

The Sum of Saving Knowledge

Ordained
Servant

May 2025



Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: THE SUM OF SAVING KNOWLEDGE

May 2025

From the Editor

Jim Campbell begins his article “A Call to Read *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*” with an observation: “Many in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church have probably never heard of *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and perhaps fewer have studied it and thought deeply about what it has to say.” In the past, however, it has been beloved in the Reformed church for its practical usefulness and beauty. Hence, Campbell’s call for renewed appreciation in our churches.

Part 3 of *Going Peopleless*, in which I explore the benefits and liabilities of AI, will appear in the June-July issue of *OS Online*.

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 “The River.” 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

Gordon Cook reviews *Grace: A Model for Grieving, a Five-Step Guide for Healing after Loss*, by Kay Towns. It is a good example of how we can benefit from the work of those who are not necessarily Christians. We can learn much in various disciplines from those who, in God’s Providence, have developed expertise in certain areas of knowledge. The review of Kay Towns is an example of how retired hospital chaplain Gordon Cook discerningly assesses the value of such a work.

David Koenig brings his exegetical abilities to his review of *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology*, by G. K. Beale. Because Beale is appreciated in our circles, Koenig found it hard to find fault with Beale’s latest offering.

Darryl Hart reviews a fascinating new book by Bruce Gordon—*The Bible: A Global History*. Hart commends this book as “a book that deserves to be used not simply for the delight of reading but also as a reference for tracing how the Bible came from Moses on Mt. Sinai to an app on our cell phones.”

Our poem this month, by John Donne (1572–1631), “A Hymn to God the Father,” was most likely meant to be a hymn. It is made up of three sestets (six line stanzas) in an

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

ABABAB rhyme pattern. Donne laments the enormity of his sin in all of its awful complexity, but he ends by trusting the greater extent and reach of God's forgiveness in the finished work of Christ.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

CONTENTS

ServantLiterature

- Danny E. Olinger, "The River"

ServantHistory

- James W. Campbell, "A Call to Read *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*"

ServantReading

- Gordon H. Cook, Jr., review of *Grace: A Model for Grieving, a Five-Step Guide for Healing after Loss*, by Kay Towns
- David J. Koenig, review of *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology*, by G. K. Beale
- Darryl J. Hart, review of *The Bible: A Global History*, by Bruce Gordon

ServantPoetry

- John Donne (1572–1631), "A Hymn to God the Father"

FROM THE ARCHIVES "BIBLE"

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-32.pdf

- "Incarnation, Inspiration, and Pneumatology: A Reformed Incarnational Analogy." (Lane G. Tipton) 17 (2008): 85–90.
- "The Public Reading of Scripture in Worship: A Biblical Model for the Lord's Day." (Glen J. Clary) 22 (2013): 17–21.
- "The Rhythms of the Christian Life in Bible Reading, Prayer, and Poetry" (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 22 (2013): 109–11.

- “Who Reads Scripture?” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 22 (2013): 9–12.
 - “Paul, the Apostle of Gender-Inclusive Translation?” (James W. Scott) 10:1 (Jan. 2001): 20–22.
 - “Should We Still Use the KJV Today: A Review Article.” (G. I. Williamson) 6:4 (Oct. 1997): 99.
 - “The King James Version in the Church: Past, Present, and Future.” (Leland Ryken) 20 (2011): 41–46.
-

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.

ServantHistory

A Call to Read the Sum of Saving Knowledge

by James W. Campbell

Beloved, when I gave all diligence
to write unto you of the common salvation,
it was needful for me to write unto you,
and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend
for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.
—Jude 1:3, KJV

WHAT IS IT?

Many in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church have probably never heard of *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and perhaps fewer have studied it and thought deeply about what it has to say. I think if you have not pondered the meaning of this little book, you may have missed some significant lessons that will help you in your spiritual quest for a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The middle decades of the seventeenth century were times of great uncertainty and conflict in Scotland. Often called “The Second Reformation,” this conflict had to do with church government (bishops or presbyters?) and with the question of the final authority for doctrine and worship and practice in the church (Scripture alone or Scripture and something else?). All the while, the political question of the place of King over the people and the Church had to be resolved.

All of us know that this time of ecclesiastical upheaval led to the Westminster Assembly, where ministers and elders, selected by the Parliament of England and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, produced the Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms. John Murray described these standards as

the mature fruit of the whole movement of creed-formulation throughout fifteen centuries of Christian history and, in particular, they are the crown of the greatest age of confessional exposition, the Protestant Reformation.¹

In addition to these formally approved documents, it was thought that a more simple summary of the truth of God’s Word ought to be prepared, especially appropriate for those being instructed in the biblical doctrines of the Gospel. It appears that two Scottish ministers in Glasgow, David Dickson (1583–1663) and James Durham (1622–1658), often reflected on how this need could be met. These men served as pastors and, at various times, as professors of divinity at the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh. It

¹ John Murray, “A Notable Tercentenary” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1, *The Claims of Truth* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 313.

is said that often they walked together in the hills near the Glasgow High Kirk. These talks led them to produce this document as they contemplated the need for a simple record of the truths of Scripture, especially one that would be appropriate as a guide for heads of families instructing children in the things of Christ. They were so successful in achieving that purpose that it came to be a staple of godly reading and meditation for all.

Never having received official confessional status by the Church of Scotland, nevertheless, from the beginning, this summary was printed along with the confessional documents, and even to the present day, it can be found published in a single volume with the other officially approved standards of doctrine, government, and worship. It was entitled *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and the subtitle gives its purpose and function: *A Brief Sum of Christian Doctrine, contained in the Holy Scriptures, and holden forth in foresaid Confession of Faith and Catechisms; together the practical use thereof.*²

So, if anyone wishes to read a concise summary of biblical teaching, either as a Christian or as an interested inquirer, he can do no better than to turn to *The Sum*.

WHY SHOULD WE READ IT?

Obviously, this is a matter of interest to those historically minded who wish to know more about the life and growth of the churches holding to the Reformed Faith, especially as they underwent the trials of the seventeenth century. But I believe that there are at least two other reasons why someone in the church today ought to study *The Sum*.

First, we need to recognize that even if we take the Bible seriously and accept it as the revealed Word of God to us, it is sometimes difficult to put the teachings of that revealed truth together and see it as a complete and systematic revelation of God's Word. The teachings of Scripture have, at their heart, a unified theme that can be overlooked as one focuses on specific questions that come to mind. The audience addressed here is not so much the scholar, theological student, or teacher, as it is the average Christian seeking to understand the faith he professes or in which he has a growing interest. Both sorts of people need to know what the substance of that faith is and what it ought to be doing with them and for them and to them. Matthew Vogan (the Editorial Director of the Trinitarian Bible Society, and an Elder in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland) is a noted scholar of the church history of Scotland and has published many articles and books in that field. He wrote a preface to the edition of *The Sum* published by the Reformation Press in 2019. He states:

The Puritans and Covenanters spoke frequently of “saving knowledge.” They understood that a person could not be saved without first coming to the knowledge of what the Scriptures teach concerning God, man, sin, righteousness, judgment, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and salvation. True saving faith always has at least three elements: knowledge, belief, and trust.³

Therefore, the first reason to study *The Sum* is because in our day, perhaps even more than in the past, there is great ignorance, even in the visible church, of what biblical truth

² *The Confession of Faith; The Larger and Shorter Catechisms: Together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Free Presbyterian Publications, 1981).

³ Matthew Vogan, preface, *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, R. J. Dickie and M. Vogan, eds. (Reformation Press, 2019), 15.

really is and how we need to correctly understand it and express it.

A second reason why we should be interested in this work is to be found in its subtitle mentioned above. Durham and Dickson were concerned to produce a work that would be doctrinally and biblically sound but would also be oriented toward the “practical.” That English word comes from the Latin, which in turn, comes from the Greek, and it means “to do, to accomplish, to engage in activity or behave in a certain way.” “Practical” was understood in distinction from “theoretical.” It was used by people to express ideas that were to have a consequence in actions; that make a difference not merely in opinions, but deeds. Words about doctrine, even when they are correct in their articulation, are not enough. There must also be thoughtful consequence in terms of actions, feelings, obedience, and trust. Our knowledge of the truths revealed to us in God’s Word ought, in short, to make a difference. Here is where *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* is very helpful, as it focuses as much on what we are and what we do as it does on what we think and believe.

HOW SHOULD WE READ IT?

We are dealing here with a document that not only seeks to convey information, but, perhaps more importantly, seeks to convey information that will lead the reader to know, to believe, to trust, and to become something better than he was before. I suggest that the call to walk close to the Son of God, our Savior, is founded not only upon what we know about God and these things of eternity, but also what we *feel* about them, how we *react* to them, and how we become different people than we were before we were aware of such things.

I hope I have encouraged you to read *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*. Let me go further and suggest that those who read this little book ought to approach it with reflective, prayerful directions such as these in mind:

1. Take time to go through the book. Become really familiar with the material, and let it become a part of your own understanding of and practice of your walk with God and your love for Christ.
2. Include others in your reflections. Certainly, solitary study is acceptable, but finding a way to work through this text with someone else is to be encouraged. If possible, involve your family, your friends, or a group at your church as you seek to become more adept at understanding the gospel, and especially, at living the gospel.
3. Be sure to ask yourself significant questions about what you read. These ought to be personal, not general. What does this mean for me? How ought I to be more spiritually minded? If what I understand about the biblical gospel is true, how ought this knowledge to be changing me? What is the Holy Spirit doing to me and with me and through me in such a time of re-evaluation?

It is my hope that these words will spur people in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, especially its ministers, elders, and deacons, to draw closer to Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of His people.

Robert Murray M’Cheyne, a nineteenth-century minister whose spiritual writings continue to inspire, encourage, and guide Christians in our own day, wrote this in his diary for March 11, 1834:

Read in *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, the work which I think first of all wrought a saving change in me. How gladly would I renew the reading of it; if that change might be carried on to perfection.⁴

It is my hope that all who take up this book and use it in the way the authors intended it to be used, might, as a result of such a study, come to know more and to experience more of that spiritual reality, which is nothing less than to draw nearer to Christ. And, thereby, all those who love the Lord, might find such study to bring an increased measure of joy, a foretaste of life eternal, and a token of our response to that One who did so much for us because he loves us so, all in accordance with his Father's holy will and sovereign decree.

Resources for Further Study

David Dickson and James Durham, *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Reformation Press, 2019).

This edition contains the preface by Matthew Vogan referred to above.

David Dickson and James Durham, *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, lightly edited and modernized text by David G. Whitla (Crown and Covenant Publications, 2023).

A study guide to this edition can be downloaded from the publisher.

The Sum of Saving Knowledge, <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-sum-of-saving-knowledge/>

This online edition is available on the site of Grange Press, the publishing endeavor of the Presbytery of the United States of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

Jonathan D. Mattull, *Reformed and Evangelical: The Historical Context of “The Sum of Saving Knowledge,”* <https://www.grangepress.com/2019/02/14/reformed-and-evangelical-the-historical-context-of-the-sum-of-saving-knowledge/>

David G. Whitla, “A Right Channel of New Obedience: Sanctification in the Sum of Saving Knowledge” in *The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal*. 7.2 (Fall 2020).

The Sum of Saving Knowledge is included with the Westminster Standards in the editions published by the Banner of Truth Trust. <https://banneroftruth.org/us/store/theology-books/westminster-confession/> and by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. <https://www.fpbookroom.org/cgi-bin/sd000001.pl?WD=confessionwestminster&PN=Westminster-Standards-PB-2004.html#SID=45>

James W. Campbell is a retired minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He served as teacher in Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hamden, Connecticut. He recently led an eleven-part study of *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* for the mid-week Bible study and prayer meeting of Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

⁴ Andrew Bonar, *Memoir & Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1894), 22.

ServantLiterature

The River

by Danny Olinger

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

When Flannery O'Connor's collection of short stories, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, was published in 1955, *The New Yorker* ran a notice that was less than complimentary. The reviewer stated that

there is a brutality to these stories, but since the brutes are as mindless as their victims, all we have, in the end, is a series of tales about creatures who collide and drown, or survive or float passively in the isolated sea of the author's compassion, which accepts them without reflecting anything.¹

O'Connor told Betty Hester that the unsigned notice was moronic and lacked moral sense, but she admitted to Hester that the stories had a hard edge. The stories were hard because nothing was harder or less sentimental in life than the reality of original sin and the saving necessity of Christ, truths which O'Connor judged to be under attack.

I believe that there are many rough beasts now slouching toward Bethlehem to be born and that I have reported the progress of a few of them, and when I see these stories described as horror stories I am always amused because the reviewer always has hold of the wrong horror.²

In "The River," undoubtedly one of the stories in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* that *The New Yorker* reviewer had in mind, Harry Ashfield, the young protagonist, is taken by his babysitter Mrs. Connin to the river to hear the preacher Bevel Summers. Harry jokingly tells Mrs. Connin that his name is Bevel, but at the river his life changes. The preacher baptizes Harry/Bevel and tells him that he now counts. Returned by Mrs. Connin to his parents' godless existence, Harry/Bevel remembers the river as a place where he counts and sets out for it. When he arrives at the river, he sees Mr. Paradise, who the day before had openly mocked gospel believers. The child plunges into the water to escape Mr. Paradise and dies seeking after the kingdom of Christ.

¹ "Briefly Noted," *The New Yorker* (June 18, 1955), 93.

² Flannery O'Connor to "A," July 20, 1955, in *Habit of Being*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1979), 90.

For O'Connor, the boy's death in seeking after the kingdom of Christ is not the horror in the story, but rather his deliverance. Modern unbelief, as symbolized with his parents and Mr. Paradise, is the horror. Life without God is without hope.

Baptism

Caroline Gordon praised "The River" as one of O'Connor's stories that "nearly approach perfection."³ She told O'Connor, "I see even more clearly with this story what you are about. It is original. Nobody else has done anything just like it. And it is something that much needs to be done."⁴

O'Connor was "highly pleased" that Gordon liked the story. She explained that she had been wanting to write about baptism but was struggling on how to do so. Particularly, she had been thinking about a woman baptizing a child that didn't know what it was about. "The Church's ceremony of Baptism is so elaborate! I keep trying to think of some way in fiction that I could convey the richness against the threadbareness of the other but my thought is none too productive."⁵

O'Connor's solution was to create two worlds. There is the unbelieving world of Harry's parents. They live in an apartment that is sterile and reeks of cigarettes. They amuse themselves by holding parties, but they neglect Harry. The other world is that of the red muddy river, the domain of the preached Word and believers, where nothing said or done is a joke.⁶ In this world, the River of Life made out of Jesus's blood, Harry, baptized and given the new name, Bevel, counts.

Harry/Bevel and Mrs. Connin

O'Connor telegraphs what will happen with the story's opening paragraph. At six o'clock on a Sunday morning Mr. Ashfield is shoving his son out of the half-open door of his apartment into the hallway. Mr. Ashfield heard a voice in return, "He ain't fixed right." The father muttered, "Well then for Christ's sake fix him."⁷

The voice belonged to Mrs. Connin, a believer, who informs Mr. Ashfield that she planned to take the boy to the river for a faith healing before bringing him back at night. Drumming his fingers on the door as he was eager to cast the boy off, Mr. Ashfield tells Mrs. Connin that it would be alright and tells his son, "Good-bye, old man."

³ Caroline Gordon, "An American Girl," *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor*, eds. Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson (Fordham, 1966), 128. Another admirer of "The River" is Bruce Springsteen. When asked to name one book that shaped him, Springsteen stated that O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* landed hard on him. "There was something in those stories of hers that I felt captured a certain part of the American character that I was interested in writing about. They were a big, big revelation." Springsteen named his 1980 *Billboard* chart toting fifth album *The River* in tribute to O'Connor. One song that Springsteen recorded at the time but did not release until nearly twenty years later was "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." Will Percy, "Rock and Ready: Will Percy Interviews Bruce Springsteen," *Doubletalk*, no. 12 (1999), 2.

⁴ Caroline Gordon to Flannery O'Connor, September 1, 1953, *Good Things Out of Nazareth*, ed. Benjamin B. Alexander (Convergent, 2019), 68.

⁵ Flannery O'Connor to Caroline Gordon, September 1953, *Good Things Out of Nazareth*, 16.

⁶ Joyce Carol Oates, *New Heavens, New Earth* (Vanguard, 1974), 158.

⁷ Flannery O'Connor, *Complete Stories* (Noonday, 1995), 157.

Before she leaves, however, Mrs. Connin heard a voice utter, "Bring me an icepack." Mrs. Connin tells Mr. Ashfield that she will ask the Reverend Bevel Summers to pray for the boy's sick mamma. She then added that maybe Mrs. Ashfield ought to see Summers since he has healed a lot of people. Mr. Ashfield replied, "maybe so" and then disappeared back into the dark apartment.

Mrs. Connin and the child departed into the gray morning blocked off on either side by unlit empty buildings. "Wipe your nose, Sugar Boy," she instructed him, and he started to rub his shirt sleeve across his nose. She stopped him and asked, "Where's your handkerchief?" He pretended to look in his pocket for one, which causes Mrs. Connin to blurt out, "Some people don't care how they send one off."⁸

She realized that she didn't know his first name and asked the child his name. His name was Harry, and he had never thought at any time before of changing it, but he tells her, "Bevel."⁹ Happy to hear that he had the same name as the preacher, Mrs. Connin takes the child to her house. He goes out to play with her three sons, but they trick him into entering a pig pen where he is attacked by a mean shoat. The hog chases Bevel to the house where Mrs. Connin catches the boy up as he reached the steps. She shouted at the hog, which was humpbacked with part of his ear bitten off, to get away and told the boy, "That one yonder favors Mr. Paradise that has the gas station." She then said, "You'll see him today at the healing. He's got the cancer over his ear. He always comes to show he ain't been healed."¹⁰

Earlier at breakfast, she had read the book "The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers Under Twelve" to Bevel while he sat on her lap. He learned that a carpenter, named Jesus Christ, made him.¹¹ From his parents, he had the impression that Jesus Christ "was a word like "oh" or "damn" or "God," or maybe somebody who had cheated them out of something sometime."¹² He also found out that this carpenter is powerful enough to drive a herd of pigs out of a man. Just before they leave the house to hear the preacher, he managed to put the book in the inner lining of his coat without Mrs. Connin seeing him.

They walked to the river with Mrs. Connin in front with Bevel, then the three boys in the middle, and Mrs. Connin's daughter, Sarah Mildred, at the end to holler if one of the boys ran out into the road. They looked like a skeleton of an old boat with two pointed ends with the white Sunday sun both following and climbing fast through a gray haze as if it meant to overtake them. Having never been in the woods before, Bevel looked from side to side as if he were entering a strange country. The woods opened to an orange stream where the reflection of the sun was set like a diamond, and people were standing on the near bank singing. The preacher, his face all bone, looked no more than nineteen years old. He was standing about ten feet out in the stream with the water up to his knees. His focus was on Jesus and the cleansing of their sins.

⁸ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 158.

⁹ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 159.

¹⁰ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 162. Carter Martin observes that Mr. Paradise is "associated with pigs, which function throughout the story, as they do biblically, as symbols of spiritual uncleanness." Carter W. Martin, *The True Country* (Vanderbilt, 1994), 47.

¹¹ O'Connor's use of "carpenter" here takes its full literal meaning of a maker, and Bevel, something a carpenter makes, is faced with the prospect of seeing himself anew. See, Ronald Schleifer, "Rural Gothic," in *Flannery O'Connor*, ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House, 1986), 87.

¹² O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 163.

"If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me. If you just come to see can you leave your pain in the river, you ain't come for Jesus. You can't leave your pain in the river," he said. "I never told nobody that." He stopped and looked down at his knees.

"I seen you cure a woman oncet!" a sudden high voice shouted from the hump of people. "Seen that woman git up and walk out straight where she had limped in!"

The preacher lifted one foot and then the other. He seemed almost but not quite to smile. "You might as well go home if that's what you come for," he said.

Then he lifted his head and arms and shouted, "Listen to what I got to say, you people! There ain't but one river and that's the River of Life, made out of Jesus' blood. That's the river you have to lay your pain in, in the River of Faith, in the River of Life, in the River of Love, in the rich red river of Jesus' blood, you people!"

His voice grew soft and musical. "All the rivers come from that one River and go back to it like it was the ocean sea and if you believe, you can lay your pain in that River and get rid of it because that's the River that was made to carry sin. It's a River full of pain itself, pain itself, moving toward the Kingdom of Christ, to be washed away, slow, you people, slow as this here old red water river under my feet."¹³

A fluttering figure moved forward, an old woman with flapping arms whose head wobbled as if it might fall off. A voice from the crowd shouted that she had been that way for thirteen years and then added, "Pass the hat and give the kid his money. That's what he's here for." The shouting man, Mr. Paradise, wore a grey hat that was turned down over his right ear and raised up over his left ear to expose a purple bulge over his left temple.¹⁴ Bevel stared at the man and then drew near to Mrs. Connin, moving into the folds of her coat. The preacher also glanced quickly at the man and said with his fist raised, "Believe Jesus or the devil! . . . Testify to the one or the other!"¹⁵

Mrs. Connin lifted the child up and told the preacher that she had a boy from town that had a sick mamma. She added that his name was Bevel and turned to the crowd and said, "ain't that a coincident." She then asked the child if he had ever been baptized, and the boy only grinned. Mrs. Connin raised her eyebrows to the preacher, "I suspect he ain't ever been Baptized." "Swang him over here," the preacher said and took a stride forward and caught him." The boy now in the preacher's arms rolled his eyes in a comical way. "My name is Bevvuuuuul," the boy said in a loud voice, but the preacher did not smile. There was only the sound of Mr. Paradise laughing loudly.¹⁶

The boy's demeanor, however, changed as he had the sudden feeling that this was not a joke. Everything with his parents was a joke, but from the preacher's face, the boy knew that nothing the preacher said or did was a joke.

¹³ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 165.

¹⁴ According to Damien Ference, O'Connor's choice of the left side for the placement of Mr. Paradise's cancer is deliberate. He writes, "In Catholic symbolism the right (*dexter*) side is the good side and the left (*sinister*) side is the wicked side. For example, in the last judgment (Matt. 25:31–46), the sheep are at the right and the goats are at the left." See, Damien Ference, *Understanding the Hillbilly Thomist* (Word on Fire, 2023), 98.

¹⁵ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 166. Joyce Carol Oates argues that for O'Connor in her fiction the devil is that which keeps you from the kingdom of God. In "The River," Mr. Paradise plays that part. Oates, *New Heaven, New Earth*, 159.

¹⁶ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 167.

“Have you ever been Baptized?” the preacher asked.

“What’s that?” he murmured.

“If I Baptize you,” the preacher said, “you’ll be able to go to the Kingdom of Christ. You’ll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you’ll go by the deep river of life. Do you want that?”

“Yes,” the child said, and thought, I won’t go back to the apartment then, I’ll go under the river.

“You won’t be the same again,” the preacher said. “You’ll count.”

Then he turned his face to the people again and began to preach and Bevel looked over his shoulder at the pieces of the white sun scattered in the river.¹⁷

That night Mrs. Connin returned Bevel to the apartment of his parents where a party is going on. As Mr. Ashfield went off to get the money to pay Mrs. Connin, one of the party guests asked the boy, “Well Harry, old man, have a big day?” Mrs. Connin immediately corrected the guest, “His name ain’t Harry. It’s Bevel.”¹⁸

His mother, lying on the sofa, for the first time shows interest in the boy and declares, “His name is Harry.” She gasps, “Whoever heard of anyone named Bevel?” In a shocked voice, Mrs. Connin told her that the child said that his name was Bevel, the same as the preacher, and the mother objected even more, taking the Lord’s name in vain. Mrs. Connin’s tone then turned deviant as she informed the mother that preacher baptized the boy. The mother sat straight up and muttered, “Well, the nerve!” Mrs. Connin then told her that the preacher also prayed for her affliction. “Healed!” She almost shouted. ““Healed of what for Christ’s sake?” ‘Of your affliction,’ Mrs. Connin said icily.”¹⁹

Mr. Ashfield, who had returned with money in hand to pay Mrs. Connin, chided Mrs. Connin, “Go on, go on,” he said, “I wanted to hear more about her affliction.” He waved the bill and said with his voice trailing off, “Healing by prayer is mighty inexpensive.” Mrs. Connin stood, staring into the room, with a skeleton’s appearance of seeing everything, and then left without taking the money.²⁰

The mother, concerned about the lies he might have spread about her, questions Harry. As she did so, “he shut his eye and heard her voice from a long way away, as if he were under the river and she on top of it.”²¹ The mother then discovered Mrs. Connin’s book, *The Life of Jesus for Readers Under Twelve*, that the boy had hid in his jacket. She read it mockingly to the party guests. A man remarked that the book, published in 1832, was valuable. The boy knew also that it was valuable, but not because of monetary worth. It was valuable because it testified to that place, the river, where nothing was a joke.

The next morning the boy awoke in the dark apartment before his parents. He looked out the window where the sun came in palely, stained grey by the glass. Deprived of the

¹⁷ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 168.

¹⁸ When Mr. Ashfield sent off his son earlier that morning with Mrs. Connin, he had also called him “old man.” Now returning, having been baptized, the boy is a “new man.” It is a spiritual change not noticeable to the senses. See, Ference, *Understanding the Hillbilly Thomist*, 101.

¹⁹ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 169.

²⁰ O’Connor, *Complete Stories*, 170. The parents believe that Christianity is a marketable commodity. Mrs. Connin’s repudiation of payment recalls Christ’s command to his apostles to wipe the dust from their feet on the thresholds of those homes which do not accept them.” Feeley, *Voice of the Peacock*, 134.

²¹ The boy, because of his baptism, participates in the river of life, his mother does not. Martin, *True Country*, 53–54.

book, his connection with the other world, he went about overturning ashtrays and rubbing the ashes into the carpet. He laid on the floor a while and studied his feet which he held up in the air. "His shoes were still damp and he began to think about the river. Very slowly, his expression changed as if he were gradually seeing appear what he didn't know he'd been looking for. Then all of a sudden he knew what he wanted to do."²² He left the apartment without a suitcase, for there was nothing in his old life that he wanted to keep.

When he got off the car at the end of the line, he did not see Mr. Paradise, who was fishing with an unbaited line, but Mr. Paradise saw him. Mr. Paradise picked out a foot long peppermint stick and started to follow the boy, but Bevel's focus was on the river. Bevel reached the river determined "not to fool with preachers anymore but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river. He didn't mean to waste any more time. He put his head under the water at once and pushed forward."²³ His head reappeared above the water as the river would not have him, and the thought ran through his mind that everything had been another joke. But then "he heard a shout and turned his head and saw something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting."²⁴ Bevel tried again, and this time, he knew he was getting somewhere. Mr. Paradise, who had jumped into the river to retrieve the boy, rose empty-handed like some ancient water monster and stared with his dull eyes down the river as far as he could see.

Baptism and Death

Seven years after publishing "The River," O'Connor wrote another shocking baptism scene in her novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*. Young Tarwater, accepting his call as a prophet, drowns the child Bishop when he baptizes him. In words that could be applied to "The River," O'Connor explained why her baptisms were so dramatic.

Well, I tell stories that frequently hinge on the things of belief, and the man of our times is certainly not a believer. When I write a novel in which the central action is baptism, I have to assume that for the general reader, or the general run of readers, baptism is a meaningless rite, and I have to arrange the action so that this baptism carries enough awe and terror to jar the reader into some kind of emotional recognition of its significance. I have to make him feel, viscerally if no other way, that something is going on here that counts. Distortion is an instrument in this case; exaggeration has a purpose.²⁵

In "The River," O'Connor also takes special interest in the role of death in the believer's pilgrimage to heaven. This is why she constantly describes Mrs. Connin as a skeleton in the story. In picking up Harry, Mrs. Connin is "a speckled skeleton in a long pea-green coat and a felt helmet" looming in the hallway. Riding the streetcar with the

²² O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 172.

²³ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 173.

²⁴ O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, 174.

²⁵ Flannery O'Connor, "Flannery O'Connor: An Interview, by C. Ross Mullins," in *Conversations*, 104–105.

child to her home, she falls asleep and “began to whistle and blow like a musical skeleton.” In walking Harry and her children to the river, her group “looked like the skeleton of an old boat with two pointed ends, sailing slowly on the edge of a highway.”²⁶ When she returns the child back to the Ashfield apartment, she stood outside staring into the room “with a skeleton’s appearance of seeing everything.” The skeleton-like features of Mrs. Connin are shared in the story by Bevel Summers, whose face is all bone. The skeleton appearance of Mrs. Connin and the preacher indicate that both view life properly.²⁷ It is O’Connor’s way of signalizing her belief that “the creative action of the Christian’s life is to prepare for his death in Christ.”²⁸

This combination of O’Connor’s attempt to speak to baptism and viewing death in relationship to the life to come led her to declare that the ending of the “The River” was positive. She said, “Bevel hasn’t reached the age of Reason; therefore, he can’t commit suicide. He comes to a good end. He’s saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He’s been baptized and so he goes to his Maker: this is a good end.”²⁹ It is his acceptance of grace, “the child’s peculiar desire to find the kingdom of Christ,” that makes the story work.³⁰

Danny E. Olinger is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

²⁶ John May states that “the allusions to death and possibly to the ark foreshadow the ending of the story, but more importantly they emphasize the process of Harry’s passage through death to life that is at the heart of the story. He must leave the meaninglessness of his parents’ apartment in order to count, and death in the guise of Mrs. Connin is the agent of his passage.” John R. May, *The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O’Connor* (Notre Dame, 1976), 65.

²⁷ Ference comments, “The fact that Mrs. Connin, her family, and Bevel Summers are the ones in the story described as skeletons or as “bony” signifies that they understand reality properly; they see that their lives are about more than this world, and they have chosen to spend their lives preparing for their final end with the one who created all ends and is the final end of all being.” Ference, *Hillbilly Thomist*, 109.

²⁸ Flannery O’Connor, “Introduction to *A Memoir to Mary Ann*,” *Mystery and Manners*, eds. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 223.

²⁹ “An Interview with Flannery O’Connor, by Katharine Fugin, Faye Rivard, and Margaret Sieh,” October 1960, *Conversations with Flannery O’Connor*, ed. Rosemary M. Magee (University of Mississippi, 1987), 58.

³⁰ O’Connor, *The Added Dimension*, 229.

ServantReading

Grace: A Model for Grieving, a Five-Step Guide for Healing after Loss, *by Kay Towns*

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

Grace: A Model for Grieving, a Five-Step Guide for Healing after Loss,
by Kay Towns. Hatherleigh, 2024, 160 pages, \$18.00, paper.

How do we provide comfort and counsel for those who are stuck in an unrelenting experience of complicated grief? It is easy to tell them they need to move on. But it may be very difficult for them to do so without significant pastoral support and guidance. Dr. Towns offers hope for those stuck in grief, and healing in the form of developing a “new normal” (88).

Dr. Kay Towns is a Doctor of Professional Counseling (Mississippi College) and a licensed professional counselor. She also received a Master of Theological Studies from Southern Methodist University and a Master in Counseling from Huston Graduate School of Theology. She is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. Her passion for the subject of grieving and the development of the “GRACE Grief Model” comes out of her own personal experience of intense loss (104–106).

Towns brings together Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), narrative therapy (NT), and a modified version of Park’s Meaning Making Model into a unified “GRACE Grief Model” intended to provide counseling, support, and healing for those experiencing loss. Her model is particularly unique in its integration of CBT into grief counseling.

Towns has provided this model for us in two volumes. The book gives the content of her model and its defense, along with material directed at both counselor and the person who is grieving. The workbook (sold separately) includes much of the content of her book, with additional exercises and examples which are very helpful in clarifying the model directed toward the person who is grieving.

As OPC pastors and elders, we are of course attracted to the concept of grace suggested in the title for her model. She employs the word here primarily as an acronym, G-R-A-C-E, not with particular theological intent. Nevertheless, her approach certainly emphasizes grace and is delivered with a non-judgmental compassion, which befits such a sensitive topic.

Towns’s five step model is summarized in this way (16, 18 [workbook]):

1. G – Grief is redefined as good.
2. R – Re-story the loss narrative.
3. A – Adopt new healthy ways to grieve.
4. C – Connect with self and others.
5. E – Engage in a new normal within a livable pattern of grief work.

While the principles Towns puts forth are applicable to normal grief of all kinds, her model is more directed toward patients suffering with prolonged or complicated grief.¹ Likewise, the extensive workbook would be best suited to those experiencing prolonged grief or those who desire to explore their personal experiences of grief more deeply.

Both volumes include an overview of grief, each of the five steps of her GRACE Grief Model, and a summary chapter urging those grieving to move on in their journey through grief into a new normal. Regretfully, the book jumps back and forth between academic defense, suggestions for counselors, and material intended for a grieving person. It is often difficult to determine which audience is in view. The workbook is far more focused on the person who is grieving, and thus, for many of us, it is the more useful volume.

A thorough evaluation of Towns's book would require a Reformed critique of each of the three therapeutic approaches. A Reformed critique of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy would be worthwhile for the pages of *Ordained Servant*, given the wide-spread use of CBT in psychiatric and behavioral health settings today. Narrative therapy, combined with narrative reconstruction, assists the grieving person in re-writing the stories that they use to describe themselves and their place within the world around them, in order to reflect on their grief more positively and hopefully (19–21). Meaning making, as a therapeutic technique, is used to assist people in examining their personal world and life view, their values, beliefs, and practices, and to integrate this into their journey of grief (21–22). A critique of each of these approaches to mental health lies beyond the scope of this review. It is worthwhile noting Towns's efforts to integrate spirituality and religion into each of these three therapeutic approaches, particularly CBT, which is often undertaken by therapists who have little awareness of or interest in their client's faith or religious practices.

On a practical level, Towns's book and workbook have many insightful passages which I found helpful. These are accompanied by concrete examples, particularly in the workbook. The workbook also provides probing questions which press the reader to reflect on grieving. However, this is offset by the almost complete lack of interaction with Scripture or theology.² In her discussions of religion, Towns tends to include Christianity alongside Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, approaching each relativistically and often superficially, primarily focused on their respective beliefs and practices in relationship to grieving. Still, her own theological perspective and Christian faith and compassion shows through at various points.

I cannot recommend the book for use in OPC churches. Its lack of interaction with Scripture and its extreme relativistic inclusiveness would not be appropriate within our solidly Christian and Reformed tradition. But I can say to pastors and elders that it is worth considering many of the grief related issues raised therein. I would recommend the workbook to OPC pastors and counselors. Despite its near total lack of biblical references, it offers extremely helpful exercises for counseling persons experiencing prolonged or complicated grief. I believe that the workbook, used in conjunction with solid biblically based counseling, could help some people stuck in grief begin to move forward toward healing.

Gordon H. Cook, Jr. is a retired pastor, coordinator of the Pastoral Care (Chaplain) program for Mid Coast Hospital, and a retired chaplain for hospice care with CHANS Home Health in Brunswick. He resides in White River Junction, Vermont.

¹ Dr. Towns's distinctions regarding the types of grief are found on pages 7–11 of the book, and pages 2–5 of the workbook.

² Dr. Towns makes only two specific references to the Bible, Jeremiah 66:9 (We may note that Jeremiah only has 52 chapters, I believe her reference is intended to be Isaiah 66:9.) and Psalm 34:18. Neither is exegeted nor applied to the context of her model.

Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology, by G. K. Beale

by David J. Koenig

Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology, by G. K. Beale. Baker Academic, 2023, xviii + 558 pages, \$49.99.

The work of G. K. Beale needs no introduction. I would venture to say that his is a name that is prominent on many of the bookshelves of readers of *Ordained Servant*. I certainly have been helped immensely by his detailed and prolific work, especially in the field of New Testament biblical theology and biblical interpretation. His latest book, *Union with the Resurrected Christ (URC)*, continues the work that he began with his *A New Testament Biblical Theology (NTBT)*,¹ an important work in its own right. Beale describes in the preface to *URC* that this book is a follow-up to *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, and as such, there is a significant amount of overlap in material. This book is also a development of the first book, with a special eye on the believer's union with the resurrected Christ. It should be stated right at the outset that this book stands on its own; there is a significant amount of new material and a significantly narrower focus to justify it. It is also a hefty book: readers of Beale are already familiar with his prose style which, while dense, does reward detailed and careful reading, and this book is no exception.

The book is divided into two parts. After an introduction setting out the purpose of the book, he begins in part one laying out the theme of the “inaugurated end-time resurrection and new creational kingdom” and its use as a framework for biblical theology. The first chapter consists of a summary of Beale's formulation of the biblical storyline in his *NTBT*. Beale mentions that this review is crucial because it sets up the theological framework for the remainder of the present work (21). What follows is a review that sets out the storyline through the corpus of Scripture, which will be familiar to readers of *NTBT*. In chapter 2 Beale turns to the subject matter of the present work and opens the chapter by stating that the core of the storyline presented in chapter 2 is Jesus's resurrection as the new creational kingdom (64). What this is precisely needs a little bit of explanation. In the preface, Beale critiques the usual approach to union with Christ in biblical theology, concentrating on the “in Christ” phrase in Paul and looking at it too generally (xvi). Beale is making the more specific argument that being “in Christ” deals centrally with union with the resurrected Christ as a beginning of the eschatological new creational kingdom. And again, he demonstrates this by proceeding through the corpus of Scripture. One of the things that opened my eyes as I was reading through this chapter is the prevalence of the resurrection theme, even in the Old Testament. Often, I have had the mistaken impression that resurrection in the Old Testament begins and ends with Daniel

¹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2011).

12. However, Beale corrects this by showing how the hope of resurrection is prevalent in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets.

I found these initial two chapters to be the more difficult part of the book. I found myself reading and rereading sections constantly to get the full gist of what he was saying. It was at this point that I thought it might be best to return to the *NTBT* for a longer explanation, and this did help. Beale's prose is dense to be sure, but I found I struggled more in this first section than in the second section.

The remainder and majority of the book is taken up by Beale's exposition of "the reality and benefits of fulfillment in Christ's life, death, and especially resurrection as the beginning of the eschatological new-creational kingdom." In the introduction, Beale states "the relationship between Christ's resurrection and believer's union with him in His resurrection can be depicted as a diamond: the diamond represents Christ's resurrection as the beginning of the end time kingdom and new creation" (2). The different aspects of what Christ's resurrection means are visually represented as a diamond with nineteen facets, and these facets are explicated in the remaining chapters. This part of the book feels more like a reference book; there is not too much development of the relationship among the facets. Each chapter is a fascinating study of these aspects of the resurrection and is done with characteristic exegetical detail. It is in these chapters that Beale works out what the resurrection of Christ fulfills from Christ's side and what it means for believers in union with Christ.

There is not much to dislike about this book, and I would highly recommend it. For the most part the book stands on its own, however, I found it helpful to review *A New Testament Biblical Theology* at several points. One can also detect hints of Beale's earlier work, especially on the temple.² I anticipate returning to the book periodically as a reference book for the aspects of the resurrection, partly because it will be helpful to review these things over and over again, and partly because reading the chapter is a bit like drinking from a firehose, thus making it difficult to retain all the details.

Beale seems quite a bit stronger in dealing with what the resurrection means for Christ than in his applications to believers. He is to be commended for making it clear that these things do apply to believers and the various ways that they do. I simply found some of his application sections a little less clear. His explanations of passages showing what the resurrection means for Christ are remarkable in both clarity and the level of detail. As usual, I find that Beale's exegesis is both correct and stimulates my own thinking.

It has been noted in other reviews of this book³ that Beale's strength is in dealing with the *historia salutis*, and when dealing with the *ordo salutis* he struggles a bit. I think that this criticism is valid. I have often found the approach of biblical theologians is one that can often be jarring to those who have been reared on our seminaries' and denomination's emphasis on *ordo salutis*. I say this in the hopes that we can all work toward the balanced approach that we all affirm, a rapprochement that can only serve to strengthen our theology.

David J. Koenig is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as pastor of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church, Dover, New Hampshire.

² G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (InterVarsity, 2004).

³ See especially Harrison Perkins, Heidelbergblog, August 17, 2023.

The Bible: A Global History, *by Bruce Gordon*

by Darryl J. Hart

The Bible: A Global History, by Bruce Gordon. Basic, 2024, 515 pages, \$35.00.

If Reformed Protestants are candid, they have to admit—off the record, of course—that the Bible is an odd way to run a religion. Sure, a book that is the Word of God easily surpasses a church with a universal bishop (Roman Catholicism) or prophets (Islam and Mormonism) who claim new revelations. The Bible’s challenge, however, is that it comes in a seemingly unmanageable form. It has sixty-six separate books, written over roughly 1,100 years. Even more challenging is the mix of genres—narratives, poetry, epistles—which avoid the sort of manual-like or constitutional precision that come with other authoritative texts. Add to the Bible’s variety the historical reality that it emerged in civilizations that lacked the codex or a printing press, publishing technologies that make the consistency of modern versions of the Bible possible. Even the Westminster Confession acknowledges that variety of human fingerprints on the Word of God:

Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased. (WCF 1.1)

Bruce Gordon’s global history of the Bible is less concerned with the diversity of writings and human authors in Scripture than it is with the Christians devoted to the book and responsible for its publication and distribution. Because the business of publishing and the record-keeping surrounding modern books did not begin until the fifteenth century, Gordon’s history necessarily covers an amazing period before Gutenberg’s moveable type and printing press. The main drivers of this story are, again, a diverse lot of human beings, everyone from monks to monarchs. Gordon himself describes his book as not so much a history of editions, translations, or interpretations of the Bible but one “of ongoing human effort to hear God” (7). By expanding his subject beyond scrolls, codices, bindings, illustrations, translators, and interpreters, Gordon’s book spills into the murky terrains of religious experience.

As kaleidoscopic as this approach to the Bible’s history sometimes renders Gordon’s book, because the subject is the scriptural canon, *The Bible* can never stray from the physical attributes of Scripture—its words, pages, authors, editors, and interpreters. One major factor in the Bible’s history is the intervention of emperors and kings in its production and acceptance. Although historians debate whether the oldest surviving codices, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, were among the Bibles that Constantine requested for his churches in Constantinople, the emperor’s instructions to Eusebius of Caesarea in 331 did put an imperial stamp on the importance of physical copies of Scripture (at least for church use). Roughly five centuries later, the production of the Bible took another

dramatic step with the publication of the Tours Bibles. This was the work of the Northumbrian scholar Alcuin, who presented the Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne, with a copy of the Tours version. The emperor himself wanted to recover the glories of Rome and believed a version that relied on Jerome's Latin translation would assist that cause. James I (of England) was no emperor, but his King James Version (1611) not only displaced the popular use of the Geneva Bible in his realm but also became "best known" for its literary aspects, which in turn "had a profound impact on the English language" (217, 218).

Even as rulers' interventions had a grand influence on the history of the Bible, the work of ordinary people was equally important. In the medieval world, the labors of scribes and artists turned the pages of Scripture into beautiful spaces that invited readers to peruse the Bible, even while craftsmen adorned covers with gold and jewels that rendered an object to be revered and even coveted. The Book of Kells is a notable example, with a text in black, yellow, red, and purple ink, accompanied by "spectacular illuminations" (89). Its "remarkable" originality stems from the marriage of imagery from the Greek East, the Italian West, and Celtic sources (90). At the other end of the production spectrum was Johannes Gutenberg's 1453 Bible, the first to use moveable type. The printer's purpose was to produce the text of Scripture more economically. But that did not stop those who bought his unbound pages from supplying their own illustrations and appropriately designed bindings and covers.

Among the most important efforts beyond emperors and kings in the Bible's reception were translators. If Scripture were ever to be accessible to people outside the eastern Mediterranean world, it needed scholars who knew both the Bible's original languages and those of indigenous peoples—from Europe's barbarian tribes to natives in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Translation is an ever-present aspect of Gordon's history, but the most arresting period was the rise of Bible missions. Between 1804 and 1817, Europeans and Americans formed organizations to print and distribute Bibles in western languages—Danish, Finnish, German, Hungarian, Russian, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, and English (both British and American)—to augment the new endeavor of Protestant foreign missions (309). Unlike older works of evangelizing native peoples as part of colonial settlements, this phase of foreign missions aimed to reach natives directly. The linguistic work involved, from teaching western language to local people and then translating the Bible into indigenous tongues, has underscored the centrality of linguistic and interpretive work in the spread of Christianity.

When Gordon examines the Bible's influence beyond church work or missions, his narrative strains. Chapters on "Science and Reason" and "The American Bible" provide an opportunity to remark upon the use of Scripture by important figures in the Scientific Revolution, for instance, Isaac Newton and Thomas Hobbes. The latter immersed himself in Scripture, disputed most interpretations of it, and believed the book should be firmly under the sovereign magistrate's control. Hobbes's rejection of the Bible's major premise—that God revealed himself through human authors—is one of the few discordant notes in a pleasing melody that features people who believed and spread the Bible's message. His chapter on the "American Bible" also sounds off-key, at least when it comes to discussion of novels such as *Moby Dick* and *Ben-Hur* or even the Book of Mormon. These are instances that fall more under "the Bible and . . ." rather than

revealing directly religious or devotional endeavors. At the same time, these asides add color and intrigue to a very big book.

Even when the author seems to get sidetracked, the reader will learn about the remarkable variety of hands—and more—that yielded the Bible's contemporary status as one of the most popular books ever published. Gordon drew an almost impossible assignment in writing a global history of the Bible. Who among us can even conceive of where to start and how to proceed? Even if Gordon sometimes falters, his execution overall is clever, thoughtful, and endlessly fascinating. This is a book that deserves to be used not simply for the delight of reading but also as a reference for tracing how the Bible came from Moses on Mt. Sinai to an app on our cell phones.

Darryl G. Hart *is distinguished associate professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, and serves as an elder at Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan and as a member of the Committee on Christian Education.*

ServantPoetry

John Donne (1572–1631)

A Hymn to God the Father

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallow'd in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done;
I fear no more.