at a rebuttal of the previous statement, has made little—if any—progress in a reversal of this opinion. ;

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21 See entry 6c in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), “Of an action, state, legal title” (p. 434).

22 Gordon, “Response,” 48.

The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church, by Shane A. Hipps. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005, 176 pages, \$18.99.

Pastor Hipps has written a thoughtful, readable account of the media-critical approach to electronic culture, an approach spawned by Marshall McLuhan in the sixties. Pastor Hipps’s love for the Lord and his desire to communicate the gospel to people are evident throughout the book. He explains the McLuhan perspective with great clarity. This is the true value of the book. But when it comes to applying these insights to the church and the Christian life, Hipps is a good deal more sanguine about the benefits of electronic media than I am, although he does not fail to raise some important cautions, especially in chapter 6 on “Community in Electronic Culture.” I suspect that the difference in our respective ecclesiologies, at least in part, accounts for the difference. The Anabaptist Mennonite context of his ministry, which he has only recently, but intentionally, chosen, tends toward a far less structured approach to doctrine in general, and the doctrine of the church and its worship in particular. Accordingly, the foreword is written by a leading light of the emerging church movement, Brian McLaren. Hipps is thus sympathetic with the epistemology and cultural milieu of postmodernism. Beyond this Hipps’s generational perspective may also account for his technological optimism. I have wondered for some time now whether the “crossover generation” of us baby boomers is uniquely disposed to retain literary cul-

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1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=51.

ture in a way that the younger generation—I never liked “generation X” as a designation—simply cannot understand. They have never known a world without computers and cell phones.

By parsing the book’s title we are alerted to both its strengths and weaknesses. The main title, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, reflects the McLuhan metaphor of the fish in water. Electronic culture is a complete environment, like water is to a fish, too close to be aware of and thus “hidden.” The first part of the subtitle, *How Media Shapes*, is an accurate interpretation of McLuhan’s famous aphorism, “The medium is the message.” By filling in the blank (How media shape _____ or This medium shapes _____) one may apply Hipps’s insight to any arena of concern regarding technology’s formative power. In the book Hipps applies this concept to *Faith, the Gospel, and Church*. Since electronic media shape culture generally, Christians and the church are not exempt from their subtle and pervasive influence.

In my own media ecology research I discovered that the Amish—one type of Anabaptist—are not the Luddites I had assumed they were (stopping technological development arbitrarily at a point in the nineteenth century).² While I do not favor—although I sympathize with some of its concerns—the separatist view of culture, I admire some of the ways these Christians have sought to be good stewards of technologies such as the telephone. Recognizing its potential to reshape social structures such as the family and the community, they have limited telephones to public use. “Observing the tendency of the telephone to isolate the individual from the family and the community, they restricted the use of telephones to community locations, to be used only when necessary.”³ That is a fine example of media ecology.

The first half of the book (Part I: “New Ways

2 Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 157.

3 Samuel Ebersole, “Media Determinism in Cyberspace,” <http://regent.edu/acad/schcom/rojc/mdic/html>, quoting Diane Zimmerman Umble, “The Amish and the Telephone: Resistance and Reconstruction,” in *Consuming Technologies*, ed. R. Silverstone and E. Hirsch (London: Routledge, 1992), 184–92.

to Perceive”) helps the reader to discern the electronic environment in new ways. Because Hipps is a pastor he often illustrates his understanding of media with examples that are familiar to Christians. He employs McLuhanesque graphics to make his point—shades of *The Medium Is the Massage*. Some might think this too cool by half, but I don’t think there is a better popular exposition of McLuhan, in less than one hundred pages, in print. It is a *tour de force* against the media naiveté that plagues both church and culture. Hipps crystallizes McLuhan in a way that any thoughtful Christian can understand. Anyone who can explain the famous McLuhan (both father and son Eric developed these) “Laws of Media” in two pages (41–42) deserves an award. He applies the four laws insightfully to the well-known *Four Spiritual Laws*’ fact-faith-feeling train in order to reveal the logical bias of print. Missing, however, is any critique of the theology of that well-known Campus Crusade tract.

Chapter 4 is the segue into the second part of the book (Part II: “Alternative Ways to Practice”), which deals with the practice of the church in the new environment. Just like his chief endorser, Brian McLaren, author of *A New Kind of Christian* and *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Hipps’s view represents a new kind of church and a new kind of orthodoxy.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but it seems to me that the absence of the definite article before the word “church” in the book’s title is significant, given the author’s Anabaptist commitment. It is not *the* church, but church—not an institution or organization, but an organism. Seeking liberation from the arid lifelessness of institutions is a quest common to both postmodernity and the emerging church. Hipps asserts, “For decades our cultural landscape has grown increasingly unfamiliar to the church” (16). If that is true among Anabaptist churches it certainly is not among Evangelicals. Ken Myers’s quip is apropos, “The church is of the world, but not in it.” While the church has sequestered itself from meaningful engagement with the world (challenging its idolatrous assumptions, as well as contributing in a genuine way to its welfare), it often apes its ways of thinking and living. I

would suggest that in part the emerging church is doing the same with postmodernism.

While Anabaptists, according to Hipps, may have largely skipped the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment, traditions that predate both are being ignored or jettisoned in the name of leaving rationalism behind. Foundationalism is the new whipping boy of postmodern and emerging church epistemology.⁴ According to Hipps, to claim that “Scripture is the foundation of truth” is a modernist assumption, locking us into “outmoded . . . apologetics” (70). Despite several disclaimers in his thoughtful exposition, Hipps nonetheless displays the tendency to disregard all traditions and voices of the past, along with systematic expositions of the church’s doctrine (58). It is important to remember that the systematizing developments of Reformation and post-Reformation theology predate the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment. *One of the McLuhanesque aphorisms from Hipps’s all-at-once Web site epitomizes his attitude toward tradition, “What doesn’t bend breaks.”* But what is the starting point and what regulates “recasting the place and purpose of the church” (16)? The guiding and protective boundaries of confessional orthodoxy are sadly absent. One of the many false dichotomies in the book is the idea that mystery and reason are enemies.⁵ This is not so in Reformed orthodoxy. The hard-line distinction between modernity and postmodernity is also, in my opinion, overdrawn. While discontinuities clearly exist in this conventional distinction, the continuity between the two has been largely overlooked by the emerging church. Fallen man’s quest for autonomy fundamentally animates both dimensions of modern culture.

This emerging epistemology leads Hipps to

4 For a very helpful discussion of this epistemological debate and how it affects doing theology, see Robert C. Kurka, “Before ‘Foundationalism’: A More Biblical Alternative to the Grenz/Franke Proposal for Doing Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:1 (March 2007): 145–65.

5 Hipps also has an aversion to “the abstract,” presumably one of the many negative consequences of rationalism. He makes pejorative references to it throughout the book. Let me suggest that images are also abstractions and that it is essential to human perception to abstract in order to make sense of experience.

assert that both methods and message “should change and evolve” (88). He goes on to claim that the new content (wine) of the gospel changes along with the container (wineskin), leaving the old behind (89). Hipps confuses the unfolding development of redemptive history with epistemological change. Clearly Jesus had the former in mind, McLuhan the latter. “The emerging gospel of the electronic age is moving beyond cognitive propositions and linear formulas to embrace the power and truth of story” (90). When narrative and propositional truth are pitted against one another in this way, we are, in my opinion, heading down a dangerous pathway. For Hipps, claims of unchanging truth are boastful. But while arrogance may be the sinful attitude of some who make such claims it seems that to jettison the value of propositional truth and reasoned theological understanding is to cast oneself into the maelstrom of postmodern confusion and relativism. Thus God’s chosen medium is for Hipps not the preached Word, but the people of God. “If God’s chosen medium was Christ, and the church is the body of Christ, then the church is God’s chosen medium for God’s ongoing revelation to the world” (92).⁶ Again he pits metaphor and image over against reason and truth. This is an unbiblical dichotomy. The “open-ended and ambiguous” seem to trump everything (93).

Hipps also favors the egalitarian tendency of electronic media. This is, of course, in keeping with the instincts of the Radical Reformation. “Power is now dispersed among the pews” (130). While he claims that authority in the church, and even in the printed medium of Scripture, are important, he seems to underestimate the dangers of electronic democratization in which everyone’s opinion is king. His desire to see the program oriented church change to a more community oriented concept is salutary. His desire for more humility and servanthood in leadership is also good. But what he seems to sacrifice in the process of achieving these is troubling.

Regarding worship, Hipps reports with ap-

6 My own use—and I believe this was original with me—and explanation of the term “God’s chosen medium” may be found in the chapter titled “Tongues of Fire: God’s Chosen Medium,” in *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 313–53.

proval that “the emerging churches are intentionally designing worship services that engage all five senses” borrowing heavily from Eastern Orthodoxy, with “body movement, incense, chanting, bells, eating, and images” (76). Absent is any notion of public worship being regulated by the express warrant of Scripture. Of course, this is not Hipps’s tradition. Interestingly, he is enthusiastic about the emerging church’s acceptance of conversion as a process that varies in each person’s experience (79), something Presbyterians have always believed.

Hipps properly decries the radical individualism of our culture, but is far too optimistic about a new communalism developing in the postmodern church (72). The very denial of the validity of absolute truth, cognitive propositions, and logical formulations, is a form of epistemological assertion of individual autonomy unequaled by the most confident modernist. It is true that the primarily oral cultures were, by the nature of their communication, tribal or communal. But the secondary orality of electronic culture seems to create, as Hipps accurately describes it, “a tribe of individuals” (105). Hipps then sums up the ambiguity of his own position: “My belief is that despite the retribalizing force of electronic media, our culture remains intensely individualistic” (108).

This is a media ecology book written by a Christian reflecting on the effect of the electronic environment on the church, something there are far too few of. Despite the serious reservations I have expressed above, I recommend this book to the critical reader. ;

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Soul Searching: Religion among the Teens

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers, by Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, x + 346 pages, \$25.00.

Never has it been more important to understand what is going on in the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers, given the confusion that exists in trying to understand them. Smith’s book does what few before him have done: explores the religious and spiritual dimensions of the lives of American teenagers. Even studies that focus on the sociology of religion usually look at those eighteen and older. The National Study of Youth and Religion is a unique scholarly research project conducted from 2001 to 2005 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where Christian Smith was professor and associate chair of sociology. He is presently professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame, Director of the Center for the Sociology of Religion, and continues as principal investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion. He studied at Wheaton College, has a BA from Gordon College, and an MA and a PhD from Harvard University. Melinda Denton is the project manager of the National Study.

The book is based on hundreds of 30- and 50-minute telephone surveys and 267 extensive face-to-face interviews with religious and non-religious teenagers in 45 states. The questions cover a “broad range” of differences in religion, age, race,

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=52. Portions of this review were originally given to the adult class in Amoskeag Presbyterian Church, Manchester, NH, and titled “Soul Training: What We Can Learn from Christian Smith about Instructing Our Children in the Principles of Our Holy Religion.” The lecture is available in audio format at www.pilgrimcrossings.org under “Sermon Audio/Sunday School.”

sex, socioeconomic status, rural-urban-suburban, regions, and languages. It is the largest study of its kind to date. Smith and Denton upend much conventional wisdom by drawing conclusions that will come as a surprise to most. For example, the research reveals that 1) religion is a significant presence in many teenagers' lives; 2) the religion of teens is remarkably conventional, not alienated or rebellious; 3) few teens are interested in eclectic spirituality as opposed to conventional religion; 4) religious diversity is not more varied than it has been for a long time; and 5) parents have the most significant influence on the religion of teens. Unremarkably, the research also confirmed that life outcomes are far better for religious than non-religious teens (259–64).

More disturbing is Smith's discovery (he calls it a "conjecture") of an emerging American culturally pervasive religious outlook that he calls "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (MTD). He believes that this may be the "new mainstream American religious faith for our culturally Post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalist society" (262). Smith perceptively relates this emerging outlook to pervasive digital communication and therapeutic individualism.

The analysis of this emerging consensus (Chapters 4 and 5, especially pp. 162–92) reveals a five-point creed (162–63), which is more like five cultural assumptions:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to solve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Smith goes on to unpack the terminology of his label "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Moral-

ism is a central element in American religious thinking. Thus, religion helps a person be good. Central to a happy life is being a good person. Being good makes a person feel good about himself. Being nice, responsible, hard working, likeable, and fulfilling your potential are the right way to live. Goodness saves people in the end and makes them ready for heaven.

Religion is also therapeutic. This is not a religion of repentance from sin, serving a sovereign Lord, self-denial or Sabbath-keeping. Religion is about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace—in short, subjective well-being. God is always there for you, to help you through problems. Helping others and praying make one feel good about oneself.

Finally, all religion has a God who created a moral order but is not "personally involved in one's affairs—especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved" (164). He is involved only when people call on him. But he is not just distant like seventeenth-century Deism, but he is there to meet our needs if we wish. He is not a demanding God, but a combination of the Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist. He gives you whatever you want, but not anything bad.

People take from their faith traditions whatever suits them—a kind of designer religion. Thus, of all teenagers interviewed, including "conservative Protestants" (a category broader, but more clearly defined than evangelical), few spoke of grace, Jesus Christ, sin, etc. "Feeling good and being happy" summed up their aspirations. "The cultural influence of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism may also be nudging American civil religion in a 'softer,' more inclusive, ecumenical, and multireligious direction" (170).

The consummate sociologist, Smith digs deeper to explore the social context fostering MTD. He identifies three major cultural themes among others: therapeutic individualism, mass-consumer capitalism, and electronic communications.

Therapeutic individualism is a theme explored at length and with great depth by sociologists like Robert Bellah and Christopher Lasch.² Smith

2 Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a*

gives a brilliant summary. The individual self is the only authentic source of all knowledge, especially spiritual and moral. Personal experience is the final measure of what is good and true. We do not adjust to society, but seek liberation from it (173). The self is no longer sacrificed or denied, but is to be affirmed and actualized by society. Instead of pastors, parents, and lawmakers, we have therapists, counselors, and social workers. Alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, and domestic violence are no longer sins or crimes, but diseases or disorders. The sovereign self is enthroned and rules. People are guided by feelings instead of clear thinking based on moral and spiritual principles. It pervades every institution. External authority and tradition, especially in matters of religion, are no longer part of the “plausibility structure” of American culture. Spirituality is a means of self-fulfillment.

Therapeutic individualism served and is, in turn, served by mass-consumer capitalism. Mass-consumer capitalism is not merely “the efficient production and distribution of goods and services; it also incarnates and promotes a particular moral order” (176). It defines the human self “as an individual, autonomous, rational, self-seeking, cost-benefit-calculating consumer” (176). It seems that this is the way it has always been. But this is actually a product of the Industrial Revolution. Christians become spiritual consumers in the religious market, choosing a church and teaching that suits their autonomous quest for self-fulfillment, “satiating one’s self-defined felt needs and desires” (176).

Mass-consumer capitalism fosters a move from tradition-centered to individual-centered religion (177). Authority resides in the autonomous self. Designer religion is the result of the mass consumer concept of the menu of choices—unlimited choices. In the name of choice and non-conformity, submitting to this mentality is a “major act of

Post-Traditional World (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William N. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979).

conformity” (177). For example, TV is not about entertainment, much less education, but about buying audiences. TV religion is, thus, a contradiction in terms. Mass-consumer capitalism creates needs, but meets very few actual human needs. It appeals to the darker side of human nature: insecurity, envy, greed, vanity. The American teenager is increasingly the target of advertising, like the drug dealer hanging out at the school yard fence. Except parents invite him in. The warning signals are everywhere.

The final major influence is electronic communication. Communication technologies (computers, the Internet, e-mail, cell phones, etc.) have changed the entire structure of the social space inhabited by teenagers. They have decentralized the “authority of gatekeepers” (179). Focusing on non-cognitive images of commerce and entertainment, the rational, thoughtful mode of print is fast disappearing. A whole new way of thinking dominates culture, which cultivates the sovereign, mass-consuming, happiness-seeking self. Not an easy self to assimilate into a confessional church.³

Filled with charts and sample interviews, this book is a rich resource with which Christian educators, church officers, and parents need to become aware.

How Should This Analysis Shape Our Teaching and Living?

Cultural and sociological analysis is an eminently Christian concern in light of the life-altering demand of the gospel enumerated by Paul in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The following practical conclusions are based on several of Smith’s explicit recommendations, along with a few additions of my own—which are implicit in this book.

1. We should continue to cultivate intra-

³ See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985); *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

generational ministry growing out of worship, not creating separate worlds of teenage and adult life. We must refrain from promoting “alienating stereotypes” such as treating teens as if they are aliens, rebels, or impossible to understand. On the other hand, we must not idealize youth as a goal, but rather demonstrate the desirability of growing up into mature adults. Perpetual adolescence should be frowned upon. Thus, we should engage teenagers as young adults in the making.

2. We should teach our teens to distinguish between civil public discourse and the offensive public communication of their religious convictions; between biblical tolerance, which is loving communication of the truth, and secular tolerance, which is silence about one’s religious convictions. Political correctness and philosophical relativism are silencing the public and personal witness of the church among teens.

3. We must be alert to the ways that our culture seeks to undermine a healthy concept of the church and human life, and seek to develop cultural and apologetic awareness in our teens. For example, we should make them aware of TV programs that portray adults as stupid, unwise, or immoral. Show them the unhealthy effect of segregating teens into various groups, which subtly—and sometimes not so subtly—teaches them that they are by nature not welcome in the adult world.

Teach them good stewardship of electronic media. Acquaint them with the messages of all inventions; the ways that technology changes our world and our view of the world as a total environment that needs to be critically analyzed. Challenge them to discover the ways that mass media and culture allure them to conform in ways that are contrary to godliness. We need to help them understand maturity defined by being servants of God and others, not selfish consumers (Smith’s “instrumentalist view” of religion—“it works for me”).

4. Finally, we must teach our young people to own the language of the Catechism and the Bible.

One of the pervasive problems with the teens Smith interviewed was an inability to articulate their beliefs. Rote memory is the beginning—but an essential beginning—not the end. We should emphasize the particularity and exclusivity of the claims of Jesus Christ and the gospel—as our second public profession vow says: “its doctrine of salvation . . . the perfect and only doctrine of salvation.” Talk to them about the attributes of the Trinity, Christ’s person and work, the meaning of the gospel, sin, repentance, self-denial, etc. Smith heard almost nothing of these things expressed by “conservative Protestants.” Public service ads regularly tell us to talk to our teens about drugs. It is even more important to talk to our teens about what they believe.

I recommend this book to all church officers and those who lead in Christian education. This book can help us assist parents in fulfilling the second vow of baptism, in which they promise “to instruct” their children “in the principles of our holy religion as revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church; . . . and to endeavor by all the means of God’s appointment to bring [them] up the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” ;

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Recent Noteworthy Monographs on the Old and New Testaments

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by John V. Fesko

Introduction

Each year publishers release hundreds of new titles for consumption by the theologically thirsty masses. Unless one knows the author, trusts the endorsement on the back cover, or perhaps sees the book recommended elsewhere, the reader is often left wondering whether a book is worth the money. To assist the reader in the process of sifting through the vast sea of ink, we can briefly survey four recent and noteworthy monographs that can be of great benefit for both the pastor and ruling elder alike. However, the reader should in no way consider such commendation as a wholesale endorsement of the whole book. There are always areas where the reader will disagree with the author. Nevertheless, a discerning reader, a good Berean, will be able to read these monographs and reap great benefits.

Old Testament

Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament, by Christopher J. H. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006, 160 pages, \$15.00, paper.

Christopher Wright has written what may be considered a companion volume to his earlier *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*. If many Christians find looking for Jesus in the OT a challenge, then it might be even more challenging to look for the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, Wright does a good job of explaining the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT by organizing his book into five chapters: the creating, empowering, prophetic,

anointing, and coming Spirit. He begins, for example, with the Bible's opening chapters and shows the work of the Spirit in creation. He then goes on to show that the Spirit was active not only in creation but also in the providential sustenance of the heavens and earth, citing such passages as Job 34:14–15: "If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust" (NIV). Wright then goes on to relate the work of the Holy Spirit to the future, to eschatology. He explains how the present creation suffers but that Christians must realize that these sufferings are part of the birth-pains of the new creation's revelation, one that has been begun by Christ and is birthed by the Holy Spirit.

Overall, Wright does a good job of tracing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit through each of the stated chapter themes. He not only explains the Holy Spirit's work in the OT but also traces the connections to the present work of the Spirit in the inaugurated eschaton. One wishes, though, that he had devoted some space to treatment of the desert tabernacle and later Solomonic temple, specifically the glory-cloud presence of the Lord. One could supplement Wright's work with Meredith Kline's *Images of the Spirit* in this regard. Wright's work is based upon a series of lectures that he delivered on the subject. This book is accessible to both the ruling elder and pastor. For those interested in a good study for laymen, Wright's book very well could fit the bill.

Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible, by Stephen G. Dempster. *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003, 267 pages, \$22.00, paper.

Stephen Dempster has written a book that no minister should be without. Dempster's work is perhaps one of the best books on a biblical theology of the OT to date. The book's title, however, does not adequately convey the excellent content within. Dempster's thesis is that the OT canon, according to its Jewish order, not the order given

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=55.

in the Septuagint, which we find in our English Bibles, gives a coherent literary tapestry that paints one picture. In other words, his argument is that the OT Hebrew canon presents a coherent plot-line from beginning to end. He notes, for example, how the book of Genesis, the first book in the Hebrew canon, ends with Joseph's speech that God will visit them and bring them out of Egypt to the promised land and that the last book in the canon, Chronicles, ends with the second exodus, the return to the land from Babylon. He points out the parallel in the terminology used in both books:

“I am about to die; but God will surely visit (dqP' *paqad*) you and bring you up out (hl' ['alah) of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Gen. 50:24)

“Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: Yahweh . . . has charged (dqP' *paqad*) me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may Yahweh be his God and be with him! Let him go up (hl' ['alah).” (2 Chron. 36:23)

Dempster explains, “Consequently, these two books, which function to introduce and conclude the canon and which have such strikingly similar endings, keep the main storyline in view with two of its important themes—dynasty and dominion—being realized through the Davidic house” (49).

While there are undoubtedly smaller exegetical details where the reader will disagree with the author, the overall case that Dempster makes is convincing. He shows how the OT narrative develops the two themes of dominion and dynasty, not only through the historical portions, but also in the other literature, such as the wisdom and poetic literature. For example, in the Psalter, Dempster notes that there is an eschatological expectation of the Messiah's rule over the whole earth. In this way, then, we see the expectation set forth in Psalm 2, and after a series of laments in Psalms 3–7 over the Davidic exile, a return to the regal

destiny of mankind through the reign of Christ in Psalm 8. Dempster also shows in *the book of the twelve*, otherwise known as the minor prophets, that the organization of these books likewise has a specific literary structure. He explains that the Lord roaring from Zion closes the prophecy of Joel (3:16; MT 4:16) and opens the following prophecy of Amos (1:2); Obadiah follows Amos and deals with Edom, which features in the last chapter of Amos (9:12); Jonah treats the repentance and salvation of Nineveh, and Micah predicts the judgment of a proud Assyria; and Nahum consists of a series of oracles describing the fall of an unrepentant and incorrigible Nineveh (183).

The broader implications of Dempster's overall thesis are manifold. We see the coherence of the OT canon as a whole; the OT is not simply a ragbag collection of stories. There is a narrative story line that unites the whole. Dempster's work truly reveals the literary beauty of God's revelation. It shows not only the care that went into the editing of the Hebrew canon, but also the providential oversight in such a production. Given this narrative cohesion, this then helps the minister or elder see the OT from a bird's-eye view and enables him to show the church the connection between the different parts of the OT canon. In this respect, Dempster's work is far superior to the recent entry by Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Bartholomew and Goheen seem merely to rehearse biblical history, though they do attempt to trace the themes of covenant and kingdom throughout the Scriptures. And, as important as it is to do so, they do not connect the concatenated whole as well as Dempster does. One cannot help but think that Dempster's work would be an invaluable tool in the many Sunday School classes or sermon series where the pastor undertakes a survey of the Bible. While Dempster's work is aimed at those with a seminary education, a careful and studious reading of the book can also be of great benefit to the ruling elder.

There is one issue that Dempster's work raises, namely, the differing order of the Hebrew canon and the Septuagint. Is there a theological differ-

ence between the two? Should we return to the order of the Hebrew canon in our own English Bibles? In one sense, the message of the OT does not change if the books are read in a different order. However, reflecting upon the differing orders perhaps reveals the theology of the respective editors. In the former, the emphasis seems to be upon returning to the Promised Land and dwelling in the presence of the Lord. In the latter, the emphasis appears to be upon looking for the coming Messiah and the dawn of the age to come. Both endings of the Hebrew canon, understood from the New Testament perspective, are valid, so long as the desire for the land and God's presence is understood in a typological fashion (e.g., Heb. 11:10). At the same time, this should also give us pause to consider the influence of the Septuagint upon the formation of both the NT and the English Bible. The apostle Paul cites the Septuagint more frequently than the Masoretic text. And, as previously observed, the English Bible follows the order of the Septuagint for the OT canon. Such facts should alert us to the importance of Septuagint studies, something that is likely neglected in sermon and Bible study preparation.

New Testament

Echoes of the Exodus Narrative in the Context and Background of Galatians 5.18, by William N. Wilder. *Studies in Biblical Literature*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001, 309 pages, \$65.95.

In recent years there has been a lot of energy expended on tracing the OT roots for NT concepts. One such recent entry is William Wilder's work, which is the published form of his doctoral dissertation that he submitted at Union Theological Seminary. Wilder's overall thesis is that throughout the book of Galatians, when Paul speaks of life under the law, he has in mind the OT exodus from Egypt. He argues that there is a parallel between Israel's bondage to Pharaoh and their subsequent existence under the Mosaic law. He supports this contention by appeal to Paul's characterization of Israel's existence under the Mosaic covenant, one of "imprisonment" (3:22), "captive under the law" (3:23), that the law was a

paidagwoj (*paidagōgos*) "guardian" (3:24), that Israel was "enslaved to the elementary principles [*stoiceia stoicheia*] of the world" (4:3), and that through Christ those who look to him are no longer slaves but sons (4:7). In particular, he argues that this slavery-language that Paul uses to characterize the Mosaic covenant and subsequent sonship-language to characterize those who have been freed from it echoes the OT narrative of Israel's freedom from slavery to be God's firstborn son (Exod. 4:22).

In the subsequent OT narrative, Israel, God's firstborn son, was freed and was then led in the wilderness by the glory-cloud presence of the Lord. Wilder convincingly argues that the glory-cloud presence that led Israel in the wilderness was the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, then, led OT Israel through the wilderness. It is this OT imagery that informs such statements by Paul as, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18). Or, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). If Wilder's argument is correct, then the exodus background explains why Paul uses language of being "led" and "walking" by the Spirit.

Now at first glance, readers might be skeptical of such conclusions, as some might likely fear over-reading OT narratives and trying too hard to draw connections that are non-existent. Nevertheless, Wilder makes a convincing case and his thesis, therefore, deserves prayerful and studious consideration for several reasons. First, is the OT merely the antecedent history that leads up to the first advent of Christ or is it more? The Westminster Standards have argued that the OT is more than mere history. Writing on the nature of the covenant of grace in the OT, the divines explain:

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel; under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient

and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament. (WCF 7.5)

Here we see that the promises, prophecies, sacrifices and the like *foresignify*, or foreshadow, Christ to come—they serve as types of the antitypical ministry of Christ. This brings up a second point.

Are the types of the OT merely restricted to the persons or specific sacrificial actions of the OT, or do the events themselves, such as the creation, flood, exodus, the establishment of the monarchy, exile, and second exodus, also typify antitypical events and aspects of our soteriology? The Scriptures in a number of places most certainly point in this direction. For example, the apostle Peter explains that the flood was a type and that baptism is the antitype (1 Peter 3:20–21). Given these broader typological connections, Wilder’s thesis deserves careful study.

Drawing connections between the redemption that comes to the church through Christ and the OT shadows shows the consistency of the message of the gospel throughout redemptive history. It also helps those in the pew see the relevance of the OT for the church, and, at the same time, helps them in their sanctification. If Wilder’s reading of Paul’s language in Galatians is correct, which it seems to be, then the worshipper would see that any attempt to return to life under the Mosaic covenant is akin to Israel’s desire to return to slavery in Egypt. Such a picture helps the worshipper see his redemption in more scriptural terms, in terms of the narratives of the OT. This is something that Paul elsewhere instructs his readers to do. Concerning Israel’s Red Sea baptism and subsequent idolatry, Paul writes: “Now these things happened to them as types, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11; translation mine). Again, while some people will inevitably disagree with certain exegetical details, Wilder’s overall case is correct and worthy of

careful study. One should note that knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is necessary to appreciate fully many of the technical points that Wilder makes.

Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark, by Rikki E. Watts. Biblical Studies Library. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 479 pages \$39.00, paper (cf. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997, \$115.00).

Along similar lines as Wilder’s thesis, namely that Paul has the exodus narrative in the background of Galatians 5:18, we find Rikki Watts offering a similar thesis concerning the Gospel of Mark. Watts’s work is his doctoral dissertation, which was submitted to Cambridge University and originally published in the *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* series by Mohr Siebeck. Thankfully, Baker Publishing Group offers a much less expensive imprint of the same book in their Biblical Studies Library Series. Once again at first glance the reader may initially be skeptical of seeing Christ’s ministry in terms of the OT exodus. However, we find interesting evidence that strongly points in this very direction from the gospel of Luke: “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30–31, translation mine). That Luke uses the loaded term “exodus” to describe Christ’s impending crucifixion is significant, especially when we consider he could have used a number of other terms. So, then, Watts’s thesis deserves careful consideration.

Addressing the particulars of Watts’s argument, he explains that one should carefully weigh the opening verses of Mark’s gospel and consider their original OT background. Mark begins the gospel with a quote from Isaiah: “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’” (Mark 1:2–3). Within the original context, Isaiah’s statement is the promise of the second exodus—the return from exile in Babylon. The return from

exile under the leadership of Cyrus, however, was somewhat lackluster, and, therefore, indicated that the true second exodus had yet to occur. Watts's argument is that Isaiah did not have the typological Babylonian exodus in mind but ultimately the exodus led by the one greater than Moses, Jesus, in mind. That Mark begins, then, with the quotation from Isaiah says two things. First, that this is in effect the thesis statement of the whole gospel. And, second, that Mark is explaining that Isaiah had in mind Christ's ministry in his prophecies concerning the second exodus (56).

One should be warned that Watts's work is a challenging read, as it is steeped in Greek, Hebrew, and page-consuming footnotes with references to foreign-language sources. It is, nevertheless, quite rewarding reading for those who are willing to wade into the dense work. While one can grasp the main thrust of his arguments without digging into the denser footnotes, this work is probably more suited for a person with a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. In many respects, taken together, Watts's and Wilder's works are complementary, in that they show the indisputable nature of the Old and New Testaments. And, for these reasons, both can be read with great benefit.

Conclusion

In these four works we find some of the latest and most noteworthy work in both Old and New Testament studies. They all offer both excellent contributions to the continued study of the Scriptures and a wealth of insight for the pastor or elder. They also demonstrate the necessary methodology of always looking to the whole of the Scriptures to understand any one part. How often do we hear NT sermons where the preacher does not show the connection to the OT? Or, vice versa, how many times do we hear OT sermons that never point to the person and work of Christ? If God is the author of both testaments, then we should always explore each in the light of the other. Or, as St. Augustine's maxim tells us, "The old is revealed in the new, and the new is hidden in the old." Admittedly, the two NT monographs are for the stout-hearted reader, yet both provide a stimulat-

ing read. If money is an issue and you can only choose one book, then Dempster's work is perhaps the most cost-beneficial. Nevertheless, with such first-rate scholarship we can deepen our knowledge of the Scriptures and teach our flocks the profound riches of the word of God. And, in learning more about God's salvation in Christ, we will be moved to praise and worship, and will desire to carry the message of the gospel into the nations. ;

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A Spiritual Feast

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Reviewed by Mark A. Garcia

Reformed Dogmatics, vols. 1 and 2, by Herman Bavinck. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2004, 685 + 697 pages, \$49.99 each.

We should be extremely grateful to the Dutch Reformed Translation Society for their work in bringing this important, stimulating publication to an English readership. First, a brief word about the contents of these volumes. After a useful introduction to Herman Bavinck by John Bolt, volume one, *Prolegomena*, covers the nature and method of dogmatic theology, the historical formation of dogma including Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics, and the distinct "principia" (foundations) of theology. This includes the "external" *principium*: revelation as general and special, and the nature, inspiration, and attributes of Scripture; and the "internal" *principium*: faith. Here one finds help-

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=57.

ful, nuanced discussions of revelation and history; the incarnation, language, and the Bible; and the relationship of Scripture to confession in the task of theology. In volume two, *God and Creation*, the greater portion is devoted to the doctrine of God. Under this heading we find sections on the knowledge, names, and attributes (incommunicable and communicable) of God, with a separate, lengthy discussion of the Trinity. We also read here of the divine counsel and decree, which forms an entrance to the doctrine of creation. Parts four, five, and six cover the creation of heaven and earth, the image of God, and providence, respectively. There is much here that will delight and edify the reader. Both volumes (volume three has been released as well) are presented very attractively in hardcover, with a bibliography and Scripture, name, and subject indexes. All of Bavinck's own footnotes have been retained and updated in form, and the subparagraph numbers of the second Dutch edition (and following editions) have been retained in this edition. Both are excellent editorial decisions, which render the final product that much more useful.

In a review of this length I cannot hope to provide a justly comprehensive picture of the contents, let alone the virtuosity, of these volumes. Any portion of these volumes could be extracted and examined here with great profit. In fact, for fuller analysis of Bavinck's work that is still very useful I commend the reviews of Geerhardus Vos.² Instead, having noted its contents, I would like to give you some reflections on Bavinck's commitments as a way of commending his work to the whole readership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Yes, that's right: this reviewer is hopeful Bavinck will eventually become familiar not only to ministers and teachers but to all OPC households!

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) was an extraordinarily astute, knowledgeable man with a depth of commitment to his God that is just as palpable on these pages as is his fervent love of the gospel

² Originally published in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, they are reprinted in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1980), 475–84, 485–93.

and the church. Some of the more doxological portions of the *Dogmatics* could be compared favorably with similar passages from Augustine and Calvin. What especially impressed me, however, as I moved methodically through these tomes was Bavinck's *integrity*. When faced with a challenge to the Reformed faith as he understood it, Bavinck did not simply content himself with repeating and resting in slogans, or treat his counterparts with trite dismissals of their work. Instead, he seems to have learned from everyone he read, even as he often ultimately provided a penetrating, devastating critique of their arguments. His integrity as a theologian is most evident, however, in the way his doctrine of Scripture comes into contact with the hard questions of exegesis: he refuses to gloss over the truly difficult questions which every careful reader of Scripture meets, and yet will not allow these difficulties to throw into question what he recognizes the Scriptures clearly teach. Bavinck has an informed understanding of the problems and challenges of exegesis, yet he does not revel childishly in the ambiguities that a not-yet-sight faith inevitably encounters. At least in this context, his commitment to Scripture as *principium* actually *functions*—it has “teeth”—in the nuts and bolts of exegesis. Here, he has much to teach us.

At the same time, for all its considerable virtues, Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is, of course, not the last word on Reformed theology. In fact, later generations have offered important corrections and modifications of his work, and future generations of Reformed theologians will no doubt continue to do so. For example, on the relationship of revelation, reason, and knowledge Cornelius Van Til represents an internally consistent corrective to the relevant sections in volume one (and portions of volume two) in Bavinck. Also, many of Bavinck's intuitive redemptive-historical insights are developed and given much more coherent expression in the later work of Geerhardus Vos and in those who have followed his lead in biblical theology. At the same time, the careful reader of these two volumes recognizes that neither Van Til's nor Vos's contributions can be fully appreciated without a good handle on Bavinck's system.

Indeed, they both seem to have drunk very deeply at the well of Bavinck even where they correct or develop his ideas.

A careful study of Bavinck could hardly be more timely. In his day, the light of Reformed theology had nearly gone out in his land. The first great step toward its recovery, as Vos recognized in his review of Bavinck, was careful historical study of the great texts and figures of the church, not only sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians but the patristic and medieval fathers as well. This study, abundantly evident in Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, provided the necessary perspective on how and where Reformed theology had lost its way. The threat he recognized as a nineteenth-century theologian was twofold: the emerging experiential, consciousness, and rationalist theologies of Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Kant on the one side; and the more proximate Lutheran and Pietist challenges on the other. If the truth claims of the Reformed faith were directly subverted in the former, it was the very integrity of the Reformed tradition as such that was at stake in the latter. This historical study helped, then, to clarify just what it meant to be Reformed in theology and, inevitably, this brought Bavinck back to the careful, meticulous exegesis of the text of Scripture itself. When it came to the Reformed theologians, he recognized that the need was to be fully and humbly informed by the fathers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but not to reproduce or "repristiniate" them simplistically. Thus, Bavinck's historical study of the catholic, Reformed tradition did not substitute—nominally or functionally—for exegesis (something prevented by his Reformed doctrine of Scripture) but instead drove him, as it should have, to the authoritative text of Scripture itself. And this is one reason why Bavinck is so timely: a constant interplay of Scripture, confession, and contemporary context which always resolves in an unabashedly dependent resting in the testimony of the Word of God. Bavinck has much to say to us regarding what qualifies as a Reformed theology of justification, creation, inerrancy, or the very concept and method of exegesis and theology—each of these press home the question of the distinctive integrity of the Reformed tradition, and thus recall

Bavinck's own concerns.

And what does he teach us? Many things, but at least this: for Reformed theologians, the risky temptation in opposing error is to relinquish much in order to protect much. This was not an option for Bavinck, who repeatedly gives expression to the unity of the Reformed faith, and brings this unity to bear on the questions with which the church is confronted. Indeed, as Bavinck's great cross-Atlantic counterpart, Benjamin B. Warfield, also understood, for all the important ideas held in common with other traditions, the Reformed faith needs to be sharply distinguished not only from gross error but also from every form of inconsistent Calvinism. Thus, in the challenges to Reformed theology posed today by varieties of post-conservatism on the one hand, and of pan-confessionalism on the other, one could justifiably note the eerie similarity to challenges in Bavinck's day. We have much to learn from his robust defense and commendation of the Reformed faith in its unity. In this respect, Bavinck's careful interaction with the theology of Julius Kaftan in volume 1 is especially instructive.

I noted earlier that Bavinck has not given us the last word in Reformed theology. It should be added that, in my view at least, ongoing work in systematic theology will not advance much if it neglects to wrestle honestly and frequently with the gems in this great work (most of which are, in my view, to be found in volume three). Reformed theologians of our present day must return over and over in their pursuits to the meticulous task of exegesis, as Bavinck faithfully did. The student of Bavinck will find that patient pondering over the *Reformed Dogmatics* is a spiritual feast. It is that kind of theology that deepens and enriches the faith of a people for whom "faith turns into wonder; knowledge terminates into adoration; and their confession becomes a song of praise and thanksgiving. Of this kind, too, is the knowledge of God theology aims for. It is not just a knowing, much less a comprehending; it is better and more glorious than that: it is the knowledge which is life, 'eternal life' (John 17:3)."³ For these reasons and many others, this is truly a publication event

3 These are the closing words of volume 1, on p. 621.

worthy of rejoicing. We can hope and pray that this will encourage the kind of theological work for which Bavinck is so greatly revered—the constant commitment to patient exegesis, the responsible and informed interaction with history, the churchly sensibility, and the keen perception into the concerns and needs of the present time. These are the classic priorities of Reformed theology, and they—and we—are deepened and advanced in Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*.

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The Prayer of Jabez: A Berean Look

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by John V. Fesko

The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life, by Bruce H. Wilkinson. Colorado Springs: Multnomah Press, 2000, 96 pages, \$9.99.

Introduction

Prayer is unquestionably a central part of the life of any Christian, or at least it should be. To this end, Bruce Wilkinson wrote a book several years ago entitled *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*. So, then, should not *The Prayer of Jabez*, a book encouraging Christians to pray a scriptural prayer, be received with open arms? The answer to this question all depends upon what the book has to say about the one-verse prayer it commends to the reader:

Oh that you would bless me and enlarge

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=74.

my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!
(1 Chron. 4:10)

The Prayer of Jabez has sold millions of copies, which, at first blush, might lead us to believe that it is orthodox. After all, how can millions of people be wrong? We must not, however, decide matters of doctrine based upon the number of people that line up behind a doctrinal proposition. Rather, we must decide whether a doctrinal proposition holds up to close scrutiny against the teaching of the whole of Scripture.

Therefore, let us carefully consider how Wilkinson explains this little prayer. We will see that he has failed to interpret properly the prayer of Jabez. We will explore the prayer of Jabez, therefore, in its historical and redemptive-historical contexts, and we will also briefly reflect upon a proper theology of prayer. Let us first briefly survey Wilkinson’s understanding of the prayer before we critique it.

The Contents of the Prayer according to Wilkinson

Wilkinson opens with the following statement: “I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers. It is brief—only one sentence with four parts—and tucked away in the Bible, but I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God” (8). Wilkinson then spends the rest of the book dissecting the parts of the prayer. The first request is for God’s blessing. Wilkinson writes, “Let me tell you a guaranteed byproduct of sincerely seeking his blessing: your life will become marked by miracles. How do I know? Because he promises it, and I’ve seen it happen in my own!” (24–25).

Wilkinson elsewhere writes, “If Jabez had worked on Wall Street, he might have prayed, ‘Lord, increase the value of my investment portfolios’” (31). He then explains that the prayer of Jabez is ultimately a request for God to grant more ministry opportunities: “O God and King, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such

a way that I touch more lives for your glory!” (32). The third request is for God’s presence and power: “We release God’s power to accomplish his will and bring him glory” (48). The last request is for God to keep a person away from evil: “‘Stay out of the area of temptation whenever possible,’ Jabez would advise, ‘but never live in fear of defeat. By God’s power, you can keep your legacy of blessing safe’” (74). Now, we must ask, how well has Wilkinson explained this verse?

Looking at the Prayer in Its Context

One of the primary rules of Bible interpretation is examining a verse within its context, because a text out of context is a pretext, which is no text at all. Therefore, to understand rightly the prayer of Jabez, we must examine the context of the passage.

The prayer is found in the midst of a genealogy in the book of 1 Chronicles, written around the time of the Babylonian exile. God had punished his people by removing them from the Promised Land. At this point, the people of God had no land and were dwelling in captivity, or possibly beginning to return to the Promised Land to rebuild the temple under the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah. This historical context tells us that when Jabez asked God to enlarge his territory, he was not praying the modern equivalent of God blessing one’s stock portfolio, nor was he requesting greater opportunities for ministry as Wilkinson explains. Rather, Jabez was asking God to restore the boundaries of the Promised Land that the people of God once possessed. In fact, this is one of the main thrusts of the genealogy.

Another factor to consider is that the prayer of Jabez is not included in the genealogy because it was special. A survey of Chronicles shows that Jabez was not the only one blessed through a prayer of faith and trust in God (1 Chron. 5:18–22; 17:16–27; 21:1–22:1; 2 Chron. 6:12–42; 7:12–16; 14:11–13; 18:31; 20:5–30; 30:18–20; 32:20–24; 33:11–13). Rather, victory and safety through prayer is a major theme of Chronicles. One commentator notes, “The name Jabez in the line of Perez apparently raised a difficulty for the Chroni-

cler. Perez was the ancestor of David whose lineage the Chronicler wanted to exalt. Nevertheless, the name Jabez means ‘pain’ in Hebrew, hardly a flattering name to include in such an exalted lineage. For this reason, the Chronicler introduced his story with the explanation that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers (4:9). His name did not reflect his character. Instead, his mother gave him this name because she bore him in pain (4:9). The reputation of the line of Perez remained intact” (Pratt, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 74). In other words, the Chronicler is showing the triumph of Jabez’s *faith* over his name, not the uniqueness of his prayer. The prayer of Jabez, however, takes on an even greater significance in the light of the advent of Christ.

When we consider the prayer of Jabez in its redemptive-historical context, we gain further illumination. Recall that Jabez’s prayer was that God would enlarge his territory, namely that he would return Israel from exile and restore the Promised Land (cf. 1 Chron. 2:42ff.). We know from other portions of Scripture that God’s promise to give Abraham the land was ultimately not about obtaining more real estate but about heaven itself. The author of Hebrews tells us that “by faith” Abraham “was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:9–10). So then, given the prayer’s redemptive-historical context, Wilkinson fails to account for the nature of the Promised Land and what it means in the light of Christ’s advent.

One cannot transpose Jabez’s request that God would enlarge his territory into one for greater financial or material blessings, even if oriented towards noble ends, such as greater ministry opportunities. Rather, one must account for the typological relationship between the Promised Land (the shadow) and heaven (the reality). We find Jabez’s prayer transposed by the New Testament in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). If we pray the prayer of Jabez, we must do so through the Lord’s Prayer—that God would advance his kingdom, not our stock portfolios. There are theological considerations to which we can now turn.

The Theology of Prayer

Let us briefly consider three main points about the theology of prayer in relation to principles that Wilkinson sets forth in his book.

First, Christ did not teach his disciples to pray the prayer of Jabez. It was a specific prayer for a specific context—a request for God to bless his people by restoring the Promised Land. The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13), on the other hand, explicitly states how all Christians should pray—the aim is the kingdom of God, not personal financial and material wealth.

Second, Wilkinson's explanation of how the prayer of Jabez works nullifies the sovereignty of God. Note who is in control when Wilkinson writes, "God's bounty is limited only by us, not by his resources, power, or willingness to give. . . . What counts is knowing who *you* want to be and asking for it. . . . Through a simple, believing prayer, *you* can change *your* future. *You* can change what happens one minute from now" (29; emphasis mine). Is this how we are supposed to pray? Note the emphasis upon the first person personal pronouns. Is prayer about being who we want to be or is it about God teaching us to desire his will and in response God conforming us to the image of his Son?

Third, according to Wilkinson's logic, we will miss out on God's blessing unless we pray the specific prayer of Jabez. This view nullifies the work of the Holy Spirit. What if a person does not know what or how to pray in a given situation? Paul tells us that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). If Wilkinson is right, then the Holy Spirit is hamstrung if we do not use the correct set of words. If Paul is right, then a person can cry out to God in desperation, in the absence of wisdom not knowing what to say, and the Holy Spirit will intercede for him. Certainly the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul is correct and Wilkinson, while well-intended, is in error.

Conclusion

While Wilkinson has undoubtedly brought his

book forth with sincere motives, it seems to reflect a current trend towards fortune-cookie spirituality. Instead, we should study the Scriptures like good Bereans so that we would know and love Christ. Let us therefore look to Christ in prayer and ask that his kingdom would come, not that our personal wealth would increase. ;

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Ordained Servant publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

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