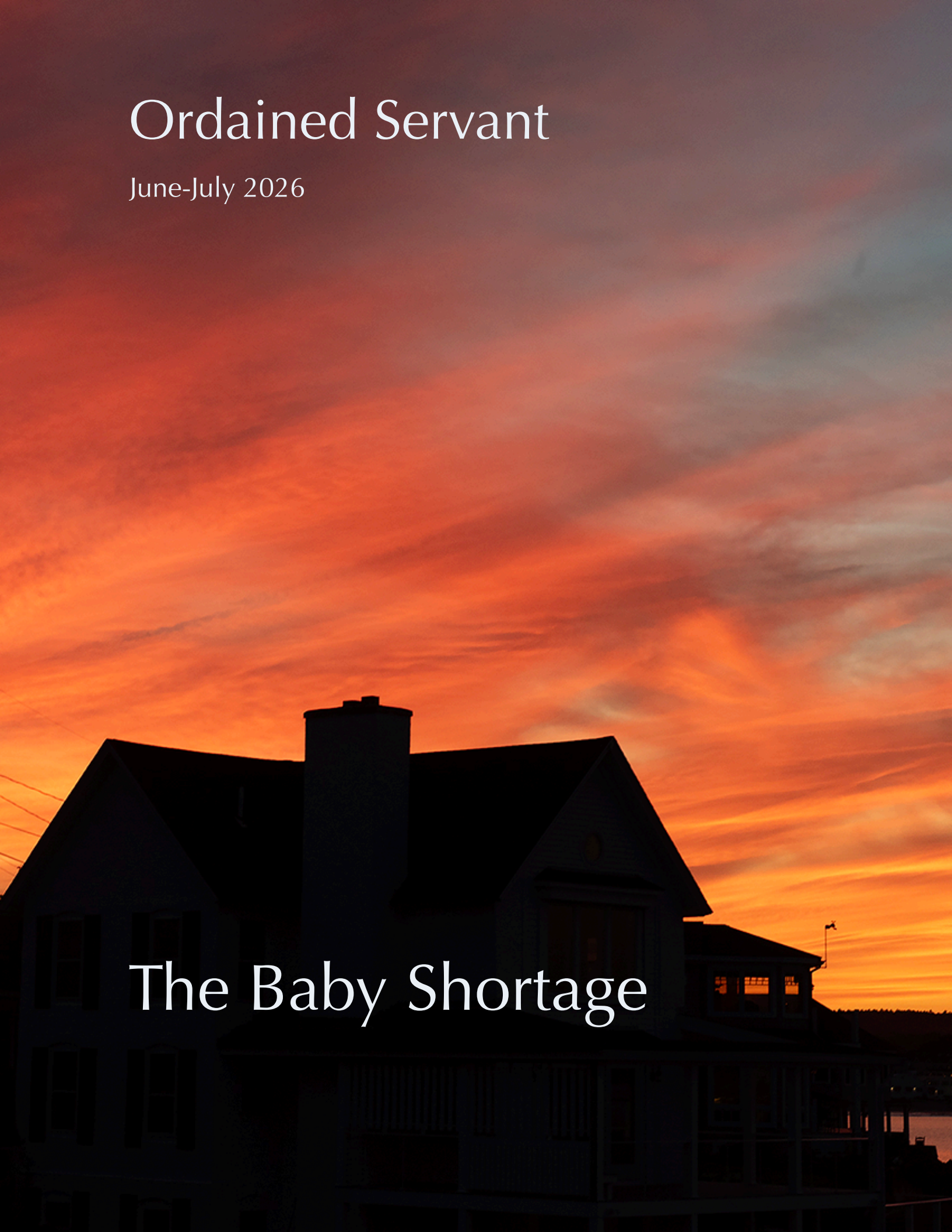
Ordained Servant

June-July 2026



The Baby Shortage

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: THE BABY SHORTAGE

June-July 2026

From the Editor

Jan Dudt brings Christian ethics to his biological expertise in discussing the latest medical technology. “For the Christian aware of developments in the biological sciences and health care, artificial gestation, a.k.a. artificial wombs or ectogenesis, is a developing technology that brings hope and dystopian fears at the same time.”

Our Servant Exchange on the topic of Christian nationalism includes Mr. Baird’s response to Dr. Hart’s review of his book *King of Kings*, published last month. Dr. Hart offers a rejoinder.

David VanDrunen reviews *Your Body Is Holy: The Christian Understanding of Sex* by Paul Tyson. While useful in upholding an essentially Christin view of human sexuality, a major problem exists in Tyson’s conception of holiness. According to him, everything good is holy. This is simply unbiblical, but as VanDrunen says, “This is a book with much good material alongside serious flaws.”

William Shishko reviews *Make Smart Choices (Not Foolish Ones) Together* by Andrew Selle. Selle’s extensive experience as a counselor in the context of the church makes this book especially helpful because it emphasizes the importance of “a multitude of counselors.”

Our poem this month is from Robert Frost (1874–1963), “The Line-gang.” Some might object that a few of the poets I publish are not by Christians. But I would remind ministers, especially, that one of the requirements for our ordination is to be “proficient in the liberal arts” (FG 21.8). And knowledge of English poetry would seem to be an essential part of that proficiency. It is also very important to note that one third of the Bible is in poetic form. The Psalms were frequently on the lips of our Savior.

I only recently discovered this poem of Robert Frost. It was first published in 1916. It is a fascinating reflection on the incursions of modern technology into Frost’s rural world. Its meter and rhyme are purposely uneven. It falls one line short of a sonnet. It is a lament noting that the linemen planted dead trees in the place of living trees, which were more broken than cut. This is the mixed blessing of technology in the *hebel* world of Ecclesiastes.

The cover photograph is of a sunset at York Beach, Maine.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

CONTENTS

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.

ServantLiving

Artificial Wombs, Convergent Trends, and the Baby Shortage

by Jan Frederic Dudt

Christians have historically found themselves in cultural circumstances that have required us to be countercultural salt and light in our times and places. Such was the case of ancient Isreal in Canaan, early Christians at the time of the Roman Empire, Christians in the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, and current day Christians in the context of global secularization and societies that deny God's value of humans as *imago Dei* who are fallen and in need of redemption. After the expansion of western cultures and their global dominance of the last few centuries, there may be a tendency among some to long for the good old days when Christianity informed ideas of human rights and values were upheld as ideals of a healthy society, even when those societies fell short of achieving those ideals. However, try as we might as Christians, it seems today that our calls for restraint and reform at the cultural level are going unheeded. Yet in the face of this there has been a corresponding explosion of global Christianity. The church's expansion in places like the Middle East, Africa, and China are most notable. And there also seems to be evidence of the fanning of dormant coals of faith in places like Europe and perhaps revival in the United States. Time will tell.

This global expansion of Christianity in the face of what at times seems to be ineffective efforts to influence the public square does not allow us as Christians to slacken our efforts to speak prophetically to the abuses of and rejection of biblical principles that distinguish the Christian and gospel message. As Christians we are to love our enemies. However, it is crucial that we know who they are and what their products look like. Here, I would like us to consider some powerful global trends that will require a critical, biblical, Christian response, regardless of how much God in his sovereignty will grant us success in the public square. Our right thinking will at least have the effect of sharpening Christian faith and practice in our personal, familial, and professional lives.

Technological developments continue to hit the news, captivating the human imagination with great hopes as well as unsettling concerns for the future. Grave abuses can be envisioned. Of course, AI is often the technology that most quickly comes to mind. Many of us use it daily as we wonder where it is headed. However, equally troubling technological advances are surprisingly close to being realized. For the Christian aware of developments in the biological sciences and health care, artificial gestation, a.k.a. artificial wombs or ectogenesis, is a developing technology that brings hope and dystopian fears at the same time. The idea is to assist late-term, high risk pregnancies, some of which could lead to spontaneous miscarriage or even therapeutic abortion. If the technology is in place, the high-risk, premature fetus could be removed from the mother and incubated in an artificial womb in the clinic or hospital until closer

to the natural forty-week term of development. Or the pregnant mother who needs to undergo risky unexpected surgeries or treatment that would put her preborn baby at risk could have the fetus, or even an embryo, transferred to an artificial womb to continue development while the mother undergoes treatment. Also, if the pre-term baby needs surgeries or medications, they could be administered while the baby develops in the artificial womb. Admittedly, this sounds risky, but if the technology is properly developed, many mothers and babies could benefit. This is the stated vision of places like the Duke University School of Medicine, that claims that artificial wombs will ensure safe neonatal development and avoid risky premature delivery. Recent articles in *Journal of Pediatric Surgery* make similar claims.

However, there is a raft of concerns associated with the developing technology. For example, the challenge of transferring a fetus to the machine and preventing a life threatening pre-mature breathing reflex is not inconsequential. Also, current artificial womb technology cannot be used on a fetus less than twenty weeks old (about halfway to delivery), because blood vessel development is not mature enough to allow transition to the machine. Such challenges can conceivably be overcome as the technology matures. And we can be sure that the researchers are working to eliminate these technological shortcomings. Human experimentation can be largely avoided as other mammals like sheep are used to perfect the technology. Yet, the FDA is slated to soon approve clinical trials in the US of 20–28 week fetuses—which raises troubling concerns for potential human experimentation under the guise of safety trials.

Given the modern crisis in bioethics, it does not take much imagination to envision almost unimaginable abuses. A recent article in *Springer Nature* by Alexis Heng Boon Chin of Singapore[1] suggests that the artificial womb could be used to remove a fetus slated for abortion, transfer it to an artificial womb, bring it to term, and then put it up for adoption. Well and good until full-term children are born with no prospect of adoption. The current acceptance of late term abortion could easily make the situation nightmarish, backfiring on pro-life hopes for the technology. It is hard to envision any culture across the globe advancing artificial gestation in a biblical prolife context. One might envision select hospitals or healthcare providers being ethical, but such groups would likely risk marginalization.

Chin's article goes on to suggest a minefield of ethical concerns, troubling for any secular society. Artificial gestation will probably not change the widespread desire to eliminate the congenitally handicapped or disabled preborn child. In fact, given global trends in bioethics, one can see that the technology would often be withheld from at risk individuals because of convenience and expense. Another situation that can be foreseen is affluent career women farming out the inconvenience of pregnancy to the machine while they continue to remain fully productive in the work force, being spared of the typical effects of pregnancy and loss of work time. Or the development of HR policies could require women to use the technology or forego insurance coverage for pregnancy since it always has risks.

---

[1] Alexis Heng Boon Chin, "Artificial Womb Technology (Ectogenesis) in Singapore – Legal, Ethical, and Social Issues," *Springer Nature* (9/14/2025): https://communities.springernature.com/videos/artificial-womb-technology-ectogenesis-in-singapore-legal-ethical-and-social-issues.

In the present context of human commodification and the use of surrogacy for a range of people wanting children, it is easy to see artificial gestation exacerbating an already troubling situation. Singles, same-sex couples, and child exploiters of various types will likely see the technology as a great resource able to provide the "product" of their desires.

There is another concern that is alarming. The current global decline in total fertility rate (TFR) has many demographers and economists concerned about global population decline and its societal and cultural effects as we move through the twenty-first century. For example, Eurostat reports that the EU's population will likely peak this year at 453 million, dropping to 447 million by 2050 with an average age of 44. The decline is expected to continue to 2100, by then the average age will be 50. China's situation is even worse. Due to their current total fertility rate (TFR) which is likely below 1.3 children per woman's lifetime, they will lose nearly 3.5 million people from their population this year. As their population ages over the next several decades, the decline will accelerate to about 10 million per year by 2100, their population will be cut in half from 1.4 billion to about 750 million. The average age will be over 60. Along the way, in 2050, their average age will be about 54. This portends economic disaster, an aging population that requires more care with less working age people to support them and eventually replace them. North America's situation, with a TFR of about 1.6, is not much better off.

So, how will these declining societies survive? Immigration is really a stopgap solution. The TFR of most of the high emigree societies is also falling and will soon likely be below replacement TFR (2.1 children per woman), if it isn't already, as is the case of Mexico (TFR of 1.8). The declining societies, whether in the secular West or the Far East, have diminished the value of the nuclear family or they have repudiated it altogether. As a result, natural reproduction is unlikely to rebound. They need people. They need babies. Will they look to the new gestational technology to deliver the answer? Are they envisioning that the state will raise the children? For Communist China it is an easy answer. Of course. For much of the secular West, many would be fine with it. The right thinking biblically informed Christian will always be opposed, and quite likely increasingly marginalized.

Recently, China's Dr. Zhang Qifeng, CEO of Kaiwa Technology, has announced that the first-ever pregnancy robot will be available in 2026, this year. The robot, called GEAIR, will be available for about $14,000. The technology is designed to replace human pregnancy, freeing woman from pregnancy, as if it were a disease. A society that is avowedly atheistic, that has produced the first GMO (genetically modified organism) children, that rejects the restraining Christian doctrine of humans in the Image of God (*Imago Dei*), that persecutes Christians endlessly, and is losing population like a punctured tire loses air, yet desires to dominate the global scene, may have found its solution: make babies. And, they are delighted to have the central authorities raise them. Communists disdain the nuclear family. However, this situation is not just China's. Much of the West, with its rejection of the importance of the nuclear family, may look to such technology, especially as the price comes down, as is invariably the case with new technology.

Convergent global trends are unsettling. The Progressive Left's preferential interest in coalitions with Islam and radical socialism (AKA communism) against Christianity and its products, AI tech giants' desire to be emancipated from the biblical creation limits of

the incarnated human, and various developing biotechnologies that assault the *Imago Dei* are converging to create challenges for the Christian that have never been experienced on such a massive scale. The future is troublingly uncertain. But we have seen troubling times before, and God loves to save his people. However, critical biblical thinking is needed now as much as ever to confront these trends with countercultural Christian responses. We need to be able to understand and act upon the implications of God's truth. That is the best hope for the world.

Political movements and technologies that can be used to assault the *imago Dei*, disrupt the nuclear family, alter human identity in the name of enhancement, erode what it means for humans to have dominion over the works of God's hands, and deny the human need for Christ's redemption, will always require a clear, biblical, prophetic Christian response regardless of the cost to personal peace and prosperity. May the Lord equip us with the biblical perception, courage, love, and faith to be the salt and light that brings God glory.

Jan Frederic Dudt *is a professor of biology at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

ServantExchange

Response to D. G. Hart Review of *King of Kings*

by James D. Baird

In the May issue of *Ordained Servant*, Dr. Hart reviewed my new book, *King of Kings*.[1] In that book, I argue that government must promote Christianity as the only true religion. Though perhaps startling to us today, this thesis is a classic principle of Old Princeton political theology. John Witherspoon saddled government with the duty to "promote true religion."[2] Charles Hodge asserted that "it is absurd to say that civil governments have nothing to do with religion," and that the "State is bound to see that the true religion is taught in all the schools under its control."[3] Indeed, "The Bible everywhere recognizes the principle that nations, as such, should be under the control of the law of God, and that they should not forget or allow the knowledge of that law to fail from among the people."[4] A. A. Hodge argued government must "promote piety," and for this reason, he petitioned for the United States to establish Christianity in the Constitution.[5] John Murray asserted that "both church and state must promote the interests of the kingdom of God."[6] With the *possible* exception of Witherspoon, none of these American Presbyterians advocated for an established *church*. However, in one form or another, they all argued that government must promote true religion, that is, Christian piety.

To prove my thesis, I provide a simple syllogism:

Premise 1: Government must promote the public good.
Premise 2: As the only true religion, Christianity is part of the public good.
Conclusion: Government must promote Christianity as the only true religion.[7]

Of course, the clear definition of terms is critical for any argument. I define "government" as "leaders who are called to hold offices of authority over civil matters."[8] I define "Christianity" as "the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest" (quoting WCF 23.3).[9] I define "promote" as "the activity of encouraging, supporting, advancing, or furthering the progress of

[1] James Baird, *King of Kings: A Reformed Guide to Christian Government* (Founders Press, 2025).
[2] John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 1912), 110.
[3] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2020), 3.342; and "The Education Question" *The Princeton Review* 3 (July 1853): 519.
[4] Hodge, "Education," 518.
[5] A.A. Hodge, *Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Banner of Truth, 2017), 295. He was also an officer of the National Reform Association, which advocated for a Christian amendment to the US Constitution.
[6] John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Banner of Truth, 2020), 1.254.
[7] Baird, *Kings*, 22.
[8] Baird, *Kings*, 2.
[9] Baird, *Kings*, 2.

something."[10] Lastly, I define "public good" as "piety, justice, and peace" (quoting WCF 23.2).[11]

In his review, Dr. Daryl Hart offers four kinds of objections to my thesis: logical, biblical, historical, and political. I will address each in turn.

Logical Objections

To disprove a syllogism, one must either successfully critique its logical form (showing it is invalid) or its premises (showing at least one of them is false). Hart does not seem to object to the validity of my syllogism. Instead, he appears to attack premise 2, namely, the assertion that Christianity is part of the public good. He states,

> Baird's sleight of hand in relying on "public good" avoids any discussion of demographics. Public is, after all, shorthand for the people in a community or society. What happens when the American public is religiously diverse? What then constitutes the general interest of a diverse public?

Hart seems to claim here that Christianity is not part of the public good because America is religiously diverse. We could formalize Hart's counter argument this way:

> Premise 1: If America is religiously diverse, then Christianity is not part of the public good.
> Premise 2: America is religiously diverse.
> Conclusion: Christianity is not part of the public good.

Of course, premise 2 is true. America is religiously diverse. But what about premise 1? I'm not sure of a good argument for it that stops short of subjectivism. One would need to admit that "public good" is determined by the viewpoints of the populace. However, as Bible-believing Christians, we hold that truth, goodness, and beauty are *objective* realities. They're not determined by the various sentiments of fallen men. Peace is peace, justice is justice, and piety is piety, no matter what a diverse populace may believe about these topics.

In other words, we must guard against the modern temptation to collapse metaphysics into social psychology. God made humanity a certain way. Some things are good for mankind—and other things are bad. If many people believe that a bad thing is good, that does not *make* the bad thing good. It means, instead, that many people are woefully mistaken. They do not know what is good for them.

In short, for Hart's critique to hold water, he must present an argument for premise 1 that does not veer into subjectivism.

Old Testament Objections

Hart also takes issue with my use of the Old Testament. In my book, I briefly outline a series of kings (both Israelite and Gentile) who promoted true religion. I show how each example explicates the meaning of 2 Samuel 23:3 and Psalm 2:10–11. Hart responds:

---

[10] Baird, *Kings*, 3–4.
[11] Baird, *Kings*, 5–8.

> By another sleight of hand, Baird manufactures examples of good government from Old Testament kings, the pagan rulers, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus the Great. He does not stumble once over the anachronism of using ancient, divine-right monarchies as examples for modern republican government.

Hart is correct to point out that our form of government today is not the same as those of the Ancient Near East. However, the particular form of government does not change the fundamental duties that God places upon rulers. Let me explain.

In 1776, George Duffield wrote an essay in defense of religious tests for office. Duffield was a highly regarded Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia. He wrote this essay while Pennsylvania was deliberating over its new state constitution. Throughout this article, Duffield makes extensive use of the Old Testament, including passages I use (such as 2 Sam. 23:3). Yet, Duffield was no divine-right monarchist. Much the opposite! He was a chaplain to the Continental Congress—and John Adams's pastor when the New Englander served in the Congress. How could Duffield explain his application of the Old Testament to America?

In his words, the Old Testament includes "some things of a particular nature and particularly designed" for the people of Israel. However, "whatever general directions were given to them" that are "founded in and consonant to the reason of things" are "equally obligatory on us."[12] What was one of these "general directions" that obliged us today? Namely, that civil rulers ought to "promote" proper "piety towards God."

What Duffield called "general directions" the Westminster Confession calls "general equity" (WCF 19.4). Like Duffield, the Confession states "maintain piety" as one of the duties that obliges civil rulers today (WCF 23.2). And what does it use as its prooftexts? It cites Psalm 2:10–12 and 2 Samuel 23:3. Moreover, these prooftexts were not only cited by early American Presbyterians but also evaluated by John Murray, E. J. Young, Ned B. Stonehouse, and John Skilton, and then approved by the OPC General Assembly.[13]

In short, Hart objects to my use of the Old Testament, but I am exegeting the OT passages used by early American Presbyterians during the Revolution, cited in our own Confession to support its principles, and later reaffirmed by the great theologians of the OPC itself.

New Testament Objections

Regarding the New Testament, Hart notes:

> Unlike the Old Testament's divine right monarchy, the New Testament presents a people, persevering and waiting for the return of their Lord. The only political instruction they receive is to honor the emperor, a Roman official who sometimes persecuted and killed Christians.

The New Testament offers more political instruction than mere obedience to civil rulers. It also describes the duty of rulers to serve God, promote the good, and wield the sword

---

[12] George Duffield II, "Who Should Be Our Rulers?," 47. This essay is included as an appendix to George Duffield, Jr., "The God of Our Fathers: An Historical Sermon Preached in the Coates Street Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on Fast Day, January 4, 1861, with Copious Notes, and an Appendix" (T. B. Pugh, 1861), 47.

[13] *The Westminster Confession of Faith including the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs* (Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2007), ix.

against evildoers (Romans 13). But how ought civil rulers to define good and evil? The Lord himself via his moral law. Moreover, in the Scriptures, true religion is an essential aspect of goodness. As John Murray notes,

> [The civil ruler] is the minister of God for that which is *good* [Rom. 13:4]. And we may not tone down the import of the term "good" in this instance. Paul provides us with a virtual definition of the good we derive from the service of the civil authority when he requires that we pray for kings and all who are in authority 'that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity' (1 Tim. 2:2). The good the magistrate promotes is that which subserves the interest of piety.[14]

Again, the Confession itself charges civil rulers with "the public good" (23.1). It then defines the public good as including "piety" and charges civil rulers with maintaining it (23.2). And what proof text does the Confession use? Just as Murray, it uses 1 Timothy 2:2.

Hart, therefore, severely understates the political duties taught in the New Testament. In this sense, he is out of step with the confessional exegesis of the OPC's brightest lights (recall it is Murray, Young, Stonehouse, and Skilton who reviewed the prooftexts).

Historical Objections

Hart next critiques my book for what it lacks, namely, a history of Christendom. In his words, "this fifteen-hundred-year-history is almost entirely absent from Baird's book." On this point, I must grant Hart's observation. The book is eighty-five pages long, designed for the average person to read in one or two sittings. I did not attempt a complete history of government and Christianity because such a story cannot be told responsibly in such a short space—or, at least, not by me.

Hart also says:

> Baird quotes Protestant sources freely from John Calvin and John Owen to Charles Spurgeon and John Murray with no regard to the political circumstances of sixteenth-century Geneva, seventeenth-century England, Victorian London, or 1960s Glenside, Pennsylvania.

This is true. I do not explicate the political circumstances of Calvin or Murray. Instead, I map the *fundamental principles of political theology* that Calvin and Murray both shared because of their exegesis of Scripture. Moreover, I do not believe the fundamentals of political theology change from age to age. To be sure, the application changes, but not the principles. Hence, when Calvin and Murray argue for their theological principles from the Scriptures, it is not necessary to contextualize their arguments within their political circumstances. In short, I am no historicist. People change, circumstances change, but God's truth never changes. Indeed,

> The grass withers, the flower fades,
> but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

---

[14] John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Westminster Seminary Press, 2020), 473.

Political Objections

Hart takes my thesis as a proposal for "big government." However, I advocate for no such thing. The government does not need to be particularly large to promote true religion. Was the Continental Congress "big government"? And yet the Congress called for days of national repentance and thanksgiving. What about the early states? They enforced strict Sabbath laws and blasphemy laws. Libertarians often idealize early America—and yet, we see the government in early America promoting Christianity in all sorts of ways. Perhaps true libertarianism has never been tried.

I am not calling for big government. I am calling for good government. However, the two ideas are not unrelated. Unless our eyes deceive us, it seems clear that secular governments across the globe grow bigger and more evil each day. One cannot help but wonder whether it is a coincidence that liberal secularism and government overreach have grown together, hand-in-hand. Government secularization has also increased alongside the most *horrific* tyrannies over the family imaginable (see one mother's testimony in the footnote).[15] Are these facts mere happenstance?

I am not too interested in continuing the secular experiment. My four boys, after all, are the test subjects. So far as it depends on me, I will not have my children subjected to secularism, as if they were Schrödinger's cat, to satisfy the curiosities of the intelligentsia. I would suffer so that my sons may live free.

Lastly, Hart suggests that I make my case "simply and somewhat breezily." He calls this "the heart of Baird's deception" because "political change is difficult." This charge of sin against me is ill founded. It ignores my last chapter, "The Way of Exile." As I state at the end of the book,

> Our modern society hates the idea. It's repulsive to them at every level. They will deploy every ounce of power at their disposal to shut down the project. You can bet that they'll play dirty. If you're looking for suffering in America, there are few better places to find it.[16]

For this reason, we must eschew all theologies of glory. Instead,

> Jesus calls us to walk in the way of the cross. We are to follow the pattern of His life: humiliation that leads to exaltation. . . . If we follow this calling, we will suffer, but all the suffering in the world is a small price to pay to hear Him speak these words on the last day: 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (Matt. 25:21)[17]

James D. Baird *is a pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Naples, Florida.*

---

[15] Maia Poet, "When Parents Lose Custody for Refusing a Child's Gender Transition," Maia's Substack, February 20, 2026, video, 1:42:42, https://maiapoet.substack.com/p/when-parents-lose-custody-for-refusing
[16] Baird, *Kings*, 84.
[17] Baird, *Kings*, 85.

ServantExchange

Rejoinder to James Baird's Response to D. G. Hart's Review of *King of Kings*

---

by Darryl G. Hart

Baird's reply to my review essay of *King of Kings* repeats several of the claims he made in the book, and in doing so he reaffirms their validity. Because Baird had even less space for his reply than he had in his short book, his elaboration of points already made suffers once again from failure to develop contested points in detail. For instance, in defending his deduction that "Government must promote Christianity as the only true religion," Baird does not seem to appreciate the gap between one of his premises, Christianity as "part of the public good," and Christianity "as the only true religion." Why would Christianity, the only true religion, be reduced to merely "part" of the public good if God's Word reveals "all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life" (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6)? Why, too, does Baird not see that limiting Christianity to "part of the public good" leaves room for other religions to make up the difference? Perhaps this author is deficient in logic to see the plausibility of Baird's syllogism, but some math education can alert careful readers to the difference between "parts" and "the whole" (implied by language of "the only true religion").

Difficulties in logic aside, the biggest difference between Baird and critics of his proposal for government promoting Christianity (along with other advocates of Christian nationalism) is the authority of history. The idea that Christians in the past who were right about theology and worship should also provide the norm for contemporary politics gives much vigor to those Protestants who propose a return to Christian government to overcome the dangers and weaknesses of liberal democratic (and secular) polities. This notion also becomes something of a stick with which to poke critics of Christian nationalism. It can lead to the charge that critics have not "done the reading" of older Reformed and Presbyterian sources. Worse, it can lead to the charge of infidelity because departing from the likes of John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, or even (if you really want to prove you have done the reading) Johannes Althusius on the nature of government is to have abandoned the Reformed tradition. When critics bring up the actual steps that Presbyterians took to readjust the Westminster Confession to modern society (e.g., the American revisions), responses invariably deny the revisions by finding other parts of the Standards (especially the Larger Catechism) that were not changed. The extent of the revisions aside, proponents of Christian government (or Christian nationalism) do not acknowledge that the political theology of Reformed and Presbyterian communions before 1789 was incompatible with the new form of politics that came to dominate the modern West after the American and French Revolutions (we should also throw in the Glorious Revolution of 1688/1689). Baird has not made the revisions to the Confession of Faith an important part of his book or reply to the review

essay. The reason for bringing it up is to highlight discontinuity between Reformed Protestants on the nature of the civil magistrate before and after 1789. The sense of discontinuity is something that not only twenty-first-century Presbyterians feel.

Simply repeating what Reformed theologians asserted prior to the American Revolution ignores the political changes that occurred when the West moved from a Christendom model of government (Protestant or Roman Catholic) to one that reduced Christianity's place in the administration of civil law, finance, education, health care, family policy, and requirements for holding office (among many others). Modern societies in the West do not operate the way they did during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Baird may legitimately claim that this is precisely the problem. He might say we should go back to Edinburgh of 1615 because contemporary societies are afflicted with any number of un-Christian policies and behaviors that prove the weakness of liberal democratic government. Missing from the complaint is any admission that the so-called Christian societies of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe also labored with problems, sometimes committed in the name of Christ, that liberal democratic politics were designed to remedy. Perhaps math could help calculate which society's problems were or are greater. Either way, theology should be at the ready to remind the calculator that no society this side of glory will be free of problems. (Just consider the reign of the Lord's anointed, King David, maybe the greatest "Christian prince" ever.)

Appealing to the past is a point of debate that not only applies to pre- and post-1789 but also to 1925, the year when the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. started on its irrevocable slide to heterodoxy. With the exception of Baird's appeal to John Murray's commentary on Romans, he never seems to quote from American Presbyterians who formed the OPC and the PCA, that is, from twentieth-century American Presbyterians who opposed the Christian government and policies promoted by mainline Protestant leaders and Progressive government officials (such as the Presbyterian Woodrow Wilson). Even Baird's appeal to Murray is nowhere near as clear as he seems to think. When Murray writes that "the good the magistrate promotes is that which subserves the interest of piety," he is not ipso-facto proposing the institution of Christian government. Murray very well could be arguing that a form of government that allows families, churches, and private associations to run institutions and nurture activities that promote Christian piety—a government that stays out of the way of citizens' private lives—could be the best for promoting true religion. Neither Baird nor this author has the decoder ring to determine Murray's own preference for government.

Aside from Murray, what if Baird had included J. Gresham Machen in the sources when he was doing the reading of Reformed political theory? For instance, Machen was suspicious of using religion to support the public good (in his day the religion would have been liberal Protestantism):

> There is the problem of the immigrants; great populations have found a place in our country; they do not speak our language or know our customs; and we do not know what to do with them. We have attacked them by oppressive legislation or proposals of legislation, but such measures have not been altogether effective. . . . we are perplexed in our efforts to produce a unified American people. So religion is called in to help; we are inclined to proceed against the immigrants now with a Bible in one

> hand and a club in the other offering them the blessings of liberty. That is what is sometimes meant by "Christian Americanization."[1]

Besides immigration, Machen noticed that American officials were turning to Christianity for help with industrial relations and international peace. The problem, however, was that a utilitarian appropriation of Christianity "degraded and destroyed" the gospel or used it "as a mere means to a higher end."[2]

Another subject where Baird and Machen do not align is whether to pass legislation that supports Christian morality. Baird has sometimes considered re-instituting Blue Laws or blasphemy prohibitions as ways to promote the public good. That was similar to the rationale for Prohibition, which outlawed the sale and distribution of alcoholic beverages. Machen cast a vote against a motion at presbytery that called for the church to support the Eighteenth Amendment, a decision that cost him a promotion at Princeton Seminary.[3] When he explained his vote, Machen questioned precisely whether Christianity could legitimately be promoted by the coercive powers of government. He wrote that,

> in making of itself . . . in so many instances primarily an agency of law enforcement, and thus engaging in the duties of the police, the church . . . is in danger of losing sight of its proper function which is that of bringing to bear upon human souls the sweet and gracious influences of the gospel.[4]

Machen's dissent from the ranks of Christian nationalists in his day was also evident when he advocated religious liberty, not just for Protestants but also for Roman Catholics and Jews. Progressive policies designed to create conformity and advance the public good were responsible for legislation that dictated what private schools could teach. Machen hoped that "Jews and Christians, Roman Catholics and Protestants," if "they are lovers of liberty," might form a "united front" against such tyrannical government. He also asserted that he was "an inveterate propagandist" and that he desired the "same right of propaganda" for others. "People object to the Roman Catholics . . . because they engage in 'propaganda,'" he wrote, but clearly they had "a right to do so, and clearly we have a right to do the same."[5]

Machen was by the standards of the Religious Right a liberal and obviously looked at government differently from today's Christian nationalists. Even aside from his politics which opposed the progressive policies of his day, Machen's understanding of the church and its commission to proclaim the gospel and shepherd members was many steps removed from seeking to advance Christianity through government.

---

[1] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Macmillan, 1923), 149.
[2] Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 150.
[3] On the background to Machen's vote and its consequences for his promotion at Princeton, see D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), ch. 5.
[4] J. Gresham Machen, "Statement on the Eighteenth Amendment," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D.G. Hart (P&R, 2004), 395.
[5] J. Gresham Machen, "Relations between Christians and Jews," in *Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 419.

None of this means that Baird or defenders of Christian nationalism must agree with Machen (though it would help if they did the reading of Machen). What differences between Baird's political theology and Machen's do indicate is that the former seems to be unaware of two aspects of American Presbyterianism. First, he has not spent time reading Machen or tried to show where the conservative Presbyterian was wrong. Second, Baird has not considered the context in which he is writing. The latter neglect is especially important since Baird's communion, the PCA, and its denominational sister, the OPC, came out of Presbyterian denominations that were in many respects proposing what he advocates—namely, using government to support a public good defined by Christian morality. Not reading Machen is one thing. Not understanding the controversies that led conservative Presbyterians to leave Presbyterian churches committed to the social gospel is another.

One way of reading Baird, then, is as a nostalgist (someone who indulges in nostalgia), an odd trait for a Millennial (Boomers are supposed to be nostalgic). He would have contemporary Presbyterians turn the clock back before both Machen and the American revision of the Westminster Confession to a time when Protestants lived under governments that controlled morality and the church. Going back in time is impossible. But the relatively simple way in which Baird invokes Reformed theologians from the past is radical because it means wiping away at least a century of human history. The biggest problem of *King of Kings* is adding to the growing discontent with our fragile political order. If frustrations with the American system of government lead to its downfall, the civil liberties of a group of conservative Presbyterians (and Baptists) who make up less than one percent of the population may be the first to go.

Darryl G. Hart *is distinguished 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.*

ServantReading

Your Body Is Holy: The Christian Understanding of Sex, *by Paul Tyson*

by David VanDrunen

Your Body Is Holy: The Christian Understanding of Sex, by Paul Tyson. Wipf & Stock, 2025, 83 pages, $33.00.

This short work seeks to explain and defend a traditional Christian sexual ethic, especially to young people who have grown up imbibing a sexual ethos that makes the Christian view entirely foreign. Paul Tyson, an Australian scholar, has succeeded in many respects. His defense of traditional Christian sexual morality is unapologetic, his writing is generally clear and winsome, and he offers concise yet informed evaluations of several major contemporary challenges to Christian sexual ethics. Nevertheless, a couple of issues likely prevent this book from being the ideal work for Reformed Christians to give to sexually confused young people.

Tyson divides his book of merely seventy-nine pages into twelve short chapters. In the first four chapters, Tyson describes the contemporary context in which the Sexual Revolution emerged, and he introduces his general approach to ethics. He distinguishes the vertical and the horizontal: The former concerns "worship" and humans' relationship to God while the latter concerns "ethics" and humans' relationship to each other, corresponding to the first four and last six commandments of the Decalogue, respectively. Tyson also argues that the vertical *defines* the horizontal (15), which makes ethics a "sub-species" of the vertical (19) and gives the horizontal a "vertical dimension" (14). This Christian understanding is thus in conflict with the predominant contemporary view that the "secular" is entirely distinct from religious matters, the latter of which should be kept private (16–17).

Tyson turns specifically to sexual issues in the next four chapters. He writes about the importance of the body, especially in light of the image of God, and argues that sexual relations should take place only within heterosexual marriage. He includes a discussion of Ephesians 5:21–33, affirming its teaching about husbands' self-sacrificial love for their wives and wives' submission to their husbands. Tyson also refutes claims by contemporary scholars that Paul directed his negative statements about homosexuality only against relationships marked by power and age inequality, not against loving and consensual homosexual relationships, which Paul allegedly knew nothing about.

The final chapters focus on three contemporary threats to Christian sexual morality: pornography, feminism, and queer theory (especially with respect to transgenderism). Tyson's opposition to pornography and transgenderism is clear and follows logically from his previous arguments. The chapter on feminism is the longest in the book. Although Tyson believes that Christians can be allies with some feminists on some issues (for example, with feminists who oppose transgenderism as harmful to females), he concludes that there is no coherent *Christian* feminism.

As noted above, there is much to appreciate in this book. All adherents of traditional Christian sexual ethics will appreciate the straightforward, unashamed, and concise way in

which Tyson defends it. I have a couple of minor disappointments in the book, but they are not crucial to Tyson's overall argument and are rather easy to overlook. But two other issues are bigger problems since they appear pervasively in the work.

The first concerns the terms "sacred" and "holy," which Tyson uses interchangeably. Throughout the book, he labels the body, sexuality, sex, marriage, and humans as holy. It would take a much longer review to document how Tyson describes what makes something sacred. He is not precise or consistent. I believe it is fair to say, in the big picture, that Tyson thinks of the holy as that which is related to God and under his authority. But this is hardly a satisfactory way to capture what Scripture means by the word holy. Biblical teaching on holiness is a complex matter, but it is at least clear that Scripture consistently distinguishes the holy from the non-holy. In Tyson's understanding, however, *everything* must be holy, or at least every good thing, since everything is related to God and his authority. In Scripture, however, the holy is always relative to what is not holy or less holy. And what is not holy is not necessarily bad. Westminster Larger Catechism 169 captures this. We regard the Lord's Supper as holy—as a *sacra*ment—but only because the bread and wine are "set apart . . . from common use." The bread and wine were not bad before their consecration, just good in a non-holy way.

Perhaps Reformed readers could overlook this issue, although I do not believe the pervasive misuse of a crucial biblical category is a minor problem. But a related issue that is even more problematic is Tyson's repeated description of sex and sexuality as "sacramental." When first introducing this idea, he defines a sacrament as a "sacred physical reality" (25). In this light, "Christian marriage is the sacrament that defines and protects the holy meaning of human sexuality" (26). Here he is crystal clear that this is *essential* to Christian sexual ethics. Those who reject the sacramental view of marriage "do not have a Christian understanding of the meaning of human sexuality" (26). In a footnote, Tyson speaks of marriage as "one of the seven traditional sacraments of the Christian Church," and also speaks of "some Protestant churches in the Zwinglian and non-conformist traditions" that have "abandoned traditional sacramental theology." This "rejection of sacramental theology" is "highly problematic" (26, n.3). Tyson does not identify in this work what his ecclesiastical affiliation is (nor could a leading AI service tell me what it is). He writes in at least one place in the book as though he is not a Roman Catholic. I surmise from Tyson's theological and philosophical views expressed here and elsewhere that he may be an Anglo-Catholic in the mode of the Radical Orthodoxy movement. In any case, Tyson writes here as though the Reformed tradition does not exist. Non-Zwinglian Reformed theologians (that is, most Reformed theologians) clearly did not "abandon" or "reject" sacramental theology, yet they adamantly denied that marriage is a sacrament, for compelling biblical reasons. From this point on in his book, however, Tyson repeatedly describes sex and marriage in "sacramental" terms.

In the end, from a Reformed perspective, this is a book with much good material alongside serious flaws. Reformed ministers and elders may find this work useful in helping them to think through issues of sexual ethics and to be better equipped to engage contemporary youth who are terribly confused about sexuality. But Reformed ministers and elders probably will not want to make this the book they give to those young people themselves.

David VanDrunen *is Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California. He is a member of the Committee on Christian Education.*

ServantReading

Make Smart Choices (Not Foolish Ones) Together! *by Andrew H. Selle*

by William Shishko

Make Smart Choices (Not Foolish Ones) Together! by Andrew H. Selle. Westbow, 2025. 415 pages, $25.99, paperback.

I have often said that baseline Presbyterianism includes the importance of "the multitude of counselors" (Prov. 11:14 NKJV); but how do you work that out in practical ways? *Make Smart Choices (Not Foolish Ones) Together!* provides a rich answer.

The author, though not as well known in the biblical counseling world as others, is superbly qualified to contribute to this too neglected (and extremely important) aspect of living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God. Selle has served as an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for over forty years. He completed his doctoral studies with the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) and has specialized training and certification in reconciliation and conflict resolution through the Institute for Christian Conciliation (ICC). Above all, he is steeped in actual church ministry experience through his peacemaking and reconciliation labors with his organization, Christian Counseling and Mediation. The great strength of this book is that it is an overflow of those years of training and experience. The result is a unique resource to help churches do the work that he has done for so many years.

The book is described as "a practical theology of decision-making," but that does not capture the thrust of this volume as a manual to help churches and other Christian organizations work with people to think through and resolve issues biblically and in community. It is a welcome response to and an antidote for the hyper-individualism of so many evangelical treatments of the topic of "knowing the will of God." And its conversational style makes it an easy read, even though the material is often complex and always life-challenging.

The book is divided into three parts: "A Theology of Decision-Making," "The Process of Decision-Making," and "Resolving Typical Problems in Decision-Making." It is replete with case studies (which are so vivid that the reader cannot help but think of real situations from his or her own experience). For those who appreciate graphics that illustrate the points, the book contains nearly two dozen. The treatments of key words such as "wisdom," "transformation," "reconciliation," "repentance," "forgiveness," and "love" help the reader to get beyond clichés and to learn, by explanation and illustration, what these grand themes really mean. Its generous footnotes provide an anthology of insights from Reformed writers—whetting the reader's appetite to dig into those primary sources. And the many probing questions throughout the book make it a feast for not only the head, but also for the heart. Beyond its specific purpose of promoting analysis and decision-making based on principle and working to resolution, it keeps real people and

real relationships in mind—something that is often tragically lost in church life when the litigiousness of "appeals and complaints" can easily trump the biblical command to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

My only criticism of the book is its overload. Selle lavishly pours out gallons of counseling water from the huge reservoir of his experience. And he does it masterfully! But how should church and Christian organization leaders (the book is especially directed to those who lead peacemaking and reconciliation efforts) use this important volume in the best way?

I suggest that church officers consider taking a year to go through each of the three sections of the book, carefully discussing and making application of the material. The book lends itself to that kind of treatment, and the results of that serious approach to this remarkably helpful manual will, I am convinced, bring the kind of transformation in counseling, reconciliation, and peacemaking work that is the obvious burden of author Selle. And, in the hand of God, that exercise by churches may well be part of the antidote to the sad divisiveness that is the equivalent of nuclear waste in far too many churches and in far too much church life.

Thank you, Dr. Selle, for this compendium of your years of counseling ministry. May the Lord use it to do just as the title calls us to do: Make smart choices (not foolish ones)—together!

William Shishko, *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is the pastor of The Haven at Commack (OPC) in Commack, New York.*

The Line-Gang

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Here come the line-gang pioneering by.
They throw a forest down less cut than broken.
They plant dead trees for living, and the dead
They string together with a living thread.
They string an instrument against the sky
Wherein words whether beaten out or spoken
Will run as hushed as when they were a thought
But in no hush they string it: they go past
With shouts afar to pull the cable taut,
To hold it hard until they make it fast,
To ease away—they have it. With a laugh,
An oath of towns that set the wild at naught
They bring the telephone and telegraph.