



*O the depth of
the riches and wisdom and
knowledge of God*

ROMANS 11:33

Memorial for a Model Elder

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From the Editor

One of the great blessings of my pastoral ministry was the presence of gifted, godly ruling elders. The first session that I enjoyed working with was the session of Franklin Square Orthodox Presbyterian Church, where the author of our Servant Memorial, William Shishko, was pastor for over thirty years. The church in New Rochelle where I was a church planter was overseen by that session. “A Model Ruling Elder: Tom Warnock” is a tribute to one of the best ruling elders I have ever known and worked with. G. I. Williamson (editor 1992–2005) would be proud of our continuing to encourage faithful ruling eldership in the pages of the journal he founded, *Ordained Servant*.

The many forces of our technological society have grossly underestimated the superiority of human intelligence and face-to-face presence. Last month in part 1, I gave a brief introduction to artificial intelligence with a brief history and a comparison with human intelligence. This month I consider the unique superiority of human intelligence and personal presence, exploring what King David meant when he declared that he was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). In part 3 I will conclude with the application of parts 1 and 2 in terms of benefits and liabilities.

Danny Olinger continues the series “Jesus, Stab Me in the Heart! Flannery O’Connor at 100” with an analysis of the O’Connor short story “Revelation,” which is considered by O’Connor expert Ralph Wood her finest story. Each month Olinger will be reflecting on a sample of O’Connor’s short stories (I recommend *O’Connor: Collected Works*, The Library of America, 1988). O’Connor is unique among the greatest fiction writers of the twentieth century. “O’Connor’s one overarching theme is Jesus Christ and the scandal of the Christian religion.”¹

Old Testament professor Bryan Estelle reviews *Reading the Psalms as Scripture* by James Hamilton Jr. and Matthew Damico. He categorizes the book as “a hermeneutics on reading the Psalter.” It serves as an excellent introduction to the basic issues involved in a true reading of this powerful portion of God’s Word. He concludes that “the authors and publishers are to be commended for producing a simple, clear, and attractively published book.”

Steve Migotsky reviews an important new book on abortion by a Reformed author: *Evangelicals and Abortion: Historical, Theological, Practical Perspectives* by J.

¹ Danny Olinger, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” *Ordained Servant Online* (March 2025), https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1171.

Cameron Fraser. Fraser presents important historical, theological, and practical information. Fraser refers favorably to the 1971 OPC *Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion*, especially its exegesis of Exodus 21: 22–25. Historically, evangelicals came to believe that human life begins at conception within the last half century. As Migotsky implies in his review article title, “Things about Abortion I Never Knew,” there is lots of new material in Fraser’s excellent book.

Scott Meadows reviews *Pastoral Visitation: For the Care of Souls* by Tyler C. Arnold. Arnold is a conservative Lutheran with a pastoral theology of visitation very similar to Presbyterians. This book covers the importance and practice of visitation. *Ordained Servant* has more than two dozen articles on the topic.

Our poem this month, “Faith in Prayer,” is by American poet Austin Phelps (1820–1890). This poem is from his book *The Still Hour: or, Communion with God* (1860). Born at West Brookfield, Massachusetts, he attended the University of Pennsylvania, Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and then Yale Divinity School. He was a preacher in Philadelphia, Boston, and then a professor at Andover Theological Seminary. He went on to be president at the seminary for ten years. He wrote several books on theological topics.

Our cover this month is a Chinese brush painting by my late mother Barbara, including her unique chop stamp signature.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

Servant Memorial

Remembering a Model Ruling Elder: Thomas Warnock

by William Shishko



Ruling elder Tom Warnock and his wife Flo

Chapter X Ruling Elders

1. Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, beside the ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereto. Such officers, chosen by the people from among their number, are to join with the ministers in the government of the church, and are properly called ruling elders.

2. Those who fill this office should be sound in the faith and of exemplary Christian life, men of wisdom and discretion, worthy of the esteem of the congregation as spiritual fathers.

3. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.¹

While we rightly esteem the office of the Christian minister, it is no less important that we rightly esteem the office of ruling elder (and the office of deacon, as well). One can make the case that a rightly functioning ruling eldership (what Presbyterians call “The Session”) has been a key element in preserving the faithfulness of many churches.

One of the most important pieces of advice given to me during my internship was, “Be sure that the church to which you are called has a strong, Reformed session.” To say the least, I was blessed by that during my years as pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, New York. And a major part of that blessing was working for all those years with Elder Tom Warnock, who went home to his eternal reward on November 20, 2023, at the age of 89. Having been ordained as a ruling elder in 1967, he served in that capacity for over half a century. He was, in every sense of the phrase, *a model ruling elder*. This tribute to him, and to God’s grace in his life, is written as a précis of the marks of those who “rule well” in the Lord’s Church. It is a way of practicing the exhortation: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7).

The first words that I heard from Elder Tom Warnock were on the evening of Ronald Reagan’s election to his first term as president in 1980. After I answered the phone and confirmed that I was, indeed, Bill Shishko, I heard, “My name is Tom Warnock. How would you like to come to Long Island to be our pastor?” That cheery, forthright greeting was an epitome of the spirit of the man with whom I would be privileged to serve for nearly thirty-six years.

Elder Warnock was probably one of the best-read ruling elders in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. His library equaled that of a minister. In fact, his library probably surpassed the libraries of many ministers. How many ministers have six, five-shelf bookcases filled two-deep with books—and books that have obviously been well-used?!. His well-read and well-worn Bible was full of notes. He read the Reformers. He read the Puritans. He read other rich theological material. And the “stuff” of that reading came out naturally in his conversations and deliberations. His heart was suffused with what is often called “experimental Calvinism,” i.e., both the doctrine and the life that breathes through the Westminster Standards. His life’s pattern of being in God’s Word and faithful

¹ The Form of Government (FG), in *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2020), 13.

expositions and applications of God's Word each day is surely a model for all Christians, and especially for church officers.

"Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ" (FG 10.3). While Tom did that in many ways, his leadership was particularly manifested in his service as Sunday School Superintendent for most of the years in which he served as a ruling elder. His "opening exercises" were rich devotional times that were clearly well prepared and earnestly presented. No doubt growing out of his own diligent reading, he took Christian education of the congregation with the greatest seriousness. He also conducted the Franklin Square church's Wednesday evening Bible studies held at the church facility. These already special times were made even more special as they were followed by coffee and an array of scrumptious desserts from the kitchen of his wife, Flo. This was a superb example of combining well-prepared spiritual food with equally well-prepared physical food. Tom's management of the church book table (which would eventually become a book room) was a vital complement to these other ways in which Tom sought to disciple congregation members. Tom always knew good books to recommend to people to help them with their questions about Christian faith and life. This model elder who was always learning and growing in grace was also always about the work of helping others learn and grow in grace as well.

Tom was a good listener. In session meetings he listened carefully to arguments made on various sides; and he would only speak after it was obvious that he had weighed carefully all that he heard. He might not always agree with a decision, but he submitted to his fellow elders, and, because he listened well, he could articulate the session's position both carefully and wisely. Those listening ears were always on display when the Word of God was preached. Tom loved the preaching of the Word and always gave thoughtful responses that encouraged a man who had truly "labored in the Word." (Although he was not bashful about responding negatively to any preaching that seemed ill-prepared and that was not permeated with Scripture.) He was a model of a ruling elder who had "particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and [who helped] in his labors" (FG 10.3).

In his work of rule, Tom was not afraid to say hard things. I will be eternally grateful that, after going through a period of bitterness early in my ministry in Franklin Square, in a meeting during which the session dealt firmly but graciously with me, Tom probingly said, "Bill, we're not upset when you speak about hell in your sermons—a faithful minister must do that; but, have you ever wept over what you've had to say?" I lost sleep for three nights after that piercing question, repented both privately and publicly for my harshness, and, by God's grace, grew in my pastoral and ministerial sensitivities through the "righteous smiting" (Ps. 141:5) of a man who was both jealous of Christ's honor in his church and likewise concerned for the life and conduct of his pastor. Tom would say frequently that the three main marks of an elder are "gentleness, gentleness, and gentleness." At the same time, he spoke the truth—and usually with great wisdom.

Elder Warnock was a principled man. Once, when one of our interns was pouring out his heart about a delicate matter that he knew he would need to face in his first ministry, Tom (after listening carefully) responded by saying, "Your responsibility is to do the right thing no matter how hard that may look right now. But the Lord will honor that, and you will know his blessing." What a refreshing reminder that was to the intern, and to me

as I listened in. Could any of us say that in a better way? Tom was principled and wise (and gentle!) in communicating the importance of always acting in principled ways.

Our home was blessed each year by the annual home visit of Elder Warnock. (How our churches would be transformed if all elders took seriously the responsibility of meaningful annual home visitation.) And given that the Shishkos were a family of eight, those visits were quite an accomplishment! Elder Warnock would always arrive at our home at 6:50 p.m.—ten minutes before the 7:00 p.m. meeting time! He knew that he had a full evening ahead of him! He met for about thirty minutes with each child, taking time to intersect with their lives, reviewing the Scripture memory and catechism work for their grade according to our standard text, *The Memory Work Notebook*, by Paul Settle (GCP), gently calling them to follow Christ faithfully, and praying with each of them. Then, at about 10:00 p.m., he would tell me to get the children to bed while he spent time with my wife, Margaret. At 10:30 I would join them, and Tom would cap off that long evening by encouraging us in our married lives (and gently admonishing me if he thought that I was falling short in any of my father or husband duties) and praying with us. Our children still remember those visits; and Margaret and I praise the Lord that we were privileged to enjoy this home visitation service by one of our ruling elders—something that has been a hallmark of Reformed churches in their best expressions. Ruling elders “are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. . . . They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant” (FG 10.3). Elder Warnock was a model in all those things.

Tom was an enthusiastic man—as I experienced from his first words to me on that phone call in 1980. Whether it was classical music (about which—along with the best sound equipment—Tom was an expert), the birth of a child within his family or the congregation, the reception of new church members, his latest book, or his beloved Yankees, Tom was never not enthusiastic! He modeled Paul’s exhortation, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23). This enthusiasm spilled over to his leadership of the Franklin Square church softball team—appropriately named “The Franklin Square Lions.” Tom was the lead lion! He loved the game, and he expected nothing less than the absolute best performance from each of his players. Sometimes, in his exuberant enthusiasm, he could give in to the remaining, indwelling sin (even model Christians have them!) of impatience and exasperation. But that led the team to victories; and Tom’s love of baseball was a big part of that driving force.

Perhaps above all, Tom was a man of prayer. “They should pray with and for the people” (FG 10.3)—and Elder Warnock did. Diligently! As a man who prizes action (e.g., “Well, what do we do about this?”), I would sometimes chafe when Tom’s response to a challenging issue (and we had many of them in our New York ministry!) was, “Well, we just need to pray about this.” We obviously need both, but Tom’s words were a reminder to me and to others that the battle for the hearts of men, women, boys, and girls is not ultimately ours, but the Lord’s. And how I wish that I had recorded the prayers with which Tom would close a session meeting when it was “his turn” in our session’s schedule. Regardless of how late the meeting was, Tom would sweep us up into the presence of God and thoughtfully bring every matter that we had discussed before the throne of grace. When I came to Franklin Square to begin my pastorate in March of 1981,

I asked the Lord to teach me how to pray as a minister. Elder Tom Warnock and his prayers were a great part of God's answer.

And no memorial to Elder Tom Warnock would be complete without mentioning his faithful helpmeet, Flo. I often think that there is something wrong if we do not instinctively put the name of the wife of a minister or ruling elder (or deacon) together with that officer. Not only is this part of a church officer being a "one wife husband" (see 1 Tim. 3:2), but, however we understand the significance of "their wives" in 1 Timothy 3:11, there is no doubt that behind every useful married man there is an equally useful wife. And that is especially true with church officers. Even as I quite naturally think of "Bill and Margaret," my fellow church officers and their wives, so I can hardly say "Tom" without also saying "Flo."

Many of our church visitors, and especially our annual Bible conference speakers, were treated to the hospitality of the Warnock home. Along with Tom's rich heavenly discussion, guests were treated to banquets at the table prepared by Flo Warnock. You did not just "eat" at the Warnock home; you feasted (always completed with a flourish by Flo's homemade ice cream.) How often did I hear from guests at the Warnock home that their time with them was a "foretaste of heaven." Not only Bible conference speakers and other guests were blessed by the extra-special Warnock hospitality, but Ministerial Training Institute (MTIOPC) pastoral theology students over many years received that hospitality as a model of the hospitality that is to be demonstrated by elders (and their wives!, 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8).

Tom and Flo both took a special interest in men preparing for the Christian ministry. For many years Tom served as our presbytery's representative on the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary's board of directors. Twice a year Tom and Flo would make the trip to South Carolina where Tom would fulfill his duties at the board meeting, and Flo would fellowship with the wives of other board members as well as with the personnel at the seminary. Tom and Flo had a shared heart for young men who were going through the rigors of the "boot camp" that meaningful seminary education is, and they would come home with stories and prayer requests that fueled the Franklin Square church's zeal to see the Lord raise up a generation of earnest preachers and pastors who were even more zealous for Christ and his Kingdom than is our generation.

These are among my precious memories of years of labor with both Elder Warnock and his faithful and loving wife, Flo. While no Christian servant is perfect—that status is only true of Christ, the Chief Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25)—God has his ways of causing us to forget the blemishes and to remember only the beauties of lives of forgiven sinners being wonderfully remade into the image of that Chief Shepherd and Overseer. May these reflections on model ruling elder Tom Warnock help all church officers to grow in those gifts and graces that make us true representatives of Christ to those whom we serve and to all around us.

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Going Peopleless Underestimates the Unique Superiority of Human Intelligence, Part 2

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.

—T. S. Eliot¹

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

—Psalm 139:14

Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments”

—Psalm 119:73

As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

—Ecclesiastes 11:5

WHAT IS HUMAN INTELLIGENCE?

Human intelligence (HI) is essentially embodied intelligence and thus distances itself qualitatively from AI. Many proponents of AI treat human intelligence as an inferior version of computer intelligence. They seriously underestimate the giant distance between the two. Princeton philosopher Alexander Englert articulates this well,

Regarding the incompleteness theorem’s philosophical implications, Gödel thought the results presented an either/or dilemma (articulated in the Gibbs Lecture of 1951). Either one accepts that the “human mind (even within the realm of pure mathematics) infinitely surpasses the powers of any finite machine,” from which it follows that the human mind is irreducible to the brain, which “to all appearances is a finite machine with a finite number of parts, namely, the neurons and their connections.” Or one assumes that there are certain mathematical problems of the sort employed in his theorems, which are “absolutely unsolvable.” If this were the case, it would arguably “disprove the view that mathematics is only our own creation.” Consequently, mathematical objects would possess an objective reality all its own, independent of the world of physical facts “which we cannot create or change, but only perceive and describe.” This is referred to as Platonism about the reality of mathematical truths.

¹ T. S. Eliot, “Choruses from the ‘Rock’ I,” in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1963), 147.

Much to the materialist's chagrin, therefore, both implications of the dilemma are "very decidedly opposed to materialistic philosophy." Worse yet for the materialist, Gödel notes that the disjuncts are not exclusive. It could be that both implications are true simultaneously.²

Mathematician and philosopher Kurt Gödel (1906–78) stood against the majority of the mathematicians and scientists of his day, who tended to be materialists. This is where biblical anthropology can help us. It will put AI in its place and help us discern the benefits and liabilities of this powerful technology. Human intelligence (HI) involves the whole person, the highly complex embodied being that we are. I asked ChatGPT, "Do you have a soul?" It responded, "No I don't have a soul. I'm just a program to process language and information. I can talk about souls, philosophy, or anything else on your mind."³

Joseph Weizenbaum reflects on the mechanistic pressures of our highly technologized society in 1950,

Of course, the introduction of computers into our already highly technological society has . . . merely reinforced and amplified those antecedent pressures that have driven man to an ever more rationalistic view of his society and an even more mechanistic image of himself.⁴

AI is at once amusing and alarming. Ken Meyers of Mars Hill Audio, at the second annual Granite Seminar in 2006 on biotechnology, was asked, "Will scientists be able to duplicate human beings?" I shall never forget his answer, "No, but they will do a lot of damage trying." As philosopher Thomas Nagel demonstrated in his 2011 book *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, materialist evolutionary science cannot adequately account for human consciousness, cognition, or conscience (value). Computers process data but they do not have a spirit; they only imitate one aspect of human intelligence. Using linguistic probability enables computers to seem like they have human intelligence, but there is no human person there. They are mere material digital realities—humans are much, much more. As Nagel pointed out, the materialist, in his case Darwinians, are unable to account for the invisible aspects of human intelligence: consciousness or self-awareness, cognition or reasoning ability, and conscience or the knowledge of right and wrong. This along with the embodied nature of human intelligence puts AI in its place, and it does have an important place, but not as a replacement for human beings.

I would like to propose a reversal of the Cartesian rationalist axiom, "I think, therefore, I am," *cogito ergo sum*, with, "I am, therefore, I think," *ego igitur cogito*. By reversing the philosophical realms of ontology and epistemology the conception of the human moves from the radically subjective to the objectivity of the created realm (being) in which the Creator rather than the creature takes precedence. I am a mysterious mixture of body and soul, a created, embodied, finite being, made in God's image, *imago Dei*.

² Alexander T. Englert, "We'll Meet Again," *Aeon* (January 2, 2024), accessed January 6, 2024, <https://aeon.co/essays/kurt-godel-his-mother-and-the-argument-for-life-after-death>.

³ Accessed February 22, 2025.

⁴ Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason*, 11.

The proper understanding of artificial intelligence (AI) requires a Christian theology, especially an anthropology rooted in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Pioneer media ecologist and Roman Catholic Marshall McLuhan observed:

After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. Whether the extension of consciousness, so long sought by advertisers for specific products, will be “a good thing” is a question that admits of a wide solution. There is little possibility of answering such questions about the extensions of man without considering all of them together. Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex. . . . The need to understand the effects of the extensions of man becomes more urgent by the hour.⁵

In my 2001 book, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age*⁶, I provide several quotes revealing McLuhan’s anthropology: “And no matter how many walls have fallen the citadel of individual consciousness has not fallen nor is it likely to fall. For it is not accessible to the mass media.”⁷ “Christianity definitely supports the idea of a private, independent metaphysical substance of the self . . .”⁸ Sounding like Jacques Ellul he asserts: “There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to contemplate what is happening.”⁹

Marshall McLuhan’s Christianity caused him to hold to an irreducible soul within man characterized by the *imago Dei*, which is not subject to perception, but has the power to interpret and even withstand the percepts of experience, especially the mass media. “At the speed of light all the physical factors disappear. Naturally churches tend to become extremely spiritualized places. The theology of discarnate man, I should think, is going to be extremely transcendental and gnostic. It’s not going to have much place for the human being as an incarnate spirit.”¹⁰

As we saw above, consciousness, cognition, and conscience—the trinity of human intelligence (CCC)—cannot be accounted for in materialist philosophical terms, which makes up a large part of STEM academia. Cal Newport says this about the uniqueness of human consciousness:

⁵ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 3–4.

⁶ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Wipf & Stock, 2001), 169.

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, Counterblast (Rapp & Whiting, 1969), 135.

⁸ Hubert Hoskins, “Electric Consciousness and the Church,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, eds. George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald (Fulcrum, 1989), 165.

⁹ Marshall McLuhan, “McLuhan Probes,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, eds. Sanderson and Macdonald (Fulcrum, 1989), 219.

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *The Review of Books and Religion*, vol. 3, #9, Mid-June 1974 (Belmont, Vermont).

The idea that programs like ChatGPT might represent a recognizable form of intelligence is further undermined by the details of their architecture. Consciousness depends on a brain's ability to maintain a constantly updated conception of itself as a distinct entity interacting with a model of the external world. The layers of neural networks that make up systems like ChatGPT, however, are static: once they're trained, they never change.¹¹

McLuhan alludes to an equal but opposite error of the materialist philosophy—cyber-Gnosticism is a philosophical nightmare disavowing the reality of our embodied existence. The goal of transcending our humanity ignores the imperfection of our humanity embedded in the historic fall of Adam. It ignores the realization of human potential in the good news of the biblical account of the Lamb of God, the Logos, in whom all things consist, and in whom salvation from sin, death, and hell is found. The original sin that both left and right seek to conquer cannot be thwarted by human effort. Ours is ultimately a moral problem that places each of us at the center of what needs fixing. Our problem is not embodiment, our physical natures, but our fallen condition, overcome only through God incarnate.

Another utopian technological problem can be seen in transhumanism. It apotheosizes the possibilities of technological transcendence of human beings. In chapter 5 of Jacob Shatzer's 2019 book *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*, AI is explored as an aspect of transhumanism. This is a portion of my summary of that chapter in my 2020 review:

This technological development is distinct from the biological and seeks to alter and replicate human thought. . . . Breathtaking is the existence of the Christian Transhumanist Association, which claims "the intentional use of technology, coupled with following Christ, will empower us to become more human." Christian transhumanists, like Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, tend toward open theism and process theologies, which see God as developing. Shatzer wisely responds, "We must resist liturgies of control, not because God is open and risky but because God is in control and we are not."

The belief that software minds can be created by mindfiles, a digitized database of one's life, in order to create a mind clone, involves a serious misunderstanding and underestimation of human intelligence. But such is fallen man's quest for immortality apart from the Christ of Scripture. Shatzer's critique focuses on the danger of reducing human intelligence to digital technology. Transhumanism "and its views on artificial intelligence are built on materialist approaches on what it means to be human." AGI assumes materialism and is thus doomed not only to failure but to causing much damage. To ignore the invisible or spiritual aspect of human intelligence guarantees that human intelligence can never be duplicated by AGI. Furthermore, depending on artificial intelligence, like Paro the robot companion for the elderly, and Siri, will tend to disengage us from real human interaction.¹²

¹¹ Newport, "What Kind of Mind Does ChatGPT Have?"

¹² Gregory E. Reynolds, "Imago Hominis: Our Brave New World," *Ordained Servant* 29 (2020): 150–154, https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=846.

The Wonder of Human Nature

My son during his early years in college once challenged me to distinguish between being present virtually and face-to-face. I responded that because something is difficult to exhaustively define doesn't mean it is not real. The human person is like that, "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). However, there is much that we can say to describe the uniqueness of human beings. Weizenbaum observes that modern man has "an utterly irrational confidence in the calculability of reality."¹³

Scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi's (1891–1976) concept of "tacit knowledge" was the knowledge that people have that cannot easily be put into words. It is intuitive, like the knowledge of riding a bicycle. Interestingly, that example involves embodied existence as well as invisible sensibilities mediated by physical nature. In skiing and other sports, we refer to that as muscle memory; but it involves the whole person, something impossible for computers or even robots. Scientific knowing is not the only way of knowing. It is empirical (assuming physical reality and human observation) and hypothetical, always subject to alteration. The personal touch is something that can never be replicated by AI, a computer, or a robot—they have no soul. No computer or robot can hug a grieving person.

Going peopleless is a very dangerous trend in the modern West. We regularly see proposals that advise going peopleless. The common ones replace the cashier with self-service check out. We recently went to a new fast-food store where there was only a manager, but everything was done through electronic ordering. More extreme proposals have asked if mothers can be replaced by robots or doctors by bots. The face-to-face presence of human beings is irreplaceable. We underestimate the importance of the simple human encounters with people at the bank and store.

Thomas Fuchs, the Karl Jaspers Professor of Philosophy and Psychiatry at Heidelberg University in Germany, calls for a "new, embodied humanism."¹⁴ The subtitle of his article is "Why Modern Man Yearns to Be Replaced, Fantasizes of Being the One to Do It, and How We Can Stay Human Instead." He offers three principles to realize "How We Can Stay Human Instead."

The first is, "You Are Not a Computer." Stop thinking of yourself in mechanistic terms. Unlike artificial systems, we have relevance, meaning, significance, and self-awareness. "Artificial intelligence is not superior to us at all, because its performance is limited to narrowly defined tasks. . . . So there is no reason for Promethean shame or feelings of inferiority in view of our machines."¹⁵ As Christians we counter the mechanistic anthropology with our being made in God's image and in our new identity in Christ.

Second is, "The Bodily Presence of Others." "We learn empathy only in bodily contact with others. . . . Only with the sense of touch do we literally enter into *contact* with the world and with others." The touchless society of the Covid-19 shutdowns was

¹³ Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason*, 14.

¹⁴ Thomas Fuchs, "Narcissistic Depressive Technoscience: Why Modern Man Yearns to Be Replaced, Fantasizes of Being the One to Do It, and How We Can Stay Human Instead," *The New Atlantis* (Spring 2024): 88.

¹⁵ Fuchs, "Narcissistic Depressive Technoscience, 90.

disastrous, exacerbating the already serious epidemic of loneliness. Virtual presence is an illusion.¹⁶

Finally is, “Life Among the Living.” This involves our embeddedness in the larger life of the world of humans. Conviviality must be our condition. “Bodily presence and communication do not only consist in the exchange of information, as in the digital world, but in alert listening with the visible expression of attention, expectation, or confirmation.”¹⁷ The Christian chiefly realizes these last two principles in the church of the living God.

“Face” is used 382 times in the *English Standard Version*. In the Bible, the face is most often referred to as a synecdoche representing the most intimate level of personal presence. The face is a revelation of the person, a window to the human soul. “Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed” (Eccl. 8:1). The absence of face-to-face presence may cause grief similar to death. This is evident in the departure of Paul from the Ephesian elders, “being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship” (Acts 20:38). Were the apostle John alive today, I imagine him writing 2 John 12 in this way, “Though I have much to communicate to you, I would rather not use email or my smart phone. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.”¹⁸

The goal of redemptive history involves Christ’s and our personal presence. The consummate reality for the Christian will be seeing the face of Jesus Christ in resurrection glory. The transfiguration foreshadowed the coming glory reflected in the face of Jesus, “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Matt. 17:2). Paul looks forward to the final glory, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). John reflects the same hope, “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). There is no better antidote to the electronic dispersion of our day than the counter-environment of the church created by the Word of the good and great shepherd.

In Part 3 we will explore the benefits and liabilities of AI.

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¹⁶ Fuchs, “Narcissistic Depressive Technoscience, 91–2.

¹⁷ Fuchs, “Narcissistic Depressive Technoscience, 93–4.

¹⁸ Gregory E. Reynolds, “The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life,” *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 20–26.

Servant Literature

Revelation

by Danny Olinger

Jesus, Stab Me in the Heart! **Flannery O'Connor at 100**

“Revelation” holds an exalted place among the stories of Flannery O'Connor. Ralph Wood calls it “her finest story.”¹ Joyce Carol Oates believes that what O'Connor achieves in the story is “extraordinary” and that the story concludes with O'Connor's most powerful revelation.² Irving Howe values it as her crowning achievement and finds it “intolerable” that an author of such a work should have died at the age of thirty-nine.³

O'Connor's terminal lupus had caused her physical condition to deteriorate greatly in 1963, which resulted in her repeated visits to the doctor's office. Observing the people there triggered her remembrance of an episode in the life of Maryat Lee. Lee had told O'Connor that when she was a student at Wellesley she had thrown a book obtensibly at a boy. The boy, however, ducked and the book hit a teacher that Lee despised in the face. The teacher surmised that the incident had been no accident.⁴

In “Revelation,” Ruby Turpin and her husband, Claud, are in the doctor's office waiting for the doctor to see Claud's hurt leg. Ruby, described by O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins as “one of those country women . . . who just sort of springs to life; you can't hold them down or shut their mouths,”⁵ is physically a large woman whose presence fills the entire room. Also waiting is a Wellesley student, Mary Grace, who becomes so enraged with Ruby's comments that she throws a book that hits Ruby in the face. O'Connor told Betty Hester, “I wasn't thinking of Mary Grace as the Devil but then the whole story just sort of happened—though it took me about eight weeks to write it. It was one of those rare ones in which every gesture gave me great pleasure in the writing.”⁶

Still, O'Connor was apprehensive whether her editor, Catherine Carver, would like the story or not. On Christmas day O'Connor wrote Hester with Carver's verdict. “Yes mam I heard from C. Carver . . . She thought it one of my most powerful stories and probably my *blackest*. Found Ruby evil. Found end vision to confirm same.”⁷ O'Connor thought the opposite. The story was one of her lightest, and she had crafted the protagonist, Ruby Turpin, to be “funny and innocent and big, one of those country

¹ Ralph Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption* (Notre Dame, 1988), 131.

² Joyce Carol Oates, *New Heaven, New Earth* (Vanguard, 1974), 171, 174.

³ Irving Howe, “Flannery O'Connor's Stories,” *New York Review of Books* (Sept. 30, 1965): 16–17.

⁴ Maryat Lee, “Flannery O'Connor, 1957,” *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 5 (1976): 43.

⁵ Flannery O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins, November 5, 1963, *The Habit of Being*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), 546.

⁶ Flannery O'Connor to “A,” December 6, 1963, *Habit of Being*, 552.

⁷ Flannery O'Connor to “A,” December 25, 1963, *Habit of Being*, 554.

women that are usually in tough touch with forces larger than themselves.”⁸ O’Connor determined to deepen the end vision “so that there’ll be no mistaking Ruby is not just an evil Glad Annie.”⁹

O’Connor also made clear that she did not want to mock Ruby. She said, “If the story is taken to be one designed to make fun of Ruby, then it’s worse than venal.”¹⁰ What O’Connor was after was the purifying of Ruby’s Christian faith. But the primary instrument through which Christ speaks, Mary Grace, is pictured as unattractive on every level. In fact, so unflattering did O’Connor make Mary Grace—repeatedly described as fat, her face covered with acne, and possessing a sour disposition—that Lee’s niece after reading the story asked her aunt why O’Connor had made Mary Grace so ugly. Lee replied, “Because Flannery loves her.” O’Connor affirmingly told Lee after hearing the account, “Very perceptive girl.”¹¹

Mrs. Ruby Turpin

Along with Ruby and Claud, seven other individuals are in a doctor’s waiting room—a runny-nosed child, a white-trashy mother, a well-dressed lady, a fat teenage girl, a gum-chewing woman, an old woman, and a seemingly sleeping old man. Gospel music softly plays in the background: “When I looked up and He looked down,” and Ruby, who knew the lyrics, good Christian lady that she is, supplies the last line mentally, “And wona these days I know I’ll we-ear a crown.”¹²

Ruby’s version of Christianity, however, is tied to Southern mores. Her first item of business in the waiting room is to assign individuals their proper social class. Her surefire way to confirm their social standing is to notice their shoes. Ruby’s footwear choice that morning, “her good black leather pumps,” aligns her with the well-dressed lady who has on red and grey suede shoes to match her outfit. Ruby is not aligned with the ugly girl wearing Girl Scout shoes,¹³ and definitely not the white-trashy mother who has on what looked like bedroom slippers, black straw with gold braid threaded through them.

Sometimes when Ruby could not sleep at night she imagined Jesus saying to her, “There’s only two places available for you. You can be a nigger or white-trash.” What would she have said? If that was the choice, she hoped that Jesus would make her a neat clean respectable Negro woman.¹⁴ In Ruby’s ordering, on the bottom rung were most

⁸ Flannery O’Connor to Ward Allison Dorrance, January 5, 1964, *Good Things Out of Nazareth*, ed. Benjamin B. Alexander (Convergent, 2019), 293.

⁹ Flannery O’Connor to “A,” December 25, 1963, *Habit of Being*, 554.

¹⁰ O’Connor to Dawkins, December 6, 1963, *Habit of Being*, 552.

¹¹ Flannery O’Connor to “A,” May 17, 1964, *Habit of Being*, 578.

¹² Flannery O’Connor, *The Complete Stories* (Noonday, 1995), 490.

¹³ Girl Scout shoes often play a prominent role in O’Connor’s stories. Sally Poker Sash in “A Late Encounter of the Enemy” is mortified when she sees two brown Girl Scout oxfords protrud[ing] from the bottom of her dress at the premiere of *Gone With the Wind*. Joy-Hulga Hopewell in “Good Country People” wears a “brown flat shoe” with her artificial limb, and Mary Fortune Pitts in “A View of the Woods” has on “heavy brown school shoes.” Like Mary Grace, Joy-Hulga and Mary Fortune are discontent and socially inept. Margaret Whitt, “You Will Know Them By Their Shoes,” *Flannery O’Connor Bulletin*, Vol. 21 (1992), 97–98.

¹⁴ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 491. Margaret Whitt comments that Ruby in referencing Jesus brings him into her social ordering obsession as co-participator, but does so on her terms as she controls his lines. Margaret Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O’Connor* (Univ. of South Carolina, 1995), 147.

colored people and all white-trash; then came homeowners, and above them, Claud and her as home-and-land owners; then people with lots of money and big houses. By the time she would fall asleep after thinking about it, people “moiling and roiling” around in her head, she would dream that they were gathered in a box car being taken off to a gas oven.¹⁵

But Ruby comforts herself knowing that she never spared herself when she finds out that someone, whether white or black, trash or decent, is in need. Still, Ruby’s habit is to take back with her mind what her hands offer.¹⁶ She thinks of blacks, “You can talk at them but not with them.”¹⁷ She thinks of trashy-people, “Help them you must, but help them you can’t.”¹⁸

Ruby’s sense of superiority is seen particularly with her wanting to avoid interaction with the white-trash mother. When the mother engages Ruby about the clock on the wall, “You want to know wher you can get you one of themther clocks?” Ruby replies that she already has a nice clock. Undeterred, the woman blurts out that you can get one with green stamps. That is how she got herself some “joo’ry.”¹⁹ Ruby thinks to herself that it would have been better if the woman had gotten a wash rag and some soap.

Changing subjects and conversation partners, Ruby explains life on the Turpin farm to the pleasant lady. Ruby shares that Claud and her raise hogs. The white-trash woman declares that hogs are filthy and no amount of hosing off can change that. Ruby counters that she and Claud have the ability with their modern machinery to make her pigs cleaner than most children.²⁰ She then adds mentally, cleaner by far than that child right there.

These two episodes reveal Ruby’s misguided beliefs. In equating redemption to social standing, she believes the trashy-woman is in need of cleansing. Then in reverse fashion, in praising the ability of modern technology to cleanse the hogs, she thinks that washing the outside of the cup is the same as washing the inside of the cup. For Ruby to stop judging by appearance—shoes, clothes, manners, race, and cultural standing— she must see that she (and not those around her like the trashy-woman) is in need of spiritual healing. She must also be brought to see that cleansing from sin comes from God alone.

Ruby continues the conversation with the pleasant lady and laments what has to be done to get Negro workers to pick cotton. Claud drives them in his truck to the field, and when they come in from the field, Ruby runs out with a bucket of ice water for them. The white-trash woman interjects that there was no way she was loving them and scooting down any hog with a hose. “The look that Mrs. Turpin and the pleasant lady exchanged indicated they both understood that you have to *have* certain things before you could *know* certain things.”²¹

¹⁵ Oates writes, “O’Connor’s chilling indictment of Mrs. Turpin grows out of her conviction that the displacement of Christ will of necessity result in murder, but that the ‘murder’ is a slow steady drifting rather than a conscious act of the will.” Oates, *New Heaven*, 173.

¹⁶ John R. May, *The Pruning Word* (Notre Dame, 1976), 114.

¹⁷ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 505.

¹⁸ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 497.

¹⁹ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 492.

²⁰ Dorothy Tuck McFarland, *Flannery O’Connor* (Frederick Ungar, 1976), 61.

²¹ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 494. According to Sura Rath, O’Connor’s Thomistic slip is showing by italicizing the words “have” and “know” in “you *have* to have certain things before you could *know*.” Aquinas taught that familiar objects in this world provide the basis for growth in spiritual knowledge. That is, for Aquinas, the natural world is the starting point for one’s acquisition of knowledge of the presence of

Ruby is aware, however, that whenever she says anything about social standing, or even thinks about it, the nasty girl's eyes are fixed on her. Earlier, when Ruby enters the room and thinks that etiquette demands that someone should relinquish a seat for her, Mary Grace makes the ugliest face that Ruby had ever seen anyone make. When Ruby thinks that the trashy-women should clean herself up, Mary Grace slams her *Human Development*-book shut and looks straight through Ruby with such intensity that Ruby turns her head to see if anything was going on behind her that she should notice. When Ruby thinks one must help the trashy-white, but help them you could not, Mary Grace turns her lips inside out and fixes her eyes on Ruby as if they were two drills.

Mary Grace's prophetic role as the messenger of divine displeasure with Ruby's view of others is tipped off by her eyes. Her blue eyes "appeared alternatively to smolder and to blaze" and "seemed lit all of a sudden with a peculiar light, an unnatural light."²² Her rage reaches the boiling point when Ruby mirrors the Pharisee of Luke 18 and announces for everyone to hear,

"If its's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful. When I think of who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!' It could have been different!" For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her. "Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!" she cried aloud.²³

A flying book hits Ruby right above the right eye with Mary Grace following close behind attempting to strangle her.²⁴ When others join in to save Ruby, the scene resembles Ruby's class status dream, people moiling and roiling around on the floor of the small boxcar-like, rectangular room.

Ruby intuitis that this is God speaking to her. Her subsequent question to the girl, "What do you have to say to me?" operates on two levels. It is as much seeking a further revelation as it is seeking an apology.²⁵

The Sun, a Snake, and the Pig Parlor

Ruby returns home believing that God is upset with her. Her guilt is so extreme that she would not have been surprised to return to her farm house and to see a burnt wound between two blackened chimneys.²⁶ Still, she disputes the truthfulness of the girl's declaration. "I am not," she said tearfully, "a wart hog. From hell." But the girl's words

the supernatural in this world. Sura P. Rath, "Ruby Turpin's Redemption: Thomistic Revolution in Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation,'" *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, Vol. 19 (1990): 1-2.

²² O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 492.

²³ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 499.

²⁴ Oates states that it is obvious that O'Connor identifies with Mary Grace. "It is *she*, through Mary Grace, who throws the textbook on human development at all of us, striking us in the foreheads, hopefully to bring about a change in our lives." Oates, *New Heaven*, 173-174.

²⁵ Jacky Dumas and Jessica Hooten Wilson, "The Unrevealed in Flannery O'Connor's Revelation," *Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Spring, 2013), 80.

²⁶ Wood, *Comedy*, 129.

brook no repudiation. The message had been given to her, “a respectable hard-working, church-going woman. The tears dried. Her eyes began to burn instead with wrath.” She laid on the bed, occasionally raising her fist and making “a small stabbing motion over her chest as if she was defending her innocence to invisible guests who were like the comforters of Job, reasonable-seeming but wrong.”²⁷

When the sun starts to set, she puts on her brown oxfords and heads out with the bucket of ice water for the three Negro women and the young boy that Claud had brought in from the field.²⁸ They notice the lump over her eye. She tells them about the girl throwing the book and saying something to her, and they ask, “what she say?” “The sun was getting whiter and whiter, blanching the sky overhead so that the leaves of the hickory tree were black in the face of it, but Ruby cannot bring forth the words. ‘Something real ugly,’ she muttered.”²⁹

The helpers respond with outrage that anyone would say anything bad about a sweet white lady like Mrs. Turpin. “That’s the truth befo’ Jesus.”³⁰ Ruby, however, knows exactly how much Negro flattery is worth. She tells them that the girl had called her an old wart hog from hell.

Looking like a woman going singlehandedly into battle, Ruby then heads down to the pig parlor. “The sun was a deep yellow now like a harvest moon and was riding westward very fast over the far tree line as if it meant to reach the hogs before she did.”³¹ The seven shoats in the pig parlor who await hosing down by Ruby match the seven people who waited in the doctor’s office with her. The reaction of the shoats, “running about shaking themselves like idiot children, their little slit pig eyes searching the floor for anything left,” parallels the scene in the waiting room after Mary Grace attacked Ruby. Ruby challenges God as she had challenged Mary Grace about the message. “How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?”³² Blindly pointing the water stream in and an out of an old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear, her answer in the language of the farm is “not in a pig’s eye.”³³

This questioning of God occurs “as the sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of trees like a farmer inspecting his own hog.”³⁴ In her self-justification, Ruby shakes her fist at God while holding the water hose so that “a watery snake appeared momentarily in the air.” She then lets out a roar to God in a last outburst of Job-like rage.

²⁷ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 502–503.

²⁸ The lack of identification is telling. Wood writes, “It never occurs to Ruby Turpin that she can have no common life with her black workers since she never bothers even to learn their names—only to identify them as old, young, hatted and so forth.” Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O’Connor and the Church Made Visible* (Baylor, 2024), 156.

²⁹ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 504.

³⁰ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 505.

³¹ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 505.

³² O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 506.

³³ Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O’Connor*, 149.

³⁴ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 507. Baumgaertner comments, “The sun goes down behind the trees and reminds her of ‘a farmer inspecting his own hogs’ (507)—and there she is straddling two kingdoms. Christ the Sun is the farmer watching her, his “hog,” while she, the farmer, stands watching her own hogs. She is both redeemed, identified with Christ himself, and sinner, identified with the “wart hogs from hell.” Jill Pelaez Baumgaertner, *Flannery O’Connor: A Proper Scaring* (Wipf & Stock, 1988), 150.

“Go on,” she yelled, “call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put that bottom rail on top. There’ll still be a top and bottom!”

A garbled echo returned to her.

A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, “Who do you think you are?”

The color of everything, field and crimson sky, burned for a moment with a transparent intensity. The question carried over the pasture and across the cotton field and returned to her clearly like an answer from beyond the wood.

She opened her mouth but no sound came out of it.³⁵

She stares out towards the highway, and then bows her head and gazes at the hogs, as if through the very heart of mystery. There was a red glow around them, and they appeared to pant with secret life. When she lifts her head, “there was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting across through a field of crimson and leading like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk.”³⁶

Then, her hands raised, she receives a vision. She sees Claud and her in a procession on “a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire.” But, ironically, while marching she views the shoes of everyone—“whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes”³⁷—ahead of Claud and her. They are at the end of the line, marching on key, but behind blacks, white-trash, freaks, and lunatics.

The irrelevance of social values in the kingdom of heaven revealed to her,³⁸ Ruby lowers her hands and grips the rail of the hog pen, not the top or the bottom rail. As she walks back to her house, she does not hear condemning cries coming from the woods. Rather, “around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah.”³⁹

Critical Evaluation

Joyce Carol Oates argues that an extraordinary part of the story is Mrs. Turbin’s assumption that words spoken by Mary Grace, “Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog,” are in fact the words of Christ intended for her alone. “Not only is the spiritual world a literal, palpable fact, but the physical world—of other people, of objects and events—becomes transparent, only a means by which the ‘higher’ judgment is delivered.”⁴⁰

Robert May asserts that O’Connor in “Revelation” provides profound contemporary expression to Jesus’s teaching that the first shall be last and the last first. Ruby initially

³⁵ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 507–508. Wood writes, “Both the question and the reply are central to the Christian faith: How can one be the reborn child of God while remaining a miserable offender? Luther struck at the core of the matter when he declared that Christians are *simul justus et peccator*. We are simultaneously justified by Christ’s life and death and resurrection, said Luther, while remaining dreadful sinners who must work out our salvation in fear and trembling.” Ralph Wood, *Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Eerdmans, 2004), 263.

³⁶ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 508.

³⁷ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 509.

³⁸ Dorothy Tuck McFarland, *Flannery O’Connor* (Frederick Ungar, 1976), 62.

³⁹ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 509.

⁴⁰ Oates, *New Heaven*, 171.

attempts to interpret the Word in order to remove its sting, but eventually she allows the Word to interpret her, which results in a shattering of her folly in judging life by appearance. “Ruby Turpin did not think either who she was or what she did would be her salvation; like the servant who received one talent, she unhappily confused what she was given with her final reward.”⁴¹

Ralph Wood maintains Ruby isn’t like the self-seeking Grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” who needs someone to shoot her every minute of her life in order to become a good woman, but she does need her world turned upside down so that she can see things as God sees them. Having received the vision from God, she must learn to live in the revolutionary new age that Christ has inaugurated through this redemptive work, even as it awaits its final completion.⁴²

Frederick Asals believes that the ending of “Revelation” provides a hermeneutic key for understanding O’Connor’s stories.

Her outraged characters begin to discover that they inhabit a world which, without ceasing to be corporeal, has taken on eschatological dimensions. The radical tension of this double perspective pervades O’Connor’s later work, and Mrs. Turpin’s cry in “Revelation,” “How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?” articulates the duality that underlies all the stories.”⁴³

O’Connor’s Comments

O’Connor told Betty Hester that in the original draft, she “started to let it end where the hogs pant with a secret life, but I thought something else was needed.”⁴⁴ After the story had been published, O’Connor acknowledged to Maryat Lee the importance of the added eschatological vision. “She gets the vision. Wouldn’t have been any point in that story if she hadn’t. You got to be a very big woman to shout at the Lord across a hogpen. She’s a country female Jacob. And that vision is purgatorial.”⁴⁵

When O’Connor received news that she had won the O. Henry first-prize for the story, she informed Hester. “We can worry about the interpretations of *Revelation* but not its fortunes. I had a letter from the O. Henry prize people & it got first.”⁴⁶ Soon after her letter to Hester, O’Connor slipped into a coma and died on August 4, 1964.

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⁴¹ May, *Pruning of the Word*, 116.

⁴² Ralph Wood, *Comedy*, 127, and *Christ-Haunted South*, 264.

⁴³ Frederick Asals, *Flannery O’Connor: The Imagination of Extremity* (Univ. of Georgia, 1982), 67–68.

⁴⁴ O’Connor to “A,” November 23, 1963, 549.

⁴⁵ Flannery O’Connor to Maryat Lee, May 15, 1964, *Habit of Being*, 577. The biblical reference that O’Connor is referring to is Genesis 32:24. Jacob wrestles with the Lord until he knew that the Lord was with him.

⁴⁶ Flannery O’Connor to “A,” July 25, 1964, *Habit of Being*, 594.

ServantReading

Interpreting and Understanding the Psalms

A Review Article

by Bryan D. Estelle

Reading the Psalms as Scripture, by James Hamilton Jr. and Matthew Damico. Lexham, 142 pages, \$14.99.

Many things factor into a proper interpretation of Scripture, or any book for that matter. Determining the genre of a book is vital to a right interpretation of its message. Alister Fowler, for example, in his significant book on genre writes,

Of all the literary codes . . . , I have no hesitation in proposing genre as the most important, not least because it incorporates and organizes many others . . . there is no doubt that genre primarily has to do with communication. It is an instrument not of classification or prescription, but of meaning.¹

I have no doubt that the above statement is true; however, genre identification of this small, newly published book on the Psalms is difficult to pin down. Is it classified as an introduction to the Psalter? Is it an exposition of select Psalms, something like a commentary? I would classify it as a book of hermeneutics; more precisely, I would suggest that the authors posture themselves to write a hermeneutics on reading the Psalter.

The book is relatively short, and it is written in easily accessible prose. It is not cluttered with footnotes as so often happens in an academic tome. Nevertheless, the authors have set out to address several weighty and significant introductory and hermeneutical issues. In chapter 1 they address the issue of reading the Psalter as a book, by which they mean a coherently delivered message that resembles a masterpiece. As is well-known, they acknowledge that the Psalter is divided into five books, with the first four concluding with doxologies that have many common elements embedded within them (Ps. 41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48). They acknowledge that the Psalter included a protracted editorial process, that may have concluded with someone like Ezra being responsible for the Psalter's final form (11). They note that a new author is introduced at the beginning of each book, and they highlight some of the themes in the Psalter and conclude that the canonical form of the psalter indicates intentional arrangement. At this point they also show sensitivity to dictional links which connect individual psalms,

¹ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Harvard University, 1982), 22.

claiming that there is a deliberate building up and development within the flow of the psalter. Their thesis can be caught in the following:

The Psalter is not a random collection of disconnected poems but a strategically arranged set of carefully curated pieces that use and reuse common terminology, have clear signposts at the collection's turning points, and evidence discernable flows of thought. (20)

Next, they take up the well-worn claim that Psalms 1 and 2 were meant to introduce the psalter. They note the emphasis on Torah meditation in Psalm 1 and the accent falling upon the theme of the king in Psalm 2. Even so, I wish they had demonstrated more awareness to the Jewish practice of asking the following extremely significant question regarding Psalms 1 and 2 "framing" the Psalter: What is the surest path to communion with God? Psalm 1, which is not a prayer, would say that pious study leads to communion with God. Psalm 2, which does fit with most Psalms, would say that acts of corporate worship and praise of the king would be the surest path to God. So, which is it? According to Jewish tradition, the editors of the psalter never fully resolved this tension, since piety in the Jewish mindset indicates that it is both study and prayer that bring one close to God.

Chapter 2 takes up the topic of the superscriptions in the Psalter. In this chapter they take up two critical questions: 1) "how should the superscriptions be regarded" (27) and 2) "how should the superscriptions guide our interpretations of the Psalms?" (27). Regarding the first point the authors consider the superscriptions as inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore canonical. Although I do not recall them using the language of "inerrant," I am inclined to think that they would hold this position as well. However, such a claim is not without difficulties. Certain Psalms and their associated titles and superscriptions present great difficulties in accepting them at face value and esteeming them to be on a par with Scripture itself. Psalm 30 with its title is a case in point. Rather, I would suggest the posture posed by E. J. Young years ago to be more sober minded:

In defending the essential trustworthiness of the titles, I do not mean to suggest that as they stand they are above investigation or criticism. But a cautious and reverent criticism, it seems to me, will be unable to dismiss them in their entirety as valueless witnesses of authorship.²

This leads to their second point, "how should the superscriptions guide our interpretation?" Since the authors esteem the titles and superscriptions so highly, they maintain that the patterning of the superscriptions reveals literary structuring devices. This holds, in their view, for both smaller units and larger ones that cut across Books 1–5 of the Psalter as well. Although I appreciate their sensitivity to the role of new exodus themes here, much of their observation of large patterns in this section of the book, especially given their emphasis on chiasmic patterns, seems speculative without much evidence marshalled to support their observations.

Chapter 3 notes the importance of careful attention to individual psalms, especially the mechanisms of Hebrew prosody. They begin with some eloquent comments on the

² E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1965), 302 [footnote 3].

importance of poetry for communicating in compressed, evocative imagery, which is meant to deepen the impact of the message being conveyed. Nevertheless, they are stuck in the “traditional” approach to Hebrew poetry which is committed to Robert Lowth’s paradigm, which understands parallelism as the essence of Hebrew poetry. Although it is true that parallelism is an important literary trope in Hebrew poetry, many Psalms commentators today do not understand the complexity of parallelism or are blind to other features of Hebrew poetry that mark when one is in the ambit of poetry vis-à-vis prose (e.g., verb gapping, loosening of prose syntactic constraints). Since the linguistic turn in studies of Hebrew poetry in the last several decades, huge advances have been made in understanding the workings of Hebrew poetry and how it functions. However, the authors of this book limit their discussion to parallelisms and acrostic forms, which are present in the Psalms, but by no means exhaust the dynamics of Hebrew poetry found therein.

Chapter 4 engages the reader on the topic of reading the Psalter as a whole, like a book. We can call this a “canonical approach,” since it is attempting what many studies have done in recent years: not myopically merely reading isolated individual Psalms but paying attention to contiguous Psalms in our interpretation and the flow of a narrative in the whole Psalter that may influence the individual parts. This is the kind of approach that was begun by Brevard Childs (Barthian) and continued by more conservative scholars like O. Palmer Robertson.³ The authors suggest that slow, prayerful pondering of reading the whole Psalter will lead one into the same insights of interconnectedness that they have observed. Indeed, “walking into the Psalter,” they say, is “not unlike the experience of walking into a great cathedral” (65), a metaphor originally invoked by D. Kidner years ago. Although I appreciate their attempts to read the Psalter as a coherent whole, I was left unsatisfied that the patterns they identify can be supported by the sparse evidence they cite.

Chapter 5 maintains that attention should be given to citations and allusions in the Psalter to earlier Scripture. They emphasize this over and against the constant tendency to find the backdrop for Psalms in ancient Near Eastern parallels. This is welcome, and one can appreciate their allusion competence especially, for example, in noticing the recurring exodus motif in the Psalms.

Chapter 6 delves into the topic of interpreting the Psalter messianically. The authors set out to instruct the reader in the school of typology. The authors enjoin paying attention to pronoun usage, which is often the gateway to a legitimate messianic interpretation (84ff). They briefly touch upon the sensitive topic of imprecations in the Psalms (89ff). Next, the authors segue into a discussion of Psalms as interpreted by later Old Testament authors and New Testament authors in chapters 8 and 9. Thankfully, in an age when C. Hays and Pete Enns have emphasized “christotelic” hermeneutics (each in their own manner), Hamilton and Damico land their feet on the stable ground of apostolic hermeneutics. That is to say that we have an obligation to read the Psalms as the New Testament authors read and interpreted them, since they are inspired Apostles.

Finally, Hamilton and Damico make an outstanding appeal in chapter 9 for why Christians should return to and practice customarily singing Psalms in worship to the Triune God. This will lead the Christian into celebrating the deeds and character of God, repeating the sweet promises of God, and internalizing the Psalms, which will necessarily

³ See, e.g., O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (P & R, 2015).

lead to changing and transforming us. The final short section of this book ends with “Seven Theses on How to Read the Psalms” (127–30), which accurately summarizes and recounts the highpoints of their argument.

I began this review by saying that its genre was hard to pin down. It is written in clear and accessible prose; indeed, the authors and publishers are to be commended for producing a simple, clear, and attractively published book. There is only one typographical error I found on page 128, where “the” should be “they.” I think that the book is worth reading for the person who has an interest in reading the Psalter as a coherent whole. Several significant introductory and hermeneutical issues are discussed. I have tried to register where I demur from the authors’ positions and hope that I have introduced the reader of this review to some of the complex but fascinating interpretive issues found in today’s discussions surrounding what is arguably the most influential Old Testament book on the theology of the church since the Reformation.

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ServantReading

Things about Abortion I Never Knew

A Review Article

by Stephen A. Migotsky

Evangelicals and Abortion: Historical, Theological, Practical Perspectives, by J. Cameron Fraser. Wipf & Stock, 220 pages, \$37.00, hardcover, \$23.00, paper.

Dr. Fraser was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Scotland. He is a graduate of Edinburgh University, Westminster Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (D. Min.). He was ordained as a minister of the Word in the Presbyterian Church of America in 1985 and installed in the Christian Reformed Church in 1995, served in Canada, and is now retired. He was the last editor of the *Presbyterian Guardian* (1978–80). As the subtitle suggests, the book has three perspectives on abortion—historical, theological, and practical. As such, it is as thorough a perspective on abortion that of which I am aware.

As a historian, a Reformed pastor, and someone who has been personally involved in the “pro-life” movement, Fraser has the heart, mind, and experience which deserve profound respect. He has dug deeply and comprehensively into the history of abortion, the biblical truths related to abortion, and the experiences of both “pro-life” and “pro-choice” politics on U.S. culture. His footnotes and bibliography are extensive and valuable to anyone desiring to study the topics further.

The book is divided into three parts. The first is a historical understanding of evangelicals and abortion. He introduces the topic by describing a conversation with a pastor who did not know “that Evangelical Christians had not always believed that human life began at conception” and that “the Evangelical position on abortion that we might like to think is an obvious reading of Scripture is less than fifty years old as of this time of writing” and that some evangelicals still believe “the biblical view is that life begins at birth” (1). According to Fraser, evangelicals in general did not believe that life begins at conception until “the Shaeffer-Koop film series and book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*” (1). Fraser describes how he and his wife Margaret got involved in pro-life movements (Christian Action Council and Christians for Life) in the early 1980s. Some pro-life groups were aimed at changing legislation to be more just, and others emphasized mercy and love as responses to abortion. In the pro-life movement he observes that the political (justice) wing and those more concerned for the pregnant women (mercy) are sometimes at odds. The public in general has come to believe that “pro-lifers” are concerned only about the unborn and politics (3). This first part provides a brief history and definition of evangelicalism, and a historical survey of approaches to abortion from early church history to today.

Part two is primarily theological on why evangelicals should be pro-life by reviewing Exodus 21:22–25, the *imago Dei*, and implication for human life as created in the image of God. He believes the OPC “Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion” in 1971 was “particularly significant in regard to the interpretation of Exod (sic) 21:22–

25,” and “it argues persuasively for a different interpretation of the Exodus passage *than what was common at the time*” (73, emphasis mine). The common evangelical view at the time was that life begins at birth. Fraser presents the exegesis of Exodus 21:22–25 in the OPC report, which demonstrated that the child in view is “not the product of a miscarriage, but . . . to the contrary . . . the child is born alive, but ahead of the anticipated time” (75). Old Testament scholars Gleason Archer and Meredith Kline also contributed to exegetical support for this correct view of life beginning before the birth of the child (76). Fraser’s presentation of the biblical exegetical reasoning used in the OPC report and other scholarly articles are a powerful refutation of the position that life begins at birth rather than conception.

Part two also includes a chapter on the *imago Dei* in human beings. The subject is considered by Fraser in the context of the Supreme Court of Alabama ruling that in vitro fertilization embryos are “considered to be children under state law, citing the image of God as the basis of that law” (80). Is being a member of the human race alone what determines the value and sanctity of life? Fraser writes that some (falsely) argue that species membership alone is not morally relevant (83). The discussion of who determines worth and moral value is extremely important. Fraser quotes the late Scottish theologian T. F. Torrance’s *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* favorably: “It is extremely important, in family and medical care, to give attention to the fact that the embryonic child, male or female, is . . . an incipient person” (92). Fraser addresses the question of what an embryo is if it is not attached to the mother, not viable, or when human eggs are fertilized out of the mother. There are also issues related to contraception practices. These involve, for example, the “morning-after pill,” which prevents the progress of pregnancy. This may include the prevention of implantation, which kills the early embryo (98). The ethics of embryo research and stem cell research is also discussed with extensive quotes from David VanDrunen’s book *Bioethics and the Christian Life*.¹ The potential use of stem cells to cure diseases has resulted in harvesting them from embryos. But the current biological facts are that embryonic stem cells are somewhat dangerous to use to treat diseases, and the umbilical cord is a better, safer, and plentiful source of medically useful stem cells (100). Recent research has taken cells from mice and mature humans and reverted them to an earlier embryonic state, which provides another source for stem cells (100). Stem cell research is now possible with no need to “destroy any embryos” (100).

Fraser also addresses the use and non-use of fetal human cells to develop vaccines. There have been vaccines developed from tissue from fetuses aborted in the 1970s and 1985 and applied to some COVID-19 vaccines, but not the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. The ethical issues of benefitting from an already aborted fetus are difficult ones. Recent Christian medical organizations are “calling researchers to develop ethical COVID-19 vaccines free of abortive cells in any stage of development” (105).

Part three gives a perspective on how U.S. society views the evangelical “pro-life” position. Fraser examines “why pro-life arguments do not always resonate with society at large as we might expect and hope for” (167). He examines the slogan “adoption, not abortion” and finds it has not been at all useful in persuading women or the culture at large to adopt it. He reviews “the backlash to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*,” the appropriate response of some Christian ministries to its overturning, and why “legislative solutions alone are not the answer” (113). This may be Fraser’s most valuable

¹ David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions* (Crossway, 2009).

contribution to how to make lasting and Christlike changes regarding abortion in the U.S. In summary, he quotes Rod Dreher favorably who “urges Christians to accept that ‘the culture war as we knew it is over. The so-called value voters—social and religious conservatives—have been defeated and are being swept to the political margins’” (120).

Pro-choice advocates have begun to redefine words and phrases to turn pro-life people into the real killers because they always neglect the babies after they’re born. . . . We even hear open claims in the media today by proabortion activists that they are the true pro-lifers! After all, they tell us, it is pro-life to favor a woman’s right to bodily autonomy, pro-life want to see women not shackled down by having to raise a child instead of pursuing an education and career, pro-life to prevent children with Down’s (sic) Syndrome from being born and having to face life with such a disability (132–33).

He points out that there is also new media attention to abortion abolitionists who reject “incremental steps toward outlawing abortion and reserve strong criticism for those who accept anything other than a federal ban equipped with criminal penalties for all involved,” including pregnant women and doctors (139). David French is quoted as writing, “Abortion can only truly end when American culture changes, not just its law” (141). There are other international examples given of how the culture in other countries is far from being pro-life.

Given the U.S. culture, Fraser writes favorably about Care Net. Care Net is an expansive network advocating for 1,200 independent, affiliated pregnancy centers across North America, as well as operating Pregnancy Decision Line to reach women and men at their point of need. Care Net works to end abortion, not primarily through political action but by building a culture where women and men receive all the support they need to welcome their children and create their own success stories (147).

I found no weaknesses in this book. It is comprehensive, thoughtful, biblical, and pastoral.

CONCLUSION

It would be a rare pastor or Christian who would not benefit from reading this book. Apparently, there are still evangelicals who believe that life begins at birth. Reading this book, the OPC “Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion,” and Dr. Kline’s article which can be found at <https://meredithkline.com/klines-works/articles-and-essays/lex-talionis-and-the-human-fetus/> will give a pastor the exegetical help and pastoral help needed for a biblical case that life does not begin at birth and that much good can be done through Christlike compassion to women and men facing a pregnancy.

Several videos were referenced by Fraser that this reviewer found informative after watching them. Historically, the most influential were *How Should We Then Live?* and, especially, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* Two additional videos, *The Silent Scream* and *Eclipse of Reason*, describe details of an abortion procedure and show abortions being performed. Both have a former abortionist describing the procedures. All these videos are available and should be useful for an evangelical understanding of abortion.

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ServantReading

Pastoral Visitation: For the Care of Souls, *by Tyler C. Arnold*

by D. Scott Meadows

Pastoral Visitation: For the Care of Souls, by Tyler C. Arnold. Lexham, 2022, 199 pages, \$19.99.

That faithful pastors visit their people and care for their souls in private, as well as in their public ministries of the Word and sacraments, is the deep conviction of this author. Helping pastors fulfill that calling well is this book's primary thrust.

The Lutheran orientation of the author and series, *Lexham Ministry Guides*, did not diminish but added value and interest for this Reformed minister. I found nearly everything either agreeable or plausible. Whatever our distinctives, caring pastors visiting and counseling in private homes have so much in common.

Hardcover and handbook-sized at 4.25" x 7," its 199 pages are a quick and pleasant read, inviting the occasional rereading and referencing as we devote ourselves to pastoral visitation. Brief introductory materials (a series preface, a pre-visit prayer, and a preface for this particular book) are followed by seven chapters divided into two parts, concluding with an appendix, annotated bibliography, list of works cited, and endnotes.

The two major parts are Pastoral Foundations (chs. 1–3) and Pastoral Resources (chs. 4–7). Chapter 1, "God's Visitation: Jesus at the Center," establishes the pastoral visitation ministry as God's grace continuing to bless his people by Jesus's ministry perpetuated through his ministers. We are his imitators and instruments in shepherding souls. What a profound motivation!

Chapter 2, "The Pastor's Visitation: God's Work as Identity," reminds us that pastors are under-shepherds and overseers, both having implications for serving the church by visitation. In this we imitate the apostles, who visited homes to proclaim the gospel, counsel, and encourage. Historical anecdotes and the author's personal experiences illustrate the topics addressed. The author candidly admits challenges familiar to all faithful pastors and offers suggestions for meeting them.

Chapter 3, "God's Story in Our Story: Using Liturgy and Listening," relates touching examples of pastoral visits, using prayers, songs, and communion from the liturgy of the gathered church, familiar to devout shut-ins named Carol and Georgia. This became a regular practice for their pastoral care, along with time spent in sympathetic listening to them. It is easy to see how comforting to them and how useful to the minister such experiences are.

Part 2, "Pastoral Resources," begins with chapter 4, "Preparing for Pastoral Visitation: Things to Consider." The anticipated list is well-organized. Preparation

requires creating a plan to include things like a visitation list, initial contact, asking to visit, and preparing to make the visit. Sensible suggestions abound. Counsel about making the visit entails praying in the driveway, making your intentions clear, listening, and concluding with prayer and blessing. These are fleshed out in helpful ways.

Chapter 5, “Doing Pastoral Visitation: Making It Work,” blends traditional methods of communication with some particular to our technological age, including voicemails, emails, letters, notes, and social media. These made some ministry possible during the Covid-19 pandemic and still have some usefulness. Face-to-face contact is preferred and may be possible in other settings than private homes, but virtual visits are better than nothing. This chapter concludes with a challenge and counsel about training lay visitors, elders, and deacons, so that others share with a pastor in this good work, and no one is neglected.

Chapter 6, “Pastoral Visitation: Five Situations,” gently guides a pastor to do well in assisting the suffering and dying, those anxious before surgery, the lonely and isolated, the spiritually lost, and those experiencing life after a tragedy, like grief and shame. Each situation includes a section called “So, What Can Pastors Do?” including general suggestions and specific Scripture texts and hymns.

Chapter 7, “Word of Encouragement,” preaches the striking truth that, in effect, we visit Jesus (Matt. 25:36, 39, 40). Also, Jesus accompanies us in this holy labor. These are heavenly truths to remember in a good work that is sometimes daunting and difficult.

Mr. Arnold’s book breathes the very pastoral spirit it urges. This is a lovely and helpful treatment that has my warm commendation.

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ServantPoetry

Austin Phelps (1820–1890)

Faith in Prayer

I have sometimes tried to conceive of the history of one prayer. I have endeavored to follow it from its inception in the human mind, through its utterance by human lips; in its flight up to the ear of Him, and on its journey around unnumbered parts in the organism of His decrees, and on its return from these altitudes, with its golden train of blessings to which eternal counsels have paid tribute at His bidding, I have endeavored to form some conception of the methods by which this omnipotence of poor human speech gains its ends—*but how futile it is!* How shadowy are thoughts I get from such attempts to master prayer. I fall back with relief upon the magnitude of this fact of prayer—“beyond the stars heard” and “answered through the ministry of angels.”