

Ordained Servant

Volume 18

2009



A Journal
for
Church
Officers

Lyme Congregational Church, Lyme, New Hampshire / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

published by:

The Committee on Christian

Education *of the*

Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Ordained Servant

A Journal for Church Officers

VOLUME 18, 2009

Ordained Servant

A Journal for Church Officers

A publication of the Committee on Christian Education
of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

ISSN 1525-3503

Volume 18 2009

Editor: Gregory Edward Reynolds • 827 Chestnut Street • Manchester, NH 03104

Telephone: 603-668-3069 • **Electronic mail:** reynolds.1@opc.org

Website: www.opc.org/os.html

Ordained Servant is published monthly online (except for combined issues June/July and August/ September) (E-ISSN 1931-7115, online edition); and printed annually (ISSN: 1525-3503) after the end of each calendar year, beginning with volume 15 (2006) published in 2007. *Ordained Servant* was published quarterly in print from 1992 through 2005. All 53 issues are available in our online archives. The editorial board is the Subcommittee on Serial Publications of the Committee on Christian Education.

Subscriptions: Copies of the annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* are sent to each ordained minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, each organized congregation, and each designated mission work, and are paid for by the Committee. Ordained elders, deacons, and licentiates of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may receive copies gratis upon request. *Ordained Servant* is also available to anyone in the U.S. and Canada who wishes to subscribe by remitting \$10.00 per year to: Ordained Servant, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Box P, Willow Grove, PA 19090-0920. Checks should be made out to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, designated for *Ordained Servant* in the memo line. Foreign and institutional subscribers please remit \$15.00 per year. All remittances should be made payable in U.S. funds.

Submissions: Chosen submissions will be published on the web and possibly chosen for the annual print edition. Please consult "Submissions, Style Guide, and Citations" on our website.

Copyright Information: All material in this periodical is subject to U.S. and international copyright laws and may not be reproduced without prior written approval. Please refer to "Submissions, Style Guide, and Citations" at our website once you have received permission. Interested parties are invited to obtain permission to reproduce material found in this publication by writing to the editor.

© Copyright 2009 by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
All rights reserved.

Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

CONTENTS

5 From the Editor

Servant Thoughts

EDITORIALS

6 “Now We Live in Q’s World”

8 “The Risk of Serious Debate”

10 “Christ in the Midst of Culture: The Church as Embassy”

14 “Changing Pace: The Need for Rest in a Frenetic World”

17 “Ambassadors of the Heavenly King”

20 “The Spirituality of Mission Work”

22 “The Humanity of John Calvin”

Servant Living

29 “When to Forgive Others,” **Brenton C. Ferry**

Servant Work

31 “The Importance of Home Visitation,” **G. I. Williamson**

Servant Witness

34 “Evangelistic Responsibility,” **T. David Gordon**

42 “Evangelism and the Church,” **Charles G. Dennison**

Servant Mission

52 “How to Plant a Presbyterian Church,” **Ross W. Graham**

56 “Faithfulness in Giving to Worldwide Outreach,” **Brenton C. Ferry**

Servant Truth

61 “Original Sin: The Doctrine and Its Implications,” **John V. Fesko**

Servant History

67 “John Calvin and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” **John R. Muether**

68 “Calvin’s Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemption in Book Three of the *Institutes*,” **Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.**

77 “John Calvin: Servant of the Word,” **Glen J. Clary**

Servant Rest

93 “Sabbaticals for Pastors,” **David VanDrunen**

ServantExchange

- 98 “A Tale of Two Calvins: A Review Article,” review of *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift* by J. Todd Billings, and *Life in Christ* by Mark A. Garcia, **John V. Fesko**
- 104 “A Response to John Fesko’s Review,” **Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.**

ServantWorld

- 114 “Courageous Protestantism? Some Reflections on David Wells’s Analysis of the Contemporary Church,” **Carl Trueman**
- 121 “David Wells’s Response to Carl Trueman’s Review of His Five Books,” **David F. Wells**

ServantHumor

EUTYCHUS II

- 123 “The Fourth Use (Unintended) of the Law”
- 125 “Remembering Robert”

ServantReading

BOOK REVIEWS

- 126 *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes* edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, **Danny E. Olinger**
- 128 *Original Sin* by Alan Jacobs, **David VanDrunen**
- 129 *We Become What We Worship* by G. K. Beale, **Shane Lems**

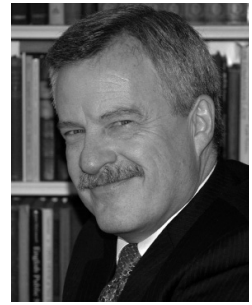
- 131 *A Step from Death* by Larry Woiwode, **Diane L. Olinger**
- 132 *Last Things First* by John V. Fesko, **David R. Holmlund**
- 133 *Why Johnny Can’t Preach* by T. David Gordon, **Stephen J. Tracey**
- 135 *John Calvin* by Robert Godfrey, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 136 *Concerning the True Care of Souls* by Martin Bucer, **William Shishko**

ServantReading

REVIEW ARTICLES

- 138 “Too Frank by Half: What Love Should Have Covered,” review of *Crazy for God* by Frank Schaeffer, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 142 “Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life,” review of *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* by Colin Duriez, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 145 “Covenant and Salvation,” review of *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* by Michael Horton, **Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.**
- 149 “Young Calvinism with and without an Edge,” review of *Young, Restless, Reformed* by Collin Hansen, and *Minority Report* by Carl R. Trueman, **Darryl G. Hart**
- 152 “Francis Schaeffer: Reformed Fundamentalist?” review of *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* by Barry Hankins, **Gregory E. Reynolds**

✦ From the Editor



This is the fourth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant*. It is a continual source of great joy and satisfaction to me to help provide this resource for the officers of our church.

Articles and reviews that are ephemeral, and may lose their importance in the coming years, will not be printed. Sometimes difficult editorial choices may require me to omit articles I would otherwise print if space were not an issue.

This year we have made an important change in our citation standards. I owe John Muether a debt of gratitude for guiding me through this process. We have decided to distinguish between *Ordained Servant Online* and *Ordained Servant*, the printed annual. The latter alone will be referred to by volume number with the year, while the online version will be referred to by month and year, and where appropriate by URL. Please consult “How to Cite *Ordained Servant*” on our website at <http://www.opc.org/OS/HowToCite.html>.

Once again I would like to thank General Secretary Danny Olinger and the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Paul MacDonald for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Diane Olinger, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, and Andrew Moody, and the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal. Finally, I want to thank Ann Hart for her meticulous editorial work, and Jim Scott for his formatting of the printed volume.

I hope you will continue to benefit from the articles and reviews that we are publishing on the web and in print. Your comments, suggestions, and unsolicited reviews and articles are always welcome and play an important part in the formation of our journal.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Thoughts

Now We Live in Q's World

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2009¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

“Q” is a term of endearment, my nickname for the so-called “Preacher” of Ecclesiastes, better known among academics as “Qoheleth”—hence Q. He is one of my favorites among biblical characters because his perspective on the world reflects so perfectly the perspective of the pilgrim believer, especially suitable for us New Covenant wanderers. He is a mysterious Solomonic figure who gathers and assembles wise words in an artful way in order to shepherd believers through life in a fallen world.

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. (12:9–11)

Q reminds us in some arresting ways that the presence of moral law—both revealed and natural—is no guarantee of justice or equity in the church (in his day, the theocratic nation of Israel) or culture. Natural law is sufficient to guide civil life and leave sinners without excuse. But the phenomena of everyday life are a mixed bag: a fabric of common curse and common blessing.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=137.

The world is seriously out of whack.² The Hebrew word הֶבֶל (*hebel*), normally translated “vanity,” has a range of meaning in the book of Ecclesiastes, which goes beyond our common understanding of the word “vanity.” Its thirty-eight uses in the book are nicely summed up by Meredith M. Kline: “not according to design.” Thus, emptiness and futility are only part of what Q is saying about our fallen situation. Because of Adam’s fall, the entire context of human life is “out of whack”; we live in a wacky world, out of accord with God’s original intention for it. “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (7:29).³ The creation is not presently the way it was designed to be. Injustice and inequity are everywhere. Wackiness is ubiquitous. Every time we see the wicked prosper this is confirmed. Each time a carefully crafted plan goes awry we learn this anew.

Q is not, however, an existential cynic—a kind of ancient version of Camus or Sartre. Nor is he, as most Christians believe, placing himself hypothetically in the position of the unbeliever for apologetic or evangelistic purposes. Rather he is a believer contemplating life in a fallen world, full of injustice and inequities, ultimately overshadowed by death; but also full of temporary blessings, the rewards of our everyday work. In the midst of it all, Q enjoins the reader to fear God, obey his commands, and enjoy his blessings.

Of course, it takes a series of sermons on Ecclesiastes to unpack the implications of this wackiness and the wisdom we need to navigate it.⁴ But let me enumerate several thematic ramifications.

God’s ways are mysterious. The ideal glorious Mosaic kingdom depicted in the Mosaic covenant

2 I owe many of my essential interpretive insights to Meredith M. Kline, who has done unique work on the book of Ecclesiastes. Everything in quotation marks without a reference should be attributed to his class notes, delivered in lectures on “Psalms and Wisdom Literature” taught in the spring of 2001 in the Granite State School of Theology and Missions, Manchester, NH.

3 Quotes within the book of Ecclesiastes will refer simply to chapter and verse.

4 A series of nineteen sermons I preached on Ecclesiastes in 2006 is available at <http://pilgrimcrossings.org/>.

was far from the reality of life in the fallen world inhabited by Q, and, by implication, us. Significantly the covenant name of God—LORD—is not used in the book. Because the world portrayed by Q was the world “under the sun,” under God’s wrath and curse, but preserved by his goodness in order to achieve his redemptive purposes in history. The believer, however, rather than seeking to deny or escape this reality is called by Q to live before God in the mixed situation of curse and blessing, not expecting anything close to perfection in this life, but truly able to enjoy the temporary blessings of God on the journey.

Depending on straight line equations can lead to folly, expecting temporal blessings each time we obey. Proverbs presents an ideal, that is not always realized in the fallen situation. For example “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Prov. 10:4). Sometimes the diligent loses his wealth in the stock market or through theft. Such folly, not an honest look at the way the world really is, is what makes cynics out of people. For some of the most faithful and obedient believers have suffered immeasurably. But their suffering never made them cynical. Along with the famous motto “All is vanity,” Q poses the thematic question, “What’s the use?” “What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (1:3). “What gain has the worker from his toil?” (3:9). “What gain is there to him who toils for the wind?” (5:16b).

Q tacitly teaches that the holy ideal of human perfection revealed in the Mosaic Law represents a glory that only God can achieve in his own way and in his own good time. Meanwhile, the believer must account for the presence of injustice, or wackiness, in this world without allowing it to undermine his hope of glory. So, not only is the present evil age not the way it was created and intended to be, but also not the way God intends it to be ultimately—his ultimate intention. “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (3:11).

At the center of the frustration experienced

by every human being is inequity of all kinds. The righteous suffer and the wicked prosper.

There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. (8:14)

The young die. Criminals get off scot-free. The wise are ignored or persecuted.

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. (9:11)

The ultimate frustration of man’s efforts is death. The earth is a veritable graveyard. “All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return” (3:20). “Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?” (6:6). “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart” (7:2).

Robert Frost caught the essence of the ephemeral nature of life in this world when he wrote,

Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf’s a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.⁵

Paul takes up the theme of “vanity” or “futility” in Romans 8. “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain

5 Frost, “Nothing Gold Can Stay.”

the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21). In the midst of the wackiness of life, God is truly in control. The wackiness is even used by him to teach us to trust him. “Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?” (7:13). “But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him” (9:1). “As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything” (11:5). “Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). He is not predictable in his ordering of history, but he may be implicitly trusted. He controls the wackiness in order to achieve his ultimate eschatological design in the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Is there any room in our perception of the world for uncertainty, grief, and mystery? If not, then we are not living in Q’s world. Well, actually we are always living in Q’s world, but sometimes we fail to see things in the wise way he sees them. We refuse to accept the givenness of our fallen situation, one in which God has placed us; and thus fail to look to him for guidance and hope.

The world is given to various forms of delusion, but whatever the form there is a dominant consensus that mankind is innately good, and that humanity can eventually rid the world of all inequities, injustice, and death itself, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The Christian is neither an optimist nor a pessimist, but a biblical realist, facing the wackiness of life in faith.

Q’s God can be trusted to ultimately rid the world of wackiness. Q’s wisdom teaches us not to seek perfection in a wacky world but in the promised future of the children of God. “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him” (8:12). “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with

eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:18-19). Meanwhile the world will see how we react to adversity. Our witness will be marred if we put on rose-colored glasses or if we become cynical or despairing. Q sums up the pilgrim attitude toward the blessings and cursings of life, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him” (7:14).

Q’s great thematic question, “What’s the use of our efforts in this life?” is answered by Paul in light of the resurrection of Christ and its future implications for us. “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58). Q’s truly is the pilgrim perspective: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). ☉

The Risk of Serious Debate

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2009¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Some will say I am foolish to invite discussion of topics that, within the Reformed community, are hot topics—that is, the kind that tend to generate more flames than illumination. My imperfect efforts have met with mixed success. However, I am confident that such discussion is one of the most important ingredients in the forging of what we know as Reformed theology. This was true in the past as a study of the history of doctrine will readily establish. The risk of being at least singed, if not burned, by the flames of the interaction of theological debate is well worth the result. Flames temper steel. As the proverb observes, “Iron sharpens iron,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=138.

and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

The debate is out there, so it is no use to ignore it. It is hoped that this controlled format will help keep the flame of this debate on a slow, illuminating burn. Thus, I have chosen to let several of our best theologians engage each other on the topic of union with Christ.

There are at least two kinds of challenges that have proved the occasions for doctrinal refinement and definition: internal and external. They have not always been easily distinguishable. The external come in the form of direct challenges to the faith. The internal are in-house debates that refine our understanding of the faith. The latter require a collegiality that is becoming rare in the modern world. Where niceness is the ultimate virtue, disagreements become the ultimate threat to peace and camaraderie. On the other hand, where a passion for truth, as the witness of the confessing church, is the ultimate virtue, meaningful debate will lend clarity to our articulation of God’s revelation. To be sure, there is a gray area at the boundaries of confessional orthodoxy where the discussion is joined. But this ought to be considered a kind of demilitarized zone until the debate clarifies what is orthodox and what is not. Sometimes this may take several generations, as did the Trinitarian and Christological debates of the early church.

If we are incapable of engaging in such debate, it seems to me that our theological tradition is doomed to a kind of fractiousness that will render us truly irrelevant—that is, with no voice outside our own small circle. Furthermore, while we are discussing important issues, we must affirm, and reaffirm, what is clear in the confessional consensus we already affirm. I also believe that some—perhaps at times a large part—of our discussion reveals our ignorance of what once has been understood by the Reformed churches. Many, perhaps most, of us in the OPC have come from outside the Reformed tradition, and often with no confessional heritage at all. So, while it may be true, as J. Gresham Machen insisted, that ours is not a creed-making age, at the very least our debates should help us rediscover what has been

forgotten.

Writer John Updike once observed that it is in the middle space between two extremes that one finds the real action and interest. So the risk of theological overstatement should be worth the light it may shed on the truth somewhere in the middle. The union with Christ debate in our circles seems to me to be just such a debate. I am concluding that there is much to be learned from both sides; and there are some extremes that need to be avoided, especially in our preaching. This is where the terse doctrinal summaries of our Confession and Catechisms can keep us on course. This analogy is meant to illuminate the nature of theological debate, and not in any way suggest that we soften our stand on the truth. Confessional truth, it seems to me, has always been arrived at in just this way, through thoughtful, respectful discussion within the bonds of the trusting and loving fellowship of the visible church. Until an ecclesiastical formulation—or perhaps understanding of what has already been formulated—is arrived at, every ear ought to be open, carefully listening.

So let’s take the risk of debate together. I have no dog in this fight, just lots of esteemed fathers and brothers in the faith seeking to disciple the nations in the truth of Scripture. Let us commend one another’s work for consideration, especially when we disagree. ☺

Christ in the Midst of Culture: The Church as Embassy

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2009¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

As long as the church has existed, Christians have sought to account for their place in the world. H. Richard Niebuhr's 1951 classic *Christ and Culture*² has set the paradigm for over half a century of reflection on the relationship of Christ and culture.³ Because Niebuhr describes typical answers to the question of the relationship between Christ and culture, none is a perfect description of any particular theologian or theology. I found myself having some sympathy with the latter two of his five categories, but sensing the need for a sixth category more consistent with the radical, or rigorous, eschatology of Geerhardus Vos, replete with a clear fourfold description of redemptive history.

Let me briefly summarize Niebuhr's five theoretical models.

1) "Christ against Culture" (45–82) pits loyalty to Christ against participation in cultural society. A clear line of separation is drawn between the children of God and the people of the world. The city of man and the city of God are entirely incompatible. This model takes various forms, such as, building entirely separate societies like the Amish, the ascetic life of the monastery, or the fundamentalist restrictions erected to protect Christians from society.

2) "The Christ of Culture" (83–115) removes the tension between Christ and culture, seeking to

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=148.

2 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

3 More recently, D. A. Carson has proposed revisiting the subject in *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

blend the two by taking the best of both: cultural Christianity. Furthermore, the present and future life form a continuum, as does the history of the world. This model refuses to differentiate among separate historical epochs such as creation, fall, redemption. Christ is a spiritual Savior, but not the Lord of life. Hence, the church is a religious association rather than a new society. Christ is the great enlightener and moral teacher, who enables the Christian to accommodate Christ to culture. Christianity and culture are perfectly reconciled, yielding a universalism characterized by the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. This view is classic religious liberalism, represented by theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl, in which the kingdom of God is essentially a social reality. It is the chief target in J. Gresham Machen's defense of historic Christianity.⁴

3) "Christ above Culture" (116–148) refuses to reject culture or accommodate Christ to culture, but proposes a synthesis in which Jesus Christ is both Logos and Lord. God is Lord over both Christ and culture, while the two spheres remain distinct. Culture is useful but temporary, so we are not to linger with it, because the beatific vision of God is the grand end of man. This view is more concerned with the culture of Christians rather than Christianizing culture. The medieval thought of Thomas Aquinas epitomizes this model, in which Christ and the church serve as the guardians of culture. Divine law is coincident with natural law but transcends it. Human society is ruled by reason. So, the church assists the state in ordering temporal life.

4) "Christ and Culture in Paradox" (149–189) proposes a dualism that lives in a tension between God and man, because both man and culture are corrupt. Grace alone is the cure. Thus, the Christian resigns himself to culture, confessing that God is both creator and redeemer. The Christian identifies with the kingdom of God in which he has been given heavenly citizenship by God's grace in Christ and has become part of a new

4 See *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923).

humanity. The two kingdoms of church and state are separate. Christ is the judge of culture, so there is no ultimate hope for culture. Thus, the benefits of cultural work are transitory. The state and civil law serve to restrain sin. Classic Lutheranism epitomizes this model.

5) “Christ the Transformer of Culture” (190–229) calls the Christian to engage in cultural work in obedience to the Lord, because of the original goodness of creation and the need to counter the effects of the historic Fall. Fallen culture is not replaced by a new creation but gradually converted or transformed. “The eschatological future has become for him an eschatological present” (195). Transformation of all of life and culture is not postponed to the future, but happens now, as the kingdom of God arrives through the work of the church and the Christian. Here Niebuhr claims that Augustine moved the Caesar-centered society of the late Roman Empire into medieval Christendom, while admitting that Augustine did not actually hope for the complete transformation of culture. He held to an “eschatological vision of a spiritual society” (216). Hence, according to Niebuhr, Augustine’s concept of the two cities makes his dualism more radical than Paul’s or Luther’s.

Clearly Niebuhr favors the last of the five models, as he seems to work in ascending order toward his preferred solution to the age-old problem of Christ and culture. Niebuhr recognizes the Calvinistic influence evident in this model but blurs the distinctions that would reveal his distance from the supernaturalism of that Calvinism. His invocation of Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards⁵ would prove attractive to mid-twentieth-century neo-evangelicals seeking liberation from the cultural isolation of fundamentalism. What is troubling is that evangelicals today favor this model and yet do not see the similarity of their project to classical Protestant liberalism of the twentieth century. Niebuhr made an argument to bolster the declining Protestant establishment of his day. As then, today American

5 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, “Christ as the regenerator of man in his culture,” 220.

Christians continue pursuing cultural relevance if not dominance. What is unclear—and I think intentionally—in Niebuhr’s depiction is that the supernaturalism, as well as the eschatology, of Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards is not essential to Niebuhr’s view. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Niebuhr concludes the fifth model with F. D. Maurice, spending a full twelve pages on his description (218–229).

This transformationist model, in whatever form, represents a long-standing temptation for the church. It is, thus, a dangerous quest that threatens to eclipse the gospel altogether, as it has, almost completely, in the moribund mainline. The tendency of this model is to obliterate the fourth state of eschatological consummation.

I would like to propose a more helpful conception by which to approach the question of Christ and culture for the confessional churches of the modern world: Christ, the king of his church, his embassy on earth, in the midst of and beyond culture. This view takes the historical perspective—hence the “beyond”—into full account, while not diminishing the already accomplished work of the Eschaton, nor underestimating the glorious future consummation. Furthermore, the church as a visible and spiritual institution must be central to any biblical description of the relationship between Christ and culture.

The Christian church in the West is at present confused about its identity, at least partly because it has not thought deeply about the question of Christ and culture. It seems that the church is more informed—and that ordinarily by default—by cultural trends than by the eschatological trajectory of Scripture and the Reformed tradition.⁶ Whether it is the big-box mentality of the mega-church or the menu-of-choices mentality of the emerging church, the culture rules. The achievement of cultural relevance provides the entrée for this influence.

6 The works of David Wells and Ken Myers are excellent examples of the value of cultural criticism in assisting us in navigating the idols, and their attendant forms of temptation, peculiar to the modern world. We appreciate the common grace blessings of culture, while discerning the idolatrous tendencies.

A recent presidential candidate declared, “I am confident we can create a kingdom right here on earth.” Such confidence—although never stated so boldly—has been a staple of presidential politics for some time. Unfortunately, the church has often bought into this idea, acting as if the kingdom of God is here and now. The old pilgrim view is considered by many to be a kind of “pie in the sky” escapism. Of course, we know that this is God’s world, so shouldn’t believers rule? Jeremiah has a message for the exiles of his day, similar to the message of the New Testament to us: Be faithful citizens of the temporary earthly kingdom to demonstrate the goodness of the coming kingdom and its gracious king, the crucified, risen, and enthroned Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jeremiah’s day, the nation of Israel was in exile due to its idolatrous rebellion against the Lord in the Mosaic covenant. The promised restoration to the land after seventy years looked forward to the greater restoration of the eschatological fulfillment of Jesus Christ. At that point in redemptive history the capitol of the kingdom of God moved from the earthly to the heavenly Jerusalem. This is our situation.

For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. (Heb. 12:20–22)

The church is no longer in the form of the nation, but has become an embassy of heaven and heaven’s king, Jesus Christ. The church is the kingdom of God in exile, gathering citizens for the already reigning king, awaiting the inheritance of the glory land. Peter refers to the new covenant diaspora as exiles, “I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh” (1 Pet. 2:11). As exiles, they are no longer in the theocratic situation. Such a depiction of the situation of the church between the two comings of Christ is typical of the New Testament writers. Even

before the epoch-making resurrection of Christ, he signals the shift from theocracy to embassy. When James and John want to call down heaven’s wrath on the Samaritans in Luke 9:51–56, Jesus sharply rebukes them. In Acts 1, Jesus calls the disciples to be witnesses of his grace and leave the restoration of the kingdom to God. The church is nowhere called to be an agent of cultural transformation, however much of a blessing individual Christians may be in various cultural arenas.

In Ephesians 6:10–20 Paul is “an ambassador in chains” counseling spiritual warfare to the church, not cultural takeover or dominance. The church and the kingdom are synonyms in Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2: “The visible church . . . consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

But lest it be thought that viewing the church as an embassy of Christ entails some world-escaping enterprise, Jeremiah, especially in his letter from Jerusalem to the exiles (Jer. 29:1–14), and the writers of the New Testament, enjoin faithfulness to earthly citizenship, and by implication, earthly culture. The inherent goodness of creation as the God-given habitation of God’s image-bearers is assumed in the New Testament, no less than in the old. Paul reminds Timothy in the face of world-denying asceticism, “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:4–5). Hence Peter commands the exiled people of God to “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (1 Pet. 2:13). The implication of this injunction goes beyond the authority of the civil government to include other institutions of society that we find in the common grace order. Jeremiah mentions “craftsmen” and “metal workers” as among the exiles. He goes on to exhort the exiles to participate in the culture of Babylon. Notably absent is any imperative to transform the pagan capitol according to the Mosaic legislation. “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce” (Jer. 29:5).

Beyond this picture of ordinary life, Jeremiah enjoins a positive program upon the sojourners in relation to the culture in which God has placed them. Jeremiah writes, “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7). The resemblance of this injunction to new covenant imperatives is notable. Seek the welfare of the earthly culture of which you are a citizen. Though provisional and redemptively focused, the real good of the culture is to be sought. The word “welfare” is the Hebrew “peace” (shalom), normally used to communicate the comprehensive, consummate state of eschatological blessedness provided by the covenant Lord through the servant of Yahweh.

Thus, exiles are called to relate to present culture in a way that is neither separatist nor transformationist. Cultural participation for the embassy means that we are to seek the good of the people and institutions around us not as protesters, but as genuine participants. Protestants have historically saved their protesting for the reformation of the church rather than the culture. Paul seeks to clear up a similar misunderstanding in the Corinthian church.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler — not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Cor. 5:9–13)

While most of us are familiar with the duty to pray for civil authorities, we often forget the Christ-like attitude we are called to imitate visibly before the watching world. “If possible, so far as

it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18). “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:1–2). And this was the attitude required even toward the Neros and Nebuchadnezzars. Jeremiah’s exiles were called to pray to the covenant LORD for the welfare of the entire city of Babylon (29:7). So, we are similarly commanded “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim. 2:1–4).

With this covenantal posture the embassy, with all of its members, is to seek new citizens for the kingdom of heaven. Ministers of the Word are especially called to bring the message of amnesty from King Jesus to the city of man. “We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). In Jeremiah’s day there were false prophets urging God’s people to trust earthly powers and not heed God’s warnings of judgment or promises of eschatological future blessing. In Corinth there was also an over-realized eschatology seeking triumph in the present world, rather than taking the pilgrim stance of ambassadors.

The embassy must maintain its own integrity in order to accurately communicate the message of our king. This means more than possessing orthodox doctrine and life. The way the embassy worships forms the embassy’s doctrine and life and, thus, the image it presents to the world. When ways of worship look more like popular culture, the transcendent message of the pilgrim people tends to be eclipsed. The quest for cultural relevance dulls the heavenly luster of church and ends up defeating the very reasons so many church leaders promote so-called “contemporary worship.” The this-world orientation of popular culture is communicated in such worship. In other words, popular culture in worship cultivates Christians whose hope and happiness is more in this world

than in the next.

Jeremiah and the writer of Hebrews exemplify the biblical witness of the future hope of God's people. The pilgrims of the heavenly embassy are to wait patiently for the glorious kingdom. "I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations" (Jer. 29:14).

You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him . . . [Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (Heb. 2:7–8; 11:10)

The church is the kingdom now, gathering citizens for its king, awaiting the inheritance of the glory land. "I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

As officers in Christ's church, it is incumbent upon us to continually remind God's people of our identity. We are first and foremost citizens of heaven, purchased by the blood of our gracious king to inherit the glory land. But we are also part of an embassy whose task is to represent our gracious king in our daily lives in this world. ©

Changing Pace: The Need for Rest in a Frenetic World

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
Online May 2009¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Planes, trains, and a cabin in the woods—these are where my best thoughts always germinate. But what do these three have in common? Planes and trains may seem oddly out of place in the quest for solitude. To be sure the enjoyment of solitude I experience in the cabin far exceeds my enjoyment of planes and trains. But in each of the three I find that I am not distracted by electronic forms of communication. Amtrak's Acela Express enhances solitude in its "quiet car," insisting, like a school marm, on "library quiet"—no conversations or cell phones allowed. Such solitude in the midst of a busy schedule is heavenly—well, in an earthly way. After the stressful passage through security, planes offer the third possibility of solitude, unless you end up next to a chatterbox—nothing an open book cannot cure. The absence of phones, Internet, and email is still a significant shift from everyday life in the modern world. My cabin in the woods, however—being without electricity as it is—offers the quintessential setting for solitude. But what is the problem solitude solves?

The problem is not people or activity—or even interruption *per se*—but distraction. Maggie Jackson's challenging new book *Distracted* describes the disease (dis-ease) in order to focus on the cure—attentiveness, a vanishing human attribute in her opinion.² Last summer Nicholas Carr caused a stir on my Media Ecology Association email discussion group with his article "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" in the *Atlantic Monthly* (July-

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=151.

2 Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2008).

August 2008)—after all everyone loves Google. To criticize it seems almost as un-American as criticizing motherhood. The sky may not be falling, but our attentions spans are—and in a way that is utterly unique to the electronic situation. The problem has been growing ever since the sluiceway of electronic information was opened by Samuel Breese Morse over a century and a half ago. If your cell phone isn't vibrating in your pocket, a wide screen is attracting your attention in the corner of the restaurant. This is the culture in which we are called to minister as church officers. My deepest concern is for ministers of the Word. The torrent of noise and visual distraction is unsettling our minds and unsuited us for deep thinking of any kind.

Positioned in our studies—not offices, please—the distractions are around every corner. Long before the Internet became a pace-altering reality, the telephone, and before that, the telegraph, were eating away at the old pace. The answering devices, in seeking a remedy for the interrupting tendency of the telephone, have only delayed the sense of urgency that lingers when that annoying beep, beep, beep, greets you when you make a call. My phone has a flashing red light that adds to the sense of emergency. “Call me, now!” says the phone. Email is worse, because under the guise of not interrupting us, it takes more time than written correspondence ever did. And we are all annoyed when someone fails to respond. I have actually grown to admire those who do not let the tyranny of the urgent, built into email, drive them to respond immediately, if ever. Call waiting is another example. It's like someone barging into line in front of you. But the most well-mannered of family and friends allow it because the technology itself demands it. Inattention is the default position of modern life.

Media commentator Christine Rosen worries that the cognitive bottleneck caused by multitasking will spawn a generation of quick but shallow thinkers.³ Rosen argues convincingly that what was early on labeled a virtue is now proving to be a hindrance to productivity of all kinds, and even

3 Christine Rosen, “The Myth of Multitasking,” *The New Atlantis* (Spring 2008): 109.

to intelligence and learning ability. Marshaling journalists, psychologists, and neuroscientists, she makes a strong case for considering multitasking a myth. While some are optimistic that the brain will adapt to the new situation, I cast my lot with the biblical notion that part of the givenness of human nature includes our ability to focus our personal intelligence. Rosen speculates about what the rising generation will look like:

The picture that emerges with these pubescent multitasking mavens is of a generation of great technical facility and intelligence but of extreme impatience, unsatisfied with slowness and uncomfortable with silence.⁴

Unchecked by prudent stewardship of the electronic media,

this state of constant intentional self-distractedness could well be of profound detriment to individual and cultural well-being. When people do their work only in the “interstices of their mind-wandering,” with crumbs of attention rationed out among many competing tasks, their culture may gain in information, but it will surely weaken in wisdom.⁵

Writer, literary critic, and teacher of writing, Sven Birkerts has observed that electronic media tend to “spread language thin, evacuating it of subtlety and depth.”⁶ Birkerts sagely observes, “Language is the soul's ozone layer and we thin it at our peril.”⁷ It is here that preachers must be most alert to this cultural peril. How will preachers—distracted in such a world, as we are—be equipped to deal with the most difficult and profound text

4 Ibid., 108.

5 Ibid., 110.

6 Gregory Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 263.

7 Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), 133.

in history, the Bible? Paul gives us a description of Word ministry that requires the profoundest kind of attention and focus:

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. (1 Tim. 4:13-15 NKJV)

The frenetic pace cultivated by electronic distraction can only be slowed by dramatically changing the pace. It makes the blessing of the Sabbath all the more attractive and important.

The Power of Solitude

The power of solitude first came to my attention through the mystical countercultural poetry of Gary Snyder. He wrote eloquently of the “power-vision in solitude.”⁸ As a fellow mystic in the late sixties I pursued his vision relentlessly. While my mystical quest left me in a spiritual quandary, I did discover the importance of solitude for reflecting on the meaning of my existence in this crazy world. Ironically, as I used my solitude to seek union with the one (a monistic quest that ended in futility), I learned the beauty and power of being alone with my thoughts.

The modern penchant for “connectedness” leaves us strangely disconnected from things that count, including our thoughts. It was in a state of utter solitude that I was brought face to face with my own need of a Savior who could liberate me from my sin and the awful prospect of death. Such solitude is often thought to be a sign

⁸ Gary Snyder, essay in *A Controversy of Poets: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Paris Leary and Robert Kelly (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 551. “There is not much wilderness left to destroy, and the nature in the mind is being logged and burned off. Industrial-urban society is not ‘evil’ but there is no progress either. As a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the Neolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe. A gas turbine or an electric motor is a finely-crafted flint knife in the hand. It is useful and full of wonder, but it is not our whole life.” Ibid.

of being antisocial. Yet I have found it essential to fortifying the most important virtues necessary to maintaining true human relations. Disconnecting from the ordinary means of communication gives us opportunity to overcome the tendency to the jejeune promoted by the electronic environment. Christian meditation is the biblical version of the power-vision in solitude.

The Sabbath is the biblical implementation of rest. The first Sabbath rest recorded in the Bible is not ours but God’s:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen. 2:1-3)

This raises the question of just what this resting is. It cannot be sleep for the divine being. It was rather a concentrated enjoyment of the completed work of creation. The Sabbath made for man—redeemed man in the worship assembly—is characterized by focused attention to worshipping and enjoying the presence of God through the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian Sabbath offers a marvelous respite from the cares of life, especially from the frenetic pace of modernity. Our proposed OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God encourages us, “In order to sanctify the day, it is necessary for [the covenant people] to prepare for its approach. They should attend to their ordinary affairs beforehand so that they may not be hindered from setting the Sabbath apart to God.”⁹ Spiritual refreshment has, of course, always been necessary for exiles and strangers awaiting the eternal Sabbath. But the sabbatical principle involved in the Lord’s Day, as the first of a new creation, is meant to form the character of the remainder of the week. Since public worship is “a meeting of the triune God

⁹ Amended Proposed Revised Version of the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God, I.A.3.a.

with his covenant people,”¹⁰ everything else must stimulate our focus on him. This has never been more necessary than in the present environment.

Therefore, church officers should promote these benefits of the Lord’s Day. Ministers, elders, and deacons must practice good stewardship of every human invention to insure that these inventions foster attention to the important things, rather than distract us from them. We also need to instruct God’s people in the cultivation of thoughtful, attentive lives. Finally, in order to guard the ministry of the Word, sessions need to protect pastors from distractions of every kind and promote sabbatical rest in their lives.

Pastors, take time to disconnect from every modern distraction. Give your undivided attention to the things that count so that your congregation may know that you have communed with heavenly reality, a sacred “power-vision in solitude.” “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). ©

10 Ibid., I.B.1.

Ambassadors of the Heavenly King

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2009¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Among the uncertainties of modern life, and my own very mortal life, one certitude is stronger than ever in my understanding—I am a preacher of the Word of God, an ambassador of my heavenly King Jesus Christ. He has called me to this task. This is true of every minister of the Word.

I remember once fearing that holding a three-office view of church government would be

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=159.

thought by others to be a kind of self-promoting elitism. And it is true that many think this, partly through misunderstanding what Scripture teaches on the subject, and partly through having encountered men who use the view to advance such elitism. So with the three-office view of evangelism taught in the two articles: “Evangelism and the Church” by Charles Dennison, and “Evangelistic Responsibility” by T. David Gordon.² At worst this view might be unfairly characterized as discouraging or even opposing evangelism. While a fair reading would never allow such a conclusion, it might appear that at least the regular church member is being told never to communicate the gospel to anyone. Let the preacher do it. However, as I understand and embrace the essential position of these two articles, I think it does two valuable things: it protects Christians from unnecessary guilt, and it protects the message from possible corruption.

The egalitarian instinct of our culture often inhibits clear thinking on these subjects. Everyone wants to be an American idol. Well, not everyone. But the idea is out there that the preacher who believes that he alone should lead public worship and publicly announce the good news of the Lamb’s kingdom is hogging center stage, as a kind of “one-man show.” The commonly used metaphor in this criticism is revealing. Worship is seen as just another form of entertainment. In a democracy, everyone ought to get a crack at performing. This is what is normally meant by participating. Biblically participation, however, is not achieved by leveling every distinction, especially that of office. We should remember this when it comes to considering whose responsibility it is to evangelize, and how everyone may truly participate without being the actual messenger. It takes many hands to run a successful embassy, but the ambassador is tasked with knowing and publicly articulating the message of the Great King.

So rather than defend the office against the charge of elitism, let me set forth, not the privi-

2 Charles G. Dennison, “Evangelism and the Church,” *Ordained Servant Online* (June-July 2009); T. David Gordon, “Evangelistic Responsibility,” *Ordained Servant Online* (June-July 2009).

leges of the office—and there are many—but the central duty. This, not center stage, constrains the true ambassador, as Paul teaches us in 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

What is often overlooked in this passage is that it is written to the church in Corinth, implying that the message of the embassy must be first known well there before it can be declared to the world. This is one reason why we Reformed ambassadors are intent on preaching Christ in every sermon—Emmaus road style. This is also the reason that many churches are incorporating a public confession of sin and a declaration of pardon in their liturgies. Each Lord’s Day, I have the solemn duty—and it is a glorious privilege—of announcing the pardon of sinners to my congregation; of assuring them that Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient Savior from sin and death. Here, I believe, I am doing the work of an evangelist, even as Paul enjoined Timothy, “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

The Lord’s Supper, in turn, seals that assurance as it seals the ministry of the Word, making every worship service thoroughly evangelistic in the best and broadest biblical sense of the word. Unlike the mass evangelistic methodology that permeates much of evangelicalism, this broader understanding of evangelism edifies the saints, who always need the assurance of the gospel, and calls unbelieving sinners who may be present to repent and believe that gospel. I believe that this is what Paul was calling Timothy to. Declaring the amnesty offered by heaven through the office of the mediator King Jesus is always the main business of the preacher as he addresses the church and the world. “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among

you” (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

How would outsiders come in to the church’s worship unless they had been invited? Here is a way in which any member may assist in the work of evangelism. My experience in three decades of ministry in the OPC is that promotion of every-member evangelism tends to leave most church members feeling guilty that they are failing to fulfill a duty that Scripture requires. But, as first name Dennison and T. David Gordon demonstrate, no such duty exists. However, in the general office of believer, supporting the evangelistic ministry of the embassy is a duty that they may fulfill in a variety of ways. Surely, prayer for sinners to be saved through the messages preached each week by the minister of the Word is one important way. Those who have opportunity may invite neighbors, family, and friends to worship. The session of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church has developed special invitation cards for members to hand out. We have also on occasion distributed invitations in our neighborhoods.

There are those—perhaps a majority in our present culture—who will never, for a variety of reasons, visit a church service. Here the ambassador should consider ways of finding a hearing outside the embassy’s walls. One way we at Amoskeag have found somewhat fruitful is for me to offer to conduct a Bible study explaining the gospel in the homes of members. The host invites neighbors, family, and friends to a one-hour study each week for between two and four weeks. The invitation promises light refreshments, punctuality, and no pressure to say or do anything. But the ambassador also offers to stay after the presentation ends to answer any questions the guests may have. Those who come are usually eager to ask questions, but those who wish may leave when the study is over. Meanwhile congregation members, who have signed up, will be praying during that hour for the Lord’s blessing on the meeting.

When sessions take part in the regular visitation of the congregation, preachers are freer to engage in this sort of outreach. I have found that writing evangelistic tracts, as one local ambassador, lends a personal note to our evangelistic

efforts as an embassy. Every member may give a word from their pastor to a friend or neighbor. In certain situations, where time and circumstances allow, ministers may proclaim the gospel in public places, as does our brother Bill Welzien in Key West, Florida.

None of this is in any way meant to prohibit Christians from informally telling others about the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In agreement with Dennison and Gordon, what I believe this view does is relieve church members of the unbiblical, and therefore unnecessary, guilt that every-member evangelistic programs often foster.

If anything sums up the task of an ambassador, it is that he is the official spokesman for his king. So, too, with preachers of the Word. As Calvin insists, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, “a commission has been given to the ministers of the gospel to communicate to us his grace.”³ This commission focuses on communicating God’s favor:

The ministry of reconciliation. Here we have an illustrious designation of the gospel, as being an embassy for reconciling men to God. It is also a singular dignity of ministers—that they are sent to us by God with this commission so as to be messengers . . . Ministers are furnished with this commission, that they may bring us intelligence of so great a benefit, nay more, may assure us of God’s fatherly love towards us. Any other person, it is true, may be a witness to us of the grace of God, but Paul teaches, that this office is specially intrusted [*sic*] to ministers. When, therefore, a duly ordained minister proclaims in the gospel that God has been made propitious to us, he is to be listened to just as an ambassador of God, and sustaining, as they speak, a public character, and furnished with rightful authority for assuring us of this.⁴

He goes on to comment on the phrase in verse

3 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 238.

4 *Ibid.*, 235–236.

20, “as if God did beseech you,”

This is of no small importance for giving authority to the embassy: nay more, it is absolutely necessary, for who would rest upon the testimony of men, in reference to his eternal salvation? It is a matter of too much importance, to allow of our resting contented with the promise of men, without feeling assured that they are ordained by God, and that God speaks to us by them. This is the design of those commendations, with which Christ himself signalizes his apostles: *He that heareth you heareth me*, &c. (Luke x. 16)⁵

Because of this divine calling, the reading as well as the preaching of Scripture is an authoritative, as well as an interpretive, act of God’s appointed servants.⁶ It is the message of the King explained and applied. Reading and preaching are all of a piece. Despite the good intentions of those who believe that anyone may read Scripture in public worship, doing so plays unwittingly into the hands of egalitarianism and so undermines the authority of the King, and in so doing diminishes the assurance of God’s people. King Jesus has appointed his ambassadors to proclaim the good news of reconciliation to the nations in order that sinners may confidently believe the message.

The perception of our task as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers reconciliation to the nations, is essential to the church’s task of evangelism. God’s message of reconciliation is central to all we preachers do both inside and outside of the visible church. ☉

5 *Ibid.*, 239.

6 Cf. the title of Hughes Oliphant Old’s monumental history of preaching, *The Reading and Preaching of Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007). Reading and preaching Scripture are inextricably linked in the history of the ministry.

The Spirituality of Mission Work

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2009¹

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

In 2002, I reread the classic work on missions from the nineteenth century, John Nevius's *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Since my first church planting experience in New York in the 1980s, I had employed the "three self" principles articulated by Nevius. Now, as the chairman of the Committee on Home Missions in the OPC's Presbytery of New York and New England, I wanted to introduce this outstanding work to our committee and home missionaries under our care. I was shocked to discover that it was out of print. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company had first republished it in 1958. They kindly gave me permission to republish the work, with Bruce Hunt's splendid preface, under the imprint of a new publishing endeavor founded with the kind partnership of my friend Tom Villeneuve.

Generations of missionaries, both home and foreign, have found biblical guidance and encouragement in Nevius's little book. Its principles are as timely today as they were when first published by Presbyterian Press in Shanghai in 1886. Already in Nevius's day, technique was eclipsing the spirituality of the missionary enterprise. By returning to the wisdom of the book of Acts, Nevius sought to correct this dangerous tendency.

An Introduction to John Nevius²

John Livingston Nevius (1829-1893) was an American Presbyterian missionary to China. Born near Ovid, New York, Nevius received his BD from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1853.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=160.

2 Gregory E. Reynolds, "Introduction," John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Hancock, NH: Monadnock Press, 2003), 9-11.

He was sent by the Presbyterian Mission Board to Ning Pong, China (1854-1859); Japan (1859-1861); Shantung Province at Tungchow, China (1861-1864), and Chefoo (1871-1893). In the early 1880s, after a trip to Korea, he formulated his principles of church planting, known as the "Nevius Method," later published in China in 1885. In 1890 he was invited by the Korean Presbyterian Church to review their mission work. After his principles were implemented, the Korean church experienced extraordinary growth. Besides *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, he also published *Compendium of Theology, China and the Chinese*, and *Demon Possession and Allied Themes*.³

One of the hallmarks of the missions endeavors of consciously Reformed churches has been their insistence that missions at home and abroad are the work of God. Building the church is an entirely supernatural business from beginning to end. He is the one who guides the circumstances and opportunities for missions. He is the one who gifts and empowers his messengers to go. He is the one who makes their labors fruitful. Paul plants and Apollos waters, but God gives the increase.

Another hallmark is the determination to assist converts to establish their own native churches. It is not democracy or American prosperity that we bring to the mission field, but the good news that God is graciously reconciling sinners to himself. The OPC was born out of the conviction that it is this saving message, and nothing else, that we are commissioned by the Risen Lord to bring to the nations. After the apostolic pattern of Acts, men are trained to lead and propagate their own churches as part of the "nation among the nations," which is the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Nevius saw the importance of this pattern in his own work as he reflected on the biblical mandate for missions. What may be good foreign policy for

3 John L. Nevius, *China and the Chinese: A General Description of the Country and Its Inhabitants; Its Civilization and Form Of Government; Its Religious and Social Institutions; Its Intercourse with Other Nations, and Its Present Condition and Prospects* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1869); *Demon Possession and Allied Themes; Being an Inductive Study of Phenomena of Our Own Times*, Intro. F. F. Ellinwood (Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1895).

an empire or a great nation makes terrible policy for missions. Our citizenship, as Christians, is in heaven. Our country transcends national boundaries. The Lord of our embassies reigns victorious over sin and death in heaven. This perspective alone fosters the humility of servanthood required by our Savior for missions.

It has been one of my greatest delights, during three decades as a minister in the OPC, to see these principles put into practice. Each missionary, who has presented the work of a particular mission in one of the churches I have served, has done so with the attitude of a servant of Jesus Christ. The focus is on what the living Lord is doing in various indigenous churches. Because our missionaries are not required to raise their own support, they do not feel pressured into painting unrealistically positive pictures of their work. They share their struggles in the great battle in which they are engaged on the front lines. Spiritual realism, in turn, encourages the genuine participation of the congregations in the labor of prayer and service.

In my own labor in home missions in New England, I have found Nevius an indispensable mentor in planting churches. At the outset, I have set the goal for each mission group to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. While Nevius worked in a unique situation, the principles that he gleaned from God's Word are applicable everywhere and in every age. The methodology of the Apostles prevents us from falling prey to the latest fads in missions and church growth. Nevius corrected many fads and false notions of his own day. He believed that God's way builds churches most pleasing to him and best calculated to endure the storms of life. Nevius breathes the spirit of the Apostolic mission. That is our mission.

As I re-read Bruce Hunt's preface to *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, I was reminded of the often extreme self-sacrifice required of many missionaries. Hunt's brief memoir *For a Testimony*⁴ movingly chronicles his own suffering. It takes men who believe that they are

4 Bruce Hunt, *For a Testimony* (Willow Grove: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2000).

ambassadors to a world which is at enmity with God; who recognize that sinners need to be delivered "from this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4); who are willing to give their lives because they seek a heavenly country and confess that they are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13), and who count the "reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:26).

Nineteenth-century Scottish missionary John Paton displayed just such an attitude. When he had determined to bring the Gospel to the New Hebrides, he was reminded by a colleague, Mr. Dickson, that his predecessors, John Williams and James Harris, were clubbed to death and eaten minutes after landing in those islands in 1839. "The Cannibals! You will be eaten by Cannibals!" Paton responded, "If I can live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms."⁵

An Excerpt

How Best to Expend One's Time?

1. The dominant idea of a missionary should be duty, and not immediate individual success as judged by human standards. If the desire for tangible results should take the form of a wish to gather into the church as soon as possible the greatest number of professed converts, it may become a dangerous temptation and snare.

2. It will be early fifty years hence to determine with positive certainty what any individual life has or has not accomplished. Only in eternity will every man's work be fully made manifest of what sort it is. Results of apparently great importance may attract attention and secure general commendation, and yet prove only temporary and illusory. On the other hand, a good book or a word spoken in season may produce important results, though the world may never be able to trace them to their true source.

5 John G. Paton, D.D., *Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891), 56.

Missionaries but Instruments in Spiritual Work

In the spiritual work of the conversion of souls and building up Christ's Kingdom on earth, we of ourselves can do nothing except as instruments.

This is a fact so familiarly known and universally acknowledged that it may well be regarded as a simple truism. Theoretically, we learned this lesson almost in infancy; practically, it is difficult for some of us fully to learn it in a lifetime. It is so natural for us to feel that with a good knowledge of the language, sincere earnestness and sympathy with the people, together with prudence, common sense, zeal, hard work, and perseverance, sooner or later great spiritual results must certainly be accomplished. This is by no means the case. Our labors may combine all the above conditions and yet be fruitless in the conversion of souls. If we depend upon our gifts or acquisitions, our zeal in the use even of God's appointed means, with an underlying and insidious desire for a result which may be regarded as something which we ourselves have accomplished, we shall probably be disappointed. If we are cherishing a feeling of self-dependence in any form, God will probably humble us before he will use us. We must feel that, if anything is accomplished, it will be by the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, and be ready to ascribe all the glory to him. Otherwise, he will probably leave us to ourselves to learn the lesson of our own weakness. The natural tendency to depend on self, or on anything else rather than God, has been a prominent sin of God's people from the earliest times. I am disposed to think that this tendency now prevails to a great extent among Christians at home and that missionaries commence work in foreign lands too much under the influence of it.

In this commercial age a commercial spirit has crept into the Church. As in business matters generally, so in religious enterprises, it is supposed that a certain amount of capital, judiciously expended, will naturally work out a certain result. The success of a mission society is gauged by the amount of money in its treasury. In order to secure more liberal contributions, only the more favorable and encouraging facts are welcomed and laid

before the churches, so that they may feel that they are contributing not to a failing but to a prospering cause. Let me not be understood as implying that money is not important and that the duty of giving to missions should not be pressed home upon the hearts and consciences of all, whether native converts or home Christians. The danger I would guard against is of giving such disproportionate prominence to money as to divert the mind from what is of much greater importance. In a word, it is making money or what money can command, rather than the Holy Spirit, our main dependence. I am quite aware that all Christians would earnestly disavow any such intention. It is not an uncommon thing, however, to find ourselves doing indirectly, or unconsciously, what we could never be induced to do deliberately and knowingly. The work we are prosecuting is distinctly and emphatically a work of God's Spirit. If we fail to recognize and act upon this fact, the mission work will decline even with a full treasury; while with the Spirit's presence it will prosper even with a depleted one.⁶ ©

6 Nevius, Chapter 5, "Beginning Work," *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 95-98.

The Humanity of John Calvin¹

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2009²

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Rarely has a man provoked such controversy as John Calvin. He is often depicted as the cruel tyrant of Geneva. The 1994 edition of the CD-ROM *Webster's Concise Interactive Encyclopedia* claims that Michael Servetus "was burned alive by the

1 Originally published in *Banner of Truth Magazine*, vols. 448, 449 (January, February 2001), 19-23; 25-27.

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=168.

church reformer Calvin,”³ and that Calvin “established a rigorous theocracy;”⁴ all of which leaves the distinct impression that Calvin was something less than human. It is my purpose in this article to demonstrate otherwise.

The nineteenth-century German Reformed church historian Philip Schaff asserted that Calvin “must be reckoned as one of the greatest and *best* men whom God raised up in the history of Christianity.”⁵ Most moderns would hardly concur. But why? There are at least two reasons of which I am aware. The first is that Calvin’s image has been purposely distorted by his opponents, and this distortion is simply parroted by their students who have never read Calvin for themselves. The second is that Calvin’s Master warned his disciples: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours” (John 15:18–20). John Calvin merited reproach like his Master.

One would hope that even those who staunchly disagree with Calvin’s theology would treat him with the historical fairness he was accorded by his nineteenth-century French opponent Ernest Renan, who called him “the most Christian man of his age.”⁶ Such, however, has not been the case. The first notable detractor was Jérôme-Hermès Bolsec, a Roman Catholic, who in 1577 accused Calvin of being an ambitious, presumptuous, arrogant, cruel, evil, vindictive, and above all, ignorant man.⁷ In 1688, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet launched

a more subtle attack asserting that Calvin was an ambitious, quick tempered autocrat, with a morose and bitter spirit, displaying a “serious sickness” in the way he pursued his adversaries.⁸ In 1841, J. M. Audin wrote a biography of Calvin, authorized by the French Roman Catholic Church up until World War I. In it Calvin is portrayed as an ego-centric coward, who “never loved.” Further, Audin commented, “He has the nature of a snake.”⁹ More recently, in 1951, Father André Favre-Dorsaz wrote what Calvin scholar Richard Stauffer describes as “the most destructive book about Calvin with which I am acquainted.” According to Favre-Dorsaz, Calvin was a cruel, sadistic dictator, a superficial theologian, and a believer whose religious feeling was of a doubtful character.¹⁰ And in 1955, Daniel-Rops summed up modern opinion by identifying Calvin as “the perfect type of fanatic.”¹¹

During his life time, Calvin was aware of his detractors. He reflected to a friend: “When I hear that I am everywhere so foully defamed, I have not such iron nerves as not to be stung by pain.”¹² Calvin was certainly, by his own admission, not a perfect man. He was a sinner saved by grace. But oh what a beautiful difference grace made in his life. This is clearly evinced by his life, his teaching, his letters, and in every relationship, even with his enemies. Let us attempt to set the record straight.

THE THEOLOGY UNDERLYING CALVIN’S HUMANITY

I. Man in God’s Image Is a Servant-Ruler of Creation

Based on his study of Scripture, Calvin believed that man was created to be a servant-ruler under God. Man cannot be properly understood,

George Shriver (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1971), 20.

8 Ibid., 22, 23.

9 Ibid., 23.

10 Ibid., 25, 26.

11 Ibid., 27.

12 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, 838.

3 Webster’s *Concise Interactive Encyclopedia*, CD-ROM, 1994 ed., s.v. “Servetus, Michael.”

4 Ibid., s.v. “Calvin, John.”

5 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 834, emphasis added.

6 Ibid., 835.

7 Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans.

or understand himself, apart from his relationship to his Creator. Thus, he was commanded to subdue and cultivate the creation under the wise and loving direction of the Lord, for God’s glory and the blessing and benefit of his fellow man.

A classic criticism of Calvin’s doctrine of man is that the Calvinistic work ethic has promoted wasteful exploitation of the natural environment. Calvin’s doctrine leads to no such conclusion. In his commentary on Genesis 2:15, Calvin wrote that the custody given by God to Adam and Eve over the garden shows that “we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on condition, that being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain. Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to his posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated.”¹³ No one rules creation properly who does not use the creation in service to God and man. The failure to do so dehumanizes mankind and destroys nature. The thoughtless pollution of the world in the name of capitalism or any other economic philosophy is not Calvinism. “Even kings do not rule justly or lawfully, unless they serve.”¹⁴

Service is especially necessary in connection with one’s neighbor. “God has bound us so strongly to each other, that no man ought to avoid subjection and when love reigns mutual service will be rendered.”¹⁵ “The law does not only pertain to the sizable profits, but from ancient days God has commanded us to remember it in the small kindnesses of life.”¹⁶ “Christians certainly ought to display more than a smiling face, a cheerful mood,

13 John Calvin, *Commentaries*, 1540–1563 (1847; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), Gen. 2:15.

14 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Matt. 20:25.

15 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Eph. 5:21.

16 John Calvin, *Golden Book of the True Christian Life*, trans. Henry J. Van Andel (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1952), 32. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), book 3, chapters 6–10.

and polite language when they practice charity. First of all Christians ought to imagine themselves in the place of the person who needs their help, and they ought to sympathize with him as though they themselves were suffering; they ought to show real mercy and humanness and offer their assistance as readily as if it were themselves.”¹⁷

Calvin understood that because of the fall of Adam, loving service is not natural to man. The image of God has been distorted. Because man no longer thinks of himself in relationship to God, against whom he has rebelled, he now considers himself a lord and not a servant of God or mankind. “Each man has a kingdom in his breast.”¹⁸ Calvin has been criticized for his references to man as “a worm.”¹⁹ Taken in context, these references always refer to man in his use of creation for his own selfish ends. By living for himself man loses his created dignity, in which he was created to be elevated to communion with his Creator. For Calvin, it is man’s sinful quest for independence that is degrading, and not his humanity *per se*.²⁰

Only Jesus Christ can restore man to his created dignity and integrity. Repentance and faith re-orient man to God-centered living.²¹ In Christ man is a new creation, fulfilling God’s purposes in the Second Adam. Calvin’s negative assessment focuses on man as a child of the fallen First Adam. In his discussion of “remaining sin” in Romans 7, Calvin asserts that despite the Christian’s battle with sin he is “never without reason for joy” because of what God has already given him in

17 Ibid., 36.

18 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.4.

19 John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 2:1–5. Cf. *Sermons on Job*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 33:29–34; *Institutes*, 1.5.4.

20 Louis A. Vos, “Calvin and the Christian Self-Image: God’s Noble Workmanship, A Wretched Worm or a New Creature?” in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 80ff.

21 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Psalm 8:5.

Christ.²² “Full manhood is found in Christ; but foolish men do not in a proper manner seek their perfection in Christ . . . whoever is a man in Christ is in every respect a perfect man.”²³ As for Paul, so for Calvin, Christ was his *summum bonum*. In redemption, man is restored to his proper role in Christ as a servant-ruler. The blessings of this restoration begin in this life and radically influence his relationship with God, man, and nature.

II. Man Is Redeemed to Enjoy God's World

In Christ the world is seen through new eyes. God's glory is everywhere, and “the whole world is arranged and established for the purpose of conducing to the comfort and happiness of man.”²⁴ The world was created to be man's home—the theatre for living to God's glory. Though the curse on the city of man has not been lifted, since Christ came, the Christian, restored in Christ, may begin to live in the world as God intended, in limited but real enjoyment of God's blessings. Tokens of God's restoration are distributed in his providence.²⁵

The proper use of God's creation is oriented by faith. “The use of earthly blessings is connected with the pure feelings of faith in the exercise of which we can alone enjoy them rightly and lawfully to our own enjoyment and welfare.”²⁶ Whether we eat or drink all is to be done for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Although the heavenly life to come is superior, this life is not to be despised because it is the wonderful gift of God.²⁷

Calvin was no ascetic. Creation is not only useful but meant to be truly enjoyed by the Christian. “Let us not be ashamed to take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this most

beautiful theatre.”²⁸ In a sermon on Job 3:1–10, Calvin recommends celebrating birthdays instead of cursing the day of our birth as Job did.²⁹ It is not only for their usefulness that fruits, flowers, fabrics, and metals were created but also for their beauty.³⁰ “Now if we ponder to what end God created food, we shall find that He meant not only to provide for necessity, but also for delight and good cheer.”³¹

Even civil government is to be enjoyed as an instrument of God's common grace to promote peace and tranquility during the Christian's pilgrimage. “If it is God's will that we go as pilgrims upon the earth, while we aspire to the true fatherland, and if the pilgrimage requires such helps, those who take these from man deprive him of his very humanity.”³² For Calvin, any philosophy, such as Monasticism and Anabaptism, which depreciates creation, civil government, and culture is an “inhumane philosophy,” which reduces man to a “block” and “maliciously deprives us of the lawful fruit of divine benevolence.”³³ Creation is the good gift of God, and man, redeemed from sin in Christ, may truly enjoy it.

III. Man Should Use and Enjoy His Creative Gifts

As the image of God, man is a creative creature. It is his dignity that he is gifted to cultivate the riches of God's creation for God's glory and his present and eternal enjoyment. Adam named the animals and cultivated the flora in the Garden of Eden. While sin distorts man's motives, it does not obliterate his creative instinct. As a sinner, he misdirects his creativity to glorify himself instead of God. Nonetheless his creativity is still God's

22 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Rom. 7:25.

23 Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 4:13. Cf. *Commentaries*, John 11:33; Rom. 5:12.

24 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Psalm 8:7.

25 *Ibid.*, Psalm 128:3.

26 *Ibid.*, Psalm 36:9. Cf. *Commentaries*, 1 Cor. 10:25; 1 Tim. 4:5.

27 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Phil. 2:27.

28 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.20.

29 Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, 3:1–10.

30 Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Cor.* 10:31–11:1. Cf. *Commentaries*, 1 Tim. 6:17; Ps. 104:15.

31 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.10.2.

32 *Ibid.*, 4.20.2.

33 *Ibid.*, 3.10.3.

gift to saint and sinner alike, and should thus not be disdained. “God is despised in his gifts except we honor those on whom he has conferred any excellency.”³⁴

The cultural gifts of arts, crafts, and agriculture developed by Jabal, Jubal, and Tubalcain are “rare endowments . . . rays of divine light have shown on unbelieving nations, for the benefit of the present life . . . excellent gifts of the Spirit are diffused through the whole human race.”³⁵ All academic disciplines and human learning should be appreciated and enjoyed. Calvin especially loved music and poetry. . His friend Louis Bourgeois wrote many psalm settings and hymn tunes for Calvin to use in the worship of the Genevan churches. Of congregational singing, Calvin said: it is “an excellent method of kindling the heart and making it burn with great ardor in prayer.”³⁶ “Music may minister to our pleasure rather than our necessity . . . pleasure is indeed to be condemned, unless it be combined with fear of God, and with the common benefit of human society.”³⁷

Because Calvin rejected much ecclesiastical sculpture and painting due to its idolatrous tendencies relative to the second commandment, many think he rejected fine art altogether. To the contrary he asserted: “And yet I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images permissible. But because sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I seek a pure and legitimate use of each, lest those things which the Lord has conferred upon us for his glory and our good be not only polluted by perverse misuse but also turned to our destruction.”³⁸

In conclusion, Calvin’s view of man, creation, and creativity is essentially positive, when seen in the context of redemptive history, which takes the reality of sin into account. Noted Calvin scholar

34 Calvin, *Commentaries*, 1 Peter 3:7.

35 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Gen. 4:20–22. Cf. *Institutes*, 2.2.16.

36 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, 841.

37 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Gen. 4:20–22.

38 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.12. Cf. 1.11.7, 8, 11.

Louis A. Vos concludes: “In spite of all the presentations of Calvin as an austere and rigid sort of person, it must be said that Calvin promoted joyful living. Our happiness he claims is in the Lord.”³⁹

Calvin himself concludes: “We have never been forbidden to laugh or to be filled or to join new possessions to old or ancestral ones, or to delight in musical harmony, or to drink wine.”⁴⁰ Here Calvin sounds like Luther, and no wonder, for despite their very different personalities, backgrounds, and situations, they both knew and served the same wonderful God.

THE PRACTICE DEMONSTRATING CALVIN’S HUMANITY

Here I follow the outline found in Richard Stauffer’s splendid little study *The Humanness of John Calvin*. The bulk of evidence comes from Calvin’s lifelong voluminous correspondence, much of which may be found in the last four volumes of *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*.⁴¹

I. Husband and Father

Calvin did not marry until he was thirty-one because of the dangers he faced as a Protestant refugee and exile. In 1538 Calvin assumed his duties as pastor to the French refugees and professor of exegesis in Strasbourg. At the Frankfurt Conference in February of 1539, seeking Protestant unity, his friend Philipp Melancthon chided him because of his pensiveness: “He was dreaming of getting married.”⁴² In May Calvin wrote to his friend and colleague William Farel concerning his quest for a wife. “Remember well what I am looking for in her. I am not of that crazy breed of lovers, who, stricken by the beauty of a woman, love even her faults. The only beauty which captivates me is that

39 Vos, “Calvin and the Christian Self-Image,” 103.

40 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.9.

41 *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (1844; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).

42 Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, 34.

of a chaste, kind, modest, thrifty, patient woman, who I might finally hope would be attentive to my health.”⁴³

The following year, Farel wrote to a friend that Calvin had finally been married in Strasbourg to an “upright and honest” and “even pretty” woman.⁴⁴ Her name was Idelette de Bure. When a plague broke out in Strasbourg in 1541, Idelette took refuge with a nearby relative. Calvin wrote to Farel, not as a stoic, but as a man of deep feeling: “Night and day my wife is in my thoughts, deprived of advice since she is not in her husband’s presence.” Then, in the same letter, after referring to a friend’s bereavement, Calvin laments: “These events bring me such sadness that they completely overwhelm my soul and break my spirit.”⁴⁵

In 1542, Idelette brought a son, Jacques, into the world prematurely. When he did not survive, Calvin wrote: “Certainly the Lord has afflicted us with a deep and painful wound in the death of our beloved son. But he is our Father: He knows what is best for his children.”⁴⁶ In 1549 Idelette herself died. Of this terrible blow Calvin wrote to Farel: “I am trying as much as possible not to be overwhelmed with grief.”⁴⁷ Then he wrote to Viret: “I am deprived of my excellent life companion.”⁴⁸ In his commentary on Ephesians 5:28 Calvin had asserted: “The man who does not love his wife is a monster.”⁴⁹

II. Friend

Concerning friendship Stauffer observes that “no other reformer had the personal attraction

that Calvin had.”⁵⁰ Calvin’s faithfulness caused his friendships to be deep and lasting. Lucien Febvre comments: “Before the classical pictures of Calvin . . . there had lived in this world a little Picard—lively, alert, with bright and sparkling eyes—a very fascinating Picard—with qualities of frankness, openness, thoughtfulness.”⁵¹ Contrary to the portrait painted by his detractors, Calvin was affable and gracious to all.

Upon hearing of the death of an Augustinian monk, who had become a reformer, Calvin mourned: “I am so staggered that I cannot express how deep my grief is. On that day I could do nothing . . .”⁵² Calvin was also frank and open as a friend. He once gently warned Farel of the verbosity of his sermons and writings: “I think that the somewhat complicated style and the rather verbose way of approaching the subject only obscure the light which I find in it.”⁵³ Even in criticism he did not fail to show genuine appreciation. In 1553, Calvin received news of Farel’s approaching death. After announcing Farel’s critical condition to all, he departed quickly with the hope that he would be too late to see his friend die. When Calvin received news of Farel’s sudden recovery, he wrote: “After having discharged for your sake what I considered the last duty of a friend, by an early departure I hoped to escape the grief and pain of seeing you die.” He closed: “May it please God, since I have buried you before your time, that the church may see you outlive me.”⁵⁴

Calvin dealt graciously with differences. Calvin was somewhat distant from Farel for five years before his own death because Farel, at age 69, had married a very young woman. Calvin thought it very unwise because of the gossip it would elicit, harming the reputation of the reformers. Calvin got his wish that Farel should outlive him. In his

43 Ibid., 35.

44 Ibid., 39.

45 Ibid., 40, 41.

46 Ibid., 42.

47 Ibid., 45.

48 Ibid., 45.

49 Calvin, *Commentaries*, Eph. 5:28.

50 Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, 47.

51 Ibid., 51.

52 Ibid., 54.

53 Ibid., 57n.

54 Ibid., 59.

last letter to Farel he demonstrates his love for a friend with whom he had such a strong difference. “Good health, to you my very good and very dear friend; and since it may please God that you live on after me, please remember our unity, the fruit of which awaits us in heaven, since it has been useful to the church of God. . . . I breathe with the greatest difficulty and expect my breath to fail me at any time. It is enough that I live and die in Christ, who is gain for his own both in life and death. I commend you to God along with the brothers up there.”⁵⁵

Despite strong theological differences with his friend Melancthon, over the doctrine of Predestination, Calvin remained a faithful friend and admirer. He once wrote to Melancthon: “I have wished a thousand times that we might be together again.”⁵⁶ To Martin Luther, who was very angry with the Swiss theologians over differences concerning the Lord’s Supper, Calvin began his letter: “To my much respected father . . .” and closed “Adieu, most renowned sir, most distinguished minister of Christ, and my ever honoured father.”⁵⁷

This should remind us of the memorable saying of Reformed apologist Cornelius Van Til: “*Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re—gentle in presentation, powerful in substance.*”⁵⁸ This ideal Calvin embodied to a rare degree.

III. Pastor

Far from being the cruel, self serving dictator depicted by his detractors, Calvin sought the unity of the church throughout the world, as well as in his own city of Geneva. This required patient tolerance of imperfection. His was the attitude of a pastor. To schismatics he wrote: “Occupy yourselves more in doing to others as you would

have them do to you.”⁵⁹ After three years of exile from Geneva, Calvin returned without a grudge. He picked up exactly where he left off expositing Scripture on the Lord’s Day.⁶⁰ He visited the poor and sick tirelessly. He accepted the guardianship of the children of a friend and told Beza: “I owe it to the memory of my wonderful friend to love his children as if they were my own.”⁶¹ He wept with the sorrowful and rejoiced with those who were blessed.

Calvin’s correspondence reveals that he was a pastor to pastors and Christians all over Europe. He worried, prayed over, and encouraged the martyrs of Lyon when he wrote: “Since we have no other means of fulfilling our responsibility except to pray to God in our prayers of the compassion and concern which we have for you, please be aware that we never fail to do this.”⁶² Here we see the full measure of his humanity.

On his death bed, Calvin asked forgiveness of each person he had offended, and begged God for mercy. “To see the good things that he has done for me only makes me more guilty, so that my only recourse is to that One who, being the Father of mercy, may be and show Himself to be the Father of one who is such a wretched sinner.” Stauffer concludes his little book: “Such a wretched sinner! Is not this confession the best proof that Calvin was not the inhuman or anti-human person whom some people have believed him to be? After having offered his heart as a burnt sacrifice to the Lord, after having spent body and soul for the triumph of the gospel, far from shutting himself up in a prideful contemplation of his sacrifice or his genius, he felt a solidarity with sinful humanity which can find justification only in Jesus Christ.”⁶³

©

59 Ibid., 76.

60 Ibid., 78.

61 Ibid., 85.

62 Ibid., 91.

63 Ibid., 96.

55 Ibid., 61.

56 Ibid., 65, 66.

57 *Selected Works of John Calvin*, vol. 4, 440–442.

58 John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 192n.

✦ Servant Living

When to Forgive Others

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2009¹

by Brenton C. Ferry

When should you forgive someone who sins against you, and why? Should you forgive the person when he sins against you, or should you only forgive the person after he has asked you for forgiveness?

Jay Adams argues that you must not forgive someone until he or she first repents and asks for forgiveness, because God only forgives people who repent and ask for forgiveness.² What does the Bible say about this?

To be sure, you must forgive someone who repents and asks for your forgiveness. Luke 17:3–4 says, “If he repents, forgive him.” But you should also forgive the offender if he or she does not repent. Mark 11:25–26 says, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

The General Concept of Personal Forgiveness

By “forgive,” I mean to “stop feeling angry or resentful toward someone for an offense, flaw, or mistake” (The New Oxford American Dictionary). Someone insults you, or your wife, or your children, or your race and heritage, or offends you, or slanders you, or lies to you or about you, or ignores

you, or talks over you, or constantly disagrees with you, or acts condescending towards you, or criticizes you, or cheats on you, or hurts your feelings. To forgive someone when something like that takes place is to not harbor feelings of resentment and bitterness towards the one who offended you. Let it go. Bear with it. Get over it. Tolerate it.

And then go beyond forgiveness by returning the offense with gracious acts of kindness. Return hate with love. “Repay no one evil for evil” (Rom. 12:17). “Beloved, never revenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God” (12:19). “[I]f your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink” (12:20). “But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:39). “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (5:44). “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

You must replace feelings of wrath, resentment, and vengeance with feelings of kindness, affection, and love. And then perform acts in keeping with your forgiving heart. All real Christians can do this to one degree or another, because we all have the Holy Spirit.

Why Does God Forgive People?

When someone like Jay Adams wrongly says you should condition your forgiveness on the repentance of the other person, because God only forgives those who are repentant, remember that God also only forgives the elect. God also only forgives people whose debt was paid for by the death of Christ. God also only forgives people who are born again. God also only forgives people who trust Christ alone, who repent, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and glorified by virtue of their union with Christ. Yet, we do not condition our forgiveness of other people upon such things. The Bible never tells individuals to grant forgiveness on the same condition(s) that God grants forgiveness.

In fact, ultimately, God, out of love, forgives the people he wants to forgive, and does not forgive the people he does not want to forgive, according to his unconditional, sovereign choice in election (Rom. 9). We don’t have that kind of

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=129.

² Jay E. Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving: Learning to Forgive One Another God’s Way* (Amityville: Calvary Press, 1994).

choice about whom we forgive and whom we don't forgive. There is no parity of conditions between God's manner of forgiving people who sin against him, and our manner of forgiving people who sin against us.

Why Do We Forgive Unconditionally?

Instead, we are required to forgive those who sin against us because vengeance belongs to the Lord. Put another way, we are to forgive those who sin against us not because they have repented, but because God will judge them (Gen. 50:19). When you begin conditioning your forgiveness upon the repentance of those who offend you, you are sinning against the throne of God, trying to assume to yourself his place. You are playing God. But you are not allowed to pick up his gavel. That is why you must forgive others. You do not have the right to withhold forgiveness. You are just a sinner like everyone else. If someone offends you, get over it, because you deserve worse. You take care of being grateful and humble, and let God take care of being offended and judgmental.

If you want to gain the repentance of one who hurts you, the Bible says to return good for evil, which will heap "burning coals" on that person's head. This means you will make the person feel guilty for what he did to you. You will prick his conscience. To wait for the offender to repent before you forgive him is to short-circuit this process.

If it is important enough, rebuke the person. But whatever you do, freely forgive the offender from your heart before the sun goes down, or before you pray, or before you worship God.

Other reasons for forgiving others apart from their repentance include God's providence (Gen. 50:20), God's common grace (Matt. 5:45), and his forgiveness of you (Matt. 6:12, 14; Mark 11:26; 1 John 4:11).

In God's providence he uses the evil intentions of our enemies to our benefit. It is part of God's larger plan for you to be offended by others (for your own good). To hold a grudge against your enemy is an indirect way of holding a grudge against God.

In God's common grace, he is withholding the

full extent of his wrath for a time. Therefore, you should exercise the patience of forgiveness and let the Lord deal with your enemies when he wants.

And finally, if you have been forgiven then you should reflect that in your own life, by being gracious with others. Remember the parable of the wicked servant (Matt. 18:21–35).

The Keys of the Kingdom

The only Christians who condition forgiveness upon repentance are church elders as they preside in an official capacity over matters of church discipline. This is called the doctrine of the keys of the kingdom. Elders have the responsibility to remove unrepentant sinners from church membership because whatever the elders bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever they loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven (Matt. 18:18). That is to say, there is an analogous relationship between membership in the visible church and membership in the invisible church, which the elders are responsible for maintaining. If a church member proves to be a non-Christian by a scandalous lack of repentance, the member is censured with excommunication (1 Cor. 5). When the person repents, he is forgiven and reinstated into membership (2 Cor. 2). Do not confuse the exercise of forgiveness in the judicial-ecclesiastical context with forgiveness on the personal level. ©

Brenton C. Ferry is pastor of *Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church (OPC)* in Mount Airy, North Carolina.

Servant Work

The Importance of Home Visitation

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2009¹

by G. I. Williamson

When I answered the call to serve a congregation of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand in 1963 I was introduced to something I had never known before. The ruling elders of the Auckland Reformed Church were reporting on their annual home visits at the very first Session meeting I attended as their new Pastor. Every family (or individual if a person lived alone) received a visitation by two elders at least once each year. These visits were made at the initiative of each of the elders who were responsible for the section of the church membership assigned to his care. As part of his primary responsibility he was expected to enlist the assistance of a fellow-elder to join him in visiting each household, and to assist fellow elders in a similar way. At the regular Session meetings the elders reported on visits they had made, seeking the counsel of the whole body of elders regarding problems. The result was a level of pastoral oversight that far surpassed anything I had ever seen in any of the Presbyterian Churches I had known.

In recent years, in semi-retirement, I have seen something similar again. With the approval of our Presbytery and the Consistory of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa, my wife Doris and I have been received as associate members. We have, therefore, received a visit by two elders every year since we have been part of

this local church, as do all of the other members. We value these visits very much and appreciate the way in which this real oversight by the Consistory (like our Session) enables it to report to our OPC Presbytery, periodically, on our activities and participation in this local church. I have even had the privilege of sharing in the annual visitation with various elders as a part-time assistant to the elders. And, again, I am impressed by the benefits of this time-honored practice and have had a renewed desire to see this excellent practice emulated in the OPC.

But is it scriptural? I believe it is. Let me give a brief summary of my reasons. They are based on the inspired account of Paul's ministry in Ephesus in Acts 20:17–38. Toward the end of the Apostle Paul's third missionary journey in 57 A.D., he called for a meeting with the elders of the Church of Ephesus. At this early period in the growth of the Christian Church it is unlikely that all of these elders would have been those who "especially . . . labor in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). And we know that, regardless of how small the Apostolic Churches were, they were always organized with a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23). Yet Paul sets before all of these Ephesian elders his own ministry as a model for them. He exhorts all of them to "pay careful attention . . . to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). "You yourselves know" he reminds them, "how I lived among you the whole time from the first day . . . how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house . . . (and) for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears" (20:18, 20, 31). And then he adds these telling words: "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak" (20:35). The nearest thing that I have ever seen to the living out of this exhortation is in the home visitation practice in all three churches of the Dutch Reformed tradition that I have had the privilege of serving.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has a body of elders (both teaching and ruling) that are second to none in their understanding of, and

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=179.

commitment to, the Reformed Faith. It is also well known that we owe a great debt from the early years of our existence to men who came to us from the Christian Reformed Church. I believe we all recognize that this blending of the two traditions—Dutch and Scottish—has greatly enriched and strengthened us. Yet, as I see it, one of the best elements in the Dutch Reformed tradition has never been fully assimilated by us. The result, I believe, is a denomination that is stronger on the upper level (what we see in the level of the ministry, the work of the Presbytery and the General Assembly), and this is very impressive. But what we see on the local level (evening church attendance, for example) is not so impressive. I am convinced that one of the principle reasons for this is the lack of personal, individual and persistent “house to house” ministry—sometimes with tears—in the “day and night” care of the sheep by the shepherds.

I am aware that what I have said thus far may be taken to suggest that I think we have a poor body of elders. Not so! I have a high regard for the ruling elders of the OPC. I know of no better. However, I do not think our tradition has encouraged ruling elders to shepherd the flock to the same extent or degree that the Dutch Reformed tradition has. Here I want to try to illustrate my point with something that recently happened. My first years in the OPC were spent as a home missionary in New England. We began with a very small nucleus of fourteen souls. I regularly visited a new section of the city, house to house—door to door—as I sought to win lost souls for the Lord Jesus. One of the people who responded was a single mother, with four little children! She had already had two husbands. Well, shepherding her into the Reformed Christian Faith was, for a while, a full time business. It took a lot of work, person to person, but that lady went on to confess her faith in Christ. Later on she remarried a fine Christian. She and her husband worked to give their children a Christian education. She is now in old age, like I am. But my point is that this never would have happened without the Pauline model of shepherding. And, in those days, I (like Paul in his first days in Ephesus) had to do this alone. The difference

is that in all three of the churches of the Dutch tradition (mentioned above) I did not have to do it alone. Yes, I still had to do it—even intensively—but I did not have to do it alone.

In the Cornerstone URC in Sanborn there are new members who have virtually no background in biblical knowledge and nurture. But there are elders who are doing the kind of person-to-person work, counseling, instructing and correcting, that simply must be done to build up the Church of the Lord Jesus. One ruling elder can only do a small part of what needs to be done, of course, in a congregation of two or three hundred. But think of how impossible it would be if it was almost all left to the pastor! This “leaving it all to the pastor” may be possible in a very small church. It may even be unavoidable, but I am firmly persuaded that it is not right to let such a situation continue. I think that is why Paul called for the whole body of the Ephesian elders, urging every one of them to follow his own good example. It is no doubt true that ruling elders may do what Paul did without setting up any regular system, but when Jesus first sent out his apostles to visit households he sent them “two by two” (Mark 6:7). The kind of work that elders need to do is not something that comes naturally. It is, in fact, very much against the preferences of our weak human nature. So we need the kind of prodding that comes from having a well-organized system. I have seen men—who would probably never have considered themselves able to do home visitation at all if they were left to do it alone—who have been able to begin to do it with another elder’s assistance, and become adept at doing it.

And now, in conclusion, let me mention a few of the benefits that result from a well-organized pattern of faithful elder visitation.

1. It enhances the office of the eldership. People are much more aware that the church is governed by a plurality of men, not just one man—the minister. They also realize that these men stand together. They stand behind the teaching of the minister.

2. Where there is a well-organized system of house visitation, the elders can more often become aware of potential problems before they become

serious.

3. When there is regular annual visitation, there is at least one opportunity each year for the members to express any concerns that they may have about what is going on in the church. This helps the elders to “nip in the bud” potential problems.

4. Those that might otherwise tend to be neglected are shown, by the elder visits, that they are valued members of the church. More than once I have seen people significantly encouraged and comforted when I would not otherwise have realized how much they needed it.

5. As my own experience as a home missionary indicated, the need for person-to-person shepherding can be even greater in a church planting situation. It may be unavoidable that a home missionary will have to bear this burden alone for a time. This can be quite exhausting because many people reached by our church today will need much shepherding. Therefore it is very important for elders, as soon as possible, to share this shepherding work with their pastor.

6. Perhaps the greatest benefit of all is found in what this kind of work does for the elders themselves. Many times I have seen growth in maturity, spiritual depth, doctrinal knowledge, and pastoral skill as elders have—against their own natural inclinations—faithfully carried out the duties of home visitation.

7. Let me mention one thing more; and to me this is very important. In all three of the congregations that I have served, which have had a long tradition of home visitation, I have also seen the attendance at the evening worship services become virtually equal to that of the morning services. I know of nothing that does more to encourage a minister than that. When people came faithfully to hear God’s word both morning *and* evening, in my own ministry, I certainly wanted to do my very best for them. And I know that persistent and patient elder visitation is an essential part of what brings this to happen.

In conclusion, let me reiterate what I said in the very first issue of *Ordained Servant*. It is “my strong conviction that regular home-visitatio

elders is one of our greatest needs in the OPC...” (vol. 1, #1, p. 7). It is my prayer that God will be glorified as our Orthodox Presbyterian congregations are strengthened and blessed by the faithful practice of home visitation! ☺

G. I. Williamson *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is now retired but still active in part-time ministerial work in the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC and Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa. He was editor of Ordained Servant from its inception in 1992 through 2005.*

✦ Servant Witness

Evangelistic Responsibility

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2009¹

by T. David Gordon

The dominant view of evangelistic responsibility in our day may be called the “universal” view of evangelistic responsibility, because it teaches that evangelism is a responsibility incumbent upon every believer. To evaluate this view that believers are universally responsible to evangelize, we must first examine what the Bible does in fact teach about this important topic, identifying any inadequacy or error involved in the view. Finally, we must consider the practical ramifications of this issue.

The Selective View of Evangelistic Responsibility

The New Testament teaches few things as clearly as it does the diversity of gifts given to the body of Christ. Questions may remain about the passages related to gifts, but what is not questioned is the clarity with which Paul teaches that gifts are distributed differentially through the church. Implicit in this general teaching is that believers have different gifts, and, consequently, different responsibilities. Does this differing responsibility include evangelism as well, or is evangelism a responsibility incumbent upon every believer?

Romans 12:4–8. “For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one

body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them . . .”

It is important to note the parallel usage of “function” and “gifts.”² Gifts are to the church what functions are to the body; they are things which are *operative*. We are to employ gifts, because non-functioning gifts are not gifts at all, just as non-functioning body parts are no better than no parts at all. And, these various parts have different functions. As Paul says, we have gifts that differ. This, as a general statement, establishes a recurring principle in Paul’s writings. Our gifts differ. We do not have, or need to have, identical gifts, any more than the body needs to have identical parts.

1 Corinthians 12:4–7. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

As in Romans 12, so also here, there is a parallel established between gifts, service, and working.³ Our *gifts* differ, which is another way of saying our *service* differs, which is another way of saying our *workings* differ. For Paul, we have differing gifts, and we do different things.

Later (vv. 12ff.), Paul constructs the well-known metaphor of the body that has many members and yet retains its unity despite the differing functions of the members. Although the various members have different functions, they are all necessary, so that one member cannot say to another, “I have no need of you.” This suggests, at least generally, that a variety of services or gifts are necessary in the church, but that there are no services common to all. “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell (v. 17)?” It may be appropriate to ask, “If the whole body were an evangelist, where would be the administrators?”

2 πρᾶξις (*praxis*) and χαρίσματα (*charismata*).

3 χάρισμα (*charisma*), διακονία (*diakonia*), ἐνέργημα (*energēma*).

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=155.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions, each of which implies a negative answer.⁴ “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?” Of course, the answer implied suggests that there are indeed different gifts and different functions within the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11. Perhaps one of the clearest Pauline passages related to the specific question of evangelistic responsibility is Ephesians 4:11. “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers . . .” The text treats evangelists as it does prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers. There is no indication that everyone should be all of these. Further, there is no indication that evangelism is singled out among these other functions as the one function all should have. This passage does contain the difficulty that it may very well be discussing particular *offices*, some of which may not be perpetual. For those who understand the passage this way, the text is less germane to our discussion than other texts. By any resolution of that question, however, Paul’s principle of differentiated service is affirmed.

The three passages summarized. These texts do not specifically prove the selective view of evangelistic responsibility. They *do*, however, prove that gifts, services, and functions differ within the church, and one of them does specifically mention evangelists as those who are different from prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers. Further, they shift the burden of proof to those who would suggest that evangelism is a responsibility incumbent upon us all. They require some reason for saying that everyone must evangelize, without saying as well that everyone should teach, administrate, or pastor. These passages demonstrate that, generally speaking, we are not to expect everyone in the church to have the same gifts, the same functions, the same service. Some additional argument would be necessary to prove that the general teaching of these passages is altered when evangelism is the particular responsibility considered.

4 Each question is preceded by μή (*mē*).

Analysis of the Universal View of Evangelistic Responsibility

Certainly the “majority report” of evangelical Christianity in our day suggests that every believer has a responsibility to evangelize. John R. W. Stott propagates this view, as does J. I. Packer, who says, “He who does not devote himself to evangelism in every way he can is not, therefore, playing the part of a good servant of Jesus Christ.”⁶ In fact, the popular support for this universal view is so widespread that few would consider it to be debatable. It is a matter whose veracity is assumed, more than argued. Nevertheless, arguments have been made, in an effort to establish this view, and we turn to a consideration of these arguments now. Prior to evaluating these arguments, it is important to make two clarifications. First, the following list of arguments is not intended to be exhaustive, but representative. There may well be other arguments advanced for this view. But the following are, in my judgment, the most common and influential ones; additional ones will probably be variations on these themes. Second, the critique of the position held does not in any way reflect my judgment about the Christian character or commitment of those who hold this view. It is not the proponents of the view, but the view itself, that is under consideration.

The Great Commission. The commission of our Lord, recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, has frequently been cited by those who defend the universal view of evangelistic responsibility.⁷ Those who cite the commission in defending the universal view tend merely to assert that the commission defends this view; they do not argue the point. This is regrettable, because their argument would

5 John R. W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 60. Stott quotes approvingly the report of the Lambeth Conference of 1958, “Evangelism is not to be thought of as the task of a select few... It is for every Christian to do what Andrew did for his brother—to say ‘we have found the Messiah’ and to bring him to Jesus... the work of evangelism is the duty and privilege of every member of Christ.”

6 James I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1961), 34.

7 Packer, *Evangelism*, 26, and Stott, *Guilty Silence*, 30.

certainly contribute to the discussion if it were available, and, because the commission does not appear to be properly employed in the defense of this view.

The commission is addressed to the eleven disciples/apostles.⁸ Because of this, one's understanding of the apostolate influences one's understanding of the commission. If the apostles are paradigm Christians, exemplars⁹ of the Christian faith, then we are to do what they do, and everything addressed to them is addressed to us. If, on the other hand, the apostles have at least some unique functions¹⁰ in the history of redemption, then one must always bear in mind the possibility that some things are addressed to them in terms of their unique functions. In particular, one must keep in mind that the apostles were the *foundation* upon which the church was established (Eph. 2:20), having some foundational responsibilities that would not be repeated. Two contextual considerations allow us to understand the commission's responsibilities to extend through the apostles to the church more generally. First, the geographic/ethnic parameters of the commission (all the nations) are so broad that the apostolate could not (and did not) complete the commission's requirement. Second, the temporal bounds of the commission appear to extend until the consummation of all things ("until the end of the age"). Thus, while the apostles are the ones to whom the commission is originally addressed, it appears that the responsibility entailed therein extends beyond the apostolate to the church of which they are the

8 Verse 16, Οἱ δὲ ἑνδεκά μαθηταὶ (*hoi de hendeka mathētai*).

9 For a discussion of the exemplary approach to historical narratives in the Bible more generally, one might consult Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970).

10 Space does not permit a complete discussion of the apostolate here. See Herman N. Ridderbos, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 187–202; Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come* (Ontario: Paideia, 1982), 82–89; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), 6–13; Ned B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 113–131; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1971), 23–24; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 353, 535–536.

foundation.

If it is granted that the responsibility entailed in the commission extends beyond the apostolate, then one must ask a second question: is the commission addressed to the church, as a corporate entity, or to its individual members, as individual entities? Expressed differently, is the commission the responsibility of every believer, or is it the responsibility of the church, each believer playing a particular role? Rather obviously, even the wealthiest individual believers cannot go into all of the nations, so this aspect of the commission is clearly beyond the possibility of any individual believer. Further, we surely would not expect every individual believer to have or exercise the prerogative of baptizing people. *Prima facie*, therefore, it appears that the church as a *corporate* entity has the responsibility to fulfill the commission, and its individual members are responsible only to contribute to the church's overall mission.

Of what, then, does the commission consist? What does the commission require of the church? Some missions agencies and evangelists have assumed that the commission is directed specifically to the activities that they perform. This assumption must be challenged.

The commission itself consists of one imperative and three participles (one of these complemented by an infinitive). The imperative is the predominant idea of the commission, and the participles explain this idea more precisely. While some grammarians have spoken of an "imperative" participle, those who do so recognize that it is a last ditch effort to describe the function of a participle in a context where there is no main verb, or where the main verb is somewhat distant from the participle.¹¹ In contexts where there is a main verb,

11 H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 229; James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3 by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 343; Blass-Debrunner-Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 245; and A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 944–946, all recognize the so-called imperatival participle, and all also recognize that it is not a genuine imperative, but is to be understood either as an incomplete periphrastic construction, with some form of the copula understood, or as a subordinate clause to an already-expressed imperative.

the participle functions dependently, to describe further the main verb, delimiting it in a variety of ways. In our context, the main verb is the imperative μαθητεύσατε (*mathēteusate*) “Make disciples.” Dependent upon this are the three participles, πορευθέντες (*poreuthentes*), βαπτίζοντες (*baptizontes*), and διδάσκοντες (*didaskontes*) (which is itself complemented by the infinitive τηρεῖν [*tērein*]). Thus, the “going,” baptizing,” and “teaching” are subordinate to the command to make disciples. A formally equivalent English translation would read, “Going, therefore, make disciples...baptizing them...and teaching.” This matter is not terribly clear in the English translations, many of which translate the first participle as though it were an imperative, “Go.” These translations then insert the word “and” between this and the imperative about disciple-making, leaving the impression that at the most, discipling is parallel in importance with going, and at worst, subordinate to it. Such translations reverse the emphasis of the original text. The original text establishes the priority of discipling, and *defines* the discipling by the three dependent verbs.

The discipling spoken of in Matthew 28 is specified by the three participles. The first, πορευθέντες (*poreuthentes*), suggests that the discipling of all the nations is not to be passive, but active.¹² The apostles, and the church, are to go among all the nations, and not to wait for the nations to come to them. The discipling is to be active, aggressive. The second participle, βαπτίζοντες (*baptizontes*), requires that the discipling include visible association with the church, through the initiatory rite of baptism. Perhaps by synecdoche, this participle includes all of the evangelistic activity that precedes the rite itself, since it is unlikely that this suggests the indiscriminate baptizing of people who know nothing of the gospel. The third participle, διδάσκοντες (*didaskontes*), is complemented by an infinitive, τηρεῖν (*tērein*). The discipling includes not only instruction, but instruction eventuating in obedience. Further,

12 Though it is also possible that this particular participle merely means, “when you depart from this discussion,” as is the case when combined with an imperative at Matt. 9:13, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’”

the obedience is comprehensive. Those who are disciplined are to observe “everything, whatsoever I commanded you.”

Summary of the Commission. Taken as a whole, the commission is far more comprehensive than is normally understood.¹³ It consists of the aggressive, worldwide discipling of people who are initiated into the visible communion of Christ, increasingly obedient to everything he commanded. Evangelism is only an *aspect* of the commission; it is not its distilled essence. Obedience to the commands of Christ is the goal of the commission; not merely initial conversion. Further, this very comprehensiveness excludes the possibility that it can be fulfilled through the efforts of any particular individual. No individual within the church can possibly be responsible for fulfilling the commission, and no individual is without responsibility to contribute in some way or ways to its fulfilling. But this contribution need not consist of active involvement in evangelism. Those who are instructing others in the content of our Lord’s teaching, or who are encouraging (or praying for) others to obey our Lord’s teaching, are no less participants in the commission than are evangelists, whether foreign or domestic. There is nothing in the commission itself to suggest even remotely that evangelism is more important than the other aspects of discipling, and nothing in the commission suggests that each believer must do every aspect.

1 Peter 3:15. Frequently, this text is cited in the effort to prove that each believer has the responsibility to be actively involved in evangelism. Beginning with the final clause of the previous verse, the text says, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense (ἑτοιμοὶ ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογία, *hetoimoi aei pros apologian*) to anyone who calls you to

13 And one notes that in the publications of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, the text is ordinarily cited in discussions of the nature of the church, and specifically in discussions of the nature and limits of church-power. For those several centuries, the text was understood to describe the basic mission and purpose of the Christian church in its historical entirety. In our generation, it tends to be restricted to missions, and especially foreign missions; but I believe the earlier centuries understood the text more correctly.

account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence . . .” The antecedent of the pronoun, “them,” in v. 14b is the ones who persecute believers (see context). Rather than fear such troublemakers, Peter exhorts the church to have reverence (fear!) for Christ instead, and with respect to those who persecute, to be prepared to give to them a reason for the church’s capacity to be hopeful under such circumstances, if called upon to give such a reason.

This passage is written particularly to those who are suffering on account of righteousness, who may very well be asked to explain why and how they endure their suffering. Since, prior to our Lord’s return, suffering is always either our experience or our potential experience, it is appropriate to understand this passage as having at least potential application for each individual Christian.

The passage teaches nothing directly about evangelism. In fact, it does not require the recipients to *do* anything; but to be *prepared* to do something. The *content* of what is required is not specifically the gospel message, but rather the *reason* for the believers’ willingness to endure suffering. The *goal* of the activity is not the conversion of the interrogators, but rather, the shaming of those who punish the well-behaving Christians (“so that those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame,” v. 16). This passage is far from the aggressive “going” of Matthew 28:20. Properly, the passage has nothing to do with evangelism. It is defensive, not offensive; passive, not aggressive;¹⁴ designed to shame the unbeliever, not to convert the unbeliever. The responsibility it describes may very well be potentially universal (any Christian *could* be persecuted at some point, and *could* be asked to explain why he remains hopeful in the midst of such), but it is not evangelistic.

Specific apostolic commissions. Several New Testament passages address the evangelistic responsibilities of the apostles. Occasionally, such passages are corralled in the effort to establish the universal view. For example, 2 Corinthians 5:18ff. is sometimes employed to this end: “God making his appeal through us.” Stott cites this text in

14 So Stott, *Guilty Silence*, 58.

attempting to establish the universal view,¹⁵ yet without making any comments about the specific nature of the apostolate. That the “we” refers to the apostolate could indeed be challenged, since in this chapter, Paul appears to use the first person plural in two ways, to refer either to Christians in general, or to Paul and his fellow-workers more specifically. But no such argument is offered. Nor is there any argument that the “we” does not refer to the church as a corporate entity. It is apparently assumed that the “we” refers to each specific, individual Christian. Since the issue is so important, it does not seem wise to settle it on the basis of an assumption. Further, the immediate context suggests that Paul is referring to ministers, not believers.

Similarly, Acts 1:8 is often cited in an ostensible effort to defend the universal view: “and you shall be my witnesses. . .” Contextually, it is clear that this promise is made to the apostles (τοις ἀποστόλοις, *tois apostolois*, v. 2), to those to whom the Lord had appeared visibly (ὄπτανόμενος, *optanomenos* “appearing,” v. 3; ὑπέλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν *hupelaben auton apo tōn ophthalmōn autōn* “from their sight,” v. 9). These apostles are indeed to be witnesses to the risen Christ. Luke understands this group to be, in his own words, “eyewitnesses (αὐτόπται *autoptai*) and ministers of the Word” (Luke 1:2). Both Allison A. Trites and Ned B. Stonehouse¹⁶ describe the unique character of the apostolic eyewitness account of the resurrection of Christ. They did not merely give witness to the character of their religious *experience*, sublime though it may have been. They gave witness to the appearance before their very *eyes* of an individual formerly dead. In this sense, their particular witness is unrepeatable. The church after the apostles can call attention to the apostolic witness, but it cannot duplicate it. Perhaps most importantly, as Trites ably demonstrates, “witness” here is *not* primarily an evangelistic term. It is a forensic or judicial term, which denotes a solemn testimony in

15 *Guilty Silence*, 14–15.

16 Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977); Stonehouse, *Origins*, 116.

verification of a claim, in this case, the remarkable claim that a man once dead later appeared alive to many eyewitnesses. Whatever may be true of our generation, one must not lose sight of the importance of *eyewitness* verification of the resurrection in the first generation of the church. To confuse *this* witness with a report about our own individual spiritual pilgrimage is to trivialize the apostolic testimony by diminishing the significance of their eyewitness testimony to the risen Christ.

Matthew 9:37ff. is a well-known passage, frequently cited in an attempt to establish the universal view: “Then he said to his disciples (τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ, *tois mathētais autou*), ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’ And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits. . . . The names of the twelve disciples are these: Simon, . . .” Contextually, the laborers appear to be the twelve named disciples. Prior to their commissioning, Jesus was the lone voice of a new religion, the single proponent of this faith. It is not surprising, under such circumstances, that he says, “the laborers are few.” This expression is perhaps an understatement, for in actual fact there were, excepting Jesus, *no* laborers. If this text is treated as though it contains a truth equally true for all time, then will we continue to say this in glory? Is it not possible, even likely, that there might be some situations in the history of Christianity in which the ratio of laborers to harvest is a bit different from the situation in Jesus’ day? And even if it weren’t, there is no indication in Matthew 9 that Jesus cajoled *everyone* into participating in this activity. To the contrary, his admonition is to pray that God would raise up laborers. If his desire were that everyone labor in this way, he would have commanded them to go and labor *themselves*; not to pray for God to raise up *other* laborers.

Timothy. Although not an apostle, Timothy, as a minister in the early church, deserves special attention, because he is often treated, by those who hold the universal view, just as they treat the apostles. That is, he is treated not as a specific

individual with specific gifts and calling, but as a paradigm Christian, an example of what every Christian should be. Those holding the universal view frequently cite 2 Timothy 4:5: “Do the work of an evangelist.” This sentence is written to Paul’s “fellow worker” (Rom. 16:21), his “helper” (Acts 19:22), about whom Paul could say, “He is doing the work of the Lord, as I am” (1 Cor. 16:18). Timothy accompanied Paul on missionary journeys, apparently doing the same sorts of activities that Paul did. In short, Timothy *was* an evangelist. Hence, when Paul tells Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, it is because that is what Timothy is gifted and called to do. “Do the work of an evangelist; fulfill *your* ministry.”¹⁷ Why should this text be lifted from its context and applied to every believer, when verse 13 is not so treated? “When you come, bring the cloak which I left in Troas with Carpus, and the books, that is the parchments.” Of course, verse 13 is so *obviously* something only Timothy can do, that no one would suggest that others do it. But the verse appears in the same chapter of the same letter, written to the same individual, as verse 5.

Variations. Not every representative of the universal view would attempt the arguments for universal evangelistic responsibility challenged above. Most will use some of them. Others will attempt to modify the position, in an effort to deflect the force of the counter-arguments. For example, some have agreed that not everyone is called and gifted to be an evangelist, but these same individuals will respond that every believer *does* have a responsibility to “witness.”¹⁸ In one sense, it is true that the church, by its very existence, *is* a witness to the power of Christ and his gospel. A worshipping

17 My hapless students have ordinarily been troubled by my suggesting through the years that perhaps the most important interpretive consideration is the pronoun. How can something so mundane as grammar be important? Well, it has everything to do with responsible interpretation. If the antecedent of the pronoun “your” in “your ministry” is an ordained minister, then the text may not responsibly be employed in discussing the alleged duties of non-ministers.

18 Stott, *Guilty Silence*, 57–58: “If God does not call everyone to be an ‘evangelist,’ he does not call everyone to be a ‘minister,’ ‘missionary,’ or ‘preacher’ either. But every Christian is a witness, and every Christian is called to bear witness.”

community witnesses to God in the very process of witnessing. The mere presence of an assembly of people on the first day of the week celebrating the resurrection of Christ is, of course, a substantial witness *to* the resurrection. But this is something that we *are*, not something we *do*. And further, it is something that we are as a corporate entity, not necessarily as individual members thereof.

More telling, however, is that some have created a definition of the term “witness” that is without biblical parallel. “Witness” is commonly confused with a “personal testimony.” There may certainly be a number of useful dimensions to the recounting of our various spiritual journeys; and we ordinarily take appropriate interest when others tell us of their particular journeys of faith. But there is no biblical warrant for so doing, nor is there any indication that the term “witness” is used in the Bible to refer to such activity.¹⁹ Certainly there are those who assert that Paul gives his “personal testimony” several times (Gal. 12; Acts 22; Acts 26), and Luke gives Paul’s testimony in the third person once (Acts 9). In every case where Paul cites the experience on the road to Damascus, the occasion is the challenge to the validity of Paul’s apostolicity. In each case, there are individuals who know perfectly well that Paul was not a follower of Jesus during his earthly ministry. These individuals know also that Paul formerly persecuted the church, and they therefore challenge Paul to produce credentials that allow him to proclaim the faith which he formerly persecuted. “Why should we listen to you? Others at least traveled with this Jesus fellow, and spent time with him. But why should we pay any attention to you?” Paul’s apostolic authority is on trial, so Paul tells his challengers why his authority is valid. Jesus has appointed Paul, no less than the other apostles. Were it not for the challenges to Paul’s apostolic authority, explicit or implicit, we might have no record of the Damascus event at all.

One of the more interesting aspects of the Damascus experience is the infrequency with which it is cited. Actually, it is a rather extraordinary experience.

¹⁹ For a thorough discussion of the usage of the “witness” vocabulary in the New Testament, see Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*.

rience.²⁰ Despite this fact, Paul says nothing about it, unless his authority is challenged. Certainly one cannot establish the necessity of our sharing our own spiritual pilgrimages on the basis of this unusual event that happened to Paul. If even the apostle Paul, whose particular experience of the risen Christ was unique, only rarely mentions the event, and then as a defensive measure, how can it be that this serves as a mandate for us to recount for others our experience?

A Final Example. Perhaps the futility of attempting to establish the universal view from scripture is found in Stott’s *Our Guilty Silence*: “Such testimony is expected of every believer... One of the plainest indications in Paul’s epistles that every believer is required to be a witness is a statement in his Philippian letter.”²¹ Then, Philippians 2:15f. is cited. Interestingly, in what is allegedly “one of the plainest indications,” the words “witness,” “testimony,” and “evangelize” do not appear. The Authorized Version does read “holding forth the word of life,” which might, at first glance, be construed as some sort of mandate to evangelize. However, the verb in question (ἐπέχοντες *epechontes*) is notoriously ambiguous. Luther, NASB, RSV, and a number of commentators argue that the verb should be translated “holding fast,” not “holding forth.” Those who prefer this understanding do so not only on lexical grounds, but also because of contextual concerns which indicate that Paul is encouraging the Philippians to steadfastness and stability in the midst of a “dark generation.” In such a difficult circumstance, Paul urges the believers to “hold fast” to their faith. It does not appear that the question can be settled with certainty. It does demonstrate the difficulty one has attempting to defend the universal view.

²⁰ Though it has some precedents in the biblical literature, in the calling of Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, for instance. Analyses of prophetic call narratives in scripture can be found in N. Hebel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77, no. 1 (January, 1965): 297–323; and William Baird, “Visions, Revelation, and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor. 12:1–5 and Gal. 1:11–17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 4 (December, 1985): 651–662.

²¹ *Guilty Silence*, 58.

If “one of the plainest” indications of the universal responsibility to evangelize is Philippians 2:16, then the view is anything but plainly clear.

If any of the passages alleged to support the universal view were clear, the citing of less clear texts as substantiating evidence might be more compelling. In the absence of such passages, and in the presence of such clear passages teaching that gifts and functions *differ* among believers, the paucity of evidence for the universal view amounts to question-begging. Despite its popular support, the universal view simply does not enjoy biblical support. The New Testament does not teach anywhere that every individual believer is to be involved actively in evangelism.

Practical Considerations

There are certainly many practical ramifications of the resolution of this issue. Three such ramifications should be considered, particularly by those who intend to continue to defend the universal view, despite its lack of biblical support.

Binding the conscience. Since the Reformation took place in an era in which many pledges of allegiance to various authorities were requested, and not infrequently required, the Reformers studied at some length the question of conscience, and to whom the conscience was bound. The creeds and confessions of the Reformation churches include sections dealing with the liberty of the conscience. In a nutshell, these various confessions univocally answer that the conscience is bound to God alone, speaking in the Scriptures. There is, therefore, a healthy concern in the Reformation tradition about requiring of people things that the Scriptures do not require.

The present question threatens this noble tradition. If the Scriptures do not demand that all people be actively involved in evangelism, then we dare not so demand. In demanding that every believer be involved in evangelism, the universal view has, unwittingly, bound the consciences of many people, leading them to believe that they are disobedient to God when in fact they are not disobedient. Our Lord himself warned about placing upon the shoulders of others burdens which were

unbearable (Matt. 23:4), and bearing the responsibility to evangelize is too much for those whose gifts do not equip them for this task.

Destruction of harmony in the church.

Closely related to the question of binding the conscience is the concern for the peace of the church when unbearable and unbiblical requirements are placed upon people. Suspicion, bitterness, and resentment frequently attach themselves to circumstances in which genuine respect for a diversity of function is absent. The proponents of the universal view as much as say that those who are not involved in evangelism are disobedient. Certainly such charges do not promote peace. By contrast, few things are as satisfying and uplifting as the word of encouragement that comes from someone whose role in the church differs from our own. Those who genuinely recognize a diversity of functions within the church can promote its peace and unity, whereas those who refuse to recognize this diversity may unintentionally inhibit such peace and unity.

Corruption of evangelism. Although the supporters of the universal view of evangelistic responsibility are sincerely concerned about evangelism, there is a very real danger that evangelism will be (and has been) corrupted by this view. When people who are neither called nor gifted to evangelize attempt to do that for which they are not equipped, they inevitably do it badly. Their good motives cannot overcome their inability. Efforts are not enough, in any area of life; efforts, to be effective, must be competent. To illustrate this, let us consider one of the extended inductions offered by the defenders of the universal view. Citing the biblical injunction to love one’s neighbor, they say, “If you love people, you want them to have what is best for them. If you are a believer, you know that what is best for everyone is to believe in Christ. Therefore, you should speak to everyone you can about the gospel.” The problem with this argument is that it *assumes* we are all capable of meeting all of the needs of those whom we love. This assumption is, of course, false. Suppose my love for my neighbor includes my desire that my neighbor receive good dental care. Precisely for

this reason, I do not attempt to fill my neighbor's teeth, but make reference instead to a competent dentist. Love wishes that needs be *competently* met; not that they be met by *me*.²²

Further, after sixty or seventy years of the predominance of the universal view, we might also observe that its effects have been largely fruitless, and often destructive. The rise of this view corresponds almost perfectly with the comparative demise of Christianity as a cultural force in the West. The typical unbeliever today is not exposed to the Christian message through the competent presentation of the faith by a trained and devoted minister, but through a (well-meaning, but) less-competent, untrained, inarticulate, and often-bumbling layperson. The impression often left is that the Christian religion *itself* is confused, inarticulate, and subjective. Further, the zealotness of such well-meaning individuals has often bordered on rudeness, as unsolicited advice is offered, and sometimes offered persistently, to those who have not invited it. The result of this is that unbelievers perceive *us* the way we perceive the Jehovah's Witnesses: as the necessary evil that must be endured as the result of living in a pluralistic society. They hate to see us coming, and avoid interaction with us whenever possible; an irony that works in precisely the opposite direction that the universal view would wish.²³

22 As Richard Baxter said: "Therefore do your best to help others to the benefit of able and faithful pastors and instructors. A fruitful soil is not better for your seed, nor a good pasture for your horse or cattle, nor wholesome diet for yourselves, than such instructors are for your neighbours' souls. If you love them, you should be more desirous to help them to good teachers, or plant them under a sound and powerful ministry, than to procure them any worldly benefits. One time or other the word may prevail with them." *Directory*, Part III, chapter XV (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 813.

23 I taught for thirteen years at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, and began my teaching there in 1984. Because of the time (roughly fifteen years prior to the third millennium), there was much discussion in those days about reaching the world for Christ by the year 2000, and people often asked one's opinion about how this might be achieved. My (somewhat impish) answer was: To evangelize the world by the next sixteen years, we evangelical Christians will need to shut up for the first ten of them, so that unbelievers, who now run from us when they see us coming, will adopt a more welcoming posture.

There is too much at stake to turn evangelism over to those who are unable or unwilling. The gospel, powerfully and clearly articulated, has the power to restore rebellious people to a relationship of service to God. It can begin a life of discipleship, which has as its ultimate goal heartfelt obedience to God's claims. For those who are without Christ, the issue is one of life or death, of experiencing the loving care of a merciful Father or the searing wrath of a holy God whose fellowship is spurned. Those who have neither the capacity nor the call dare not enter such an arena. Evangelism must be done; the proponents of the universal view are correct on this point. It must also be done *well*; on this point the proponents of the universal view may be less correct. ©

T. David Gordon, *an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, is Professor of Religion and Greek at Grove City College, Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

Evangelism and the Church

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online June-July 2009¹

by Charles G. Dennison

Editorial note by William D. Dennison: In 1979–1980, the Presbytery of Ohio of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church discussed the issue of evangelism. The Rev. Charles G. Dennison (1945–1999), who was pastoring Grace OPC in Sewickley, Pennsylvania at the time, was a formative participant in the discussion. At this time, questions about evangelism revolved around the method and substance of the popular volume entitled *Evangelism Explosion*

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=158.

by D. James Kennedy.² Many Orthodox Presbyterians had found the prescription for evangelism in that work attractive. Mr. Dennison did not and, thus, decided to present his concerns before his fellow presbyters. The issue became so serious that some of the presbyters were of the mind-set that Mr. Dennison's position may need to be subject to ecclesiastical discipline. In order to counter that attitude the following paper was a further expansion of his presentation before the Presbytery of Ohio.

Mr. Dennison's paper appears in *Ordained Servant* by permission of Mrs. Virginia Graham Dennison and the Rev. Dr. William D. Dennison. Two points should be kept in mind. First, Mr. Dennison was meticulous about editing material that went into print from his pen. Of course, his final editing was not possible for this printing; hence, we have decided to preserve the paper in its final form with minor editorial work. Second, it is imperative to read and analyze the paper fairly. Although Mr. Dennison was emphatic that he did not oppose evangelism, his critics accused him of such opposition for years after his paper was presented. Since, evangelism has had a distinct understanding in the Reformed tradition, it is hopeful that Mr. Dennison's paper will provide assistance to the present generation in the OPC about the biblical and Confessional truths of that tradition.

Preface

The substance of this study was presented to the Presbytery of Ohio of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in May of 1980. The present expanded form of this study includes a discussion of the Westminster Standards and evangelism, a revision of the section on Calvin and evangelism, and an extensively revised introduction and conclusion.

Introduction

Without a doubt, great differences exist within the church concerning evangelism. I have endeavored to approach the subject with reverence

2 Thanks to Rev. Danny E. Olinger for providing this point about the occasion of Rev. Dennison's paper.

knowing that many recent voices of the Reformed tradition disagree with me. Therefore, my desire is to treat this subject with charity.

Important, at the outset, is an *affirmation* of my commitment to the evangelistic ministry of the church. On two occasions I have presented my position (once in Sewickley and once in Pittsburgh); each time people have left to bear tales about what they thought I said. To their way of thinking, I oppose evangelism. This is untrue. The question is not whether evangelism should be done, but how and by whom. Invariably, many who disagree with me conclude I do not believe in evangelism simply because I do not accept their personal view of it.

In order to focus the discussion, let me enumerate my chief concerns. First is that of the church (people of God) and the Word. The people of God have been made to suffer guilt and frustration because they have been placed beneath a burden the Word never intended them to bear. Evangelicals of our day have been convinced that the individual members have an obligatory and definite evangelistic calling which involves them directly in presenting the gospel to the unregenerate. I believe this position to be unscriptural and that it has not only injured the evangelistic ministry of the church but confused the body of Christ with regard to its proper obligations.

The second chief concern is that of church and office. Major tragedies have been created for the church because of a blurring of biblical office. In jeopardy is the biblical position on calling. The Reformation tenet, "the priesthood of all believers," has been mishandled so as to teach that the laity is welcomed to all the responsibilities of the ordained. Such a position results in disintegration not because of a simple violation of order but because of disobedience.

Before I conclude this introduction, a word must be addressed to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Some Orthodox Presbyterian pastors, although quite uneasy with and even hostile to my position, have operated in a practical fashion according to it. It may be that they even chide church members for lack of evangelistic zeal and enterprise, but all in all, the evangelistic ministry

in their churches is carried on by them alone. These men, in all fairness, should not judge me. Others have accepted the every-member mobilization model, yet feel an uneasiness about it. Convinced that their uneasiness is due to personal sloth or disobedience, they have forced themselves to continue with their program unaware that there may be adequate reasons for their qualms rooted in their confessional heritage. Finally, many pursue the modern evangelistic model from conviction only to discover the fruits of such an approach are meager to non-existent within the OPC. As one minister told me, “We’ve seen no one come to Christ, but the good it has done our people is immeasurable.” Admittedly, good to the converted was *not* the objective of the program. Too often, the frustration which develops is handled by laying still another reason for self-immolation upon Orthodox Presbyterians. There are reasons, very complex reasons, why programs which flourish elsewhere do not succeed when dressed up in OP attire. Possibly, a better use of one’s time would be to understand these dynamics rather than perpetuate the multiplication of futility and flaying.

My Position

At this point, it would be well for me to state briefly my position. I believe evangelism to be the official proclamation of the eschatological Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ; this task is committed to the visible church (WCF 25.3) by the crucified and risen Lord and, until the end of the world, is to be carried out by those whom the church, in harmony with the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, has recognized within it to fulfill that ministry.

The Problem

Currently, we are far from such an understanding of evangelism in the Christian community. For various reasons, the role of the visible church has become an afterthought at best and an irrelevancy at worst. Also, the nature of biblical office and the distinctiveness of New Testament vocabulary have been eclipsed in the contemporary milieu.

How We Arrived Here

In my mind, there are presently few issues as important as that of the church. The question concerning evangelism is tied inseparably to it. For Calvin, the doctrine of the church was of greatest importance. In fact, Calvin studies, over the last 50 years, have recognized its centrality.³ The *Institutes*, it has been observed, tend toward the final book on the church; this was Calvin’s goal. Late in life, Calvin said his only prayer was that his work bear richer fruit for the church of God.⁴ He also stated, “Since I undertook the office of teacher in the church, I have no other purpose than to benefit the church.”⁵ I might add that he had no other church in mind than the visible.⁶

At least Catholicism realized the significance of Calvin in terms of his position on the church. When compared to Luther, Calvin was considered the greater threat by a wide margin; it was he [Calvin] who signaled the radical shift in European religious culture. Says Catholic historian Hilaire Belloc:

[The] change was . . . caused by the great effect of Calvin, who set out with great lucidity and unparalleled energy to form a *counter-*

3 Cf. the bibliography in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1011–1012.

4 *Ibid.*, 4.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, 1014–36. Calvin saw the visible church as indispensable to any true understanding or experience of salvation and perseverance. Simply note the heading of Book IV of the *Institutes* [The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein]. In the second section of that book’s first chapter, he declares himself unequivocally: “... no hope of future inheritance remains to us unless we have been united with all other members under Christ, our Head” (1014). Later, he says those who neglect the spiritual food offered through the church, “deserve to perish in famine and hunger” (1017). He also said that “separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ” (1024), those who desert the church are “without excuse” (1033), and that forgiveness of sins cannot be enjoyed apart from “communion in the church” (1036). The Westminster Confession of Faith is of the same spirit when it says “...out of [the visible church] there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (25.2).

church for the destruction of the old church. He it was who really made the new religion wholly hostile to the old one.⁷

Commitment to the church has eroded since the days of Calvin. Of course, there are the effects of the splintering of Protestantism and the rise of denominationalism; there is as well the fruit of the secularization of our western civilization. Let me point out, however, two additional ways in which the demise of the church is evident.

First, there is the development of evangelicalism. It is not difficult to collect a bibliography debating the definition and value of modern evangelicalism.⁸ Before this rising flood, commitment to covenant consciousness, confessional community, the corporate character of the people of God, and the visibility of the body of Christ has been engulfed. Modern usage of the word “evangelical” would be unintelligible to Calvin. For him, it had meaning within an ecclesiastical frame. To be evangelical was tantamount to belonging to the visible evangelical church. The word properly modified the position of the church. Individuals were welcomed to that description only as they took their place within the church of evangelical conviction.⁹

7 Hilaire Belloc, *Characters of the Reformation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1905), 9; emphasis added.

8 Here is a list of pertinent studies: William E. Ashbrook, *Evangelicalism: The New Neutralism* (Columbus, OH: Calvary Bible Church, 1966); James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978); Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947); idem, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976); Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979); Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979); Cornelius Van Til, *The New Evangelicalism* (syllabus, n.d.); David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977). Two important historical studies: John T. McNeill, *Modern Christian Movements* (New York: Harper, 1968); George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale, 1970).

9 Note the comments in Calvin’s letter to Francis I in 1536 in Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 11–14. Calvin’s concern is the true church.

Present-day evangelicals, citing the meaninglessness of the notion of the “unified, visible church,” have redefined the word evangelical. It speaks about personal commitment and an individualism which, to my mind, has now overrun both doctrine and life. More than anything else, it reflects individual preferences; i.e., tastes in faith and life-style. Beneath the fundamental doctrinal commitments is an even more basic devotion to the *autonomy of the individual conscience* and to *volunteerism*. When this devotion is acted out, the visible church is obliged to take a back seat to organizations which best reflect the evangelical spirit. The visible church is even redefined in terms of the evangelical organizations; e.g., it sits at the level of other voluntary agencies. No longer an obligation, the church is forced to compete; it acts more or less like a corporation. The rules are established according to the evangelical spirit as the church steps into the market of attracting “consumers.” Sadly, shopping for a church seems no different than shopping for cornflakes or a new car. In this context, *evangelism* too often is simply offering a sleeker and more dazzling model. The scenario is completed when seminaries slip into the role of employment agencies with various voluntary organizations (including the churches) vying for the “top prospects.”

All of this was evident at the 1979 Inter-Varsity Conference at Urbana.¹⁰ There, the visible church was clearly subordinate to the agency which best embodies the spirit of evangelicalism. More than on the level of the church, this agency supplanted it. In fact, it lays claim to the authority and ministry which are properly those of the visible church by enlisting and sending “missionaries” (i.e., doing evangelism) and serving the sacraments. Unfortunately, the visible church acquiesces by setting up booths as if it were at a trade fair seeking to lure prospective customers. Such a scene makes one wonder who the “arm of the church” truly is and who suckles whom at whose breast. Is it too far fetched to imagine our Lord visiting such a conference and spending an afternoon overturning tables loaded with brochures?

10 *New Horizons*, 1:3 (March 1980), 3–4.

[I might say that the trivializing of the church is not corrected by promoting that Reformed heresy which reduces the church to the level of the family, school, and state.]

Against this background, meaningful use of biblical terminology has been largely short-circuited. We are being inundated with jargon—pious sounding “buzz words”; e.g., words like witness, testimony, ministry, fellowship, growth, discipling, sharing, as well as evangelizing. All of these words have been turned into “trigger words,” which subtly mark the boundaries of a new orthodoxy. If someone questions the accepted usage, he is immediately suspect.

Second, the erosion of the church is evident regarding the offices within it. For the Reformers, the distinction between clergy and laity was of greatest importance. This fact never led them, however, to minimize the laity’s importance. Calvin, especially, did much for the laity due to his positive view of creation and his understanding of vocation. Each person’s task is important before God; the Christian has responsibility to cultivate contentment and to pursue his calling honestly.¹¹ The true task of the saint is to pursue each particular task as part of the fabric of the whole Christian life. Witness is not isolated from life; nor is one’s true calling “witnessing,” while his occupation is made an avocation to afford him more opportunities to that end.

It is true that Calvin spoke often of what we might call “lay witnessing.” Although there is no such notion in the *Institutes*, many references are found throughout his sermons and commentaries.¹² But to be fair to Calvin, his position, while including the act of speaking up for Christ, was the witness of the total life of the believer rather than that of a specialized program or isolated segment of one’s schedule.

Proof that Calvin’s emphasis is out of step with the contemporary evangelical understanding of evangelism is the general lack of patience among

11 Cf. *Institutes*, 3.10.6.

12 Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 39, 237-243.

evangelicals for Calvin at this point. Evangelicals may find an occasional encouragement in Calvin’s work but, admittedly, the emphasis lies elsewhere. As the Reformed position developed, the laity were seen under obligation to work hard, do good, attend the means of grace, give cheerfully, and pray incessantly. Such “reverent behavior,” not excluding the good word for Jesus, would hopefully have effect upon one’s neighbor (Heidelberg Catechism, Question 86); but the focus was upon righteous living, not aggressive evangelism. In this way, the people of God are salt, light, and a city set on a hill (Matt. 5:13–16). And what about evangelism and preaching of the gospel? In the mind of the Reformed church, that task belonged to the ordained (The Second Helvetic Confession 18).

The Westminster Standards are consistent with this tradition. For the majority of the Westminster divines, evangelism was preaching, and preaching was done by the church through the ordained ministry. To the point is Question 158 of the Westminster Larger Catechism:

Q. By whom is the Word of God to be preached?

A. The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.

It might be added that, due to historical circumstances, evangelism was done chiefly *within* the church. This was the case because, in the thinking of the Assembly, nothing less than a national church was in view; i.e., one to which all citizens of the realm belonged. Still, as Samuel Rutherford had said of Scotland, not one in forty was a true Christian. Therefore, the major evangelistic ministry was carried out within the walls of the church through the preaching of the Word.

But what was the laity’s obligation to the unconverted? The exposition of the law of God and the Lord’s Prayer in the catechisms provide the Assembly’s answer. While dealing with the law of God, the standards point out the believer’s duty irrespective of the spiritual condition of those to whom the duty is due. Regarding prayer, note par-

ticularly the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 191, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 102. Christians are “to pray ... that ...the gospel [be] propagated throughout the world” and that “ourselves and others [be] brought into [the kingdom of grace].”

The Assembly had within it those who advocated a modern view of evangelism and it rejected their position.¹³ It faced the question of the laity’s relationship to the unconverted; its answer was to do good, live circumspectly, and offer prayer. To the ordained ministry belonged the preaching of the Word for the gathering of the saints. Admittedly, there have been great cultural and ecclesiastical changes since the 1640s. The transformation of culture, however, does not demand that the laity assume the role of the ordained. Instead, the ordained are compelled to take the gospel beyond the walls of the church building in the ministry of evangelism; i.e., church planting and strengthening missions to the ends of the earth. In recognizing the necessity of the extension of the church through the ministry of the Word and the prayers of the people (cf. WCF 25.3; WLC 191), the standards present a positive position of evangelism. But it seems to me that modern programs which lay a direct responsibility on the laity to evangelize or create an every-member-mobilization-for-evangelism mentality cannot be defended out of the standards.

Some have charged that stress upon the laity as salt and light through vocation, good works and words, loving support of the ministry of the Word, and tireless prayer overturns the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Those who suggest this do not understand the teaching of the Reformation. The Reformers never supported the notion that the universal priesthood of believers meant erasing the gap between minister and laity; rather, it meant the abolition of the special office of the priest. Each Christian could approach God through Christ in order to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through the Savior (The Second

Helvetic Confession, 18). The laity, therefore, were never invited to assume the duties of the ministry; i.e., preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments (The Second Helvetic Confession, “The Duties of Ministers”).

Actually, the Anabaptists pushed the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to the point of minimizing the difference between clergy and laity. They insisted that the special devotion of the medieval clergy and particularly the monks was expected of all. Vows of poverty and sexual abstinence became common in these groups. Furthermore, they saw every Christian as an *official* missionary, teacher, and preacher. The Great Commission, for example, was read as universally and individually applicable to all Christians, men and women alike. In time, individuals were differentiated more in terms of their charisma than their office. Everyone, it seems, had the office, few the electricity.

The spirit of Anabaptism underlies present-day evangelical thinking or evangelism. To be sure, it has been domesticated and refined with age. Nevertheless, what was once considered the lunatic fringe by the Reformers or found on the frontier in our own nation has become the position of the conservative establishment. The Anabaptist spirit, in matters of evangelism and increasingly in matters of office, has triumphed. My contention is that the Reformed church is capitulating. I am unaware of any Reformed seminary where the Anabaptist position is not the majority position of the Practical Theology Department. Some Reformed authors have continued to maintain that evangelism is the work of the visible church (John Murray, R. B. Kuiper); but none, to my knowledge, have rejected decidedly the emerging consensus that evangelism is a requirement for the laity. On the contrary, this consensus is promoted (e.g., R. B. Kuiper, J. I. Packer, Morton Smith, and D. James Kennedy).

What Do the Scriptures Say?

1) The General Scope

There was no missionary mandate laid upon Israel. To be sure, the Jews were the recipients

13 This is evidenced by the debate over Acts 8:4; see John Lightfoot, *The Whole Work of the Rev. John Lightfoot, D. D.*, ed. John Rodgers Pitman, vol. 13 (London: J. F. Dove, 1824).

of a promise that they would be a blessing to the nations. There are many pictures in the Old Testament of that coming great day; but still we are dealing with promise and even a foreshadowing but not a command. The Psalms and Prophets are full of the expectation of a new epoch when the nations will be drawn to, and flow up into, Zion. The coming age of universal blessing is prefigured as Israel, under judgment, takes the worship of the true God beyond the borders of Palestine and into the world. Here is a picture of the coming missionary epoch but absent is the evangelistic command.

Objections to this conclusion have been many. Some say the missionary mandate has been located in the command to treat the stranger well. But emphasis is upon kindness, not conversion. The law has been seen by some as the content of Israel's evangel. The Old Testament does not substantiate, however, the notion that Israel was under the command of the Lord to carry the law to the ends of the earth. That was part of the expectation of the prophets (cf. Isa. 42:4). Others suggest Israel's wisdom as the content of the evangel. Again we are faced with the absence of a command to carry it to the ends of the earth. The book of Jonah has been interpreted as God's case against Israel for its lack of missionary vision. Such an interpretation, in my estimation, is mistaken. In Jonah, God chides Israel for its anemic view of the Kingdom and its ultimate destiny. Condemned is Israel's self-righteousness and proclaimed is the character of God who shall bring about his purposes to the nations.

The public ministry of Jesus is wholly consistent with the Old Testament stance. It is directed to the house of Israel much in keeping with the ministry of the prophets. Jesus carries no mission to the Gentiles and strongly condemns the work of Jewish missions (Matt. 23:15). However, his ministry is ripe with premonitions of the coming missionary age. He evangelizes a Samaritan woman, addresses himself to the faith of a Syro-phenician woman, heals a Gentile's servant, and speaks of judgment upon the initial servants in the vineyard while the vineyard is given to others.

With the crucifixion and resurrection, the

missionary age dawns. Indeed as Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). In this new day, the gospel of full salvation goes forth to the ends of the earth. The task of missions and evangelism is laid upon the church by the church's Lord until the close of the age.

The Acts of the Apostles charts the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, from Jewish church to Gentile congregations, and from the Jewish capitol to the believing community of all the elect as the sacred center of God's great work. The gospel progresses by way of official witness and authoritative proclamation while believers in general are nowhere placed under direct command to evangelize.

The Apostle Paul writes to the various congregations strung out through the Gentile world. He speaks to them as one commissioned by the risen Christ to spread the word. He calls his readers to imitation of Christ and himself but never does that imitation include assuming the functions of his office. He neither commends the churches to which he writes for their active evangelistic enterprise nor chastises them for failure to implement an evangelistic program. However, he repeatedly reminds them of his own calling and ministry, prods them to prayer and doing good; he asks for money and hospitality. He reminds others of their particular and special ministry (e.g., Timothy, 2 Tim. 4:5); but nowhere does he place upon the general membership of the church the obligation to evangelize. His interest was an integrated Christian life which he referred to as the Christian's "walk." One searches in vain the passages in which Paul deals with the Christian's "walk" for mention of, let alone endorsement of, the modern notion of aggressive lay evangelists.

2) Specific Passages

Matthew 28:16–20. This passage has been a hotbed of controversy. The medieval church saw in it a justification for "papal missions," i.e., evangelization by force. The Anabaptists read it as individually binding on each Christian. Against both interpretations the Reformers reacted. While Calvin was committed to the spread of the gospel

through out the world,¹⁴ he did not use the Great Commission as the rally text for an evangelistic program.¹⁵

The Reformers may have over-reacted to Roman Catholic abuse of this passage but they certainly were on target as far as the Anabaptists were concerned. It is impossible, exegetically, to apply the Commission individually to each Christian since it explains discipling the nations in terms of baptizing and teaching. Both of these activities were the official duty of the ordained and could not be passed on to the Christian individual.

We cannot defend every-member-mobilization-for-evangelism from the Great Commission. Such exegesis, to be perfectly blunt, is preposterous.

Acts 8:4 (cf. 11:19, 20; 13:1). This passage has become the calling card of the lay evangelist position. Rev. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Coral Ridge, Florida, has suspended his method on this text.¹⁶ He contends that “every Christian [is] a witness”¹⁷ and that everyone is to evangelize.¹⁸ Acts 1:8 is used to defend his conviction that every Christian is a witness. However, the Word “witness” in Acts is a technical term and is never used of anyone but an eyewitness of the risen Christ. Acts 8:4 presents its own difficulty. It seems that the word “evangelize” is applied to the church generally as it is driven from Jerusalem following the death of Stephen. Kennedy notes

14 R. Pierce Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” and Philip E. Hughes, “John Calvin, Director of Missions,” in *The Heritage of John Calvin: Heritage Hall lectures, 1960-70*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 40–73; cf. R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 152–153.

15 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper, 1939), 25–28; William Richey Hogg, “The Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern, 1517–1914,” in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 99–100.

16 D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1970), 2ff.

17 *Ibid.*, 2.

18 *Ibid.*, 4.

that the apostles stay behind.¹⁹ Does this passage, however, support the practice of lay evangelism as the norm for the church? The following matters need consideration. First, we should compare this passage with Acts 11:19–20 and 13:1 which pick up on the theme of persecution following Stephen’s martyrdom. These passages make clear that, while there may have been a general diaspora, many official church leaders were involved; e.g., prophets and teachers, even those ordained in Acts 6. In fact, Acts 11:19–20 progresses in such a way so as to emphasize the ministry of the men who took the gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch. This exact pattern is followed in Acts 8. The text focuses upon the official ministry of Philip to the Samaritans. Luke does not intend to underscore lay evangelism, if indeed that was even involved, but to call attention to the official ministry of those in the church as the gospel progressed. Second, we should be aware that the circumstance was anything but normal. The church was undergoing extreme persecution. Is it hermeneutically responsible to take this abnormal situation as the criterion for the norm of the church? I greatly doubt if lay evangelism is in view at all; rather the church is dispersed and from that church went the proclamation of the gospel as the road was cleared for the eyewitnesses of the risen Christ to touch the ends of the earth. The church, as it was dispersed, representatively preached the gospel. Third, even granting that lay evangelism is practiced in Acts 8:4, absent is any direct command. Fourth, there are certain complexities in Luke’s accounts which need study in relation to this text. One complexity is his doubling of “people” and “leader” under a common description. A second complexity is his concern not only to chronicle the transition into the apostolic era but also out of it.

1 Thessalonians 1:8. This passage is even more difficult than Acts 8:4. Its difficulty is due to Paul’s very complex manner of dealing with interpersonal relationships. He sees them against the paradigm of the action of God in Christ. The principle point is *imitation*. In a description reminiscent of the incarnation, Paul explains his own

19 *Ibid.*

“coming” to the Thessalonians (1:5). He reminds them what kind of man he *became* among them for their sake. As the coming of Christ had the result of imitating Christ, so the coming of Paul has the result of imitating Paul (v. 6). As Paul had done himself, the Thessalonians have accepted the Word in much tribulation but with joy (v. 6). As the coming of Christ produced a word that goes forth to have its effect in the Thessalonians from Paul, so the coming of Paul produces a word which goes forth into all the church in Macedonia and Achaia from the Thessalonians concerning the reception Paul had among them. *This word functions like the Word of God* which “sounds forth” without Paul as much as opening his mouth (v. 8; cf. Ps. 19:4). It concerns the quality of the Thessalonians’ faith, love, and hope (v. 3), their example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia who now are called to imitate them. This word is directed to the church for edification and suggests nothing regarding an aggressive ministry of evangelism. While Paul is taken up in the parallel between Christ’s coming to the world of sinful men and his own coming to the Thessalonians, he is also mindful of the difference between his word and that of the Thessalonians. Paul’s word called these people to initial faith; their word was of the quality of faith and called other Christians to endure in keeping with their example (v. 10).

I Peter 3:15. The circumstance, similar to that in Acts 8:4, is persecution. Peter’s word is a call to readiness; i.e., to be prepared to respond to those who question the saints about their hope. He says nothing about Christians asking questions concerning an unbeliever’s lack of hope. The call to readiness is indeed an imperative to understand the faith, but it is not a call to aggressive lay evangelism. The context demonstrates that Peter has in mind the peaceful, devout life which Christians are to live before the world. The aggressive parties in this passage are the non-Christians; they are the ones who are creating the situation and precipitating the conversation. The saints respond to the interrogations of those who oppress them or marvel at them.

Conclusion

I have not dealt with every passage which defenders of every-member-for-evangelism use. Nor have I presented a comprehensive analysis of the passages dealing with a believer’s scriptural duty. These tasks are continuous and will occupy my time for years to come. Suffice it to say, I am convinced that the modern position on evangelism did not underlie the Reformed confession and that there is no compelling scriptural evidence which demands that we jettison our heritage. Many may disagree with me, but let them also agree that there is no ground upon which to censure me according to our standards.

While I am critical of the modern Reformed church at this point, I am also aware of the many pressures which have produced the present situation. During this century, a great deal of time has been spent by the Reformed church proving its evangelistic zeal. We have had to convince many that we were a mission-minded church, that we upheld the “free offer” of the gospel, and that our commitment to election was not antithetical to active pursuit of the lost. Reformed churches have also endured a century of containment, division, and decline. It has been thought that the answer to our confusion, immobility, ineffectiveness, and smallness is found in the berating of self, the resorting to technique and goal-setting, managerial efficiency and program-monitoring and fine-tuning; the answer has also been sought in activism both social and evangelistic.²⁰ Emphasis is upon

20 The question “Why doesn’t the Orthodox Presbyterian Church grow (faster)?” is very important to the historical development of our church and supremely important in evaluating the present mood in leadership and people. Ordinarily, the answer to that question generates guilt and frustration since the OPC, we are told, is guilty of particular disobedience. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find leaders of our church using this guilt and frustration to awaken the people to greater zeal and growth. This approach is a failure; it not only doesn’t remedy the situation, it compounds the problem since, in light of the continued slow progress, goals remain unattained and the guilt and frustration increase. How depressing have been my discussions with pastors who, in a state of confusion, live beneath the weight of this burden. It is not uncommon to hear these able and devout ministers of the gospel seriously talking about demitting the ministry. Pitifully few Orthodox Presbyterians (in particular, our leaders) have adequately or honestly assessed the reasons for the modest progress of the OPC. A full analysis of those reasons is the subject of another paper. At this time, let me only say that they are rooted

attractiveness, relevance, survival, and success.

Pressured by such an agenda, the Reformed church has failed to account for the absence of a direct command in Scripture or its confessions, prescribing laity evangelism. Without warrant, it has proceeded to issue the order where our creeds were silent. Such silence, however, is due neither to error nor ignorance. It was because our fathers felt bound to say no more than Scripture, to place the people under no greater obligation than did the Scriptures. Following their wisdom and pursuing our obvious duties, we may again marvel at the tokens of God's delight in us. In any event, we will learn to cultivate the quiet, peace-filled spirit of humble and loving faithfulness. ☉

Charles G. Dennison was pastor of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, Pennsylvania (1976-1999); and historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1981-1999).

in the significance of Machen for American Christianity and the relationship of biblical Christianity to American culture. I believe these reasons will prove to be essentially positive, not negative; and that they also carry with them the potential to encourage us in our identity and calling as Orthodox Presbyterians. [Unknown at the time, Rev. Dennison would become the historian of OPC in 1981, a position he held until his death. As historian he developed and conveyed his thesis about the OPC and Machen which has been preserved in the volume, *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002).]

Servant Mission

How to Plant a Presbyterian Church

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August–September 2009¹

by Ross W. Graham

You can learn a lot about a denomination’s “corporate culture” by how it does certain things. The OPC has a way of starting new churches that discloses much about itself. It is not just the way the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the OPC fosters the development of new churches. Nor is it simply the way presbyteries on the east coast or the west coast or in the north or the south start new churches. Nor is it only the way men who have graduated from certain seminaries start new churches. It is something that seems to make sense to everybody in the OPC. And it is starting to make sense to folks in other Reformed fellowships as well.

The purpose of this article is to explain as clearly as possible a six-stage process that seems to be intuitive to ministers and elders in the OPC who have embraced it to start dozens of new Presbyterian and Reformed congregations among the sixteen presbyteries of the OPC, over the past decade. Simply put, it goes like this: start with a group, provide elder oversight, call an organizing pastor, take time to let the group mature into the body of Christ, organize it as a new congregation, and expect it to take its place among the working, serving, and giving churches that helped to start it.

Since *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian*

*Church*² was introduced in 2002, this manual for starting new churches, published by the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, has been widely used to make the establishment of new congregations understandable and achievable. It describes a chronological process and set of procedures for starting new churches. But the crisp, six-stage process mentioned above and unfolded below is an assumption made by the book that needs unpacking to appreciate its biblical conformity, its Presbyterian consistency, its Reformed distinctiveness, and its working simplicity.

1. Start with a group.

The Apostle Paul employed this method in his church planting ministry. “And Paul went in [to the synagogue] as was his custom” (Acts 17:2). The Holy Spirit chose to reveal that Paul had a regular plan of approach—to go where God-fearing believers honored the Scriptures and looked for the Hope of Israel. There he gathered groups who would form the nuclei of the churches he established in Asia Minor and Europe.

Starting with a group of sincere believers makes a lot of sense. It ensures that God is at work in the gathering process and that there is reason to believe a new church should be established. Rather than relying on the vision or urging of a single leader who gathers people around his plan, the gathered group itself is strong evidence of the plan of God.

A group can be gathered for the purpose of starting a new church in a number of ways. Advertising and then leading a Bible study in a targeted community is the most often used method. Conducting an exploratory informational meeting about whether a new church could be started, holding a seminar on a subject of Christian interest, and conducting sample evening worship services are all means that have been effectively used to collect the names of interested families and individuals. But by whatever means such names are garnered, following up with a plan for next

2 *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church* [second edition] (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, 2008).

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=161.

steps is crucial.

Since this gathering stage is used to determine whether God is at work in the effort, care must be taken not to manipulate people or simply to gather their names. They must be given opportunity to commit themselves to the project and show themselves faithful to that commitment in order to take next steps. Such objective evidence as regular attendance, willingness to spend time and energy on the work, inviting friends and relatives to become involved, and beginning the practice of regular financial support of the work, all help those initiating the hopeful establishment of the new church to determine whether the hand of God is on the work. But once that determination is made and a decision is reached to move forward, some very specific things need to happen.

2. Provide elder oversight for the group.

The story of the founding of the church in Corinth in Acts 18 contains an interesting account of its chronology. When Paul moved the venue for his church planting ministry to Corinth, he labored with Aquila and Priscilla in the trade of tent making, and he reasoned and persuaded in the local synagogue (verses 1–4). But when Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul was occupied or “compelled by the word,” testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus (verse 5). It was when a plurality of elders was present that the work and witness of the church got underway. Paul’s traveling companions were more than assistants and trainees. He traveled with a plurality of elders who were given on loan to help direct and govern the new, developing churches that were planted until their own overseers could be put in place.

Providing elders to oversee the new work from its start, rather than relying on the leadership of a single individual or creating an internal steering committee, has great advantages. First, it follows a biblical rather than a corporate pattern. Second, it starts the church in the way that it will operate for the rest of its ministry life. And third, it allows the whole church to see an example of the kind of men they will want to choose in the future as their own indigenous elders.

Ruling elders and ministers (teaching elders) from other churches are routinely borrowed for this work in the OPC. Sometimes it is the whole session of another congregation that is appointed for this responsibility. Sometimes the presbytery appoints officers from various congregations as a committee to provide such help. It is these men who selflessly take the time necessary to arrange and oversee worship and preaching, to receive members, to provide for the administration of the sacraments, and to begin the initial training and preparations for the group to become a new congregation of God’s people.

3. Call an organizing pastor to work with the elders to mold the group into a church.

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). This simple statement provides the job description for the organizing pastor of a mission work. He is a man who is specially called of God and is so intensely gripped with the significance of the doctrine of the church that, at the bidding of his presbytery, he is willing to move to a place where he is needed and to love and serve a group of people temporarily as God builds them into a mature body of Christ, and who is able to consider his work completed if they decide to call another man to be their pastor.

Note that in the church planting process this is stage 3. The organizing pastor is not usually the first minister with whom the group has had initial contact. The group has heard the Word and taken godly counsel from others. And a plurality of elders is already in place to govern and set the tone for the new church. The organizing pastor comes to a group which already has a history. So he does not necessarily function as the pace-setter or the visionary leader in this process. Note also that at this point on the timeline of the process, the newly developing church probably has twenty-five to fifty people in its group and is governed by an overseeing session of two to four elders. Because the developing church has so much of the “look and feel” of an organized congregation, it has been the experi-

ence of the OPC that many seasoned pastors from its ranks have been willing to take on this work.

But this is difficult and demanding ministry. Only the rudiments of church life have been set in place by the time the organizing pastor arrives. He must be a man of great faith to be able to see — in the core group of families with which he works — the church that they will become, as others are added to their number. So he must also do the work of an evangelist to see to the addition of new families as God supplies. And throughout his specialized service as an organizing pastor, he must model a sincere faith in a God who will supply his and the church’s needs and will raise up men to join him in ministry as godly elders and deacons.

4. Take the time necessary to let the group mature into a local body of Christ.

In Paul’s message to the erring Galatians who “are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6), he chides them for their folly, but he also teaches them some important lessons about the church. He says to them, “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). He employs the plural pronoun — you all. He intimates that there is a time in the life of a gathered group before it may be appropriately called the body of Christ. Just as the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the life of an individual at a point in time, at which it may be said, that he has been born again, so the Spirit forms a group of believers into a local body of Christ at a point in time after they have been initially gathered together. It takes time for that group to develop its unity and maturity. And the process by which the Spirit does this cannot be rushed.

The largest section of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*³ deals with building maturity into the corporate life of a group of people who have come together with their borrowed elders and their appointed organizing pastor. This is a process that may take two to three years to work through.

.....
3 Ibid., 77–105.

It involves at least four areas of church life. First, it is vital to develop means to promote the spiritual growth of the people of the mission work. Establishing sound worship practices, a solid education and discipling foundation, and ministries to strengthen and maintain healthy families are parts of this work. Second, it is necessary to develop and ensure ongoing ministries of outreach and evangelism to faithfully carry out the Great Commission. These involve, on the one hand, outreach ministries which make the work of the church known to the people of the community in which the congregation ministers. They involve, on the other hand, direct gospel activities which bring the righteous requirements of God and his plan for the salvation of his elect before the people of that same community. Third, it is very importance to develop ministries of mercy and concern to demonstrate the compassion of Christ for the household of faith and for all God’s image-bearers, as well. Fourth, it is also important that sound administrative practices and procedures be put in place so that the ongoing life and ministry of the church may be protected and ensured.

5. Organize the group into a new and separate church.

In Ephesians 4, Paul sets the standard for what makes a mature body of Christ. In verses 1–6, he speaks of the unity of the Spirit, urges that it be maintained, and spells out how much oneness believers have in common — one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Then in verses 11–16, he describes what Christ has done to take the things believers have in common and build them into a mature body of Christ in a local place. The aim and goal of church planting is not to celebrate the gathering of individuals with shared common interests. Rather, the aim and goal is to celebrate that a mature body of Christ has been established which is able to care for itself and minister through Christ to the world around it.

The work that has been done over a number of months or years is expected, as its end result, to produce a mature body of Christ. But that work

must be carefully evaluated by the scrutiny of wise and objective presbyters who have not been involved in the preparation process. That is why the OPC Form of Government says that “a group of believers may be organized as a separate congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church only under the supervision of presbytery” (FG 29.A.2).

Determining the maturity of the group, and the presence of the body of Christ in them, is not an easy job. Those involved in the church planting process in the OPC have learned that asking lots of questions and getting consistent, anticipated answers is the best way to determine a group’s readiness to stand on their own with their own pastor and elected officers, ready to take their place among the working, serving, and giving churches that helped them get started.

So answers to questions such as the following are sought: Does the group demonstrate a commitment to godliness of conduct among them, to a covenant community emphasis, to God-centered worship, to constancy in prayer, to seeing lives changed by Christ through the gospel, and to a worldwide vision and outreach? Do the members of the group love, respect, and defer to one another? Do they submit to their temporary presbytery-appointed leaders? Does their worship of God as a congregation unify them and encourage their hearts? Do they understand what the OPC is, do they share her interests and concerns, and are they praying for and financially supporting her ministries? And are they appreciative of the work of their presbytery on their behalf?

Deciding to move forward to organize the group as a new church also involves more objective and task-oriented work. The training and preparation of men to be freely elected by the congregation as their elders and deacons must be completed. And the documents spelling out the procedures and policies that the church will follow once it is self-governing must be developed.

6. Expect the new church to take its place among the working, serving, and giving churches that helped to begin it.

“And you Philippians yourselves know that in

the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again” (Phil. 4:15–16). Paul was pleased with the exemplary role that the church in Philippi played in his church planting efforts. He was subtly signaling, “If you want to see a church that is really shouldering its load, look at our brothers and sisters in Philippi.”

If this kind of mature participation with other churches of close association in the work of the gospel is expected, it must be trained for from the very beginning of the church planting process. An axiom of Presbyterian church planting practice is that the way a church is begun will determine much of the way it will function throughout its maturity. If it is to be a Presbyterian church, then the presence and oversight of godly and competent elders ought to be there from the start. If it is to be a connectional church, then its interaction with people from other like-same churches should be fostered and modeled from earliest days. If it is to be a congregation that holds to the rich doctrinal tradition of the Reformed faith, then confessional documents ought to be known and taught and referenced in sermons from the beginning of the church.

Newly organized congregations that follow this Philippian model find it easy to become involved in the work of their presbytery and the life of their denomination. They have been seeing it practiced and expect to take an active role in the affairs of their larger church. Their officers make happy volunteers in the life of their regional church, serving on committees and attending general assemblies. And their members are enthusiastic about their broader church’s gospel outreach and expect that they might some day be asked to help start yet another new church.

Conclusion

It must be stressed that the work of church planting is from first to last a spiritual undertaking. It is the implementation of all that the Bible teaches concerning the nature and purpose of the

Church. It is the application of the power and work of the Holy Spirit, who draws men to the Savior, unites them together in the church, and gifts and equips them for the work and witness of the body of Christ. And it must be remembered that it is also a frontal assault on the forces of Satan. Those who set their minds and hearts to establish a new church of the Lord Jesus Christ invite and must expect the opposition of the Evil One. But they also have the great privilege of being used as tools in God’s hand, as he gathers his people and builds a habitation for himself among them. No methodology conceived by man adequately reflects the depth of the spiritual nature of church planting. Those who involve themselves in this work regularly stand in awe of the power of God and the truth expressed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church.” ☉

Ross W. Graham, *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is general secretary for the OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania.*

Faithfulness in Giving to Worldwide Outreach

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2009¹

by Brenton C. Ferry

This essay is designed to encourage faithful giving to Worldwide Outreach, which represents our denomination’s ministries of foreign missions, home missions, and Christian education. This is a motivational article, answering the question: Why give? I am writing to sessions, which have the responsibility of allocating annually budgeted money to pay for what the denominational church has been commissioned by Christ to do. To support it, or not to support it?

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=162.

Without attempting to be exhaustive, my approach is to consider what the Westminster Standards teach about financially supporting the work of the church. Then I give attention to what the Bible says by discussing the charity model of giving, the wage-earning model of giving, 1 Corinthians 9, and Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek. I conclude that if you belong to the OPC, contributing to Worldwide Outreach is a duty grounded in the law, but motivated by something greater; namely, a love for the glory of Christ and the building of his kingdom.

The Westminster Standards

The Larger Catechism directly associates supporting the ministry of the Word with the second commandment: “You shall not make for yourself an idol.” We read, “The duties required in the second commandment are the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his Word; particularly... the ministry and maintenance thereof” (WLC 108).² The Scripture references in our catechism (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:7-15) indicate that by “the ministry and maintenance thereof” is meant the financial supply of ministerial wages. In other words, to neglect paying the minister’s wage is a kind of, cause of, means for, or occasion to the sin of idolatry (WLC 99.6). In addition, indirectly, the Larger Catechism aligns supporting the ministry with the eighth commandment: “You shall not steal,” which requires “rendering to everyone his due” (WLC 141).³

The Westminster Standards, then, approach this topic from the perspective of a wage-earning paradigm involving both tables of the moral law. More specifically, according to the Westminster Standards, it is like unto idol worship and theft to neglect financially supporting your missionaries.

2 *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms: The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), 246–247.

3 *The Confession of Faith*, 283.

The Charity Model

When we look at what the New Testament says about the collection and distribution of money, we see a distinction between the charity model and the wage model. The former is applicable to the practice of collecting a deacons' offering, which is used to help those in need. The latter applies to paying bills, expenses, wages, and other debts the church might owe individuals or companies who provide services at a fee.

The charity model appears to have eschatological significance, and is perhaps the more glorious of the two. In the Old Testament, every seven years all debts among God's people were to be forgiven as a prophetic shadow of the future kingdom of heaven. Deuteronomy 15:4 says, "There will be no poor among you." This was called the Sabbath year.

The inaugurated fulfillment of this Old Testament calendar event likely took place in the early life of the New Testament church. Luke records that in spite of all the poor among the multitudes of converts in Jerusalem, "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34), because everyone was donating their property to a diaconal fund, the proceeds of which were first distributed by the Apostles, and then by the seven deacons of Acts 6. With the onset of persecution, the regional church of Jerusalem became the object of charitable support from surrounding regions, as Paul traveled from place to place collecting a diaconal offering from areas like Corinth, Galatia, and Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:1-5; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15).

Our current practice of diaconal collections for local needs and beyond are what remains of that practice in the early church, signifying that the age of the Sabbath year has been inaugurated and awaits the consummation of our Lord's return. This is the charity model. It has a diaconal focus, and reflects the already-not-yet eschatology of the New Testament age. The needy in the church are provided for, because we live in the age of the Sabbath year.

The Wage Model

While funds given to Worldwide Outreach are

probably applied toward some charitable concerns, the money they receive should, rather, be thought of through the wage-earning paradigm. Giving to Worldwide Outreach is not charitable giving. By allocating money to Worldwide Outreach, your session is not doing anyone a favor, but fulfilling an obligation, not unlike the one your employer has towards you at the end of each pay cycle.

Unlike charity, a wage is "not counted as a gift but as his due" (Rom. 4:4). Are the ministers and missionaries in the OPC wage earners or objects of charity? Diaconal giving aside, when we put money in ecclesiastical offering plates, are we paying a fair share of what we owe (the general parameters of which are helpfully indicated by the publication of requests), or are we donating to a company of beggars? What about the money our sessions designate to Worldwide Outreach? Are our foreign missionaries, home missionaries, and Christian educators working wage earners sent by us to preach and teach the Bible for the expansion of God's kingdom, or are they mendicants sent into the wild blue, subject to the whim of our charitable sensibilities? What is the nature of our responsibility towards such people?

The Bible teaches that, while such men have the right to decline a wage, the church is nevertheless obligated to provide one (1 Cor. 9). With respect to supporting the ministry of the Word, the Bible establishes a wage-earning paradigm, not a charity paradigm. And since we are connected Presbyterians, supporting these ministries on a denominational scale is an ecclesiastical obligation of highest order, similar to any local financial obligation your particular church may have. The money we contribute to Worldwide Outreach is not charity for the needy or a ministerial welfare program, but a debt we owe to men working for income, at least; and more than that, for the Great Commission.

Anabaptists

During the Protestant Reformation there was a group called the Anabaptists (also known as the Radical Reformers), who were primarily known for opposing two things: infant baptism, and the union

of church and state. Their modern descendants include the Amish and the Mennonites. Perhaps lesser known is their opposition to ministerial salaries. According to Francis Turretin, they believed the gospel should be preached gratuitously, either by wealthy people who need no salary, or by people who can support themselves by a tent-making trade. If an Anabaptist minister needed diaconal help it was provided, but not as a proper wage. After all, they reasoned, Paul was a tent-maker, the gospel is free, and offering ministerial salaries will only encourage a desire for sordid gain. The Anabaptists, in fact, accused our Magisterial Reformers of selling their services to the highest bidder.⁴

An acquaintance of mine is an Anabaptist preacher. He is convinced that receiving a wage from my church compromises my fidelity to the Bible. He once said, “Brent, you don’t have the freedom to adjust possible errors in what you believe, because if it gets someone’s attention you might lose your job.” Objectivity is lost. His assumption is that a living wage necessarily compromises fidelity. My assumption is that a living wage is required by the second and eighth commandments. Who is right?

1 Corinthians 9

What does the Bible say? Turretin points us to 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul offers at least eleven arguments for paying ministerial salaries. In context, he is explaining the rights of a missionary. The word translated “right” (ἐξουσία), in this context, means to have the power of possessive control. Paul has the “right” to eat and drink (v. 4), the “right” to take along a wife (v. 5), the “right” to receive a wage (vv. 7–14), and the “right” to decline a wage, which Paul refers to as not making full use of his “right in the gospel” (v. 18). So, in context, Paul is not talking about receiving charity through pity, but an earned entitlement.

Paul’s first argument for the wage-earning paradigm is *from the eighth commandment*. Verse 4 rhetorically asks, “Do we not have the right to eat

and drink?” In other words, not to provide Christian missionaries with their earned resources to live on is to rob them of that to which they are entitled.

The second argument is *from equality*. Verse 6 says, “Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?” Paul means that he and Barnabas should not be required to work a side job to support themselves, since other ministers are paid a living wage for their ministerial work. In local terms, since you pay your pastor, you should also pay your missionaries, and *vice versa*. They are equal and have equal rights to an earned wage.

From here, Paul lists a series of arguments from analogy. The third argument is *from analogy with a soldier*. Verse 7 says, “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?” The fourth argument is *from analogy with a viticulturist*. “Who plants a vineyard,” continues verse 7, “without eating any of its fruit?” The fifth argument is *from analogy with a shepherd*. Verse 7 then says, “Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?” The sixth analogical argument is *from analogy with a plowman*. “The plowman,” says verse 10, “should plow in hope.” Which means the plowman should be able to hope to eat from his labor. The seventh analogical argument, also in verse 10, is *from analogy with the thresher*, who threshes “in hope of sharing the crop.”

Eighth, Paul argues *from a comparison of unequal things*, writing, “If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?” He means that a material wage for a spiritual service is not asking too much, because a spiritual service is worth more than a material wage. It is a bargain.

Paul also makes two arguments from the general equity of Old Testament laws. Ninth, quoting Deuteronomy, Paul says, “For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned?”⁵ By this he means, if beasts of burden have the God-given right to live off of their work, how much more missionaries? Tenth, he argues *from general equity of the Old Testament priest-*

4 Francis Turretin, *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1997), 3:269–274.

5 See also 1 Timothy 5:18.

hood, noting that they were paid for their work. Verse 13 says, “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?”

Finally, Paul argues *from the words of Christ*. “In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” He is referring to Matthew 10:10, the substance of which is repeated in 1 Timothy 5:18, in a similar context. These arguments all serve to establish that ministerial work entitles one to an earned material income.

Turning to Galatians 6:6–7, the church is warned against not properly supporting the gospel ministry, saying, “God is not mocked.” Which means not supporting ministers of the Word amounts to scornfully teasing God with contempt, a sin no one gets away with.

The ministry of the Word is not supported on a charity paradigm, but a wage-earning paradigm. The money a church collects, other than the deacons’ offering, is not charity. If the church has a pastor, the collection is towards an earned wage that the congregation owes its employee. Similarly, if the church has a mortgage on a building, or rent, utilities, and maintenance costs, the collection is not charity, but payment towards a debt the congregation owes the bank, or the utility company, or contractors, or others.

Our local obligations are comparable to our denominational obligations. As connected Presbyterians, we believe this principle of corporate responsibility extends beyond the local church. The needs of our larger denominational ministries like Worldwide Outreach are not of marginal importance. Their expense is our debt.

Worldwide Outreach supports over one hundred households around the world: twenty-four families on the foreign mission field, fifty-two families in home missions, and thirty families involved in Christian education, approximately. “Worldwide Outreach is not a program without faces,” says associate general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions, Richard Gerber. Without our regular support, “missionaries will come

home, churches will not be planted, interns will not be trained to be pastors, materials will not be published to assist the churches in discipling their people, the website will go dark, and *New Horizons* will not be published.”⁶

Ordinarily the question of how much we must give the church leads into a debate about tithing. But the wage paradigm requires a different answer; namely, you are required to give what you owe, which might be more or less than 10 percent of your income. The question of the amount of your contribution does not strictly rest on how much you earned, but also must take into consideration how much the other people working for you earned. If everyone gives 10 percent, yet the heating and air conditioning repairman has not received full payment for his services, then the people in the church must give more, according to the eighth commandment. That same principle applies to the support of Worldwide Outreach.

The Melchizedekian Tithe

Some believe that Christians in the New Testament era are required to give their church a tenth of everything they earn, while others believe the tithe was part of the Mosaic ceremonial law, which is not enforced in the New Testament age. Those who support a compulsory New Testament tithe appeal to Genesis 14, where Abraham tithed to Melchizedek from the spoils of war. This, it is assumed, demonstrates that tithing was not unique to the Levitical ceremonial system, since that event predates Moses. As if to say: since Abraham was required to tithe then, you are required to tithe now. You can establish and dissolve the Mosaic covenant a thousand times, and it will not change the tithe law, because that law existed apart from the Mosaic ceremonial law.

However, this argument does not take into account what the author of Hebrews says about the tithe Melchizedek received from Abraham. Namely, that Abraham was not required to tithe to Melchizedek. There was no law on the matter.

In Hebrews 7, the author discusses the typo-

6 Email correspondence, February 4, 2009.

logical likeness of Melchizedek to Jesus Christ, in order to stimulate a mature interest in the Savior. In verses 1–3, the author explains that Melchizedek was a prophetic shadow of Jesus. And in verses 4–10, the writer explains that the Melchizedekian priesthood was greater than the Levitical order of priests. The remainder of the chapter explains the necessity of Christ’s priesthood. My concern is with verses 4–10, which establish the superiority of Melchizedek to Aaron.

Melchizedek’s superiority is seen in two ways. First, Melchizedek received a *tithe* from Abraham. Second, Melchizedek *blessed* Abraham. The act of tithing demonstrated Melchizedek’s superiority over the Levites, insofar as the Israelites paid their tithes *because the law required it*. The tithe was compulsory. It was illegal not to tithe. Verse 5 says, “And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham.”

But Melchizedek received a tithe in the absence of any legal instrument of compulsion. When verse 6 states, “But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham...” it means the one to whom the law did not apply collected a tithe. In other words, Melchizedek did not have the proper genealogy to qualify for demanding a tithe, let alone from Abraham. Yet Melchizedek received a tithe, even from the patriarch himself. Therefore, the Melchizedekian order of priests, of which Christ is a part, is greater than the Levitical order, because Abraham tithed to Melchizedek apart from any legal compulsion. William Lane explains,

The writer stresses in v. 5 that the particular ordinance by which those priests who descended from Levi and Abraham exacted the tithe depended on the total legal system of authority. By contrast, Melchizedek is identified as “one not tracing his descent from them” (v. 6a) who did not require the law to authorize his reception of the tithe.⁷

7 William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 7, *Hebrews*

Donald Guthrie notes the same thing, writing, “In the matter of rights, Melchizedek differed from the Levitical priests in that he received tithes not by command, but by the spontaneous action of Abraham.”⁸

Would the Israelites have tithed to the Levites if the Law had not required it? Would you pay your taxes if they were voluntary? Yet, Abraham brought a voluntary tithe to Melchizedek. Imagine a king whose government is so great that foreigners voluntarily offer to pay a tribute to that king in support of his kingdom. That is how great Melchizedek was. That is how great Christ is!

He does not tax his people like Solomon. The offerings Jesus receives are presented to him in the manner of Abraham’s; not compelled by the yoke of the law, which no one can keep, but by the irresistible inherent dignity and value of the king himself and his kingdom. The Melchizedekian tithe!

When we give to Worldwide Outreach, it is not simply because our denomination has bills to pay for services rendered, but more importantly and essentially because we love to give honor to Christ, and we have an interest in seeing his kingdom come. ☺

Brenton C. Ferry is pastor of *Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church (OPC)* in Mount Airy, North Carolina.

1–8, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 168–169.

8 Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 158. See also Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 176–177.

✦ Servant Truth

Original Sin: The Doctrine and Its Implications

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2009¹

by John V. Fesko

Introduction

In the opening paragraph of John Calvin's magisterial treatment of the doctrine of justification, he writes that it is "the main hinge on which religion turns." Yet, he goes on to explain that man must first grasp what his relationship to God is, and the nature of the judgment against him, otherwise man has neither a foundation on which to establish his salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.² Calvin does not make explicit reference to the doctrine, but it is original sin that lies in the background. Original sin is the condition that affects all mankind as a result of the first man's act of disobedience. Adam yielded to the temptation of the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit. But his single act of disobedience not only made Adam the slave of sin but also brought both the guilt and pollution of sin upon all of his descendants.³ Or, as the Shorter Catechism states,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=133.

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, vols. 20-21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.

3 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (1932-1938; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 221.

The sinfulness of that estate whereunto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of the whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it. (Q. 18)⁴

If Calvin's statement regarding the doctrines of justification and original sin is true, then wherever there is an attenuation of the significance of original sin, a diminution of the doctrine of justification is certain to follow.

This formulaic relationship between original sin and justification can be illustrated from appeal to Charles Finney (1792-1875). Finney is perhaps one of the better-known evangelists of the nineteenth century. He is particularly remembered for the role he played in, what is now called, the Second Great Awakening (ca. 1790 – ca. 1840). All too often people evaluate Finney based on the numbers he could produce rather than his doctrine. One need not dig very far before he uncovers Finney's views on original sin: "Moral depravity, as I use the term, does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature, in the sense that the substance of the human soul is sinful in itself. It is not a constitutional sinfulness. It is not an involuntary sinfulness. Moral depravity, as I use the term, consists in selfishness; in a state of voluntary committal of the will to self-gratification."⁵ According to Finney, man was neither inherently sinful nor were there any adverse effects from the fall upon mankind. Rather, moral depravity is simply voluntary sinning with no direct connection to Adam and his sin.⁶

Finney's view of original sin, or moral depravity as he calls it, ripples through his understanding

4 All quotations from the Westminster Standards are taken from *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005).

5 Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology: The Complete and Newly Expanded 1878 Edition*, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. (1878; Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994), 245.

6 Jay E. Smith, "The Theology of Charles Finney: A System of Self-Reformation," *Trinity Journal* 13 NS (1992): 76.

of doctrine so that he all but demolishes the doctrine of justification. Finney writes: “If Christ owed personal obedience to the moral law, then His obedience could no more than justify Himself. It can never be imputed to us.”⁷ If there is an absence of an imputed righteousness, then the vacuum must be filled with the obedience of man. In fact, Finney believed, “There is no proof that mankind ever lost their (sic) ability to obey, either by the first sin of Adam, or by their own sin.”⁸ This means that man’s justification is, according to Finney, entirely reliant upon his full and entire consecration of heart and life to God and service to him, and the penitent Christian remains justified only insofar as his full-hearted consecration continues.⁹ In other words, man’s justified status is never settled and is constantly in the balance hinging upon his continued faithfulness. The pastoral implications of Finney’s understanding of original sin crystallize in his counsel to pastors: “I am fully convinced that until evangelists and pastors adopt, and carry out in practice, the principle of total abstinence from all sin, they will as certainly find themselves, every few months, called to do their work over again, as a temperance lecturer would who should admit the moderate use of alcohol.”¹⁰ One of the keys to an effective gospel ministry, then, is not merely living a godly life, but a total abstinence from sin. If a minister can abstain from sin, then his ministry of gospel persuasion can be all the more effective. The pastor’s obedience becomes as effective, if not more, than Christ’s.

Sadly, because ideas have consequences, the echoes of Finney’s understanding of original sin reverberate in much of the broader Evangelical church today. A parallel to Finney’s theology can be found in the preaching of Joel Osteen, pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, a megachurch that meets in the former home of the NBA Houston Rockets. Osteen writes,

7 Finney, *Systematic Theology*, 363.

8 *Ibid.*, 327.

9 *Ibid.*, 369.

10 *Ibid.*, 395.

We have to conceive it on the inside before we’re ever going to receive it on the outside. If you don’t think you can have something good, then you never will. The barrier is in your mind. It’s not God’s lack of resources or your lack of talent that prevents you from prospering. Your own wrong thinking can keep you from God’s best.¹¹

There is no mention of sin and therefore what need is there to be justified, to be saved? Osteen’s message certainly harmonizes with Finney’s message of self-reformation, and does not ruffle the feathers of most professed American Christians, 80 percent of whom believe that Benjamin Franklin’s aphorism, “God helps those that help themselves,” actually comes from the Bible.¹² Even though the great heresiarch Pelagius (ca. 354 – ca. 420–40) has long since died, his spirit lives on in Finney, Osteen, and sadly, in many so-called Evangelical churches.¹³

The remedy for this Pollyanna view of man lies in a biblical understanding of original sin. Therefore, a brief review of the salient points of this doctrine is in order. Just as Finney’s views led him to believe that ministers had to set the example by abstinence from sin to influence their congregations, a thorough understanding of the bad news of sin gives the church and her ministers a greater appreciation and understanding of the good news of the gospel. The pastoral implications of a proper understanding of original sin can have a dramatic effect upon the ministry of the pastor and the local session, as well as the church’s broader witness to the world.

11 Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: Seven Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (Nashville: Faith Words, 2007), 3.

12 Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 74.

13 For some of the literature of the famous Augustine-Pelagius debate, see St. Augustine, *Writings against the Pelagians*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 5; Pelagius, *Pelagius’s Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Theodore de Bruyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Original Sin in Brief

The key to understanding the doctrine of original sin lies in a truth that rubs against the individualistic grain of many Americans—corporate solidarity. Mankind is not a collection of individuals but an organic unity, one race, one family (Acts 17:26).¹⁴ The principle of corporate solidarity manifests itself in God’s covenantal dealings with man, whether in the covenant of works between God and Adam or the covenant of redemption between God and Christ and its consequential covenant of grace.¹⁵ The apostle Paul highlights both the corporate and covenantal solidarity that mankind knows through the two federal heads of the first and last Adams. In a word, all of history can be summarized as the consequences of the representative disobedience and obedience of the two Adams. Paul is crystal clear in this regard despite the claims of some that he does not have in mind the manner by which people become sinners.¹⁶

Paul explains, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Adam’s one act of disobedience becomes the sin of all mankind and this is why all men die, even the most fragile and seemingly innocent of the race, infants. Paul succinctly states: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were constituted sinners” (Rom. 5:19b).¹⁷ Adam’s representative disobedience, according to Paul, brought two devastating effects:

14 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2008), 3.102.

15 On the relationship between the covenants of redemption, works, and grace, see David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 167-196.

16 So N. T. Wright, *Romans*, New Interpreter’s Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 526-527.

17 Translation mine. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 345 n. 144; C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. (1975; repr. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 1.290-291.

all mankind bears the guilt (*reatus*) and pollution (*macula*) of Adam’s sin.¹⁸ This conclusion is evident not only in that through Adam’s one sin the many were constituted sinners, but that “one trespass led to condemnation for all men” (Rom. 5:18a).

The twofold effect of Adam’s one transgression is certainly evident in Scripture. First, man is totally depraved. Man is evil from his youth and is himself a source of all sorts of evils. The Genesis flood narrative observes: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5; cf. 8:21). All men are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5) and from sinful man’s heart come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, and adultery (Mark 7:21). Not only is man morally evil, but because of his fallen state, he is incapable of understanding the things of God or in submitting to God’s law (1 Cor. 2:14; John 8:34-36; Rom. 6:17, 20; 8:7). It is in no uncertain terms that Paul describes fallen man as a child of wrath by nature and as dead in his sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1-3).¹⁹ Given Adam’s covenantal (or federal) representative status, when he sinned not only did he plunge himself into total depravity but the entire human race.²⁰ Adam was God’s viceroy over the creation (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8), and so it is also legitimate to say that he surrendered his kingship to the reign of Satan, sin, and death (Eph. 2:2; Rom. 8:2). Adam’s fallen kingdom is coterminous with the sin-darkened present evil age (Gal. 1:4), a kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13). Therefore, not only is the human race individually and corporately depraved, but so is the very temporal place that man occupies in history. Original sin does not have consequences merely for the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) but also for the *historia salutis* (redemptive history).

18 Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 182, 258.

19 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.119.

20 Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.121.

The second consequence of Adam’s sin is that the entire human race is liable for Adam’s one transgression. Paul tells the church at Rome that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23a). As stated above, all men die because they have all sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22). Paul elsewhere writes: “As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust” (1 Cor. 15:48a). In other words, the promised covenant sanction of death of which God warned Adam is visited upon all of his offspring (Gen. 2:17). Some think that God granted Adam a stay of execution of sorts because from all appearances, God did not immediately strike Adam dead—Adam went on to live more than nine hundred years (Gen. 5:5).²¹ Such a characterization of the covenant sanction fails to consider what it means to be exiled from the benevolent presence of the living God. For the faithful Israelite, to be exiled from the camp was akin to death itself.²² On the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he truly did die—not only did he thrust himself into a state of spiritual depravity but he was also exiled from God’s presence. For all of Adam’s progeny, due to Adam’s one sin, they not only exist in a state of spiritual death, but their physical death culminates in a state of eternal death—eternal exile from the benevolent presence of the triune God (Rev. 22:15).

Due to Adam’s one representative act of disobedience, he secured both his spiritual state of depravity and the liability for his action for all of his progeny. And this is to say nothing of the actual sins that each individual might commit which only bring greater guilt and condemnation. Mankind has its existence anchored in this corrupted and guilt-ridden state save one hope—the representative obedience of the last Adam. The only way that man, weighed down by original and actual sin, can be saved is by believing and trusting in the saving

21 E.g., Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 72.

22 Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *I Studied Inscripturations from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 404.

work of Jesus Christ. It is Christ’s work that is the antithetical counterpart to Adam’s work. If Adam’s representative disobedience brings guilt and condemnation, then Christ’s work brings righteousness and justification (Rom. 5:18). The antithetical parallelism between Adam and Christ is especially evident when Paul writes: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be constituted righteous” (Rom. 5:19).²³ God imputes Adam’s corruption and condemnation to those in him and righteousness and justification to those who are in Christ.²⁴

It is Christ through his resurrection and ascension who becomes a life-giving Spirit and overcomes both the corruption and condemnation of Adam’s one transgression on the ground of his own representative obedience (Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 15:45). If death came through Adam, then life comes through Christ (1 Cor. 15:21-22). For those who are united to Christ by faith and through the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the effects of original sin are more than reversed. Not only is redeemed man eventually cleansed of all his sin in his glorification, but unlike Adam, who was created in a state of defectible righteousness, those who are in Christ are indefectibly righteous. Redeemed man cannot fall away. He will not only bear the image of the man of heaven (*ordo salutis*), but he irreversibly enters the kingdom of God, the age to come (*historia salutis*) (1 Cor. 15:47-48). The only remedy for original sin is Christ and his gospel. This conclusion, as one can imagine, has significant pastoral implications.

Pastoral Implications

In Brian McLaren’s most recent book, *Everything Must Change*, he lists four significant global problems: the environmental breakdown caused by the global economy, the growing gap between the ultra-rich and the ultra-poor, the danger of cata-

23 Translation mine.

24 John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1959), 76.

clysmic war fueled by those at opposite ends of the economic spectrum, and the failure of the world's religions to address the three aforementioned global problems. McLaren's answer to these four global crises is to learn what it means to call Jesus Savior and Lord and to discover what he intended to save people from,

His angry Father? The logical consequences of our actions? Our tendency to act in ways that produce undesirable logical consequences? Global self-destruction?

He argues,

The popular and domesticated Jesus, who has become little more than a chrome-plated hood ornament on the guzzling Hummer of Western civilization, can thus be replaced with a more radical, saving, and I believe, *real* Jesus.²⁵

McLaren sees that these global crises are threats to man's existence and that Jesus is the solution. But what of original sin? What of man's spiritual corruption? What of the gospel of Christ?

At one level, it is easy to criticize McLaren's social gospel, as it is one entirely bereft of a biblical soteriology. However, many do not realize that the same social gospel chickens come home to roost when the church engages in social reform movements of various sorts. Many within the church are ardent supporters of placing the Ten Commandments in the courthouse, yet how many of those same Christians read the Law in their own churches? Many Christians vigorously support pro-marriage legislation to stem the tide of the gay-marriage agenda. Or Christians want legislation that will overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Yet why is there a cacophony on gay marriage or abortion and a relative silence on divorce, drunkenness, pornography, or adultery? Could it be that far too many Christians are divorced, drink to excess, fill their computers with pornography, and regularly engage in adulterous conduct?

25 Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 5-6; cf. Walter Rauschenbush, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1945; Nashville: Abingdon, 1987).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) once observed that in Anglo-Saxon countries churches often organized "campaigns" or "crusades" to combat various sorts of societal evils. He saw this pattern as a continuation of the medieval practice of a crusade. Bonhoeffer argued that this crusade-mindedness that starts first with human problems and then looks for solutions from that vantage point is unbiblical. The essence of the gospel is not found in solving worldly problems but in first starting with God's Word to the world. This Word is: Jesus Christ and salvation in his name.²⁶ In a word, it is only the message of the gospel that preaches sinful man's need for Christ. To borrow Cornelius Van Til's apologetic terminology, the church as the church must dispense with its blockhouse approach to societal ills, a piecemeal engagement of individual problems, such as abortion or gay marriage.²⁷ Such a blockhouse method, while undoubtedly well intended, reflects a hypocritical view towards the church's own sins. Rather than using the blockhouse approach, the church must bring the transcendental critique of the Word of God, that which levels the weight of the whole law against *all* sin, including the church's, and points all sinful men to their need for the gospel of Christ. The gospel of Christ brings with it the inherent acknowledgement of the disastrous effects of the representative disobedience of the first Adam (original sin) and the only remedy, the representative obedience of the last Adam (the gospel).

The same observation can be made regarding the ministry of the pastor and local session. Will a church see its significance chiefly in the family-friendly programs that it offers or in its ministry of Word and sacrament? Will the pastor and the session tell the congregation that godly covenant children can be raised through a specific parenting method, or that God's people, including covenant children, have only one hope for the death-laden

26 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 6, ed. Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Ernst Feil, and Clifford Green, trans. Reinhard Kraus, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (1949; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 355-356.

27 See Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1976), 72-78.

cancer of original sin—the Spirit-applied gospel of Jesus Christ? Scheduled feedings, spankings, home schooling, courtship, and Christian colleges are powerless to extirpate original and actual sin from the heart of a covenant child. Only the miraculous power of the Spirit applying the representative obedience of Christ removes the heart of stone and grants the heart of flesh.

Conclusion

If anything, this brief essay has emphasized what Calvin wrote long ago, that sinful man cannot build a foundation of piety and godliness unless he first understands the judgment that hangs over him. Apart from understanding the weight of the millstone of original sin around the neck of man, sinners will never see the need for the gospel of Christ. ☉

John V. Fesko *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as an Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.*

✦ Servant History

John Calvin and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church¹

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2009²

by John R. Muether

John Calvin was never a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Calvin died in 1564, and the OPC was formed in 1936. In those 372 intervening years, the work of John Calvin traveled through several nations and was interpreted by many voices as it made its way from Geneva to the new world.

Even where Calvinism would flourish in America it seemed to experience perpetual modification. The theological descendents of Jonathan Edwards in New England advocate a so-called “consistent Calvinism.” The twentieth century saw the rise of “neo-Calvinism,” a term elastic enough to describe both the followers of Karl Barth and Abraham Kuyper. We have suffered under the captivity of the “Calvin vs. the Calvinists” school of thought, which sought to convince the Reformed world that Calvin spoke to the church today only if he could be liberated from his heirs. One recent Calvin biographer has even identified a secular or atheistic Calvinism, which seeks to underscore the Reformer’s contribution to the sciences, politics, and economics of Western culture without refer-

1 Adapted from the introduction to the lectures presented at the General Assembly Seminar, May 27, 2009, Kuyper College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=169.

ence to his soteriology.³ And now we have the new Calvinists—young, restless, and Reformed—and decidedly more hip than the “button-down book-worms” of an older American Calvinism.⁴

All of these trends remind us that American Calvinists must always distinguish genuine Calvinism from its counterfeit forms. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has never claimed to be the only Calvinist church in America, but it is a denomination that is not ashamed to call itself an heir of Calvin, and it has endeavored to embody a full-orbed Calvinism in its life and teaching. And so, in 2009, as the international Reformed community celebrated the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, the Committee for the Historian of the OPC invited General Assembly commissioners and friends to a seminar that reflected on Calvin’s ongoing importance to the church today.

The two essays that follow were presentations at this pre-Assembly seminar. The two authors are uniquely qualified to introduce us to important themes in the work of John Calvin that bear especially on the life of the church today.

Dr. Richard B. Gaffin needs no introduction to readers of this journal. Born a month after the formation of the OPC to Presbyterian missionaries in what is now Beijing, China, Gaffin attended Westminster Seminary where he earned B.D., Th.M., and Th.D. degrees. He joined the faculty at Westminster in 1965, where he taught for over forty years until his recent retirement.

What may be less well known about Professor Gaffin is his work as a Calvin scholar. He wrote his Th.M. thesis on Calvin on the Sabbath (subsequently published by Mentor books). His work on Calvin’s doctrine of justification in relation to union with Christ was among the more important contributions in the recently published study of Calvin’s *Institutes*.⁵

3 Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

4 Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

5 David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, eds. *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (Phillipsburg,

A native of Oklahoma, the Rev. Glen Clary is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in Dallas. Since 2005 he has served as pastor of Immanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in West Collingswood, New Jersey, and he is currently engaged in a Doctor of Ministry program at the Institute for Reformed Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary, under the eminent scholar Hughes Oliphant Old. It is in the course of his doctoral research that he reflected at length on the topic he addressed at the pre-assembly seminar: John Calvin as Servant of the Word.

As a flood of conferences and books marks this quincentenary year, it is fitting for Orthodox Presbyterians to reflect on the witness of John Calvin and to return with profit to the fountainhead of the Reformed tradition. The Committee for the Historian is grateful to the editor of *Ordained Servant* for enabling these fine lectures to reach a broader audience. ©

John R. Muether is the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and a ruling elder at Reformation OPC in Oviedo, Florida.

NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008).

Calvin's Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemp- tion in Book Three of the *Institutes*¹

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2009²

by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

1 A lecture, slightly edited, given on May 27, 2009 at the Pre-Assembly Conference of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth.

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=174.

Introduction

I consider it a special privilege to have this opportunity to speak to you on this occasion. If I may begin on a personal note, I started my formal study of theology about the time of the 450th anniversary of Calvin's birth (marked, for one thing, by the appearance of the Battles translation of the *Institutes*) and now on the occasion of the 500th anniversary, looking back over the intervening years, I'm aware of just how much I owe to Calvin and how singularly I have been blessed by him, not only as a minister and teacher in the church but also and more importantly as a Christian.

I think here of 1 Corinthians 4:15. There the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, "For though you have countless guides [or teachers] in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." I know there are others here today—many, I'm sure—who will join me in saying that in Calvin we have found more than just another teacher. Rather, as we have read and studied him, the distance from the sixteenth century has disappeared and we have been nurtured in the gospel and our Christian walk in a way that can only be described as fatherly. We are blessed in having Calvin as one of our relatively few "fathers" in the faith.

In the beautiful and powerful prayer in the latter half of Ephesians 3, that the church might "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowing," Paul asks as well that such comprehension take place "with all the saints" (vv. 18-19). That "with all the saints" expresses a precious and important ecumenical truth, one that, despite divisions necessary and unnecessary, not only spans the face of the earth at any one time but also extends, and will extend, across the centuries until Jesus comes. We can only be reminded of that unity when we consider how by God's faithful hand on his church, we, the OPC, together with so many others are heirs in so many ways of that spiritual and theological legacy of Calvin, preeminently, that we call the Reformed faith. That legacy, in its distinctives, we may remind ourselves on this occasion, is not sectarian; rather it is, so to speak, truth held in trust for all believers. As Benjamin B. Warfield

observed around the time of the 400th anniversary of Calvin's birth, Reformed doctrine doesn't divide the church; it promotes its true unity.

This afternoon, in the time at our disposal, I want to consider with you something of Calvin's soteriology by looking at the structure or pattern of his teaching on the application of salvation, primarily as that teaching finds its matured expression in Book Three of the *Institutes*. This is an appropriate topic to consider particularly as we commemorate Calvin and the importance of his theology as a Reformer. For in the need for the Reformation and the issues at stake in it, this issue, the application of redemption, as much as any is the central issue.

Other doctrines, such as the sole ultimate authority of Scripture as God's Word, are clearly at stake as well. Nonetheless, it is fair to say, that among the developments within medieval Catholicism that necessitated the Reformation it was especially this area, the application of salvation, of the sinner's actual receiving of salvation, which was most crucially in need of remedy. What had become so severely obscured was the answer to the young Martin Luther's anguished question, "How do I obtain a gracious God?"—the answer found only in the gospel "solus" of a totally gracious salvation.

It has been said, fairly, I think, and in fact by a Roman Catholic, that a crucial difference between Protestants on the one hand, Catholics and Orthodox on the other, is that for the latter faith in Christ and faith in the Church is the one and same act of faith.³

From the perspective of faith, the essence of the Reformation is in its decisive and liberating break with this disastrous and enslaving confusion or at least blurring of Christ and the church as the object of faith and, with that break, its recaptured understanding of what faith in Christ is. And that renewed understanding of faith inevitably brought with it a fresh appreciation of how Christ is central in our salvation, particularly in its ongoing applica-

tion, its personal appropriation.

Among the Reformers, that centrality of Christ—not only now for the accomplishment of our salvation but also and particularly in its application—has been grasped and presented by Calvin in a peerless and, I would say, even to the present still unprecedented way. My interest today is in reminding us how that is so.

The often-quoted words of Phillip Melancthon toward the beginning of his *Loci Communes* ("Theological Commonplaces"), known to some of you, may serve as our point of departure: "to know Christ is to know his benefits." That is certainly true, particularly in view of Melancthon's concern to guard against the tendency in late medieval Roman Catholic theology to reflect upon his person ("his natures and the modes of his incarnation") in an unduly speculative way that neglected or distorted his work. (I will have to leave to the side here how these words of Melancthon have subsequently been taken out of context and abused by critical theologians, like Rudolph Bultmann.)

Now, if we take Melancthon's statement and reverse its terms, it reads, "to know his benefits is to know Christ." Doing that can serve to point up an important accent for Calvin. What is the sense of this reversal and the accent it suggests? With that question in mind we may turn to considering some emphases in Book Three of the *Institutes*.

Union with Christ

1. The final (1559) Latin edition of the *Institutes* represents an approximately 25 percent expansion of several previous editions and printings of basically the same length appearing from the second edition of 1539 through 1554. Equally, perhaps more, important is the overall restructuring that takes place. What previously, since the first edition of 1536, had been a single volume now for the first time has the multiple book-chapter-section format, familiar since to readers of this definitive Latin edition in its translation into numerous languages (including among English translations those of Beveridge, Allen, and, most recently, Battles).

We are not left to speculate how Calvin himself viewed this substantial restructuring. In his

3 Richard John Neuhaus, "A More Real World," *First Things*, December 1997; "The Secular City Redux," *First Things*, November 2003.

prefatory remarks to the reader, he comments that the editing he had done previously, beginning with the second (1539) edition, was such that the work “has been enriched with some additions.” But, he continues, “I was never satisfied until the work had been *arranged in the order now set forth*.” (Battles translation, vol. 1, p. 3; emphasis added; in what follows the page numbers for all quotes are from volume 1 of this translation).

This statement should be kept in mind in reading the *Institutes*. The structure of the whole and the placing of materials in relation to each other in 1559 afforded Calvin a measure of satisfaction that had eluded him previously for over twenty years. In his own estimation he has now expressed himself more adequately than he had previously. Without in any way suggesting anything less than thorough continuity between this and earlier editions, he is, however, saying something like, “Now I’ve finally gotten things in the right shape, now at last I’m saying it the way I’ve been wanting to.” This particularly needs to be kept in mind as we look at how he treats the application of salvation in Book Three, both the basic overall structure of that treatment as well the material that is new in 1559.

2. Book Three is entitled “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow.” Previously, the latter half of Book Two (chapters 9–17) has dealt with the finished work of Christ, the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation. So, as the title to Book Three shows, Calvin’s concern throughout will now be with the application or personal appropriation of that salvation (“the grace of Christ”), its “benefits” and consequent “effects.” All told, his primary interest now is with “the way” (*modo*; “mode,” “manner,” “method”) in which believers “receive” this grace, in other words, with how this salvation is appropriated personally. Several points may be noted.

a) Book Three, sections 1-2, their positioning as well as their composition, are new with the 1559 edition, with minimal antecedents in earlier editions. The opening words of 3:1:1 restate the concern expressed in the title in the form of a

question: “We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men?” The next sentence (the second in the Latin original) then reads, “First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us” (537).

In my view it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this sentence for Calvin’s applied soteriology as a whole and, I would add, for a sound biblical understanding. Calvin speaks here of what is “first” in the sense of what is most fundamental for him in the application of redemption. This is primary, the single most decisive consideration that underlies all others and in that sense controls *everything* said throughout Book Three (and elsewhere in Calvin) about the application of redemption. Put negatively, as he does, this most deeply decisive consideration is that Christ not remain “outside us,” that we not be “separated from him.” Or, to express it positively, as he presently does just beyond what we have quoted, that most crucial consideration is that “we grow into one body (*in unum*) with him.” In other words, as his point of departure for all that he has to say about the application of salvation in Book Three, Calvin brings into view and highlights the union that exists between Christ and believers.

This union is so central, so pivotal, that, again expressing the matter negatively, he can even say that without it the saving work of Christ, the once-for-all redemption he has accomplished, “remains useless and of no value.” Union is the all-or-nothing reality on which everything depends in the application of salvation. I must have Christ or I have nothing—that consideration underlies and gives rise to all others Calvin is saying. Absent that union, his work for me is—the sweeping, unrelieved language is striking—“useless and of no value.” Without union, the benefits that flow from it are nonexistent.

Further, implicitly here and anticipating

what he will make clear later, this union is not a partial union, as if we could share in some benefits without others. Unless I share in all of his benefits, I share in none of them. If I do not have the whole Christ, I have no Christ. Or as he puts it elsewhere, Christ “cannot be divided into pieces” (3:16:1, 798); we must not “rend Christ asunder” (*Romans Commentary* on 6:1; 8:10), referring to those who envision receiving justification and the free remission of sins apart from sanctification and inner renewal.

b) This union, he immediately goes on to make clear, is “obtained by faith.” In other words, the union in view is union as it does not exist apart from or prior to faith but is given with, in fact is inseparable from, faith. This mention of faith, and the key role accorded to it, prompts Calvin, still within this opening section, to touch on what would become a central question in subsequent discussions about the *ordo salutis*, namely the origin of faith. This view of the origin of faith gave rise eventually in Reformed theology, especially in response to the emergence of Arminianism, to the doctrine of regeneration in a narrower sense.

We observe, he says, “that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel.” Why? Not because of some differentiating factor or capacity on our side. The answer is not to be found ultimately by looking into ourselves or contemplating the mystery of human freedom and willing. Rather, consistent with his uniform teaching elsewhere about the total inability of the will due to sin, we must “climb higher” and consider “the secret energy of the Spirit” (*arcana Spiritus efficacia*). Faith is Spirit-worked, sovereignly and efficacious.

Union with Christ, then, is forged by the Spirit’s working faith in us, a faith that “puts on” Christ (citing Gal. 3:27), that embraces Christ as he is offered by faith in the gospel. Faith is the bond of union seen from our side. “To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself” (538). Subsequently (3:11:10, 737), in discussing union and justification, he will categorize this union as “spiritual” as well as “mystical,” that is, as produced by the ineffable working

of the Spirit, it is sublime and ultimately beyond our comprehension.

c) This, then, is Calvin’s understanding of the application of salvation at its core, the heart of his *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by Spirit-worked faith. It seems to me that he could hardly make that more clear than he does here. Subsequently (for instance, in 3:11:1, which we will consider), he will also make clear that from this union flows a “twofold grace” (note the singular), consisting of justification and sanctification, the former definitive and settled, the latter in its initiation as an ongoing process, each as distinct as it is inseparable from the other.

We may note here, in passing as it must be, that this Spirit-worked union as the source or matrix of all other benefits in the application of redemption is a part of our Church’s confessional commitment. To the question, “How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?” Shorter Catechism 30 answers, “The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.” Then the immediately following questions and answers, beginning with 32, specify the particular benefits of this union brought about by effectual calling. The answer to Larger Catechism 69 is even more explicit: “The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, *manifests* their union with him” (emphasis added).

With these comments in view from the beginning of Book Three, comments that evidently frame Calvin’s overall approach to the application of redemption with its controlling focus on union with Christ, we may explore that structure further by turning now to Chapter 11 of Book Three, the first in his lengthy multi-chapter treatment of justification.

Union with Christ and Twofold Grace (Justification and Sanctification)

1. Section 1 of Chapter 11 begins with Calvin

reminding his readers of what he has previously explained “with sufficient care,” namely that “the one sole means of recovering salvation” left for those under the curse of the law is “in faith.” He also recalls his discussion of faith and its attendant “benefits” and “fruits” (for example, in 3:2-3, on faith and regeneration [= sanctification] by faith). Then follows a summary (*summa*) of these matters discussed up to this point in Book 3, best quoted here in its entirety (725):

Christ was given to us by God’s generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by his Spirit [not “spirit,” contra Battles] we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.

This summary involves two accents that should not be missed. First and foremost is the focus on Christ, on his *person*. The saving benefits in view that Christ procures do not accrue to faith apart from his person. That is, specifically, they are received only as, by faith (*fide*), he himself, Christ, is “grasped and possessed.” In other words, in view here already at the outset of Calvin’s discussion of justification is the believer’s union with Christ, about which we hear, emphatically and repeatedly, as that discussion unfolds.

Secondly, by this union, this sharing or partaking of him, believers “principally” or, as we might also translate, “above all” (*potissimum*) receive “a double grace” (*duplicem gratiam*). (Since this double grace is “principal,” apparently for Calvin it encompasses all other saving benefits that stem from union with Christ.) This twofold grace, Calvin will presently make clear, consists, each in a word, of justification and regeneration (equivalent here with sanctification), each being described in this summary statement in terms of its outcome. Concerning justification, described here as being “reconciled to God,” believers have in heaven, instead of a wrathful and unreconciled Judge, a

gracious (or propitious, *propitium*) Father.

Concerning sanctification, as “sanctified,” believers are to “cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.” It is noteworthy here that in the matter of sanctification, of personal transformation and renewal, Calvin affirms a settled as well as a continuing aspect: it is just as believers have been and already are “sanctified” (note: in distinction from having been justified) that they are to “cultivate” a life of holiness. (This appears to anticipate what more recently John Murray has called “definitive” in distinction from progressive sanctification.)

This summary, with which Calvin opens his treatment of justification, expresses what may be described as “his triangulation of union with Christ, justification, and sanctification” (Mark Garcia). These three elements are fairly taken as points of reference that largely fix the framework of Calvin’s thinking, all told, on the application of redemption, the personal appropriation of the finished salvation accomplished by Christ, with which, as we have already seen, he is formally occupied in Book Three of the *Institutes*. In particular, as we are seeing from the opening of Chapter 11, this triangulation frames his thinking on justification.

2. This raises an important question: how in Calvin’s view are these three elements related to each other? At least two things stand out clearly in this summary. First, we find what we should expect from what we have already seen at the beginning of Book Three and from the way there Calvin sets the direction for his entire discussion of the application of redemption: union with Christ has precedence in the sense that the twofold grace is rooted in union and flows from it. Twofold grace is derivative; that is, it is received “by partaking of him.” Secondly, as the double benefits of union, justification and sanctification, are clearly inseparable, yet they are not confused; they are clearly distinguished.

Accenting inseparability, Calvin speaks not of two graces but of “twofold grace,” in the singular, although later in this section he does refer to “regeneration,” that is, sanctification, as “the second of these gifts” (or, better translated, this “second

grace”). This signals distinction and a priority of justification to sanctification as an ongoing process that we will address below. The nature of both this difference and inseparability, as well as the nature of the underlying union involved, Calvin will clarify as his discussion unfolds. But these observations already prompt us to speak of the basic union-twofold grace (*unio-duplex gratia*) structure of Calvin’s applied soteriology.

3. Directly following this summary statement, Calvin himself, still in section 1, draws attention to a noteworthy feature of the overall structure of Book Three, a feature present in his argumentation from 1539 on. Prior to taking up justification, he has discussed regeneration (which, as we have already seen, he understands broadly, equivalent to what later theology calls sanctification) and has done so at considerable length. He said what he deemed “sufficient” on that topic and mentioned justification only in passing, leaving it, as he says, “more lightly touched upon.” In other words, he first discusses the change that takes place within the sinner, our ongoing inner renewal and personal transformation, *before* the definitive change effected in the sinner’s legal status, our forensic standing before God. He addresses, as he does, the removal of the corrupting slavery of sin before considering the abolition of the guilt it incurs.

This way of proceeding is apparently counterintuitive, even contrary some might think, to Reformation instincts. In the face of Rome’s basing of justification on an ongoing process of sanctification, stressing the priority of justification to sanctification would appear to be crucial. Calvin’s approach may also seem to be at odds with what he himself will presently say about the pivotal importance of justification as “the main hinge on which religion turns.”

This way of ordering material in Book Three, deciding to treat sanctification fully (chapters 3–10) before justification, has provoked considerable discussion about Calvin’s motive(s) for doing so. Without being able here to enter into the details of that discussion, we may note that, whatever other factors may have been at work, his primary motivation, at least as he saw it, is plain enough

because he tells us explicitly. He has proceeded as he has, he says, “because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned.”

This clause bears careful scrutiny. First, the stated reason for discussing sanctification before justification is in order to make clear that faith, justifying faith (“the faith through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God”), does not lack good works. It was “to the point” (*ad rem*), he says, to make clear the nature of that faith “first,” that is, before discussing justification itself. Why is doing that “to the point”? One consideration is likely polemical. The constantly echoing charge from Rome at that time (and ever since to the present) is that the Protestant doctrine of justification, of a graciously imputed righteousness received solely by faith, ministers spiritual slothfulness and indifference to holy living.

Calvin counters that charge, effectively and masterfully, by dwelling at length (133 pages!) on the nature of faith, in particular faith’s inherent disposition and concern for holiness. Prior to discussing justification as a topic and in any length, largely bypassing justification and saying little about the role of faith in justification, he concerns himself extensively with sanctification and faith in its sanctified expressions. Calvin demolishes Rome’s charge by showing that faith, as the sole instrument in receiving justification, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without explicit reference to its role in being justified.

But what is “to the point” for Calvin is not only its polemical edge. Not only his Roman Catholic opponents (which are only in view implicitly), but all Protestant readers as well, need to understand “how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God.” In view is an ongoing concern for godliness, for sanctification, and that concern, Calvin says, is of the essence of the faith that justifies. In other words, sanctifying

faith, faith functioning for holy living, is the same faith that justifies.

Certainly, this does *not* mean that for Calvin faith justifies because it sanctifies or as it functions in sanctification. As he makes clear elsewhere repeatedly and emphatically (in Book Three, e.g., 11:7, 733-734; 14:17, 784; 14:21, 787; 18:8, 830), faith is the sole instrument in receiving justification, and that role differs from its role in sanctification. But faith as justifying and faith as sanctifying are not different faiths, nor are these exercises, though certainly distinguishable, somehow separable.

Further, to understand this and, correlatively, “the nature of the good works of the saints” is a part of the concern of “this question.” What question? The question of *justification*. Pertinent to discussing justification, Calvin is saying here, is to clarify what place the believer’s good works have, a question that he will discuss in some depth especially in chapter 16, a discussion we are not able to follow here except to note a comment at the end of section 1 that expresses its gist: “Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified *not without works yet not through works*, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness” (798; emphasis added).

These observations prompt a further comment. As twin components of the grace received by being united to Christ by faith, justification and sanctification are inseparable. Now it appears as well that they are simultaneous; inseparability involves simultaneity. Calvin knows nothing of a justification that is first settled and then is only subsequently followed by sanctification. Rather, because and as they both flow from Spirit-worked union, they are simultaneous in the sense that given with this settled and irreversible justification, from the moment it takes place at the inception of the application of redemption, is a *disposition wrought in the ungodly to godliness and holy living*, no matter how weak and sin-plagued that disposition and how imperfectly manifested subsequently.

With that noted, to avoid possible misunderstanding: as an *ongoing, lifelong process*, for Calvin

sanctification plainly follows justification. He is not saying, nor am I saying that he is saying, that in order to be justified you must have first done a certain amount or requisite number of good works. Nor is it the case that sanctification simply follows justification in some unrelated, parallel fashion. Rather, justification is the *absolutely indispensable precondition* of progressive sanctification. This is likely why Calvin calls sanctification “second” in relation to justification. In this sense justification is plainly “prior” to sanctification, and the believer’s good works are the fruits and signs of having been justified; only those already justified are being progressively sanctified.

This, however, is not the same thing as saying, what Calvin does *not* say, that justification is the “source” of sanctification or that justification “causes” sanctification in the sense that it produces sanctification. He may appear at a first glance to say that elsewhere (3:17:9, 812), but there his point is that justification, Christ’s imputed righteousness, is the “source” or “basis” of the *acceptability* to God of our (all too flawed) good works. This is saying something different than that justification is the “source” or “cause” of sanctification and good works. Rather here (in 3:11:1), that source, that cause, is “Christ’s Spirit”—Christ by his Spirit, Christ, the “life-giving Spirit” (3:1:2, 539, citing 1 Cor. 15:45; not “spirit,” contra Battles), in whom, Calvin is clear in this passage, at the moment they are united to him by faith, sinners simultaneously receive a twofold grace and so begin an ongoing process of being sanctified just as they are now also definitively justified.

4. With this prefatory mix of considerations introduced, flowing out of matters he has previously treated, towards the close of this section (11:1), Calvin begins a thorough, multi-chapter (11-18) treatment of justification. What needs to be kept in mind throughout, he goes on to say, is that justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns” (726; “the principal hinge by which religion is supported”—Allen); Calvin’s own 1560 French edition has “the principal article of the Christian religion”—“le principal article de la religion Chrestienne.”

A couple of comments are in order on these frequently quoted words, probably Calvin's most well-known statement on justification. a) Clearly, beyond question, he intends here to highlight the central importance of justification. But how is it important? In what sense is it centrally or crucially important? The answer to that question appears in the explanatory sentence that immediately follows at the close of section 1, "For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God."

Uppermost in his mind here is that without the *knowledge* of justification, expressed as the believer's settled and favorable judicial relationship to God, there is lacking a "foundation" (*fundamentum*) for salvation and piety. In other words, unless you "grasp" that God is no longer your wrathful, unpropitiated judge but your loving heavenly Father, as you then have no basis "to establish your salvation," so neither do you have a basis "to build piety toward God" (to make more explicit the syntax of the sentence in Latin). The accent here is on what believers need to *know*, and to know "first of all," for the stable possession of their salvation and to pursue holy living.

It is also to the point here to note that Calvin speaks of "religion" ("the main hinge of *religion*"). He does not say the main hinge of "salvation," or of "the gospel," or of revealed truth, or of biblical teaching concerning the application of salvation. The word "religion" as it is used here is two-sided in its reference. It presupposes God's self-revelation but has in view primarily the response appropriate to that revelation. In this regard it does not seem unduly speculative to see here an implicit but unmistakable contrast to Rome's religion which, because it grounds justification in an ongoing process of sanctification and infusing sacramental grace, produces a piety for which the outcome at the final judgment is ever uncertain.

b) It is easy enough to lift this "principal hinge" and the following "foundation" statements out of context in the interests of maintaining the

view that for Calvin justification is the cardinal and most basic blessing in the application of salvation, the fundamental blessing that gives rise to all others. However, as far as I can see neither the wider context of his teaching in the *Institutes* and elsewhere, nor even the immediate context of this section will tolerate such a reading. The terms of the next to last sentence of the section (quoted just above) must be noted. In possessing salvation, justification is certainly a *sine qua non*, but it is not the *sole* foundational consideration. As crucial as justification undoubtedly is, it is not the stand-alone foundation of the application of redemption.

That foundation, Calvin is clear from the outset of this section (and from the way, as we have seen, he has framed the application of redemption as a whole at the beginning of Book Three), is justification, but justification as a component, together with sanctification, of the principal "twofold grace" that flows out of the believer's underlying union with Christ. If I may put it this way, a "hinge" is not a "skyhook," to function (to "turn") a hinge has to be anchored to something. Without in any way diminishing its pivotal and central importance, the "hinge" of true religion that justification is, is a hinge that can only turn as it is anchored firmly in our union with Christ, as we are bonded to him by faith. Indeed, as Calvin sees it, justification has its pivotal significance only as — and because it is — anchored in union.

Regarding the relationship of union and justification, for Calvin justification is not union-producing, it is not a uniting justification, a justification that unites (and then sanctifies). Rather, union is justification-effecting, a justifying union, a union that justifies. According to Calvin, I am not justified in order to be united to Christ; I am united to Christ in order to be justified. Again, I am justified, I have Christ's righteousness imputed to me, by faith. How? Only by being united to him by faith. In that sense, I am justified by faith because by faith I am united to Christ, not the reverse. I am not justified, even for moment, outside of my union with Christ (any more than I am united to Christ without, even for an instant, being justified).

Listen to these words of Calvin, his “confession,” relating union and justification, in particular what is at the heart of justification, imputation, Christ’s righteousness imputed to believers, received by faith (3.11.10, 736-737):

I confess that we are deprived of this utterly incomparable good [imputed righteousness; justification] until Christ is made ours. Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.

In no way do I wish to make my “reader response” normative, but I must confess that I never tire of hearing this confession of Calvin and am thrilled every time I re-read these words about our union with Christ and our justification in him. And, I would add, taken as they are to be read and properly understood, they hardly “de-center” justification, as some may think. Rather, they echo so well, it seems to me, both the sense and the mood of the God-breathed and normative confession of the apostle in Philippians 3:7-9 that because of the all-surpassing value of “knowing” Christ as Lord, he reckoned all of his previous pedigree and performance as rubbish. To what end? “In order that I might gain Christ and be found in him” and, *consequently*, in that being found in Christ and as he is found in him, he had a righteousness not his own but the righteousness of God through faith. As Paul teaches elsewhere (Romans and Galatians), this is the righteousness of Christ imputed and received solely by faith. For Calvin, and for Paul and the rest of Scripture that he is so faithful to at

this point, justification is central, as central as the union with Christ to which it is inseverably tethered and apart from which it is nonexistent.

Returning briefly to the Melancthon quote with which we began, yes, “to know Christ is to know his benefits.” But that is true, as Calvin has so helped the church in seeing, only as and at the same time and more basically it is also true that “to know his benefits is to know Christ.” Knowing Christ does not amount to knowing about or receiving certain saving benefits (“twofold grace,” justification and sanctification) in a way that takes place without knowing or receiving *him*. That is how some have understood Melancthon and how many Christians, in effect, understand their salvation, particularly the forgiveness of their sins. Rather, we receive those benefits, that is, we “know” them, not apart from him but *only* as we know *him* in the Pauline sense—as we “gain Christ and are found in him,” that is, only as, by faith, we receive him and are united with him.

5. To sum up on the relationship among union, justification, and sanctification in Calvin—a key issue at the heart of any discussion of the application of salvation: justification and sanctification are the twofold benefit that flows from union with Christ simultaneously and without separation, yet also without confusion.

An illustration Calvin uses for this relationship is a metaphor that seems hard to improve on. It’s found in *Institutes* 3:11:6, in the context of his vigorous refutation of Osiander, where he is intent on showing that Osiander is so seriously wrong about justification because he is so seriously wrong about the nature of union with Christ; a sound understanding of justification and union stand or fall together. Christ, our righteousness, Calvin says, is like the sun, justification, its light, sanctification, its heat. The sun is at once the source of both, so that light and heat are inseparable. But only light illumines and only heat warms, not the reverse. Both are always present, without the one becoming the other (we need not get side-tracked by the physics involved in this metaphor to appreciate its validity) I would take out the exclamation point.

This analogy hardly seems arbitrary or a purely

random one. It is prompted by the biblical truth, for instance, that as he is God's last-days speech and "the exact imprint of his nature," the Son is also "the radiance of his glory" (Heb. 1:2-3). The "sun" of our salvation is the Son. Calvin, in his writing and preaching, has focused the church's attention on the obvious and glorious centrality of the Son in the once-for-all, finished accomplishment of our salvation. But also, as few others and in a singular way, he has served the church by showing how the Son in his glory is central in its ongoing application.

As God continues to bless those efforts of Calvin, that glory of the Son, we can be sure, will shine for another 500 years or even beyond, or until sooner, if God wills, we no longer see him, the justifying and transforming glory-image with whom we are united, "in a mirror dimly, but ... face to face." ©

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

John Calvin: Servant of the Word¹

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2009²

by Glen J. Clary

In St. Peter's Cathedral in Geneva, there is a plaque commemorating the life and ministry of John Calvin, which simply describes him as "servant of the Word of God."³ Truly, above all else,

1 A lecture, slightly edited, given on May 27, 2009 at the Pre-Assembly Conference of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth.

2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=170.

3 David Wright and David Stay eds., *Serving the Word of God*:

Calvin was a servant of the Word.

Calvin is well known and appreciated as a biblical commentator. John Murray said, "Calvin was the exegete of the Reformation and in the first rank of biblical exegetes of all time."⁴ He wrote commentaries on several books of the Old Testament and on every book of the New Testament except Revelation, and all his commentaries are still in print.⁵

Calvin was also a lecturer on the Bible. In fact, this was his first appointment in Geneva, and he retained this role throughout his entire ministry. He delivered his lectures weekly, going through whole books of the Bible for the benefit of students, the other ministers, and especially candidates for the Gospel ministry, who went on to pastor churches in France and elsewhere.⁶

Calvin also expounded Scripture at a weekly meeting each Friday morning, which was called the *congrégation*.⁷ This was essentially a preachers' workshop. The ministers of Geneva and of the surrounding villages came together each week to study Scripture. The usual practice was to study whole books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, verse by verse.⁸

The point here is that in all these activities,

Celebrating the Life and Ministry of James Philip (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2000), 219.

4 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 1:308.

5 See Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin, Expanded Edition: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 75–90.

6 See Wulfert de Greef (2008), 90–93, and Wright and Stay (2000), 219.

7 According to James H. Nichols, "This practice began in Zurich in 1525, and it was called prophesying. ... A similar practice was followed ... in à Lasco's Church of the Strangers in London and in the English refugee congregation in Geneva." See James H. Nichols, "The Intent of the Calvinistic Liturgy" in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 92.

8 See Wulfert de Greef, "Calvin's Writings" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 45–46. Cf. Wulfert de Greef (2008), 101–104.

Calvin was fulfilling the role of “servant of the Word of God.” “His whole theological labor was the exposition of Scripture.”⁹

Of course, Calvin’s primary task as servant of the Word was the reading and the preaching of the Scriptures in the worship of the Church. This was given top priority—the living voice over the written commentary; the pulpit over the lectern.

In 1909 (at the Calvin 400 celebration in Geneva) Émile Doumergue (the leading Calvin scholar of the day) delivered a speech entitled, “Calvin, the Preacher of Geneva.”¹⁰ Doumergue paints a portrait of Calvin, not as a man of action or as a man of thought, but as a man of the Word. Calvin was a man who spoke.

Here [in Geneva], like Moses and the prophets, whose speech lifted up and moved the Hebrew people; [here] like saint Ambrose or saint Chrysostom, those great bishops whose speech held the crowds of Milano or Constantinople in sway, at the foot of their pulpits; [here] like Savonarola, the reformer whose words, over a two-year period, transformed Florence, Calvin spoke. He spoke for 25 years! He spoke from his pastor’s or professor’s pulpit, sometimes every day, for month on end, sometimes two times per day, for weeks on end. He spoke with endless exhortations to the Consistory, to the Friday Congregation, to the Town Council. He spoke in his treatises, those ardent improvisations he dictated as though in a single breath. He spoke through his countless letters, letters of consolation, letters of a spiritual counselor, letters of a statesman, letters, especially, of a friend. . . . Here is the Calvin who seems to me the true one and the

9 John Dillenberger, *John Calvin, Selections from His Writings* (Scholars Press, 1975), 14.

10 This address was given at the 400th anniversary of the birth of Calvin at Saint Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva; “Calvin le Prédicateur de Genève,” Conférence faite dans la Cathédrale de Saint-Pierre, à Genève, par M. le Professeur E. Doumergue, Doyen de la Faculté de Théologie de Montauban (Édition Atar, Corraterie, 12, Genève). I am indebted to the kind assistance of Mrs. Barbara Edgar for the English translation of this text. Je vous remercie pour votre aide, Madame Edgar!

authentic Calvin, the one which explains all the others: *Calvin, the preacher of Geneva, shaping the reformed soul of the 16th century by his word.*¹¹

Calvin was first and foremost a minister of the Word. And as T. H. L. Parker says, “he is not fully seen unless he is seen in the pulpit,” and “it is impossible to do justice to his work in Geneva unless preaching be given the main place.”¹²

Many of Calvin’s recent biographers agree that all of his labors were tethered to—and structured around—the pulpit. Bernard Cottret wrote,

Preaching was at the center of the Reformer’s activity; in his last years it utterly exhausted him and wore him down. His frail appearance, his short breath, his voice as if from beyond the tomb, and his back bowed by illness regained a sudden energy and a last grandeur under the impulse of the Spirit that animated and subdued them. Calvin was a man who spoke.¹³

For Calvin...preaching was not just one literary genre among others; it was the very essence of the Reformation.¹⁴

And so, in this presentation on Calvin, the servant of the Word, we will focus our attention on Calvin’s preaching. This is an area of Calvin’s work that has been largely neglected, at least until recent years. Thomas J. Davis observes,

When we speak of Calvin’s preaching, we approach one of the two final frontiers... in studies of Calvin; the other is exegesis. Calvin the theologian...has been the subject of a great tradition of scholarship. Within the

11 Doumergue (1909), 8–9.

12 T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (England: Lion Publishing, 1987), 114.

13 Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 288.

14 *Ibid.*, 295.

last generation, however, many within that tradition find it no longer acceptable to study Calvin as theologian in the traditional manner: by reading solely the great *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. With great vigor, a number of scholars have begun the task of taking on the commentaries and are beginning to relate Calvin's theology and exegesis in fruitful ways. Calvin's preaching, however, is just now beginning to come into its own as an area of study.¹⁵

I have already mentioned Doumergue's lecture on Calvin's preaching, delivered at the 400th anniversary in Geneva. This was indeed a rare topic in his day. At Calvin's 500th anniversary, however, virtually every major conference on Calvin has included (or will include) a lecture on Calvin's preaching.

The first serious work on Calvin's sermons was written by the German scholar, Erwin Mülhaupt in 1931, *Die Predigt Calvins*.¹⁶ This is what led to the *Supplementa Calviniana*. "The editors of the *Opera Calvini* did not place a lot of value on the sermons," so they only included less than half of them, but now, "almost all remaining sermons preserved in manuscript" have been "published in the *Supplementa Calviniana*. Occasionally new manuscripts of sermons are found and printed."¹⁷

For example, in 1994, another eighty-seven sermons on Isaiah were discovered in the library of the French Protestant Church in London.¹⁸ Thus, the homiletical corpus of Calvin is expanding.

15 Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body: the Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 94.

16 For a brief survey of Mülhaupt's work, see Lester Ronald De Koster, "Living Themes in the Thought of John Calvin: A Biographical Study" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, 1964), 294–296.

17 Wulfert de Greef in McKim (2004), 45.

18 Max Engammare, "Des sermons de Calvin sur Esaïe découverts à Londres," in *Calvin et ses contemporains*, ed. Olivier Millet (Geneva, 1998), 69–81; "Calvin Incognito in London: The Rediscovery in London of Sermons on Isaiah," in *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society*, 26, no. 4 [1996]: 453–462.

The history of the sermon manuscripts is a tragic tale, and unfortunately, of all the sermons that he preached, only about one-third of them have been preserved.¹⁹

In the English world, says Davis, pioneering work into Calvin's preaching starts, in many ways, with T. H. L. Parker's *The Oracles of God* (1947). "This represents the kind of historical spadework necessary to establish the actual work of Calvin's preaching."²⁰ First of all, Parker gives us the logistics of his preaching *activity*. He tells us how many sermons he preached on what book and when. Secondly, Parker analyses Calvin's homiletical *form* and *style*.

It is unnecessary to repeat here what can easily be found in hundreds of books, but just to give you an idea of the scope of Calvin's homiletical *activity* – between 1549 (when a stenographer, Denis Raguénier, was hired to take down his sermons)²¹ and 1564, Calvin preached over 2,000 sermons, including: 123 on Genesis, 200 on Deuteronomy, 353 on Isaiah, 43 on Galatians, 86 on the Pastoral Epistles and 186 on 1 and 2 Corinthians. He also (in that time period) expounded Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Acts, Ephesians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. And beginning in 1559, he started preaching a Harmony of the Gospels, which series remained incomplete at his death in 1564.²²

19 For details see, Wulfert de Greef (2008), 93–100. Cf. Richard Stauffer, "Les sermons inédits de Calvin sur le livre de la Genèse," in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, 3 ser., 15 [1965]: 26–36; Lester De Koster (1964), 291ff.; and Bernard Gagnebin, "L'incroyable histoire des sermons de Calvin," in *Bulletin de la Société d'Historie et d'Archéologie de Genève*, 10, no. 4 [1955]: 311–334.

20 Davis (2008), 94.

21 It should be pointed out that Calvin preached without manuscript or notes, with only a Hebrew or Greek Testament open in front of him. Wright and Stay (2000), 220. Calvin objected to the practice of "reading from a written discourse"; see his letter to Somerset, 22 October 1548, in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, 7 vols., ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 5:190.

22 For details, see T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 153ff.

Dr. Hughes Oliphant Old says, “In more than twenty years as preacher at Geneva, Calvin must have preached through almost the entire Bible.”²³ His normal practice was to preach New Testament books on the Lord’s Day—except, at times, he preached the Psalms in the evening service—and Old Testament books during the week, except for holy week, when he preached through the Passion narrative.

With regard to his homiletical *style*, it is well known that Calvin adopted what has rightly been called the “Protestant plain style.” Calvin refused to embellish his sermons with rhetorical decorations. This was a matter of theological conviction. Dr. Old explains,

What surprises the modern reader of Calvin’s sermons is the simplicity of his sermons. We find no engaging introductions, no illustrative stories nor anecdotes, no quotations from great authors, no stirring conclusions. Although Calvin was one of the most literate men of his age and a master in the use of language, his sermons depend not at all on literary elegance. The forcefulness of his sermons is to be found in the clarity of his analysis of the text. Calvin seems to have no fear that the Scriptures will be boring or irrelevant unless the preacher spices them up. In fact, Calvin seems to have a horror of decorating the Word of God. Scripture does not need to be painted with artists’ colors! So confident is the reformer that God will make his Word alive in the hearts of his people, that Calvin simply explains the text and draws out its implication. The simplicity and directness of his style is based in his confidence that what he is preaching is indeed the Word of God. This simplicity is an expression of reverence.²⁴

This is all the more significant when one realizes that Calvin was a master of classical rheto-

23 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 76.

24 Ibid.

ric. Being educated in the schools of Christian humanism, he was greatly influenced by Cicero and Quintilian. His first published book was a commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*, in which he “shows himself acquainted with the whole of Greek and Latin classical literature, citing 155 Latin authors and twenty-two Greek, and citing them with understanding.”²⁵

Calvin may have even taken the name of his great theological work, the *Institutes* from Quintilian’s *Institutes of Oratory*. Lester De Koster remarked that the Christian humanists regarded the Ciceronian style as the equivalent of Christian beatitude.²⁶

“Cicero had distinguished among three types of style: the plain, the intermediate and the sublime. Calvin deliberately eschewed the use of the sublime and even of the intermediate styles and restricted himself severely to the plain” style.²⁷ According to Doumergue, Calvin’s language is “simple, more than simple, familiar, popular.... It is the tone, the true tone of the people.”²⁸

This is important for Calvin, and it is something that Reformed ministers ought to take seriously, but looking at Calvin’s homiletical *activity* or *style* is surely not where we should spend most of our time. Parker laid the foundation for the study of Calvin’s preaching, but unfortunately, it seems that few have advanced beyond it. If we are going to find something that constitutes a legacy in preaching, then we really need to look to something more substantive, something more significant than Calvin’s preaching *activity* or *style*. To discover Calvin’s homiletical legacy, we must, first of all, examine his understanding of preaching as divine worship.

25 Allan Menzies, *A Study of Calvin: and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan, 1918); cf. Lester De Koster, *Light for the City: Calvin’s Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 28.

26 Lester De Koster (1964), 296.

27 Ibid., 299.

28 Doumergue (1909), 10–11.

Preaching as Divine Worship

One of the primary concerns of the Reformers was to restore the reading and the preaching of the Scriptures to a central place in the worship of the Christian Church. Thus, “for the twelve thousand people of Geneva, there were fifteen services with sermon every week,” distributed throughout the three parishes of Geneva.²⁹

In the Reformation, “preaching occupied a position which it had not held since” the ancient Church.³⁰ With Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century and his mystagogical catechesis and his plan to revitalize the city of Jerusalem by turning it into a pilgrimage center, the worship of the Church took a tremendous turn toward ceremonialism.³¹ More and more, the reading and the preaching of Scripture in the worship of the Church receded into the background. Ceremonialism won the day, and preaching suffered greatly.

In the Middle Ages, more and more frequently, public worship omitted even the simplest kind of sermon.³² There were great preachers in the middle ages such as Bernard of Clairvaux, and there were efforts to revive preaching such as the preaching orders of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, but it is not until the Reformation that preaching was restored to its central place in the worship of the Christian Church.

Calvin sums up the popular attitude toward preaching among the papists when he says, “The pope, his bishops and all his vermin” are busy with blessing organs, baptizing bells, consecrating vestments and ornaments, but preaching? “That’s trivial stuff, they’ll not deign to touch it. That’s for the mendicants, the friars.”³³

29 James H. Nichols in Bratt (1973), 89.

30 T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London; Redhill: Lutterworth, 1947), 10.

31 For more on this subject, see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and the Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3–31.

32 Old, *Worship* (2002), 68.

33 Wright and Stay (2000), 232.

So, the Reformers sought to restore biblical preaching after the example of the apostles and the ancient Church. But it should be born in mind that “there is no credit due to Calvin in this recovery, for he was... a member of the second generation of Reformers, who entered into the work which the first generation had done.”³⁴

When Zwingli was called to Zurich in January of 1519, he began preaching through the Gospel of Matthew day after day, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, for a whole year.³⁵ This kind of systematic exposition of Scripture—the *lectio continua* or continuous reading—was patterned after the great preachers of the ancient Church. “Zwingli’s friend Johan Froeben, who at that time was Basel’s leading publisher, had sent him a copy of Chrysostom’s *lectio continua* sermons on Matthew shortly after they were off his presses.”³⁶

Adopting this systematic exposition used by the Church fathers and the homily form of the sermon, Zwingli restored the *lectio continua* to the worship of the Church. This was the very first liturgical reform of Protestantism. It is Zwingli’s great contribution to the Reformation.³⁷ “One by one the Christian humanist preachers of the Upper Rhineland began to follow his example.”³⁸ Of particular importance in terms of influence on Calvin are the Reformers of Strasbourg (Matthäus Zell, Wolfgang Capito, and Martin Bucer) and also John Oecolampadius, who won the city of Basel for the Reformation by preaching through Isaiah. Calvin closely followed the example of the Church fathers, with the same devotion to expository preaching and to the *lectio continua* that his Rhenish predecessors had.³⁹

34 Parker (1947), 20.

35 Old, *Worship* (2002), 71.

36 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and the Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 46.

37 *Ibid.*, 43–46.

38 *Ibid.*, 46.

39 Old, *Worship* (2002), 75.

Like the other Christian humanists, Calvin was greatly influenced by the Church fathers. His admiration of Augustine as a theologian is well known, but with regard to preaching, he was more influenced by Chrysostom. In fact, he set out to translate all of the homilies of Chrysostom into French, but he did not get very far with that project; he never actually made it past the preface.

Since Calvin rejected the Alexandrian school of exegesis in favor of the Antiochene school with its grammatical-historical approach, he thought that while Augustine was a better theologian, Chrysostom was a better exegete. John L. Thompson observes,

Calvin's recommendation of Chrysostom above all other patristic writers points directly to one of his hallmarks as an exegete, namely, his avowed commitment to the "literal" or "historical" sense of the text. While Calvin admits that Chrysostom's theology has its flaws, he lauds him above all for sticking in his interpretation with the plain meaning of Scripture and the simple meaning of its words (*simplici verborum sensu*). Calvin's position here is hardly new or unique, of course, for he was preceded by many other reformers who felt that the church had been badly misled by fanciful and capricious exegesis, particularly the so-called "spiritual" or allegorical exegesis of many patristic and medieval writers.⁴⁰

Now, in addition to his grammatical-historical exegesis, Calvin was also impressed by Chrysostom's commitment to a *contextual* exposition of Scripture as exemplified in his use of the *lectio continua*. Chrysostom wrote, "How do we find [Paul] employed at Thessalonica and Corinth, in Ephesus and in Rome itself? Did he not spend whole nights and days interpreting the Scriptures *in their order*?"⁴¹ By the phrase *in their order*,

40 John L. Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter," in McKim (2004), 63.

41 John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, trans. W. R. W. Stephens, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 4.7 (emphasis added).

Chrysostom means *lectio continua*.

It was this commitment to *contextual* preaching that impressed Calvin. When passages of Scripture, says Calvin, are seized on thoughtlessly, and the context is ignored, it should not surprise us that mistakes arise everywhere.⁴² Calvin saw this as one of the problems with the lectionary of the Christian year. It cut up the Bible into unrelated scraps. Dr. Old writes,

It imposed an arbitrary arrangement on Scripture. As Calvin saw it, the pericopes of the lectionary often separated a text from its natural context. The texts of Scripture should be heard within the total message of a particular biblical author. A lectionary could not help but encourage over the years a stereotyped interpretation.⁴³

Calvin declared, "We must not pick and cull the Scripture to please our own fancy," but we "must receive the whole without exception."⁴⁴ Again, commenting on Paul's example of preaching the whole counsel of God, Calvin writes,

What order must pastors then keep in teaching? First, let them not esteem at their pleasure what is profitable to be uttered and what to be omitted; but let them leave that to God alone to be ordered at his pleasure. So shall it come to pass that the inventions of men shall have none entrance into the Church of God. Again, mortal man shall not be so bold as to mangle the Scripture and to pull it in pieces, that he may diminish this or that at his pleasure, that he may obscure something and suppress many things; but shall deliver whatsoever

42 Cf. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 442 (Isaiah 14:12).

43 Old, *Worship* (2002), 75.

44 From Calvin's sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16, cited in LeRoy Nixon, *John Calvin: Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 52.

is revealed in the Scripture....⁴⁵

So, for Calvin, the *lectio continua* was not only to be preferred over a selected reading of Scripture, it was essential, for we have no right to pick and choose what we want to preach.

The story is well known, but perhaps it is worth repeating here. One could hardly give a presentation on Calvin's preaching without mentioning it. After Calvin was exiled from Geneva, and returned three years later, he resumed his exposition of Romans at the exact place where he left off without saying anything about his banishment. In a letter to William Farel, Calvin wrote,

When I preached to the people, everyone was very alert and expectant. But entirely omitting any mention of those matters which they all expected with certainty to hear...I took up the exposition where I had stopped – by which I indicated that I had interrupted my office of preaching for the time rather than that I had given it up entirely.⁴⁶

So, we see that Calvin—like the other Reformers—sought to restore the *contextual* preaching of Scripture to its central place in the worship of the Church. And this leads us to the main point that I want to emphasize. For Calvin, “the whole purpose of preaching is to glorify God, to worship him in Spirit and in truth.”⁴⁷

He sees it as worship every bit as much as the celebration of the sacraments and every bit as much as the service of prayer. Calvin thought of the reading and preaching of Scripture in the midst of the assembly of God's people as

45 John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 251 (see Acts 20:26). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Calvin's commentaries are taken from this series.

46 Cited in Parker (1947), 34.

47 Hughes Oliphant Old, “Preaching as Worship in the Pulpit of John Calvin” (paper given at Calvin500 in Geneva, Switzerland, July, 2009), 29. Cf. Old, *Preaching* (2002), 132ff.

worship and worship at its most profound.⁴⁸

Furthermore, preaching is not an act of worship on the part of the minister alone but on the part of the whole congregation when it hears the Word and receives it in faith and love. Hearing “the Word of God is of the essence of worship.”⁴⁹ Dr. Old sums up Calvin's thought:

[It] is not only the preaching of the Word, but the receiving of the preached Word, which is worship. The whole congregation worships God by receiving his Word with humility and obedience. The ministry of the Word is not a solo sport, like a game of solitaire or playing tennis against the garage door. Preaching both honors God and builds up the Church. It is, as prayer, and in fact as all worship, the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ to the glory of the Father.⁵⁰

Again he writes,

The more Augustinian theology of the Reformers brought them to understand worship not as a human work but as a divine work. The reading, the preaching and the hearing of the Word was the work not of the minister or of the congregation or even of the Church as a whole, as it was the work of the Holy Spirit. That being the case, then, the minister of the Word was a listener just as much as the believing congregation.⁵¹

The doxological nature and goal of preaching is clearly underscored by the fact that Calvin ended “virtually every one of his thousands of sermons [with these words] ‘And now let us bow down before the majesty of our gra-

48 Ibid., 2.

49 Ibid., 12.

50 Ibid., 17.

51 Old, *Preaching* (2002), 76.

cious God. . . .”⁵² On this point, Sinclair Ferguson remarks that Calvin’s preaching “made God great and man bow down. By contrast, much modern preaching seems to have as its goal making man feel great, even if God Himself has to bow down.”⁵³

There is much more that could be said about the subject of preaching as worship in Calvin’s pulpit, but we must move on to the next point in examining Calvin’s homiletical legacy, namely, the real presence of Christ in preaching.⁵⁴

The Kerygmatic Real Presence of Christ

Richard Stauffer observes that for Calvin, preaching is not only a moment of worship, not only a task of the Church, but also something of a divine epiphany. In preaching, the Holy Spirit uses the words of the preacher as an occasion for the *presence* of God in grace and mercy.⁵⁵ Calvin says, “When the gospel is proclaimed to us, it is a manifestation of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶

This concept of Christ’s living presence through the preached Word is at the very heart of Calvin’s gospel.⁵⁷ The preaching of the Gospel not only conveys information about Christ, but it conveys Christ himself.⁵⁸ Christ is present in the midst

52 Sinclair Ferguson, “Preaching to the Heart,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002), 197.

53 Ibid.

54 For more on the subject, see Hughes Old’s Calvin500 Paper, “Preaching as Worship in the Pulpit of John Calvin” (July, 2009).

55 Cited in John H. Leith, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in the Light of Recent Research,” in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 211.

56 John Calvin, *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*, trans. LeRoy Nixon (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1980), 14 (sermon on 1 John 1:1–5).

57 Cf. B.A. Gerrish, “John Calvin and the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” *McCormick Quarterly* 22 (1969): 92.

58 Cf. Dawn DeVries, *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 17.

of the worshipping assembly clothed in his Gospel.⁵⁹

There are several angles from which we may examine this concept. We will limit ourselves to three. First, Calvin asserts that the minister is the mouth of God.

The word *goeth out of the mouth* of God in such a manner that it likewise “goeth out of the mouth” of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven, but employs men as his instruments....⁶⁰

When a man climbs up into the pulpit, is it so that he may be seen from afar and that he may have a higher place than the rest? No, no! But so that God may speak to us by the mouth of man and be so gracious to us to show himself here among us and will have a mortal man to be his messenger.⁶¹

Thus, for Calvin, the voice of God is heard in the mouth of the minister. Therefore, the preaching of the Word *is* the Word of God. According to T. H. L. Parker, this is a claim advanced in the sermons times without number. There cannot be many sermons where it is not asserted explicitly or at the least implied.⁶²

Now, this raises the question, “In what sense did Calvin understand preaching to be the Word of God?” Mark Beach rightly notes that, for Calvin, there is a distinction between the Word of God as inspired and inscripturated and the exposition of that Word.

When the preacher preaches, his words are not verbally inspired; his message is not infallible or inerrant. In fact, the preacher’s mes-

59 Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 3.2.6.

60 Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah* 55:11.

61 Jean Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 269. Quotations from this work are given in modern English.

62 Parker (1992), 41.

sage may have a number of errors and flaws or other shortcomings. That does not mean, however, that the voice of Christ does not come through or that Christ does not admonish his people in that sermon or instruct them or console them.⁶³

[Furthermore,] To call preaching the voice of Christ does not mean that God's Word inscripturated is incomplete or that Christ is adding new chapters to the Bible through the Sunday sermon. God's inscripturated Word is complete. Everything we need to know for our salvation has been given to us. However, although God's *revelation* is complete, the *administration* of that message written in the Bible is not complete. That is why Christ instituted preaching.⁶⁴

For Calvin, the preached Word *is* the Word of God because it is a transmission of the Word as inspired and inscripturated. It is the Word of God in a *derivative* sense, but this does not make it any less the Word of God in an *actual* sense.⁶⁵

The message of Scripture is the Word of God whether or not it comes from the lips of an inspired apostle or a non-inspired, post-apostolic minister. But in the post-apostolic era, preaching “‘borrows’ its status of ‘Word of God’ from Scripture.”⁶⁶ The difference between apostolic and post-apostolic preaching is in the mode by which the message is mediated. The apostles preached the Word in a non-derivative fashion, but their successors do so only in a derivative fashion. The apostles spoke directly from God to the people. We, however, must take the text of Scripture and expound it for God's people.

But the second-hand nature of post-apostolic

63 Mark Beach, “The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel: Luther and Calvin on the Nature of Preaching,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 125.

64 *Ibid.*, 126.

65 Parker (1947), 50.

66 Parker (1992), 23.

preaching does not alter the nature of the Gospel as God's Word. Of course, “the all important factor,” says Parker, “is not whether the preacher has received the message directly from its giver or received it at second hand, but whether the message which reaches the recipient shall be the message originally given.”⁶⁷ Calvin explains,

[This is] the difference between the apostles and their successors: the former were sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God; but the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scriptures.⁶⁸

According to Calvin, God reveals himself by accommodation. He accommodates himself to human capacity. He stoops down, as Calvin says, and clothes himself in human form, which means, primarily, human words and, ultimately, a human being, the incarnate Christ.⁶⁹

What we want to point out here is that this concept of accommodation is also used by Calvin to explain what happens in the act of preaching. Ronald Wallace writes, “The preaching of the Word by a minister is the gracious form behind which God in coming near to men *veils* that in himself which man cannot bear to behold directly.”⁷⁰ Calvin says, “God has graciously condescended to stoop down to us, [so] let us not be ashamed to give this honor to [the preached] Word and [to the] Sacraments – to behold [God] there face to face.”⁷¹

Again, he says, Christ, “the living image of God, is evidently set before our eyes in the mirror

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Institutes*, 4.8.9.

69 See Ford Lewis Battles, “God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity,” *Interpretation* 31 [1977]: 38.

70 Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 84.

71 *Ibid.*, 26. Cf. *Commentary on Haggai* 1:12.

of the gospel!”⁷² Calvin frequently employs this mirror analogy to describe how we behold the face of Christ and of God in preaching.⁷³ Commenting on 1 Corinthians 13:12, he writes,

[There can be no doubt that Paul’s mirror metaphor refers to] the ministry of the word [and Sacrament]...For God, who is otherwise invisible, has appointed these means for discovering himself to us...The ministry of the word, I say, is like a looking-glass. For the angels have no need of preaching, or other inferior helps, nor of sacraments, for they enjoy a vision of God of another kind; and God does not give them a view of his face merely in a mirror, but openly manifests himself as present with them. We, who have not as yet reached that great height, behold the image of God as it is presented before us in the word, in the sacraments, and...in the whole of the service of the Church...we walk by faith, not by sight. Our faith, therefore, at present beholds God as absent. How so? Because it sees not his face, but rests satisfied with the image in the mirror.⁷⁴

Another angle from which we may examine the concept of the presence of Christ in preaching is by looking at the role of the Holy Spirit. And we could not very well do justice to Calvin’s theology of preaching without giving much attention to the Holy Spirit.

Christ is present in the preached Word by the agency of the Spirit. The preaching of the Word is not merely a human work; it is a work of the Spirit. Preaching has a dual nature; it is a divine-human activity. Calvin says, “we see how God works by the Word which is preached to us, that it is not a voice which only sounds in the air and then vanishes; but God adds to it the power of His Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵

72 Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* 32:30.

73 See Wallace (1957) 24ff.; cf. Davis (2008), 118ff.

74 Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 13:12.

75 Cited in Parker (1947), 55.

Again, he says,

For first, the Lord teaches and instructs us by his word. Secondly, he confirms it by the sacraments. Finally, he illumines our minds by the light of the Holy Spirit and opens our hearts for the Word and sacraments to enter in, which would otherwise only strike our ears and appear before our eyes, but not at all affect us within.⁷⁶

Preaching, therefore, is powerless for salvation without the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that preaching is ever ineffectual. On the contrary, preaching is never in vain.⁷⁷ But without the Spirit, it cannot produce any *saving* effects. Although Calvin embraces the distinction between the *Verbum Dei externum* and the *Verbum Dei internum*, he rejects the notion of the Anabaptists that the *external* Word is powerless.

For delirious and even dangerous are those notions, that though the internal word is efficacious, yet that which proceeds from the mouth of man is lifeless and destitute of all power.⁷⁸

So, for Calvin, preaching has a dual nature. God condescends to joins himself to the ministers of the Gospel and “...shows that he uses them as his hands and his instruments.”⁷⁹ In the act of preaching, the minister is a co-laborer with God.⁸⁰ It is a divine-human activity, and Calvin consistently maintains this teaching without (on the one hand) blurring the distinction between the work of God and the work of man and (on the other hand) without separating the two. As John Leith explains,

76 *Institutes*, 4.14.8.

77 “Whether the outcome be life or death, [the Word] is never preached in vain;” Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 2:15; cf. his comments on Isaiah 6:10; 34:16; 55:11 and Hebrews 4:12.

78 Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews* 4:12.

79 Cited in Parker (1992), 28.

80 Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 3:9; cf. *Commentary on Malachi* 4:6 and *Institutes*, 4.1.6.

enabled him both to understand preaching as a very human work and to understand it as the work of God. . . . From one perspective the human work of the sermon is critically important. The sermon's fidelity to scripture, the skill of the syntax and rhetoric, the liveliness of the delivery, are of a fundamental importance that ought not to be minimized. From another perspective a sermon is a work of the Spirit of God, which may make a "poor" sermon the occasion of God's presence and a brilliant sermon barren of [redemptive] power. Calvin unites the work of God and the work of man in the sacrament and in preaching without separation, without change, and without confusion.⁸¹

There is another angle from which we may examine the concept of the presence of Christ in preaching, namely, by comparing it with the presence of Christ in the sacrament. Standing in the Augustinian tradition, which defines a sacrament as a visible Word, Calvin posits the closest possible connection between Word and sacrament. The sacraments are "joined to [the Word] as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing" the promises of the Gospel.⁸² The sacraments cannot exist apart from the Word. The Word "throws life into the sacraments."⁸³

Furthermore, the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to "offer and set forth Christ to us and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."⁸⁴ Calvin's explicit rejection of a memorialistic understanding of the Lord's Supper and his insistence on the real presence of Christ is well known, but not many have made the *necessary* connection between the eucharistic presence of Christ and, what Dr. Old has called, the kerygmatic

ic real presence of Christ in the Word.⁸⁵

I say this is a *necessary* connection because there can be no eucharistic presence of Christ apart from his kerygmatic presence. This is one reason why the sacrament cannot exist apart from the Word. The eucharistic presence of Christ is grounded in his kerygmatic presence. In both cases, Christ is really present by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Christ is near, says Calvin, "and exhibits himself to us, when the voice of the gospel cries aloud; and we do not need to seek far, or to make long circuits, as unbelievers do; for he exhibits himself [and by *exhibits*, he means nothing less than *gives*] to us in his word, that we, on our part, may draw near to him."⁸⁶

The main point to remember here is that in the same way that Christ is present in the eucharist, he is also present in the preached Word. What is received in the sacrament is the same thing that is received in the Word. And just as Calvin denies that the sacrament is a bare sign, so too, the preached Word is never void of the reality it proclaims. The Word is efficacious; it gives what it declares, and that is nothing less than Christ himself, the whole Christ, the living Christ and all his saving benefits with him. In the Word, we receive the same Christ that we receive in the sacraments. Robert Bruce expressed the point perfectly when he said,

[We] do not get a different or better Christ at the supper than we get in the preaching of the Word; but because the supper-sign is added to the Word preached by God's grace and the Spirit's ministry, we may get the same Christ better.⁸⁷

Thomas J. Davis has set forth the thesis that just as Calvin's doctrine of the real eucharistic presence of Christ has largely been unappreciated or even rejected by his successors, so too his

81 John Leith in George (1990), 211–212.

82 *Institutes*, 4.14.3.

83 Calvin, *Commentary on Ezekiel 2:3*.

84 *Institutes*, 4.14.17.

85 Old, *Preaching* (2002), 133.

86 Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah 55:6*.

87 Wright and Stay (2000), 216.

doctrine of the real presence of Christ in preaching has been virtually forgotten.⁸⁸ This is certainly something worth considering for those of us who claim to be Calvin’s spiritual heirs.

Union and Communion with Christ through Preaching

The third topic with regard to Calvin’s homiletical legacy is union and communion with Christ through preaching. For Calvin, the believer’s union with Christ is established and nourished through the preaching of the Word. Calvin’s entire soteriology is based on the notion of faith-union with Christ that is effected by the work of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the Word.⁸⁹

Calvin underscores the importance of union with Christ in that famous passage from the *Institutes*, “As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”⁹⁰ Calvin adds that this necessary union with Christ is brought about by “the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.” “The Holy Spirit,” he says, “is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”⁹¹

Now, what does this have to do with preaching? The preaching of the Word is the *instrument* through which union with Christ is effected by the Spirit.⁹² The gospel is not merely an invitation to fellowship with Christ; it is a vehicle by which Christ is communicated to us or, to put it another way, “the effective means by which communion

with Christ is brought about.”⁹³ Calvin says,

We ought...to understand that preaching is an instrument for effecting the salvation of the faithful, and though it can do nothing without the Spirit of God, yet through his inward operation it produces the most powerful effects.⁹⁴

Again, he writes, God has “ordained his Word as the instrument by which Jesus Christ, with all his graces, is dispensed to us.”⁹⁵

The Holy Spirit establishes this union with Christ by working faith in the hearts of the elect. And for Calvin, there is a permanent relationship between faith and the Word; one could not separate them any more than one could separate the rays of the sun from the sun itself.⁹⁶ “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word” (Romans 10:17). Calvin says,

[T]his is a remarkable passage with regard to the efficacy of preaching, for he [declares that by preaching] faith is produced. He had indeed before declared, that of itself [preaching] is of no avail, but that when it pleases the Lord to work, it becomes the instrument of his power.⁹⁷

Preaching is the mother, which conceives and brings forth faith.⁹⁸ Take away the preaching of the gospel, and no faith will remain.⁹⁹

The closest thing we have from Calvin to a

.....

93 Ibid., 84.

94 Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* 11:14.

95 Jean Calvin, “Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” in *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2:165–166.

96 *Institutes*, 3.2.6.

97 Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* 10:17.

98 Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 13:5.

99 Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* 16:31.

88 See Thomas J. Davis, “Preaching and Presence: Constructing Calvin’s Homiletical Legacy,” in *The Legacy of John Calvin*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000). Cf. Randall Zachman’s response in the same work.

89 Cf. DeVries (1996), 9.

90 *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

91 Ibid.

92 Cf. B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: the Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 76ff.

treatise on preaching is his “Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments.”¹⁰⁰ In this document, we find the clearest statement regarding union and communion with Christ through preaching.

The end of the whole Gospel ministry is that God . . . communicate Christ to us who are disunited by sin and hence ruined, that we may from him enjoy eternal life; that in a word all heavenly treasures be so applied to us that they be no less ours than Christ’s himself.

We believe this communication to be mystical, and incomprehensible to human reason, and Spiritual, since it is effected by the Holy Spirit [by whom] he joins us to Christ our Head, not in an imaginary way, but most powerfully and truly, so that we become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, and from his vivifying flesh he transfuses eternal life into us.

To effect this union, the Holy Spirit uses a double instrument, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

When we say that the Holy Spirit uses an external minister as instrument, we mean this: both in the preaching of the Word and in the use of the sacraments, there are two ministers, who have distinct offices. The external minister administers the vocal word, and the sacred signs which are external, earthly and fallible. But the internal minister, who is the Holy Spirit, freely works internally, while by his secret virtue he effects in the hearts of whomsoever he will their union with Christ through one faith. This union is a thing internal, heavenly and indestructible.

In the preaching of the Word, the external minister holds forth the vocal word, and it is received by the ears. The internal minister, the Holy Spirit, truly communicates the thing proclaimed through the Word, that is Christ. . . . so that it is not necessary that Christ or for

100 Jean Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 170–77. Despite the questions concerning the authenticity of this document, there are several good reasons for attributing it to Calvin as does Beza; see Reid’s introduction, p. 170.

that matter his Word be received through the organs of the body, but the Holy Spirit effects this union by his secret virtue, by creating faith in us, by which he makes us living members of Christ, true God and true man.¹⁰¹

The Present Reign of Christ through Preaching

For Calvin, preaching is of the very essence of the kingdom of God; indeed, the kingdom “consisteth in the preaching of the gospel.”¹⁰² Calvin goes so far as to call the pulpit “the throne of God” and the judgment seat of Christ from which he judges the world.¹⁰³

As the exalted Son of David, our Lord Jesus exercises his royal dominion mediately, through the preaching of the Word. Calvin says Christ calls himself Lord and King of heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18) because when he draws men to obedience by the preaching of the Gospel, he is establishing the throne of his kingdom on earth.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, “Christ does not otherwise rule among us than by the doctrine of his gospel.”¹⁰⁵ He exercises and administers his kingly authority by his Word alone.¹⁰⁶

Describing the messianic reign of the Son of David, Isaiah prophesied that Christ would strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips, he would kill the wicked (Isaiah 11:4). Calvin comments,

101 Citations are from *ibid.*, 171–173.

102 Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* 1:8. On the relationship between the reign of Christ and preaching, see Wallace (1957), 85ff. Cf. Lester De Koster’s remark, “Calvin aptly profiles how the ruling Lord exercises his authority: the pulpit as Throne of the Christ in the midst of his City!” in Lester De Koster (2004), 19.

103 Cited in Parker (1992), 26; see Calvin, *Commentary on John* 16:8.

104 Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew* 28:18.

105 Calvin, *Commentary on Micah* 4:2. Cf. his *Commentary on Psalms* 96:10.

106 *Institutes*, 4.3.1.

The Prophet here extols the efficacy of the word, which is Christ's royal scepter. . . . The Prophet does not now send us to secret revelations, that Christ may reign in us, but openly recommends the outward preaching of doctrine, and shows that the gospel serves the purpose of a scepter in the hand of Christ, so far as it is preached, and so far as it is oral... otherwise it would have been to no purpose to mention the mouth and the lips. Hence it follows that all those who reject the outward preaching of the gospel shake off this scepter, as far as lies in their power, or pull it out of the hand of Christ. . . . Here we must again call to remembrance what is the nature of Christ's kingdom. As he does not wear a golden crown or employ earthly armor, so he does not rule over the world by the power of arms, or gain authority by gaudy and ostentatious display, or constrain his people by terror and dread; but the doctrine of the gospel is his royal banner, which assembles believers under his dominion. Wherever, therefore, the doctrine of the Gospel is preached in purity, there we are certain that Christ reigns; and where it is rejected, his government is also set aside.¹⁰⁷

Christ, therefore, has been appointed by the Father "not to rule after the manner of princes, by the force of arms . . . but his whole authority consists in doctrine, in the preaching of which he wishes to be sought and acknowledged; for nowhere else will he be found."¹⁰⁸ "Whereas David ruled over his earthly kingdom by a golden scepter, Christ's heavenly kingdom is presided over by the scepter of the preached gospel."¹⁰⁹ It is through preaching, therefore, that Christ executes the office of a King; he advances his kingdom, subdues us to himself, rules, governs and defends us, restrains and conquers all his and our enemies and takes vengeance on all those who do not know

¹⁰⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah* 11:4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 49:2. Cf. his *Commentary on Hosea* 1:11.

¹⁰⁹ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 132.

God and obey the gospel.¹¹⁰

It is in this context that Calvin understands the power of the keys of the kingdom. The keys have a double function: to loose and to bind, to remit and to retain (Matthew 16:19, John 20:23).

But when it is a question of the keys, we must always beware lest we dream up some power separate from the preaching of the gospel.... [A]ny right of binding or loosing which Christ conferred upon his church is bound to the Word. This is especially true in the ministry of the keys, whose entire power rests in the fact that, through those whom the Lord had ordained, the grace of the gospel is publicly and privately sealed in the hearts of the believers. This can come about only through preaching.¹¹¹

Thus, when Christ promised the apostles that they would be given the keys of the kingdom and would be able to bind and loose and to remit or retain sins, "he was referring to the effect their preaching of the Word of God was to have on its hearers."¹¹²

The comparison of the keys is very properly applied to the office of [preaching, for] there is no other way in which the gate of life is opened to us than by the word of God; and hence it follows that the key is placed, as it were, in the hands of the ministers of the word.... [And] as there are many, who not only are guilty of wickedly rejecting the deliverance that is offered them, but by their obstinacy bring down on themselves a heavier judgment, the power and authority to bind is likewise granted to ministers of the Gospel.¹¹³

T. H. L. Parker sums up Calvin's thought,

¹¹⁰ Larger Catechism 45.

¹¹¹ *Institutes*, 3.4.14.

¹¹² Wallace (1998), 132–133.

¹¹³ Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew* 16:19.

The “legate of Christ” is the preacher. The “mandate of reconciliation” is the Gospel. The absolution is declared by the preaching of the Gospel. He that believes receives forgiveness; he that refuses forgiveness has his sin still “retained” to him. Because the Gospel preached is God’s Word, this is the verdict of God himself from, so to say, his judgment seat the pulpit.¹¹⁴

It is also in this concept of the present reign of Christ through preaching that Calvin finds the motive for missions.¹¹⁵ “The world is to be formed, so far as may be, into the kingdom of Christ,” through the proclamation of the gospel to the nations.¹¹⁶

When our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, he acquired possession of the whole world; and his kingdom was extended from one end of it to the other, especially with the proclamation of the Gospel. . . . God has consecrated the entire earth through the precious blood of his Son to the end that we may inhabit it and live under his reign.¹¹⁷

It was through the preaching of the Word by Jesus himself that the kingdom was inaugurated (Mark 1:14-15), and after his ascension, Jesus continues this ministry through the apostles as his Spirit-empowered agents. When the apostles asked the risen Christ, “Lord, is now the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel,” they misunderstood the true nature of the kingdom.¹¹⁸ They were still thinking of an earthly, geo-political kingdom,

114 Parker (1992), 43.

115 For Calvin’s view of missions, see the overview and bibliography in Lester De Koster (1964), 365ff. See also Philip E. Hughes, “John Calvin: Director of Missions,” and R. Pierce Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” in Bratt (1973), 40–73.

116 Lester De Koster (1964), 366.

117 From sermon no. 45 on Deuteronomy, cited in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 192.

118 “There are as many errors in this question as words,” says Calvin; *Commentary on Acts* 1:6.

confined ethnically to the Jews and geographically to Palestine. “They dream,” says Calvin, “of an earthly kingdom, which should flow with riches, with dainties, with external peace, and with such like good things. . . .”¹¹⁹

But, “the nature of the kingdom is of another sort than they judged it to have been.”¹²⁰ It is a Spiritual, heavenly kingdom; it is international in scope, encompassing all nations. And the means through which it is established and extended is the preaching of the gospel. Jesus tells the apostles that it is through their Spirit-empowered preaching that he will authoritatively exercise his rule as King and advance his kingdom throughout the world (Acts 1:8). Thus, “Christ reigns whenever he subdues the world to himself by the preaching of the gospel.”¹²¹

No set limits are allotted to them, but the whole earth is assigned to them to bring into obedience to Christ, in order that by spreading the gospel wherever they can among the nations, they may raise up his Kingdom everywhere.¹²²

When Jesus “causes His Gospel to be preached in a country, it is as if He said, ‘I want to rule over you and be your King.’”¹²³ Even though the era of the apostles has ended, this worldwide effort to extend the kingdom of Christ through the preaching of the gospel continues. According to Calvin, the so-called Great Commission

was not spoken to the apostles alone; for the Lord promises his assistance not for a single age only, but even to the end of the world. . . . In like manner, experience clearly shows in the present day, that the operations of Christ

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid., 1:8.

121 Calvin on Acts 1:8 as cited in Wallace (1957), 86.

122 *Institutes*, 4.3.4.

123 Calvin’s sermon on Acts 1:1–4 as cited in Wallace (1957), 87.

are carried on wonderfully in a secret manner, so that the gospel surmounts innumerable obstacles.¹²⁴

The ministry of the Word had transformed Geneva into “the most perfect school of Christ, which has been seen on earth since the days of the apostles,”¹²⁵ and Calvin longed to see the gospel have the same effect in other parts of the world. Although Calvin lived “before the era of self-conscious world evangelism,” Philip E. Hughes argues that Calvin may rightly be seen as a “Director of Missions.”¹²⁶ It is well known that in the generations following Calvin, the Reformed Church excelled in missions, and this may rightly be traced back to Calvin’s theology of preaching, particularly, his doctrine of the present reign of Christ through preaching.¹²⁷ This doctrine, therefore, is part of Calvin’s homiletical legacy.

Having examined Calvin’s theology of preaching under these headings (preaching as divine worship, the real kerygmatic presence of Christ, union and communion with Christ through preaching, and the present reign of Christ through preaching), it should not surprise us to hear Calvin speak so highly of the ministry of the Word. The preaching of the Word is so critical to Christianity that:

If the gospel be not preached, Jesus Christ is, as it were, [is still] buried.¹²⁸

If there be no preaching, the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ will come to nothing;

124 Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew 28:20*.

125 This was how John Knox described Geneva; cited in Bratt (1973), 44.

126 Ibid., 40–54. Hughes notes that in 1556, missionaries were sent from Geneva to Brazil, and although this missionary project was unsuccessful, it testifies “strikingly to the far-reaching vision Calvin and his colleagues in Geneva had of their missionary task.” Ibid., 48.

127 See Henry H. Meeter, “Why Calvinism Excels in Missions,” in *Banner* 76 (February 7, 1941): 127ff.

128 Jean Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness: And Other Selected Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 99.

the world will not know him to be the Redeemer of the world; it will avail us nothing at all, that he was delivered to death for us.¹²⁹

Of what advantage would it be to us that the Son of God had suffered death and risen again the third day [if there be no preaching]?¹³⁰

Near the end of his life, when his poor health prevented his free movement, Calvin asked to be carried to St Peter’s in a chair in order to carry out his ministerial duties.¹³¹ On February 6, 1564, he preached his last sermon. After that, he held on “for some months, growing slowly weaker, until he died in the evening of May 27. ‘Behold as in an instant,’ mourned Beza, ‘how that very day the sun did set, and the great light that was in the world for the building of the Church of God, was taken into heaven.’”¹³²

Calvin was truly, above all else, a servant of the Word of God.

[Calvin] saw himself to be the servant of the Word. God had called him to be such a servant, and he devoted all his energies to be faithful in that service.... John Calvin had such a strong sense of standing under the authority of Scripture that it kindled the devotion of a whole generation of preachers.¹³³

And may God graciously grant his Church a new generation of servants of the Word of God! ©

Glen J. Clary is pastor of Immanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in West Collingswood, New Jersey.

129 Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus*, 951.

130 Ibid., sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9–10.

131 Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (England: Evangelical Press, 1997) 101. Cf. Charles Washington Baird’s romanticized account of Calvin’s last communion service in *Eutaxia: Or, the Presbyterian Liturgies* (New York: M. W. Dodd Publisher, 1855), 43ff.

132 Parker (1947), 44. Beza (1997), 118.

133 Old, *Preaching* (2002), 131.

Servant Rest

Sabbaticals for Pastors

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2009¹

by David VanDrunen

Sabbaticals are a foreign idea to most people who are not professors, and thus many congregations and sessions may never have thought about granting a sabbatical to their pastor. This present article is designed to encourage congregations and sessions to do just that. Sabbaticals can be a healthy and productive means for ministers to become better students of God's Word and thus to become better pastors. By permitting a pastor time for focused study and learning, sabbaticals can benefit not only the pastor himself, but more importantly the congregation that he serves and the broader church.

Because the concept of a sabbatical is easily misunderstood, I first clarify what a sabbatical is and is not supposed to be. Then I discuss why it is appropriate to grant sabbaticals to pastors and offer suggestions as to how pastors might use their sabbatical time fruitfully. Finally I present some reflections on how churches might cope with logistical difficulties that sabbaticals raise, such as, bearing the financial costs and meeting the pastoral needs of the congregation while the pastor is away.

Sabbaticals: What They Are and What They Aren't

The notion of sabbaticals for pastors may immediately raise questions about why ministers should enjoy a benefit that most other people do

not. Yes, most pastors work hard and face plenty of stressful situations, but many other people in their congregations also work long hours and face constant stress on the job. Why should a congregation consider giving its pastor a sabbatical when the other hard-working people in the church would never dream of receiving one from their employers?

That is a good question, and I believe that the initial answer is this: pastor sabbaticals should *not* be thought of as a time to rest. Sabbaticals are not vacations with an exalted name. If a congregation believes that its pastor is overworked, then it should lighten his pastoral responsibilities. Sabbaticals should be times of work—but a different kind of work from usual. Sabbaticals are periods in which a person interrupts his ordinary routine in order to engage in focused study and learning, for the purpose of gaining knowledge and skill that will make him better at his labor and will benefit the people for whom he works. I would hasten to add that taking such a sabbatical periodically may have the side benefit of alleviating stress and avoiding burnout, since often a change of pace itself can be rejuvenating. But that is not a sabbatical's primary purpose.

Sabbaticals are most often associated with those who serve as professors at schools of higher learning. While sabbaticals could potentially be of benefit to people in many other occupations, there are good reasons why they are particularly appropriate for professors. In order to fulfill their responsibilities to teach at an advanced level and to publish material that makes a contribution to current scholarship, professors must spend a lot of time reading and researching. Maintaining expertise in an academic discipline and gaining mastery in a particular field of research requires focused periods of study. In the midst of their ordinary routine of teaching, mentoring students, and fulfilling committee assignments, it can be difficult for professors to set aside adequate time for this focused study, and over a stretch of time this can cause professors to fall behind in their learning, to the detriment of their teaching and writing. For this reason, many colleges, universities, and seminaries have sab-

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=152.

batical programs in which professors, often for a semester, are relieved of ordinary classroom and committee responsibilities so that they can devote their time to reading and research. When professors are diligent and use their sabbatical time well, they should be better teachers when they return and thus their *students* and *institutions* benefit.

Why Sabbaticals for Pastors?

Pastors are not professors, but many of the same principles that make sabbaticals beneficial for professors also make them beneficial for pastors. In the Reformed tradition we have embraced the ideal of the *learned* pastor. The OPC, reflecting this tradition, continues to require—with occasional exceptions—its ministerial candidates to earn a bachelor's degree and then a master of divinity degree from a seminary. It expects a candidate for ordination to have gained competency in Greek, Hebrew, biblical exegesis, systematic theology, church history, and apologetics. In other words, we do not simply take the most pious man in the congregation and make him the pastor, nor are we satisfied with someone who has memorized many Bible verses or catechism answers. We want pastors who are generally well-educated and specifically, in J. Gresham Machen's words, *experts* in the Bible. Before an OPC minister gets into the pulpit, he should have studied and researched the passage that he is going to preach. Before he counsels a young church member who is struggling through Religion 101 at the community college, he must understand what higher criticism of Scripture is, what its presuppositions are, and how to respond to it intelligently. Before he gets up to speak at presbytery when charges of theological error are brought against one of his ministerial colleagues, he must be well-acquainted with the doctrine at issue, with the relevant biblical texts, and with the systematic implications of erring on this doctrine. Zeal and piety are requirements for the ministry, but without knowledge and learning to accompany them a pastor is ill-equipped for his work.

To be a learned pastor, furthermore, requires *ongoing* study. Even the best seminary education cannot come close to teaching someone all that

there is to know about Scripture and theology. And what a person does learn in seminary grows dull if it is not cultivated. In addition, there are constantly new things to be learned. Biblical scholarship advances, theological debates change, different challenges to the Christian faith emerge. The man who does not stay current will find himself disadvantaged as he confronts the various challenges of the pastoral ministry.

But it can be very difficult for pastors to find adequate time to engage in the kind of reading and study that enables them to fulfill the pastoral ideal described in the preceding paragraphs. Ironically, the demands that Reformed churches tend to put on pastors can exacerbate this problem. Most OPC congregations meet for worship twice on the Lord's Day, and hence expect not one but two sermons each week that faithfully and insightfully expound a text of Scripture. Plus, the pastor may well be teaching Sunday school, catechism, and/or Bible study classes. OPC pastors are also expected to be industrious churchmen at the broader level, participating in meetings and serving on committees of the presbytery and General Assembly. There is often a great deal of material to prepare for preaching, teaching, and reports of various kinds, not to mention the frequent counseling and visiting responsibilities that a pastor must be generally ready to handle. Either pastors must be given sufficient time to study in preparation for these tasks or they should not be expected to pursue all of them. I believe that pastors should indeed be engaged in all of these tasks, so the acute question is how to ensure that they do so in a learned way.

Even pastors who try to be diligent in keeping up with their studies often find themselves with little time for reading beyond basic preparation for the next immediate responsibility. When two sermons and an adult Sunday school class are looming a few days ahead, trying to get some reading done for those three things needs to have first priority. But ministers often rightly feel that there is so much more that they could learn about the passage they are preaching. God's word is immensely rich and there is a great deal of beneficial scholarship available that could allow more light to shine

from Scripture through a pastor's preaching. How many times has a pastor been preaching through a book of Scripture and discovered something wonderful two-thirds of the way through the sermon series and said to himself, "I wish I had known *that* about this book when I preached from chapter 1." If he had spent time doing general study of the book before beginning that series—rather than beginning the series after only reading commentary on the first five verses of the first chapter—he may have preached more rich and edifying sermons from the outset.

There is also that stack of books and periodicals on the pastor's shelf that tends to grow ever higher. In them is a wealth of information about the latest theological controversies that he has heard about but never really investigated firsthand, about the latest atheistic challenge to Christianity that sits atop the best-seller lists, and about new discoveries in biblical archeology that illuminate various biblical texts. Reading this material would enable the pastor to be better prepared to examine the candidate for ordination who knows about the latest theological controversies, to be better prepared to discuss God's existence with the church visitor who has read the latest best-seller, and to preach with more insight from Scripture. But the pastor has so many responsibilities day by day that his immediate worries prohibit much headway into that stack.

Again it must be said that doing more reading and researching is not the only way in which pastors can grow as more effective ministers of God's Word. But it is one very important way. Thus, congregations and sessions should have great interest in helping their pastors be able to pursue this reading and research that the tyranny of the immanent often makes impossible. Providing their pastors with occasional sabbaticals—even short ones—is one way that they may be able to provide this help.

During such a sabbatical, the congregation would normally relieve the pastor of his ordinary preaching, teaching, and pastoral responsibilities. But this should not be considered interchangeable with a vacation. Pastors may well want to do

some reading during vacation weeks, but vacations presumably involve spending extra time with family and pursuing recreational activities with no necessary connection to regular ministerial duties. Sabbaticals, on the other hand, should not be used for leisure. Pastors may spend their sabbaticals in a variety of productive ways, but they should always use them industriously to become better equipped to handle the Word of truth rightly (2 Tim. 2:15) and to proclaim the whole council of God (Acts 20:27).

Before I present some concrete thoughts on how pastors might use sabbaticals, I note that in some circumstances it may not be wise for a congregation to grant its pastor a sabbatical, even when it is logistically possible. If a pastor is struggling with time management issues, for example, then granting him a sabbatical is probably not wise or responsible: a pastor who is unaccustomed to using his time well in his ordinary labors will most likely not use his time well on sabbatical. If he is spending hours every day reading and posting blogs, it may be that he has the time for necessary reading and reflection but is simply using it poorly. In such circumstances, the elders would probably serve the church better by helping the pastor to become more disciplined in his use of time than by giving him more time to squander. Congregations may also be unwise to grant a sabbatical to a pastor who has no plan about how to use it or who is unwilling to be held accountable for how he spends it. When a pastor and session agree that a sabbatical will take a certain form, and when the pastor consents to provide a report afterwards on what he has accomplished, the pastor is more likely to use his sabbatical time diligently and the congregation is more likely to recognize the sabbatical as mutually beneficial and thus is also more likely to be supportive of the idea.

What to Do on a Sabbatical

In this section, I present some suggestions for how pastors might use sabbaticals in ways that will benefit them and the church. Of course, this is not meant to exhaust the possibilities, only to stimulate productive conversations among pastors and

congregations about potential sabbaticals.

First, a pastor might simply spend his sabbatical time reading. This reading could serve a number of ends. For example, a pastor who is planning to preach through Romans in the near future might use his sabbatical to do general reading on the teaching of Romans or on Pauline theology broadly. Perhaps he is vaguely aware of recent controversies concerning the New Perspective on Paul or Paul and the law but has never had the opportunity to read the important literature on these subjects. Doing such reading would serve both to keep him up to date with contemporary theological literature and also to prepare him directly for a more insightful and responsible exposition of Romans on Sunday mornings. Or perhaps a pastor sees something like the recent publication of Herman Bavinck's four volume *Reformed Dogmatics* in English translation and realizes that it has been an awfully long time since he read a detailed systematic treatment of Reformed theology. Spending his sabbatical working through Bavinck's *Dogmatics* could be a wonderful way to refresh and sharpen his understanding of the Reformed system of doctrine and would enrich his catechetical instruction and general teaching ministry.

Second, a pastor might consider using his sabbatical to take a course at a seminary. While most pastors will not have sabbaticals long enough to enable them to take a semester-long course, many Reformed seminaries offer one-week or two-week courses at certain times of the year. Rather than simply doing independent reading to catch up on a certain topic or to gain general knowledge about a book of Scripture, many pastors could benefit from classroom instruction and interaction with fellow students. By regaining acquaintance with seminary life, the pastor may also become better equipped to serve the church through supervising a summer intern or through contributing to his presbytery's candidates and credentials committee.

Third, a pastor could dedicate at least some of his sabbatical to writing. Some pastors are especially gifted writers but have little time to exercise this gift. By permitting such pastors to take time to focus on writing for publication, congregations

may not only be benefiting themselves but also giving a gift to the broader church. Pastors who have researched and studied carefully in preaching through a book of Scripture, for example, may have gained great insights that could be profitably communicated in writing beyond the confines of their own congregations. Writing is a task, however, that should not be reserved for the rare pastor who is able and eager to write for publication. As I am constantly reminded in the course of my own work, there are few things that test whether a person *really* understands something better than sitting down and trying to write about it coherently and persuasively. Even if he produces something only for his church's literature rack or for a Sunday school course, a pastor who uses his sabbatical to write can bless his congregation both directly through the final product and indirectly through the general sharpening of mind that the discipline of writing can bring.

A fourth suggestion involves travel. This is less conventional and surely harder to pull off, especially for a pastor with children at home, but may also provide mutual benefit for a pastor and his church. One sort of travel that may be appropriate for a sabbatical is visiting a foreign mission field. Presumably a pastor would spend part of such a trip working with the missionaries in their labors, and he ought to be careful about returning to his congregation more tired than when he left. But taking a break from his ordinary labors to spend a short time with missionaries on a foreign field could in itself be a refreshing experience. Such a sabbatical would not only be a gift to the broader church through its direct support of mission work but could also give the pastor an enriched perspective on his preaching and evangelism and equip him to serve more effectively on a presbytery or General Assembly foreign missions committee. Other kinds of travel also hold promise of benefiting a pastor and his congregation. Here we might imagine a pastor who travels to Israel and gains a richer understanding of biblical geography or who travels to Greece and Turkey before preaching through Acts and gains helpful insights about Paul's missionary journeys. These sorts of trips may

be somewhat harder to distinguish from a vacation, but there is no reason why the sabbatical and vacation ideas cannot be combined on occasion.

Concluding Reflections: Logistics

Some readers may have arrived at this point and concluded that granting their pastor a sabbatical would be a good thing in theory but is impossible in reality. Many OPC congregations are small and struggle to meet their budget as it is, and finding competent people to step into the pulpit or to provide pastoral care during a pastor's sabbatical may be very difficult. In some situations it is undoubtedly the case that a church cannot responsibly grant its pastor a sabbatical. But in this last section, I offer some concluding reflections on why and how to make it happen when it is actually possible.

First, sessions and congregations should not be so focused on meeting immediate needs that they neglect longer-term needs. This may be analogous to a person who becomes so concerned about his financial obligations month-by-month that he fails to fund his 401(k) or his children's college fund. He cannot simply stop paying his electric bills, but the long-term gain of investing a percentage of his salary each month is well worth some short-term sacrifice. Likewise, churches should look at pastoral sabbaticals as an investment that requires some present sacrifice to gain future benefit. Congregations may hear four fewer sermons from the pastor each year if they grant him an annual two-week sabbatical, for example, but if the ninety sermons that they do hear from him are more biblically rich and insightful, then in the long run they will profit.

Second, pastors and congregations might consider arrangements in which the pastor agrees to stay local during his sabbatical. Though he would be freed from ordinary preaching, teaching, and counseling obligations, he would remain available in case of pastoral emergency. This could ease the mind of the session about being able to meet the needs of the saints during a sabbatical and may also reassure the congregation that the sabbatical is for their own good and not simply a way for the

pastor to get away from them for a couple more weeks a year.

Third, neighboring Reformed congregations could consider a pulpit exchange arrangement in which they give their pastors sabbaticals at the same time. Though this means these pastors would be in the pulpit during their sabbatical weeks, they could preach sermons that they have already preached recently and thus not require much additional preparation work. This could still provide pastors with study weeks relatively unencumbered by ordinary duties and would relieve the congregations of the effort and expense of finding competent pulpit supply.

Finally, congregations who wish to give their pastor a sabbatical might try to secure the interim services of a seminary professor who is on sabbatical. Though professors on sabbatical are ordinarily obligated to pursue their own research projects, some of them may find it profitable to spend part of their sabbatical providing regular pulpit supply or even more holistic pastoral care for a congregation.

These are only suggestions meant to stimulate thinking about important things. I urge congregations and sessions to contemplate the concerns that I have raised in this essay and to work with their pastors to secure adequate time for him to grow as a learned minister of God's Word. When used responsibly and wisely, regular pastoral sabbaticals can be a blessing for the pastor, his congregation, and the broader church. ©

David VanDrunen, *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California.*

✦ Servant Exchange

A Tale of Two Calvins: A Review Article

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2009¹

by John V. Fesko

Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ, by J. Todd Billings. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, xii + 218 pages, \$120.00.

Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology, by Mark A. Garcia. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008, xxiv + 356 pages, \$46.00, paper.

Two recent entries into the vast sea of Calvin research address the same subject, namely the place of Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ. Both books address the subject with slightly different foci and in places come to decidedly different conclusions. In some respects it is almost as if one watches two talented conductors orchestrate a symphony of primary sources, secondary sources, and analysis; at many points they agree, but at other key points a decidedly different tune emerges despite the fact that they are playing from the same musical score.

Both books are published versions of the authors' doctoral dissertations, Billings from Harvard Divinity School and Garcia from the University of Edinburgh. Billings's work surveys Calvin's understanding of union with Christ and relates it to Calvin's context and to patristic and medieval

theology. He traces the doctrine through the various editions of the *Institutes* and Calvin's commentaries, relates it to prayer and the sacraments, and then shows how Calvin's doctrine interfaces with the law of God and Calvin's doctrine of the "two orders," or as it is more popularly known, the doctrine of the two kingdoms. By comparison, Garcia's work is more narrowly focused upon Calvin's soteriology, and specifically the *duplex gratia*, or the twofold grace of justification and sanctification. It is Garcia's goal to show the relationship between justification and sanctification. He does so by establishing the historical setting for Calvin's theology and focusing upon Calvin's Romans commentary in its successive editions. Garcia also covers the debate between Calvin and Andreas Osiander (1498-1552). Both studies are the academic products of two of the world's finest schools and are, therefore, well-written and well-researched. However, what accounts for the differing portraits of Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ?

All doctoral dissertations set out to prove a thesis, to prove a point. What are the two theses, and does this give us a clue as to the differing conclusions? Billings sets out to prove that Calvin's understanding of union has been misrepresented and misunderstood by critics. Radical Orthodox theologians such as John Milbank have criticized Calvin's understanding of union arguing that it is unilateral, exemplified in Calvin's use of imputation and predestination, and, therefore, renders humans as merely passive agents. They have also claimed that Calvin empties the language of participation, or its related concept of union, and of its pre-nominalist theological significance, undercutting an Augustinian-Thomistic model of reciprocity (12). Similarly, Feminist theologians have argued that Calvin's understanding of God is governed by themes of domination and control, which again render the human as passive, eliminating reciprocity in the divine-human relationship (13). Billings's goal, then, is to set Calvin in his theological context and show how his doctrine of union with Christ has been misunderstood (16). Billings's theological foils account for the broader sweep of his book, one that not only covers the

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=139.

duplex gratia but also delves into Calvin's doctrine of the two kingdoms. Billings writes: "Participation in Christ—and hence the richest language about union with God in Christ through the Spirit—is always connected for Calvin with the life of horizontal love" (16). In this respect Billings's case is oriented in a historical-theological direction, one that wants to show how Radical Orthodox and Feminist theologians have misunderstood Calvin's theology of union with Christ.

By contrast, though Garcia is careful to stipulate that his is a work of historical not systematic theology (xvii), his thesis nevertheless turns on a dogmatic question. Garcia writes: "How can a definitive pardon, freely bestowed on the basis of a righteousness imputed from outside us (*extra nos*), be tied meaningfully to the divine promise and demand of a holy life, understood as something very much within us (*in nobis*)" (2)? He seeks to answer this question by turning to Calvin's doctrine of union. His argument is that Calvin provides a unique answer to this question, one that is distinctly set apart from his Lutheran counterparts. In fact, showing how different Calvin's soteriology (especially with respect to the relationship between justification and sanctification) is from his Lutheran counterparts, is something of a leitmotif of Garcia's work (xv, 3, 7, 75-77, 241, 251-252, 260). The crux of Garcia's argument is contra popular expressions that sanctification is grounded in justification, or that justification is the cause of sanctification. Calvin, according to Garcia, believes that there is something more fundamental to both justification and sanctification, namely union with Christ (3, 264, 267 n. 7). In this regard, one finds that Garcia differs from Billings in his appraisal of the place of union with Christ in Calvin's theology.

Both Billings and Garcia place their title at the feet of the doyen of Reformation and post-Reformation historical-theological studies, Richard Muller, by rejecting the problem-laden central dogma theory. Billings is not willing to accord any doctrine, including union with Christ, the place of a central dogma: "With Richard Muller, I do not think that Calvin has a 'central dogma' from which his system as a whole can be deduced. As such, I

do not think that 'participation in Christ' or the related concept of 'union with Christ' are 'central dogmas' for Calvin" (19). He does stipulate, however, that union with Christ "has undeniable importance for an examination of his theology of participation in Christ" (19). Similarly, Garcia also rejects the idea that any one doctrine is the key to unlocking Calvin's theology as a whole. However, he does believe that "the doctrine of union with Christ does appear to stand as a singularly determinative idea in Calvin's soteriology" (18). What does Garcia mean by this statement? "By 'singularly determinative,'" writes Garcia, "I intend to emphasize the controlling significance for Calvin of the truth that the Holy Spirit unites believers savingly to Christ by faith. It is the *role* of this union-reality in Calvin's exposition of the *duplex gratia* that I suggest is 'singularly determinative'" (18).

In this regard, it seems fair to summarize the thrust of Garcia's argument by saying that justification does not have any sort of priority, logical or temporal, as Garcia understands the Lutheran tradition to argue, but on the other side of the coin, neither does sanctification have any sort of logical or temporal priority, as say legalists of various stripes might try to maintain. Rather, Garcia's reading of Calvin has the Reformer arguing that the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification are received inseparably and simultaneously, but at the same time should not be confused. Like the Chalcedonian christological formulation of the hypostatic union, the two natures of Christ are joined together in one person and are therefore inseparable but nevertheless distinct. In other words, union with Christ is controlling and singularly determinative (133, 162-163, 235, 248, 250). Garcia further argues that Calvin's own understanding of the *unio Christi-duplex gratia* (3) merely reflects the Pauline *ordo* of Romans 8:29-30: "Theologically, this *ordo* reflects the union believers have with Christ by the Spirit through faith" (253). Garcia's argument becomes especially evident in contrast with Billings's understanding of the relationship between union and the *duplex gratia*. Billings explains that the first grace of the *duplex* is justification. The second part of the *duplex* is regen-

eration and sanctification (106-107), though one should keep in mind that for Calvin *regeneration* is the term that contemporary theologians now call *sanctification*. Notice, in contradistinction to Garcia, Billings prioritizes justification as being first. In fact, he goes as far as to say, “The first grace of free pardon provides the indispensable context for the second” (107). However, with Garcia he also affirms that the *duplex gratia* is inseparable and simultaneous and along the same lines as Garcia, Billings uses the same christological analogy: “Just as one cannot divide the two natures in the person of Christ, so the grace of justification and sanctification can be distinguished, but not divided” (107). What accounts for the different readings of Calvin on this particular point?

The most obvious is the different emphases that both scholars place upon the role of union with Christ in Calvin’s theology. Billings sees it as an important theme, whereas Garcia sees it as the controlling factor for Calvin’s soteriology. In addition, Garcia has dogmatically employed his understanding of Calvin’s *unio Christi-duplex gratia*.² At its best, historical theology exists as a discipline unto itself—its task is to perform theological archaeology—it is a descriptive enterprise. What often happens, however, is that theologians develop ideas, but especially within the Reformed community, the words of Charles Hodge echo through the halls of the Reformed academy, “There are no new ideas in theology.” So, theologians look for precedents for their views or discoveries. In many respects, the relationship between dogmatic and historical theology exists in a careful balance. While one does not want to distort the *sola Scriptura* principle and turn it into a “me and my Bible” approach to theology and therefore ignore the theological past, neither does one want to eisegete the past to establish the legitimacy of one’s own theological idea. The most notorious instance of the abuse of historical theology in Calvin studies has been the much vaunted but now highly criticized efforts of Karl Barth and the Barthian

2 See Mark A. Garcia, “Imputation and the Christology of Union with Christ: Calvin, Osiander, and the Contemporary Quest for a Reformed Model,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 219-251.

historical-theological school who claimed Calvin as the Barth before Barth. This brings one to the following observation.

Garcia’s reading of Calvin is based on that of Richard Gaffin, one whom Garcia acknowledges has greatly influenced him and to whom Garcia dedicated his book (xii, xx). This raises a legitimate question pertinent to the present review, one that provides a possible answer to the divergent readings of Billings and Garcia. Gaffin published his doctoral dissertation in 1977 in which he called for a restructuring of the *ordo salutis* along Pauline lines, namely ensuring that the *ordo* reflected the centrality of union with Christ. Gaffin writes, “Everywhere Paul speaks of the believer’s justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification . . . , there the more basic underlying consideration is resurrection with Christ, that is, (existential) union with Christ as resurrected.”³ In this respect, Gaffin sees Paul’s *ordo* not as a sequence of events, whether temporal or logical, but as a single act—namely, union with Christ.⁴ What is of particular interest to this review, is that in Gaffin’s dissertation, there is no mention of Calvin vis-à-vis the *ordo salutis* or the priority of union with Christ.

Perhaps Dr. Gaffin, or others familiar with the Gaffin corpus, can answer this question more definitively, but it appears that his own personal understanding of the union priority antedates his discovery of the same pattern in Calvin. For example, it is not until 2002 that Gaffin writes: “This, in a nutshell, is Calvin’s *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by (Spirit-worked) faith.”⁵ Beyond this, one also finds the same characterization of Lutheran theology that appears in Garcia’s work in this same

3 Originally published as Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) and now retitled as *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), 129.

4 Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 135-136, 142.

5 Richard B. Gaffin, “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards,” *WTJ* 65 (2003): 172. Gaffin has also argued this same point in idem, “Justification and Union with Christ (3.11-18),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 248-269.

lecture as well.⁶ There are also echoes of Gaffin’s reading of Calvin in his other former students. For example, in an essay by Craig Carpenter that both Garcia and Gaffin cite as part of their case for the centrality of union in Calvin, one finds the following: “As important as justification by imputed righteousness is for him, it is not justification by faith but union with Christ that is the controlling principle of the Reformer’s doctrine of applied soteriology.” Or there is the following similar statement, “It appears that Calvin’s *ordo salutis* does not require the logical or temporal priority of a forensic act to a renovative act. Although he does speak of one’s progressive sanctification following in time one’s justification, the legal and the transformative blessings of salvation are given together in the Spirit’s act of uniting the sinner to Christ.”⁷

It appears that there is a distinctive school of thought associated with Gaffin’s doctrine of union with Christ, particularly regarding its logical priority and the rejection of any logical or theological priority of justification to sanctification. As a matter of historiography, it appears that proponents of this school also find the very same features in Calvin’s doctrine of union with Christ. However, this also poses another question. What came first, the chicken or the egg? Was Gaffin influenced by Calvin or did he later find his own understanding of the Pauline *ordo* in Calvin? This is not in any way to suggest that Drs. Gaffin or Garcia maliciously or irresponsibly eisegete Calvin. That Dr. Garcia’s dissertation sustained examination for his doctorate is certainly evidence that it is in-depth research and deserves a careful reading—the exhaustive footnotes certainly bear this conclusion. Moreover, one can also safely assume that Garcia studied the primary sources for himself and was convinced of his own conclusions and is not merely parroting an esteemed professor. However, though one’s research can be thorough, it does not mean that all of his conclusions are correct. Everyone brings assumptions and presuppositions to any enterprise,

6 E. g., Gaffin, “Biblical Theology,” 173.

7 Craig B. Carpenter, “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 380-381.

nevertheless these assumptions and presuppositions must be tested against the evidence.

There seem to be key statements scattered throughout Calvin’s writings that point away from Garcia’s conclusions and harmonize with Billings’s assessment. For example, in Billings’s coverage of Calvin’s debate with Osiander, he concludes, “If salvation is to be truly a gift from God—and sanctification a life of gratitude—a forensic notion of pardon is the necessary prerequisite for such a life of sanctification” (58). Again, Billings writes: “God’s free pardon in justification is essential for participation in Christ through sanctification—so that the Christian life can be a life of gratitude and voluntary obedience to God” (61). Or, “Justification always and necessarily leads to real sanctification” (57). In terms of the *duplex gratia*, Billings explains: “The wondrous exchange in imputation draws believers into a transforming union with Christ, even as the transformation of believers does not provide the *ground* for this union” (71). This analysis seems to explain better a number of statements that one finds in Calvin.

Both Billings and Garcia draw attention to the importance of Calvin’s commentary on Romans for understanding his doctrine of union with Christ. Billings states, “The themes of participation, adoption, and engrafting in Romans become crucial for Calvin’s theology” (51). Garcia devotes an entire chapter of his book to a case study of the editions of Calvin’s Romans commentary instead of the *Institutes* to support his thesis of the union priority (36-41, esp. 37, and 89-148). Yet, what does Calvin identify as the main theme of the whole epistle: “Thus [Paul] enters on the main subject of the whole Epistle, which is that we are justified by faith.”⁸ To be sure, this is a point that Garcia acknowledges (39, 94-95), but for some reason it does not bear enough significance for him to pause and consider the statement as counter evidence to his thesis.

Another statement that one finds comes from Calvin’s response to the pronouncements of the Council of Trent where he writes:

8 John Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, CNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 5.

We, indeed, willingly acknowledge, that believers ought to make daily increase in good works, and that the good works wherewith they are adorned by God, are sometimes distinguished by the name of righteousness. But since the whole value of works is derived from no other fountain than that of gratuitous acceptance, how absurd were it to make the former overthrow the latter . . . In short, I affirm, that not by our own merit but by faith alone, are both our persons and works justified; and that the justification of works depends on the justification of the person, as the effect on the cause. Therefore, it is necessary that the righteousness of faith alone so precede in order, and be so pre-eminent in degree, that nothing can go before it or obscure it.⁹

Here it appears that Calvin does assign a priority to justification over sanctification and even uses language of causality to do so. In this regard, it seems crucial that one note that when Calvin explains the *duplex gratia*, the first grace is justification and the second is sanctification.¹⁰ If there is no priority of justification, as Garcia maintains, does one ever find Calvin reversing the order of the *duplex gratia*? In other words, does Calvin ever call the *duplex gratia*, sanctification and justification?¹¹

9 John Calvin, "Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote," in *Selected Works*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge, 7 vols. (1851; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3.128.

10 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed., John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.

11 In one sense, this is something that Garcia does not do concerning the structure of the *Institutes*, as he focuses upon the successive editions of Calvin's Romans commentaries, but Gaffin does try to argue this case. Gaffin writes: "What is remarkable here is the 'ordo' (!): Calvin discusses the change that takes place within the sinner, our ongoing inner renewal and personal transformation, before the definitive change effected in the sinner's legal status, our forensic standing *coram Deo*. . . All told, he treats sanctification, at length, before justification. Such an approach contrasts conspicuously with subsequent Reformed and Lutheran theology, where justification always (without exception?) precedes sanctification" (Gaffin, "Biblical Theology," 176). There are several points that warrant comment. First, it is anachronistic to argue that the structure of Calvin's *Institutes* reflects his *ordo salutis*. The *ordo salutis* is a *terminus technicus* that did not develop until well after Calvin's death. Second, there

It would seem that the answer to this question is a definite no, though Garcia in one place does reverse them (96-97). If one turns to Calvin's sermons, there is further evidence to consider.

In one of Calvin's sermons, he explains the *sola of fide* as it pertains to justification in the following manner:

But it is said, that faith and works can never agree together: and therefore this must be our conclusion, that when we are justified by faith, works must needs cease and be nothing worth [sic]. Now this at the first sight, may seem to be an hard kind of speech, to wit, that faith and good works can never go together: for it might seem, that if faith only justifies, that the reins are slacked and let lose to all iniquity. Now Saint Paul speaks this according to a certain quality and regard, as he also speaks of the law and faith: the law, says he, can no way agree with faith, for they are two incompatible things. And in what sort? For is not God as well the Author of the law as of the Gospel? Is there any contrariety or repugnancy in him? Without doubt no, for he is unchangeable. Why then finds Saint Paul such a contrariety between the law and the Gospel? Forsooth, it is in respect of our justification.¹²

is a difference between the *ordo salutis* and the *ordo docendi* that Calvin adopts. In other words, the *Institutes* is a catechetical work that is organized upon pedagogical concerns. In this regard, one must note that Calvin does mention the doctrine of justification in book two (e.g., 2.17.2-3). Third, Gaffin's question of whether this pattern exists in subsequent Lutheran or Reformed theology suggests that Calvin is the lone outpost of this union priority. What seems more likely? That the whole Reformed tradition has missed this structurally significant point and has argued for the priority of justification, or that Gaffin's reading of Calvin is incorrect? It seems that the latter is far more likely, unless, of course, one can produce other scholars pre-Gaffin, who have also independently come to this conclusion. On the first two points raised, see Thomas Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretations," *JETS* 50/2 (2007): 311-328. Wenger's overall case appears to be cogent, though perhaps it requires some nuance regarding his reading of Gaffin regarding the central dogma theory. Like Garcia, Gaffin would likely also reject union with Christ as a central dogma, but would nevertheless agree that union is singularly determinative for Calvin's soteriology.

12 Calvin, *Sermons on Melchizedek and Abraham: Justification, Faith, and Obedience* (1592; Audubon: Old Paths, 2000), 128-

So, then, Calvin explains that faith alone is the instrument of our justification: “Faith must go before righteousness: for it is the mean cause, the instrumental or formal cause we call it.”¹³ Works play no role, as it pertains to one’s justification. This is not to say that Calvin excludes works, as it pertains to one’s sanctification: “And without doubt, we can never be said to be right Christians, without we be after that manner renewed, and be made the workmanship of God, created in our Lord Jesus Christ: to do the works which God has prepared.”¹⁴ In these statements from Calvin’s sermon, he clearly places a priority of justification over sanctification, uses causality language, and even does so using the law-gospel hermeneutic, something Garcia argues is non-existent in Calvin (75-77).¹⁵ What sort of priority does justification have over sanctification?

In Calvin’s understanding, the believer is not

129 (CO 23.703-704).

13 Ibid., 185 (CO 23.731-732).

14 Ibid., 158 (CO 23.718).

15 What is peculiar about Garcia’s claims regarding the law-gospel hermeneutic is the manner in which he describes it: “The effect of this hermeneutic is the relegation of ‘conditional’ passages of Scripture to the category of Law as distinct from Gospel” (75). Yet, this is not how Lutherans or Reformed theologians have defined it. It is not the conditional passages of Scripture, but recognizing the difference between a command, or the demands of the law, and a promise, the promise of the gospel. This division is clearly evident in Calvin’s statement from his sermon. One can find the law-gospel hermeneutic in a number of Reformed theologians such as Zacharias Ursinus, Theodore Beza, or William Perkins. See Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1852; Phillipsburg: P&R, n.d.), 1; Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith*, trans. James Clark (Lewes: Focus Christian Ministries, 1992), 41-43; William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy* (1606; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 54-56. One can also find the law-gospel hermeneutic in contemporary Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck and Louis Berkhof. Berkhof, for example, writes: “The churches of the Reformation from the very beginning distinguished between the law and gospel as the two parts of the Word of God as a means of grace. This distinction was not understood to be identified with that between the Old and the New Testament, but was regarded as a distinction that applies to both Testaments. There is law and gospel in the Old Testament, and there is law and gospel in the New” (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 612). Bavinck writes, “God uses his word to make his will known in the area of morality and spirituality, and it must be differentiated as law and gospel” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Friend, 4 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2008], 4.450).

accepted on the basis of his own good works (read sanctification), but on the basis of Christ’s works, which comes by faith alone (read justification). This is why, as Billings has argued, justification creates the context for sanctification (106-107). To fail to acknowledge this priority in favor of leveling justification and sanctification fails to account for what Calvin himself has written. Garcia does this by emphasizing the simultaneity of the *duplex gratia* (96-97, 250), as if this somehow eliminates any possibility of logical or theological priority, perhaps relying upon the mistaken idea that the *ordo salutis* is a sequential application of redemption. It seems to be the priority of justification that lies behind Calvin’s famous statement that justification “is the main hinge on which religion turns” and that apart from it, man does not have a foundation on which to establish his salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.¹⁶ Calvin does not say sanctification is the hinge, nor does he say union with Christ is the hinge or foundation for piety (read sanctification) but gives this role to the doctrine of justification.

In the end, these two books raise important questions regarding the role of union with Christ in Calvin’s theology. Is union with Christ an important theme for which one must account or is it the singularly determinative element of Calvin’s soteriology? The small bits of gathered evidence seem to point away from Garcia’s conclusions. Another question is, How widespread is this particular reading of Calvin? Can one find it prior to 1977 and the publication of Gaffin’s doctoral dissertation? Is there a Gaffin-school reading of Calvin, one driven by Gaffin’s reading of Paul? These questions are important on several levels.

First, there is the historical-theological significance. It is important that the proper reading of Calvin be established. It is certainly possible that Gaffin’s reading of Calvin that Garcia offers is correct, and if so, then others should follow suit.

Second, there are the dogmatic, or systematic-theological, implications. While one wants to maintain the careful balance between historical and dogmatic theology, if Gaffin’s reading of Cal-

16 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.1.

vin is correct, and as Garcia has argued that Calvin has simply reflected Paul’s *ordo salutis* (255), then it means that many within the Reformed community need to reconsider their understanding of the relationship between justification and sanctification.

Third, there are broader ecclesiological implications, namely, the relationships between a number of ministers and theologians within the broader Reformed church. Perhaps it is impolite to point at the large pink elephant, but there is an ongoing debate between the Westminster campuses in California and Philadelphia as well as among some of their graduates on union with Christ and the *ordo salutis*, particularly the relationship between justification and sanctification. The difference of opinion has for the most part been cordial, but at times there have been pointed exchanges.

In many respects, the answers to these questions will likely not come any time soon. It can sometimes take a generation or more to establish a historical-theological corrective reading. In this regard, the test of time often, though not always, determines the validity of a thesis. Time will tell whether the Gaffin-school reading of Calvin that Garcia has put forth will endure scrutiny. It does appear, however, that Billings’s reading of Calvin is a more accurate portrait. Others have arrived at similar conclusions. Cornelis Venema writes: “In my judgment, Garcia and Carpenter overstate the extent to which union with Christ ‘coordinates’ its two benefits of justification and sanctification, and do not do justice to the careful way Calvin also maintains the (theological, not temporal) ‘order’ of justification in relation to sanctification.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, one should obtain copies of both Billings’s and Garcia’s books and study them to see which

17 Cornelis Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The “Twofold Grace of God” and the Interpretation of Calvin’s Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 136 n. 9. Venema draws attention to the more balanced assessment of Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 405-406. One should note, though, that Garcia sees significant problems with Venema’s overall thesis. Garcia believes his own work is a corrective to Venema: “At several points in this investigation, the textual, contextual, and theological arguments put forward serve to advance, clarify, and occasionally correct Venema’s more general assertions” (Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 34 n. 76).

of the two Calvins emerges as the more accurate portrait. This task is not merely one for ivory tower theologians, but is an exercise of standing upon the shoulders of a giant. As one cannot help but be drawn into the primary texts of Calvin to determine which of the two books best represents the Genevan giant, and in such a journey one can learn from one of the church’s greatest minds. Therefore, *tolle et lege!* ☺

John V. Fesko is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California.

A Response to John Fesko’s Review

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online March 2009¹

by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

In the course of this review article my views come under scrutiny, eventually toward its close (16)² with the hypothesizing of a possible “Gaffin-school”(?!) reading of Calvin, a reading about which Dr. Fesko not only raises questions but expresses fairly substantial doubts. I recognize, and value, the constructive way in which he voices his reservations and certainly agree with his closing comments about the need for further discussion of the issues involved. I also appreciate the editor’s initiative in offering me an opportunity to make some response. I do so not so much to argue a case in any adequate way (the space reasonably at my disposal precludes that) but primarily to clarify issues, something, it seems to me, much needed

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=149.

2 For easier reference I have numbered the paragraphs in the review, and referred to them in parentheses (I count 20). Also, where full citations are given in Dr. Fesko’s review, short forms will be used in this response.

in the current climate of discussing the matters addressed in the review.

Recently, I have expressed my views more fully in a chapter, “Justification and Union with Christ (3.11–18),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (2008), 248–69, to which I refer readers, especially, so far as this review is concerned, the section (252–60), “Union with Christ and Twofold Grace.” Since Fesko is aware of this chapter (see fn. 4), I’m somewhat puzzled by his virtually ignoring it. It provides a much fuller and more recent statement of my views, including those he subjects to criticism, a statement, in my judgment, both clearer and more adequate.

1. Fesko (10) raises a question about my theological biography: Do my own views on the priority of union with Christ in the application of salvation antedate how I understand Calvin’s view of that priority? He asks, “What came first, the chicken or the egg? Was Gaffin influenced by Calvin or did he later find his own understanding of the Pauline *ordo* in Calvin?”

This is not a question I had really thought about previously. Fesko is prompted to ask it apparently because in the Conclusion of my *Resurrection and Redemption* (= *The Centrality of the Resurrection*), from which he cites, I am silent about Calvin. Why? Because, as far as I can recall at a distance of some forty years now (the book, first published in 1979, is an editing down, without substantial changes, of my Westminster Seminary dissertation already completed in 1969), my no more than cursory reading of Calvin at that time, as part of the ancillary research in Reformed theology I was able to do for what is a study in Pauline theology, showed clearly enough that lacking in Calvin is the notion of an *ordo salutis*, with its attendant issues and problematics, as that idea is articulated and developed in subsequent Reformed theology. Consequently, he does not figure in the comparison the Conclusion draws between the *ordo salutis* in that later theology and my findings about the structure of Pauline soteriology.

I wish now, in retrospect, that I had read Calvin more carefully at the time because sub-

sequently, especially when my major teaching responsibilities shifted from New Testament studies to systematic theology with the opportunity for studying him more carefully, I saw the deep, substantial continuity there is between the structure of his applied soteriology, notably in Book 3 of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, and what I had previously found and have had confirmed over the years in my ongoing study of Paul.

So, in answer to Fesko’s chicken-and-egg question, no, the origin of my own understanding of the priority of union with Christ in the application of redemption was not originally influenced by Calvin. He, however, has certainly enriched and reinforced that understanding, and, as far as I can see, I have not been reading into him what is not there.

Fesko thinks I have done just that. He raises the question of the origin of my reading of Calvin, it seems, because he thinks it is likely wrong in important ways. That is clearly the drift of the review as a whole. Still, toward its close (17) he entertains the possibility that in our reading of Calvin, Garcia and I are correct. I appreciate this latter note of openness and hope, for my part, for a similar readiness to be corrected.

2. In footnote 10 Fesko critiques the following quote from me:

What is remarkable here is the “ordo” (!): Calvin discusses the change that takes place within the sinner, our ongoing inner renewal and personal transformation, *before* the definitive change effected in the sinner’s legal status, our forensic standing *coram Deo*. . . All told, he treats sanctification, at length, before justification. Such an approach contrasts conspicuously with subsequent Reformed and Lutheran theology, where justification always (without exception?) precedes sanctification (Gaffin, “Biblical Theology,” 176).

This passage (including the sentence Fesko elides) is admittedly not among the clearest things I’ve written. Along with my statement that for Calvin, “the relative ‘ordo’ or priority of justifica-

tion and sanctification is indifferent theologically,” (177), it has understandably occasioned problems for some. I apologize for that and wish I had been clearer. Still, it does seem to me that if the same scrutinizing attention some have given to the offending passage had been given to what I have written elsewhere in my article (and beyond), it would be fairly clear, for instance, that I do not have in view the actual application of salvation for Calvin or hold that for him sanctification precedes justification. (Thomas Wenger, in the article cited favorably in footnote 10³ is convinced I’m also guilty of adopting the “central doctrine” approach to Calvin, of embracing the Calvin-against-Calvinist paradigm, and so presumably of distancing the Westminster Standards from Calvin. I’m quite at a loss how to account for such a misreading and hope that most other readers of my article will have no difficulty in recognizing how thoroughly groundless these charges are.)

I can perhaps further clarify the passage above by responding briefly to Fesko’s three points of criticism in footnote 10. Taking the first two together, of course it’s obviously anachronistic to suggest that Calvin thinks explicitly in terms of the notion of *ordo salutis* and related discussions that didn’t emerge until well after his time. That’s precisely the point I just made above (see also below). It is as well a major point in the article itself. So, I am hardly contradicting or overlooking it in the criticized quote.

Fesko suggests (elsewhere he is explicit⁴) that I have confused Calvin’s *ordo docendi* with his *ordo salutis*. This is a helpful distinction, one which I should have been alert to and utilized. But, however unclearly I expressed myself, the former—Calvin’s teaching order, his order of presenting material—is in fact my point. Note, for instance, that in the passage “ordo” is in quotes and with a parenthetical exclamation mark, signaling that I’m using it in a sense other than it has in the expression *ordo salutis*. Notice, as well, that the

3 Cf., more recently, *JETS* 51 (September 2008): 564ff.

4 J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 279, n. 40.

main controlling verbs in the sentences that Fesko quotes are Calvin “discusses” and “treats,” and in the sentence he omits, “addresses.” It was the farthest thing from my mind even to suggest that because in Book 3 of the *Institutes* Calvin discusses the life of ongoing sanctification before justification that, therefore, the former precedes the latter in the actual application of redemption.

As to Fesko’s third point of criticism, does he really dispute that in subsequent presentations of the application of redemption, Reformed and Lutheran, we don’t find, as we do in Calvin, an *ordo docendi* that treats sanctification before justification? At least that approach is not characteristic later. This difference is worth reflecting on. One reason, it seems, is that later discussions, unlike Calvin’s, are so shaped by an *ordo salutis* notion not present in him that it would not occur, and likely seem strange and confusing, to deal with sanctification prior to justification.

3. Fesko perceives a major misunderstanding in the view he questions: it denies or at least fails to recognize in Calvin the priority of justification to sanctification. That perception prompts the following comments.

It should not be missed that the supporting material in Calvin that Fesko cites, as well as his discussion of it, has in view *progressive* sanctification, sanctification as an ongoing process in the life of the already justified believer. The progressive aspect, what is done in and by the believer in time and over time, is apparent, for instance, from the repetition or recurrence inherent in the plural “good works.” Calvin is resolute in showing that, whether any one or together, good works have no place in producing the believer’s justification; that role belongs exclusively to Christ’s perfect righteousness, and only as it is imputed and received solely by faith.

This priority of justification to sanctification, if it needs to be said, is not at issue or in any way disputed by me (or Garcia; in my view he has been clear about that in his published writings and more than once in previous issues of *Ordained Servant*). For Calvin and, more importantly, in Scripture, justification is prior to sanctification in the sense

that the latter, as a life-long and imperfect process, follows the former as complete and perfect from the inception of the Christian life. Furthermore, in God's sight the full forgiveness granted by the former covers the sins and imperfections of the latter. So, for instance, I would not only not hesitate but believe it quite important to say, as Fesko quotes Billings with approval (11), "a forensic notion of pardon is the necessary prerequisite for . . . a life of sanctification." Given the clarification made above (point 2), I can't see that anything I have written even suggests otherwise. I hope that the future discussion Fesko envisions can proceed with the recognition that the priority, logical and temporal, of justification to progressive sanctification is not in dispute.

4. The quotations from Calvin that Fesko cites have in view, as just noted, sanctification as progressive, the justified believer's ongoing life of sanctification. But what about the initiation of that process, the beginning of sanctification? How in Calvin is the alpha-point of sanctification related to justification and how are both, in turn, in their interrelationship, related to union with Christ. With the question put that way, differences between Fesko's views and mine do emerge. Here I can do little more than address them briefly as matters for further reflection. My chapter mentioned at the outset provides some elaboration.

These differences may be focused, for the most part, by two interrelated affirmations: for Calvin, in the application of redemption, as all three (union, justification and sanctification in its initiation) occur simultaneously, a) the inception of union with Christ is antecedent to both justification and sanctification, and b) justification and sanctification, the latter in its inception, are coincidental. In what follows I hope to be as clear as I can and more precise about the simultaneous antecedence and coincidence involved in these two affirmations and the relationships they have in view. But first, a couple of general observations.

Calvin's writings are voluminous and no doubt, for all their remarkable clarity and power, contain inconsistencies (Calvin, after all, is not Scripture!). We need to be on guard in quoting

him not to do so in a way that takes him out of context, both immediate and overall. Also, we should not fail to recognize that, as with any writer, he has a hierarchy of concerns (ascertaining that hierarchy is, of course, a matter for debate), in which some concerns are not only more central, controlling, and basic than others but also in any instance will be more or less adequately expressed, so that there may be points of tension.

Also, the affirmations above are historical; they state, as I see them, Calvin's views. But I also consider them to be faithful to what Scripture, especially Paul, teaches.

5. So far as the first affirmation is concerned, the antecedence (or priority) of union is quite plain in *Institutes*, 3.11.1. Here the way Calvin summarizes matters he has touched on previously also sets the direction for the entire lengthy discussion of justification as a topic that follows in the rest of this and the next several chapters (through chapter 18).

Let us sum these up. Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.

Here the point is not simply that the "double grace" in view (justification and sanctification) is received in union with Christ (described as "partaking in him," as him being "given," "grasped and possessed"). Rather, we receive the former "by" the latter, not the latter "by" the former. Union is antecedent to this double grace in the sense that the former is the consequence of the latter; union carries with it justification and sanctification; being united to Christ "in faith" effects justification and sanctification. This passage can hardly be read to say that justification is the antecedent forensic ground of union or that union (or, as we will see, sanctification) is somehow a consequence

of justification.

This antecedence is sounded already in the opening words of Book 3 of the *Institutes*, as sweeping as they are emphatic.

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. (3.1.1)

The last sentence here is hardly some throw-away line made in passing. Nor, in light of what Calvin says repeatedly elsewhere in places like 3.11.1, just noted, may it be read as saying no more than that union with Christ provides the eventual setting or context for saving benefits somehow received apart from or antecedent to that union. The sentence is too strongly charged for any such subordinating or marginalizing readings.

Furthermore, this sentence answers the question posed in the preceding sentence, the crucial question that drives all reflection on the application of salvation and may be fairly read as an equivalent to Luther’s, “How do I obtain a gracious God?” Calvin’s answer here stipulates what is “first,” primary, what controls *everything* said throughout Book 3 about the application of redemption. That single most decisive factor is union. Everything depends on that all-or-nothing reality. I must have Christ or I have nothing, Calvin is saying. Absent that union, his work for me, including what he did for my justification, is simply “useless and of no value.” Without union, the benefits that flow from it, including my justification, are nonexistent.

Justification is not union-producing, a uniting justification. Rather, union is justification-effecting, a justifying union. I am justified, I have Christ’s righteousness imputed to me, by faith. How? *Only* by being united to him by faith. In that

sense I am justified by faith because by faith I am united to Christ, not the reverse.

From the specific vantage point of faith and its role in justification, this antecedence is clear when he later writes (3.11.7, italics added), “faith of itself does not possess the power of justifying, but *only in so far as* it receives Christ.” In fact, “*before* his righteousness is received Christ is received in faith.” “Before” here is striking. It is hardly to be taken temporally, as if to say that one is united to Christ for a time without being justified, but it surely makes *logical* and *effective* priority or antecedence plain.

Then there is 3.11.10 to consider:

I confess that we are deprived of this utterly incomparable good [imputed righteousness; justification] until Christ is made ours. Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because [*quia*] we put on Christ and are grafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him.

How could the antecedence of union to justification be made any plainer? Calvin even uses causal language. Imputation is “because” of union, not the reverse.

A final instance here of that antecedence (as well as an indication of the coincidence of justification and sanctification we will presently consider) is 3.16.1 (last para.; emphasis added):

Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? *You must first possess Christ*; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces [1 Cor. 1:13]. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he

bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in *our sharing in Christ, which justifies us*, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.

It is important to be clear about the specific nature of the union in view in this passage, as well as in 3.1.1 and often throughout Book 3 and elsewhere. Briefly it is, as Calvin says, “mystical,” an organic union, a “spiritual bond” (3.11.10), because it is by faith effected in sinners by “the secret energy of the Spirit” (3.1.1) and results in a union where, by the Spirit, Christ indwells the believer and they are in him. Calvin recognizes, of course, a predestinarian (or decretal) “in Christ” and a redemptive-historical “in Christ” (being contemplated in and represented by Christ in his once-for-all accomplishment of salvation). In view in our passages, in distinction, is the applicatory “in Christ,” union as it does not exist prior to or apart from the exercise of faith. In discussing the issues Fesko raises we must guard against blurring or otherwise equivocating on these distinctions.

Fesko cites Calvin’s often-quoted justification is “the-main-hinge-on-which-religion-turns” statement (3.11.1) to support the priority of justification to union (15). The issue here can be reduced to the relationship between this statement and the “Christ-outside-us, useless-and-of-no-value-for-us” statement in 3.1.1. So far as I can see, for reasons noted in the passages already looked at, there can be little question that the latter controls the former and provides the deeper and more fundamental perspective for Calvin on redemption applied. A “hinge” after all, as I have put it elsewhere (in the chapter cited above, 257), is not a “skyhook.” To “turn,” to function effectively, it needs to be anchored, and in this instance what anchors the hinge of justification and gives stability and permanence to our actual possession of it is our union with Christ.

Fesko (12) holds that Calvin’s taking justification to be the main theme of Romans in his commentary counts as evidence against the priority of

union. But taking justification as the letter’s main theme and holding union to be prior are hardly incompatible. What would have to be shown additionally is that the commentary’s teaching either asserts the priority of justification to union or denies that union is prior. Neither is the case as far as I can see, and Garcia, I believe, has provided positive evidence for the priority of union.

These comments do not, as some allege, “de-center” justification in Calvin. For him, justification is central, as central as the union with Christ to which it is inseparably tethered. To ask, whether in Calvin or in Scripture, which of the two in the application of salvation, union or justification, is “central” (or “more central,” “more important”) is an unhappy non-starter. It strikes me as somewhat like debating whether in its accomplishment Christ’s death or his resurrection is central (more central). They are equally central (“of first importance,” 1 Cor. 15:3–4), but they are that as the latter is the consequence of the former, not the reverse.

Nor, to address a related misconception, does giving union antecedence, as Calvin does, make that spiritual union the ground or judicial basis of justification. That exclusive ground in the application of redemption is Christ’s finished righteousness imputed to us for justification solely by faith (as it unites us to Christ. Cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism 30). The nature of that Spirit-worked, faith-forged union is such that it does not destroy or blur the personal distinction between Christ and the believer. In union, his righteousness, as his actual personal accomplishment, remains his, not the believer’s. In that sense, it is and remains an “alien” righteousness reckoned as ours. But it is that, alien, only as he, outside of us (*extra nos*), is, by his Spirit, in us and we in him.

Finally here, it strikes me that Fesko (and others) are not always clear that for Calvin (and in general) the relationship of justification to union and the relationship of justification to sanctification are not the same. To talk about the former relationship is not to be talking about the latter, as if union and sanctification (the Spirit’s renovating work) are practically identical. Union, as I’ve tried

to show, is broader and deeper than either justification or sanctification; the latter two, including their relationship, flow from the former. To put it another way, it needs to be appreciated that in Calvin (and Scripture) in the application of redemption the organic embraces both the forensic and the renovative, without compromising the purity of the former or being simply identified with the latter.

6. The coincidence, logical and effective, of justification and the inception of sanctification (the second affirmation above) is certainly not as emphatic in Calvin as is the antecedence of union to the “two-fold grace” of justification and sanctification. Still, this coincidence seems clear enough, for instance, in 3.11.1, where he says he has discussed “regeneration” (= sanctification) prior to justification, leaving the latter until now “more lightly touched upon.” Why?

because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned.

The reason for treating sanctification before justification, he says, is because it was important for him, as pertinent for understanding justification, to make clear “how little devoid of good works” *justifying* faith is. Sanctifying faith, faith disposed toward holy living, is the same faith that justifies. Certainly, this does not mean that faith justifies because it sanctifies or as it functions in sanctification. He could hardly be more clear, repeatedly and emphatically, as he is elsewhere (e.g., in these chapters, 11.7; 14.17, 21; 18.8), about the role of faith, not works (or anything else), as the sole instrument in receiving justification. Faith’s role in sanctification is different. But faith as justifying and faith as sanctifying are not different faiths, nor are these exercises somehow separable.

Calvin can hardly be read here as even suggesting that faith first justifies and, having done so, takes on sanctifying potential. In fact, such a reading is quite contrary to what he says. Calvin

knows nothing of a justification that is first settled and then only subsequently is followed by sanctification. Rather, coincident with this settled and irreversible justification, at the moment it takes place and given with it, is a disposition to godliness and holy living, no matter how undoubtedly weak and sin-plagued that disposition and how imperfectly manifested subsequently.

It is misleading at best, then, to say, flatly and without any qualification, that for Calvin justification “causes” or is the “cause” of sanctification. Certainly, as noted earlier, it is the absolutely indispensable precondition of progressive sanctification. As justified, believers have “in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father.” Lacking that knowledge, “you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God” (3.11.1). This—because ongoing sanctification is imperfect—is likely why Calvin calls it “second” in relation to justification and gives the latter the priority already noted. Similarly, the main-hinge-of-*religion* statement (discussed above) is made in the face of Rome’s religion that grounds justification in an ever uncertain and unstable process of sanctification. In this section, however, sanctification’s cause, to use that category, is “Christ’s Spirit,” flowing to the believer in union with him.

Fesko (13) offers a quotation to show the causal priority of justification. In that quotation, however, what “depends ... as the effect on the cause” is “the *justification* of works ... on the *justification* of the person” (italics added). This is saying something different than that justification is the cause of sanctification. Similarly, in discussing the believer’s good works in relation to justification, in 3.17.10 (elsewhere cited, by Wenger, to support causal priority) Calvin makes the point that, “so to speak, as effect to cause,” “works righteousness” (the believer’s good works) is related to *faith* as it justifies, and “ought to be included under *faith* and be subordinated to *it*” (Battles’s translation, italics added).

There is some ambiguity here in the Latin, giving the possibility that what is said to effect works righteousness as its cause is either “free jus-

tification” or the composite expression “faith and free justification.” The latter (note the order with “faith” first) seems more likely. Calvin’s own 1560 French edition reads at this point:

Now if this righteousness of works as such proceeds from faith and free justification, we must not take it to destroy or obscure the grace on which it depends, but it ought rather to be included in it [the grace], and is related to it as fruit to tree (my translation).

Here “the grace” almost certainly refers to the expression “faith and free justification” (again note the word order). Note also that cause-effect language is absent, having been replaced with the tree-fruit image. These considerations, it seems to me, show that the accent is on faith, as justifying, as the proximate source of the believer’s works and Battles’s translation is not far off the mark.

One can hardly say, however, that Calvin never uses causal language for justification in relation to the believer’s good works and ongoing sanctification. For instance, there is the unambiguous and much more emphatic statement in 3.17.9, “They cannot deny that justification of faith is the beginning, foundation, cause, proof, and substance of works righteousness.” A statement like this, however, does not stand alone or on its own. In its immediate and larger context its sense and relative weight for understanding Calvin’s views as a whole will have to be determined together with that of the other considerations we have already noted. At any rate, the priority of justification in view here concerns the ongoing life of sanctification, not its initiation, a priority I affirm.

7. The preceding six points respond to Fesko’s expressed concerns. I have little doubt about the pertinence of going on to say that the ongoing discussion he desires would be helped significantly by a common recognition of what John Murray, more recently, has referred to as “definitive sanctification.”⁵ This is the crucial soteriological truth that in the inception of the application of

redemption, at the moment sinners are united to Christ by faith, they are delivered from sin’s enslaving power, from bondage to sin as master. At issue here, as much as anything, is the sense of the rhetorical question in Romans 6:2, as it expresses the controlling theme of the passage (Rom. 6:1–7:6) on its negative side, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” Despite the exegesis of some Reformed commentators, this death to sin is almost certainly not to the guilt that sin incurs and justification. In view, rather, is a definitive deliverance from sin’s over-mastering power to being enslaved instead to God and righteousness. That Spirit-worked (7:6) deliverance, not justification, grounds and provides the dynamic for the believer’s beginning to “walk in newness of life” (6:4), their being enslaved in their conduct to God and righteousness (vv. 16–22).

At any rate, with little question the latter view is Calvin’s in his Romans commentary.⁶ It is also intimated, it appears, in the key section in the *Institutes* we have already had occasion to consider, 3.11.1. The phrasing that describes the “double grace,” received by being united to Christ by faith, is “namely, ... being reconciled to God ... and ... sanctified by Christ’s Spirit.” Here, reinforced by the parallel syntax, “reconciled” (= “justified”) and “sanctified” are coordinately definitive and settled realities. The latter, having been sanctified, is to the end that “we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.” That is, the sanctification spoken of here in this way is not realized through that life-long process but is rather its antecedent ground.

8. For Calvin union with Christ, as noted above, is spiritual and organic in the sense of being Christ’s Spirit-initiated indwelling of believers by his Spirit. This means in the application of salvation giving the spiritual antecedence or priority to the forensic or, to put it another way, recognizing that the spiritual in its antecedence has forensic as well as renovative significance. But that is not only what Calvin but subsequent Reformed theology has always taught. The standard *ordo salutis* pre-

5 See esp. John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 277–293.

6 See Owen’s apposite footnote in J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*; trans. and ed. John Owen (1849; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 219.

sentation itself maintains the order: regeneration-faith-justification, an order that gives antecedence to the spiritual, indeed to the Spirit's renovating work: regeneration is causally prior to faith, which, in turn, is instrumentally prior to justification. To cite another related instance, the Westminster Confession of Faith's chapter (13) on sanctification states that those "regenerated . . . are further sanctified." Without deciding the exact force of "further" (which can be plausibly read to say that sanctification begins with regeneration and so, in that sense, is prior to justification), here sanctification is clearly rooted in regeneration and, by the Spirit's work, flows directly from it. Neither in this or chapter 16 on good works is their any mention of justification as the cause of sanctification or even of justification at all.

Still with that observed, I want to make clear—and as emphatically as I can—that I share fully what I take to be the deepest concern of Fesko and others on the matters raised in his review, namely that nothing in us, whether done by the Spirit or anything else, be seen as constituting the ground or in any other way contributing to our justification and acceptance with God. Only Christ's righteousness, reckoned as ours solely by faith, secures that acceptance. I agree entirely that for our salvation and its security *the forensic must have priority*.

Here an issue for further reflection presents itself. Given what has been pointed out in this response about Calvin and especially the problems noted in the preceding two paragraphs, it seems to me most satisfactory (more so than I have thought in the past) to say that the antecedent forensic ground, on which the gospel of truly free and unmerited grace to sinners is staked, is found in the rich capital provided by the once-for-all accomplishment of our salvation. The truth, the gospel truth, as distinctive to Reformed theology as is its doctrine of regeneration—among those elements that give it its "isolation," as Van Til put it—is this: Christ's work does not provide a no-more-than-potential reconciliation for all that becomes actual only for those who believe, but effects the actual and completed reconciliation-justification of his

people that each one of them eventually appropriates by faith. On the antecedent forensic basis of Christ's atonement, his wrath-propitiating obedience unto death, God, by the faith-creating call of the gospel effective in the power of the Spirit, unites sinners to Christ now exalted to his right hand and, in so doing, gives them a share in the benefits that flow from that spiritual union, both forensic and renovative, without confusion and without separation.

God justifies the ungodly, those who are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), because there in the cross of his Son "in wrath he has remembered mercy" (cf. Hab. 3:2). As now reconciled and propitiated, in his great love and rich mercy toward them (v. 4), he takes hold of them just when they were "dead in trespasses and sins" (vv. 1, 5) and unites them, by faith (v. 8), to Christ. In that life-union they share in all that he is and has secured as resurrected and ascended (vv. 5–6), including primarily ("a double grace"!) the reckoning of his perfect righteousness as theirs and their sharing in the renewing work of his Spirit.

This response has gotten longer than I intended at its outset. I hope, in bringing it to a close, that I have not tried in the space I've been given to say too much. I hope to have clarified misunderstandings of my views and not to have caused further misunderstanding. I hope, then, that in reading Calvin we can dispense with talk of an innovative "Gaffin-school," which does not strike me as particularly useful (even less so is including me among those styled the originators of a putative "new perspective" on Calvin). Whatever the contributions of my work over the years, as I view it on its historical-theological side at this point, it has largely been a matter of going back in the Reformed tradition, to note what has become obscured in large part in the more recent past for many of us. Certainly, on the confessional level, the views I have expressed on the application of redemption, however undoubtedly capable of being said better than I have here or elsewhere, are in accord with Westminster Larger Catechism 69: whatever benefits of redemption applied, including justification, "manifest" our (vital) union with

Christ; and, similarly, Westminster Shorter Catechism 29–32: those benefits stem from the union produced by effectual calling; what makes that calling first of all effectual is that it effects being united to Christ by faith.

As to the “large pink elephant” of institutional difference Fesko mentions (19), I do fervently hope that the discussion we anticipate together may prove that this particular animal, like others of its species, is nonexistent. ☺

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

✦ Servant World

Courageous Protestantism? Some Reflections on David Wells's Analysis of the Contemporary Church

A Review Article

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2009¹

by Carl Trueman

Introduction

For nearly two decades, David Wells, the Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has been subjecting American church life, particularly white, evangelical church life, to rigorous, if not merciless, scrutiny. In four deep tomes he has argued that, for all of the superficial signs of health among American evangelical churches—crudely considered, their impressive size, financial resources, and political influence, compared to the lack of these for evangelicals elsewhere in the world—there is a deep, dark sickness at the heart of the American evangelical church which indicates a deep spiritual crisis which is even now bearing evil fruit.² The

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=147.

2 *No Place for Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); *God in the Waste-*

books are an interesting tetralogy, bound together not only by a pervasive tone of pessimism but also by common enemies (American pragmatism, the mega-church) and by a common solution (classic Protestant orthodoxy and church life). Now, Wells has summed up and extended his critique in a single volume, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).³ I say “extended” because, in addition to providing an excellent summary of the argument of earlier volumes, he now includes some critique of the recently arrived “emergent/ing” churches in his critique. His thesis (with which I am in basic agreement) is that, broadly speaking, these represent the latest example of American secular values expressed in a Christian idiom. As mega-churches represented the greed and big-is-best mentality of the eighties, so the emergents represent, among other things, the consumerist pick-and-choose mentality regarding truth, the past, etc.

In this essay, I want, first of all, to offer a summary of Wells's basic arguments, and then to lay out some lines of reflection and critique. The latter should not be taken as any sign of disagreement with the fundamentals of his case or his scholarship: I am in essential agreement with the first and somewhat in awe of the latter. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible his books will be read by some in the Protestant orthodox community as a confirmation of their (our) essential correctness; and I want to argue that, in fact, many of his criticisms apply as painfully to those who pay lip-service to all that Wells holds dear. We confessional types are no more immune to the wider cultural waters in which we swim than the mega-church people and the emergents.

land: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); *Above all Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

3 The edition which I am using for this review article is actually that published in the UK by InterVarsity Press UK.

The Argument of *The Courage to Be Protestant*

Wells's book is divided into seven chapters. In the first, "The Lay of the Evangelical Land," he outlines the three basic types of Christian with whom he is going to engage: classic evangelicals; marketers; and emergents. All three come in for relevant criticism. Not surprisingly, Wells criticizes the marketers and the emergents most vigorously. The former is an attempt to repackage classic evangelicalism in a way that is appealing and entertaining. Their strategies are rooted in polls, focus groups, and giving the people what they want, and they inevitably abandon the hard things—the doctrines, the imperatives—to make Christianity more palatable.⁴ The latter are virtually impossible to define in terms of doctrine, so broad is the collection of beliefs they represent. They see the essence of Christianity more in terms of what I would call aesthetic qualities—as seen, for example, in their preference for the language of "conversations" and "openness." The idea is to be on an exciting journey, but never actually to arrive.⁵ As for classic evangelicalism, Wells correctly identifies two weaknesses in the movement, particularly as it developed in post-World War II America: its increasing doctrinal minimalism, a requirement of its basic existence as a coalition movement; and its marginalizing of the church in favor of parachurch entities, a factor closely connected to the first weakness.⁶

Much of the remainder of the book is a detailed dissection of these three movements in terms of the salient lines of critique laid out in the first chapter. It is probably a fair assumption that most readers of *Ordained Servant* will find themselves in deep sympathy with most or all of what he has to say. He attacks mega-churches for what we might describe as the triumph of marketing techniques, a means of growing, and of seeing growth, in primarily numeric terms. Underlying this, of

4 *Courage*, 13-15.

5 *Courage*, 15-18.

6 *Courage*, 7-12.

course, is what we might call a Pelagian view of human nature—though it is worth remembering that Pelagianism in the early church was a movement rooted in strict self-denial, and was originally a protest against what it saw as the potential moral laxity of Augustine's teachings. In essence, it was a countercultural movement. Mega-church Pelagianism today is, ironically, not a cultural protest movement but an expression of the dominant free market culture through a vaguely Christian idiom. In other words, it just goes with the flow.

When it comes to emergents, Wells (correctly, in my view) sees the connection between these and the mega-church advocates as lying in the impact of modernity, particularly in its consumerist aspects, on their respective agendas. While mega-churches see Christianity as a commodity to be marketed, so emergents see Christians as eclectic consumers who can pick and choose those bits of truth, tradition, etc., that they like. Interestingly enough, Wells heads up the chapter entitled "Truth" with a quotation from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, "All that is solid melts into the air, all that is holy is profaned." This was written, of course, in the heat of the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution, but yet is a remarkably prescient description of the impact of consumerism—or, perhaps better, capitalism—on the values and ideological structures of society. While Wells's own analysis might well be regarded as very conservative in many respects, harking back to an earlier, better age, it has potent similarities with the neo-Marxist critique of postmodernism offered by writers such as Perry Anderson, Frederic Jameson, and, especially, Terry Eagleton. These writers have argued that much of postmodern relativism is a function of the underlying consumerist culture in which we now live. Truth has become, if you like, a product; and one buys that which one likes and leaves on the shelf that which one finds less attractive.

Along the way, Wells offers some healthy debunking of much of the philosophy of language that undergirds, or at least provides the pretext for, the rejection of traditional notions of truth and that has been rather naively absorbed by the vanguard

of the emergent movement as basic. This verbiage, which marks so much postmodern theory, is, as Mark Thompson has elsewhere argued, predicated on the fundamentally unbiblical premise that language is essentially opaque, obscure, elusive, and manipulative. On the contrary, while human beings can and do use language to be opaque, obscure, elusive, and manipulative, this is a problem of sinfulness, not something which is inherent in language itself. Herein, one might say, is one of the problems with emergentism: not that it is too critical of the culture, but that it is not critical enough. Postmodern philosophy tells us this about language (in an apparently clear and non-manipulative manner!) so it must be true, and all that the Bible and church have ever opined on this issue must be set under this critical axiom.⁷ It reminds me of a recent encounter with someone who claimed my classes at Westminster had taught him how to be critical of culture; yet, when this same person heard a presenter on National Public Radio make a claim about Westminster, his first instinct was to believe the presenter and attack the seminary for incompetence. Criticism which only ever critiques the tradition is no real criticism at all; rather, it is merely an idiom for cultural compliance.

One of the frustrations that some have voiced about Wells's work over the years is that it all sounds like so much bad news; what about positive proposals? Well, in this volume Wells does offer a positive vision. Theologically, he argues for a message built around the five *solas* of the Reformation, emphasizing God's holiness and sovereignty, the uniqueness of Christ's person and work, and justification by grace through faith. Practically, his vision is built around the three marks of the church as articulated in later Reformed confessional documents such as the Westminster Standards: the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and discipline.

7 *Courage*, 77-80; for an excellent and informed defense of the perspicuity of scripture in light of modern linguistic theories, see Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2006).

Critical Reflections

One of Wells's strong points is that, though primarily a systematic theologian, he is too good a historian to indulge in some of the ahistorical doctrinal abstractions which too often afflict the discipline. He knows that beliefs, behavior, and social and economic conditions are intimately connected. That is what makes his analysis so satisfying: it is not just that he offers some version of the "the church is in a bad way because of sin" argument. Such an argument, undoubtedly and indisputably true as it is, of course, is by itself of but very limited usefulness, somewhat akin to saying that the Twin Towers collapsed on 9/11 because of gravity. Universal causes only take us so far in understanding the nature of particular actions and events. Thus, everything happens because of providence; and bad things happen because of sin. So much for the general rules; a more useful and probing question is how and why did this bad thing happen at this particular juncture of time in this particular place and in this specific way? Answering that question is the task of the historian or the cultural analyst, and that kind of question yields far more useful results. Thus, Wells not only tells us what we know—that the church is in trouble because of sin; he also provides contextual specifics that allow us to gain greater insight into the specific manifestations and ramifications of particular sinful phenomena in the contemporary church world.

At the heart of Wells's analysis is his correct identification of consumerism as perhaps the most powerful drive underlying some of the most unfortunate trends in current ecclesiastical practice. Here is just one of the many paragraphs in the book which makes this point with pungency:

The seeker-sensitive are adapting their product to a spiritual market that believes it can have spiritual comfort with very little truth. The emergents are adapting their product to a spiritual market that is younger, postmodern, and leery about truth. But in both cases we see this strange anomaly. Here are those who think of themselves as being biblical, as being the children of the New Testament, the followers of

Jesus and the apostles, embracing an alternative spirituality in order either to be successful or to be culturally cutting-edge.⁸

A number of comments are in order here. As noted above, Wells is correct in identifying the consumer/market forces which underlie the mega-church and emergent agendas and bind these two apparently antithetical movements together. But there is a sense in which his critique itself is somewhat muted because (I suspect) of its cultural context. *Consumerism*, along with its cognates, is a term bandied around (and I am as guilty as anyone here) in Christian circles and presented, generally speaking, as a very bad thing; but consumerism is itself a function of the wider phenomenon of capitalism. Now, if one were to substitute *consumerism* with *capitalism* throughout the book, the argument would remain a cogent and powerful one; in fact, the critique would arguably be even more powerful because it would reveal to us the full power of the forces at play in the transformation of church life here. Consumerism is not some accidental, aberrant by-product of the West; it is the epiphenomenon of capitalism, a system within which we must all today live, move, and have our being, given the complete lack at this moment in time of any really viable alternatives for economic and social organization. Communism has failed; as did medieval feudalism, as will feudalism's modern-day relative, Muslim fundamentalism, Taliban style. To use the term *consumerism* potentially blinds us to the real, all-consuming (pardon the pun) power of the rip tide within which we swim. Of course, as soon as one uses the word *capitalism*, one is going to be suspected of incipient Marxism; but one does not have to be a Marxist to acknowledge the powerful impact that capitalism and the free market have on all aspects of life, from the cost of living to the way we think.

We can now push this a little further: if it is not consumerism but capitalism that is the driving force behind so much of the unfortunate nonsense that makes its way into the church's life, we are surely forced to see the situation as more ambigu-

ous and more complex. For a start, we have to acknowledge that the very forces which Wells (correctly) identifies as so damaging have also brought tremendous good. After all, who of us wants to go back to an era without all of those gadgets and devices which make life so tolerable? Or abandon the freedom of the democratic system which goes hand-in-hand with the freedom of the market? At the simplest, most self-serving level, I prefer to mark student papers that are typed on word processors, not scrawled in undecipherable hieroglyphics; at a higher level, I like living in a world where I have access to antibiotics, printed books, fine wines, the potential of peacefully removing failed political leaders, etc. None of these are essential to human life; but I consider them to be gifts of God's common grace that allow me to enjoy being alive. I think that living at a time such as this, when there are so many things which enhance the overall quality of life, of which previous generations knew nothing, is a good thing. And I do not think that my access to these things is separable from the capitalist system within which I live. Consumerism is thus not an entirely bad thing; nor can I easily extricate myself from the consumerist mind-set, given that its values are deeply embedded in the whole of life, both for good and for evil.

This should also surely influence how we look at the past. There is a sense in this book (and in the tetralogy as a whole) that, underlying Wells's take on the past is a certain nostalgia. For example, he refers to the fact that, in times past, people's sense of value was rooted in factors outside of the self, specifically in terms of its own gratification. Thus, work, family, community provided the focus of life, whereas now it is leisure activities and personal well-being/entertainment which stand at the center of each person's universe.⁹ I have no argument with this, but I do want to point out that the balance sheet of present to past is perhaps more complicated than it might seem.

Take my late grandparents, for instance: in many ways, they epitomized the world whose disappearance Wells laments. They worked in order to provide for their families, they found their fulfill-

8 *Courage*, 178.

9 E.g., *Courage*, 136.

ment in putting bread on the table and shoes on their children's feet, their lives were centered on others, not on themselves. On paper, their world sounds just like the world Wells admires. Yet there was a dark side to that world: my grandparents worked long, back-breaking hours for little pay; yes, they put bread on the table and shoes on their children's feet, but they were never more than a week away from financial ruin and a month or two away from total destitution; they did not find their fulfillment in leisure activities because, quite frankly, they had too little time, too little money, and too little energy after long hours of labor to engage in such; and it is questionable whether they found too much value in their work in itself—granddad worked in a factory, grandma scrubbed floors. Their work was a means to an end: survival. Needless to say, none of their children made it to college; only with my own generation did that become a possibility.

All of this is not to create nostalgic sympathy for my family of yesteryear, but it is to point to the fact that nostalgia for the good old days is, generally speaking, the preserve of the middle class intelligentsia or of those who are in no danger of living in such a past. Whatever idyllic visions we may have of the past, there is another side to the story which is not so palatable. And then the pressing question comes: can we have the values without the brutal social context? That is something at least worth asking.

Indeed, we could pursue this last question a little and turn up the heat on nostalgia for the past even more: what about Victorian values, which I am sure many conservative Christians look back to as a good thing? We may admire the virtues of thrift, self-control, modesty, etc., which we typically associate with the phrase. But what of the other Victorian values? What about children forced to work as chimney-sweeps or in factories, the workhouses, the debtor's prisons, the absurdly harsh penalties for minor infringements of property rights? The general disregard for life—at least the life of the poor and the working classes—which marked these times? Of course, our times are no better: globalization means that the child sweat-

shops, etc., are generally speaking abroad, not at the end of our own streets. So our consumerist heaven is also built on oppression and exploitation; but that is not my point here. My point is that the past was not all sweetness and light, and that the package as a whole was problematic too.

To make the point crystal clear: can we pick and choose which bits of the past we like, and nostalgically mourn their loss and desire their return, while rejecting those bits we do not like? Are they separable in this way? The very system of capitalism which developed the tools for improving working conditions and gave my family the social mobility for me to go to a good college and find a job that does not involve back-breaking physical toil is the self-same system which has brought about the other social, cultural, and moral consequences which Wells rightly laments. On this level, his program is reminiscent of Mrs. Thatcher in the eighties: her genius was that she was able to persuade the electorate in Britain to believe that you could have free market economics that shattered traditional vested interests at a social and political level, and yet at the same time you could also maintain traditional moral and social values. History would seem to indicate that this is not the case and that advanced capitalism does transform the whole world, not simply the means of producing and exchanging goods; and that it does so in part by fostering the very thing which Wells identifies as such a problem but which also brings great benefits to humanity. David clearly acknowledges this at a principal level; but in practice, by talking about *consumerism*, rather than *capitalism*, he gives the impression that the unfortunate consequences we see all around us are the result of an aberrant mind-set, rather than an essential part of the capitalist dynamic of Western, especially American, society. Is Wells himself guilty of a kind of eclectic consumption of the past akin to that with which he charges the emergents?

This then raises a further problem: if the cause of the transformation of Christian life and practice is not consumerism but the whole capitalist dynamic of our society, then the answer Wells gives—a return to what we might call traditional,

confessional Protestantism—starts to look less promising, or at least more complicated. Do not misunderstand me here: I believe that the kind of traditional, confessional Protestantism for which Wells argues represents, in belief and practice, the most consistent kind of Christian belief and practice available. The problem is that even this can be subverted and transformed by such a powerful and comprehensive cultural force.

Think about it. Ideas are one thing; but social practices, about which Wells has much to say, are another, and these are frequently shared in common by those who represent a wide variety of different, even contradictory and mutually exclusive, beliefs. So much of what Wells criticizes in emergents and mega-churches is also alive and well within the more doctrinally refined circles of traditional, confessional Protestantism. Thus, when he talks about the pizzazz of the mega-church experience, my own mind is drawn to the vibrant world of Reformed conferences, with their celebrity speakers. When Wells notes the rise of the language of “rights” among today’s generation (156–60), my mind is drawn to how often in confessional Protestant churches I have been treated (!) to lectures, for example, on the *right* to bear arms, the *right* to free speech, the *rights* of the individual over against the federal government, even the *right* not to have to be on the church’s clean-up roster (!!). Whatever the merit of these discussions in themselves, radical individualism that focuses on rights is alive and well on the theological right as well as the political left and sits quite comfortably under preaching and teaching that, on paper at least, should be its very antithesis.

The amazing thing about capitalism is that it can turn anything into a commodity. It is a matter of form, not substance. The most amusing example of this is, surely, the fact that Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* is now available in multiple editions in branches of Borders and Barnes & Noble. The archetypal anti-capitalist tract is now a best-selling commodity, making money for big corporations. If it can be done with Marx, then it can just as surely be done with Luther, Calvin, the Reformed Orthodox, and their modern-day successors.

One example of this is provided by Frank Schaeffer in *Crazy for God*, his controversial memoir about growing up as Francis Schaeffer’s son. Here is how he compares his own father (of whom he is far from uncritical) in comparison with some other conservative, traditional evangelical leaders:

Dad had a unique reputation for an intellectual approach to the faith. And his well-deserved reputation for frugal ethical living, for not financially profiting from his ministry, for compassion, for openness, and intellectual integrity, was the opposite of the reputations of the new breed of evangelical leadership, with their perks, planes, and corner offices in gleaming new buildings, and superficial glib messages. Empire builders like Robertson, Dobson, and Falwell liked rubbing up against (or quoting) my father, for the same reason that popes liked to have photos taken with Mother Teresa.¹⁰

Perhaps few in the OPC will have much time for Falwell, let alone Robertson; my guess is that quite a few will have books by Dobson on their shelves. But no matter: the point is that conservative theology can go hand in hand with empire building, personality cults, and worldly conceptions of power—and these of the most dramatic kind. Confessional Reformed theology can itself be an idiom for the most dramatically secular aspirations. There are a number of celebrity Reformed ministries out there. I wonder what the cultural difference between some of these and, say, Joel Osteen is. Is it perhaps simply that Osteen and his kind are more honest about what their agenda is? Sound theology is never going to be enough if it is allied to the contemporary culture. Critique of that culture is not simply being anti-abortion or believing in and teaching the five *solas* of the Reformation. It involves seeing how even the best ideas and theology can be co-opted by the silent but deadly carbon monoxide of “the American way” in its most attractive and deeply ingrained

10 Frank Schaeffer, *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back* (New York: Carroll and Graf: 2007), 297.

form: health, wealth, influence, and the radical individualism upon which these notions float. To put it bluntly, the content of our theology needs to shape the form of the church's culture; but simply getting the theology right will not, in and of itself, produce this result.

This brings me to my final reflection. I applaud Wells's call for the reinstatement of church discipline as a central part of the church's testimony. As the Westminster Standards argue, discipline fulfils a manifold and vital purpose in the church: reclaiming sinners; deterring others; purging out the leaven; vindicating the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel; and preventing the wrath of God (WCF 30.3). As such, it is clearly vital to healthy church life. The question for me, however, is this: what does this look like in an era of motor cars, multiple denominations, and a culture of radical individualism that is politically more alive and well in the middle class Republican ethos of conservative Protestant churches than in their equivalents in the inner city?

When Hester Prynne must wear the infamous scarlet letter in the novel of that title, discipline is an awesome and terrifying thing because she is trapped in a relatively tight-knit community with no anonymity and no way of escape. Discipline is enforceable because of the social conditions which apply. Today, any church that tries to discipline someone has to face the fact that, unless that person is immediately moved to repent, the likelihood is that, next Sunday, he will simply jump in his car and keep driving until he finds a church that will accept him. Then, during the week, nobody will care because we live in a world where there is significant privacy and anonymity. None of this is to say that I regard motor cars or privacy as wrong; it is simply that we need to realize these things have profound implications for the possibility of church discipline.

Further, once again confessional, traditional theology is, in and of itself, no answer. Indeed, my observation of conservative churches would lead me to believe that they can often be worse offenders. The "Here I stand!" principle of Luther at Worms is taken by many conservative Christians

to mean that their conscience is sovereign and that there is no need to acknowledge the authority of the church in any practical way at all. Allied to the strong currents of individualism within American culture, this can make conservatives among some of the most egregious offenders when it comes to church discipline, accountability to the church, etc. The problem of discipline is not something monopolized by the anonymous, casual mega-churches or by the eclectic and loosey-goosey theologians of the emergent churches. It is a function of modern society, with its cheap gas, its anonymity, its multiple denominations, its radical individualism, and its consumerist aesthetic; and the confessional Protestant world is just as capable of being a part of the problem as anything else. Indeed, it might be worse. There is nobody less likely to meet with the elders, in my experience, than the hardline confessionalist whose monopolistic possession of the truth, combined with an oh-so-sensitive conscience and a Luther complex, places him above the reach of ordinary church courts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that I find Wells's latest book (along with his others) to be a compelling analysis of the problems facing the church in the modern West, particularly America. The church has secularized to an impressive degree. Whether it is mega-church excess or emergent eclecticism, it is clear that both by and large provide religious idioms for the expression of deeply secular cultural concerns. I also find myself in full agreement with David that the answer to these problems has to be a return to the great *solas* of the Reformation, to a church practice built around word and sacrament, and to the practice of church discipline.

Given all this, my concern is two-fold. First, I fear that many in OPC type circles will read this book and have the reaction so ably exposed by Jesus Christ in one of his most devastating parables: "I thank you Lord that I am not like other men." It is easy to take pot-shots at Willow Creek and emergent excess, but the problems of American culture which they variously represent—cults of

personality, worldly conceptions of success and power, standing on one's rights to the exclusion of everybody and everything else, radical individualism, eclecticism, iconoclastic views of the past—can sit very comfortably with Reformed, confessional theology. Such theology can just as easily be turned into a commodity as anything else out there in the marketplace. That is, after all, the American way! We confessional conservatives too like our superstars, our celebrities, our glossy magazines, and our mega-conferences. With all of this to take into account, we need to realize that theology is not enough; that theology needs to challenge many of the things that are so dear to American culture that, spiritually speaking, they are virtually invisible to the naked eye.

Second, while agreeing wholeheartedly with Wells's call for a return to church discipline, I am very pessimistic about that happening for the reasons outlined above: ease of travel; multiplication of denominations; and arrogant, anti-authoritarian individualism and libertarianism that spill over from politics into church life. Discipline is a wonderful ideal. I am just not sure what it looks like in the contemporary world. And to the extent that we all, conservative Protestants and otherwise, are part of this wider culture, so we are impotent to resist its forces.

Wells is right: it is a time for a courageous Protestantism. But sadly such may be too little too late. Like the charge of the Light Brigade, a courageous Protestantism on the attack might find that it merely goes down in a spectacular, brave defeat rather than actually achieving any of its desired goals. The analysis in this book is superb; the proposal—a return to classic Protestantism—is sound. Yet, only a dramatic transformation not simply of church theology and practice but also of church culture and the hearts of individual members of the church will be able to effect any of this. It is hard to believe, but I suspect I am accusing David of being too optimistic, something which is rarely alleged against him. But, then again, there is hope: with God, all things are possible. ©

Carl Trueman is a minister in the Orthodox Pres-

byterian Church, serving as a Professor of Historical Theology and Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

David Wells's Response to Carl Trueman's Review of His Five Books

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2009¹

by David F. Wells

I am not sure that any author should have the opportunity to engage with a review such as this. Once a book is written, it is out there for people to read and say what they want!

However, if I were to respond, I think I would want to correct just a little—one or two things.

Let me begin by connecting two things which you say and which I don't really think are accurate. They are 1) that I am a pessimist and 2) the matter of capitalism and consumerism.

Some people have accused me of longing for a golden age of some kind which has now disappeared, and you come close to that. I don't actually believe in golden ages at all, nor do I lament the passing of the world our grandparents inhabited. What I have always said is that as we pass from age to age there is a balance sheet of pluses and minuses. I have written that there are enormous benefits to living in the modernized world, beginning with the fact, if we are looking at the U.S., that in 1900 the average life expectancy was forty-nine and now it is just above eighty. And who, I have said as you also say, would turn back from the medical advances, the brilliant technology, all the conveniences and so on? These are all enormous pluses, and I don't deny them or want to say that they are not.

On the other hand, because these benefits are

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=145.

so splendid, we do not always realize the costs of living in a context like this. The costs are hidden and psychological. They have to do with the loss of connections to place, family, and a structure of values that once were somewhat “there.” Now, everything is up for negotiation. And in this context, it is very difficult for Christian faith to sustain itself. Not impossible. But simply as a description I think we have to say that it must be difficult, otherwise we would find it easier to know why we are not doing very well. I treat statistical work a little cautiously but when “The World Christian Encyclopedia” shows a massive flight of Christian faith out of the West, that certainly comports with what I think I have observed from my little corner of the church-world. Today, in the West, there is a crisis in believing and behaving.

Being a pessimist simply means that in one’s disposition one is inclined to think that things are bad, going to the dogs, going downhill, and so forth. My analysis may suggest that picture, but, I would argue, it has nothing to do with my disposition and everything to do with the difficulty Christian faith has in sustaining itself here in the modernized West.

Then, as to capitalism and consumerism—I don’t think it is correct to equate them. Capitalism is the system which makes consumerism possible. Indeed, it makes consumerism likely, but not inevitable. I also believe that capitalism is the hope, humanly speaking, for the Third World (where I work each summer in Africa). It is the creation of markets which generates the capital which makes medical care possible, builds infrastructures, sustains education, and makes the wealth that enables people to escape some of the harshness of life (which you also speak about). I believe this strongly. Until Africa can produce the social conditions that will allow for the right environment for markets to emerge, it will be without any hope of addressing its most distressing human problems.

The trick is to be able to use the fruit of capitalism without falling into the trap of consumption, of defining life by the things possessed, of flitting from product to product in such a relentless fashion that we even begin to think of life in

these terms, and of seeing Christ and the gospel as themselves products there for our satisfaction. That is when capitalism has become truly damaging to us—it has become consumerism. Can we live in a context of capitalism without this happening? I am not a Marxist and do not believe that our internal consciousness is inevitably, deterministically, formed by the external economic and class structure, so I answer “yes”—but it is not easy. Obviously it is difficult, because look where the evangelical world is today! ☹

David F. Wells is the Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts.

✦ Servant Humor

From the Back Pew

Eutyclus II continues the tradition of Eutyclus I, Ed Clowney's pen name in the initial issues of *Christianity Today* (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutyclus (and His Pin)*: “Eutyclus was summoned to his post as a symbol of Christians nodding, if not on the window-sill, at least in the back pew.” Like his namesake, Eutyclus II aims at “deflating ecclesiastical pretense, sham and present-day religiosity.” This nom de plume will remain a cover for this ecclesiastical sleuth—to maintain his anonymity, and thus his freedom to poke fun.

The Fourth Use (Unintended) of the Law

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2009¹

by Eutyclus II

The scene is familiar to many elders when examining covenant children who are making profession of faith. You ask questions about the Bible, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the benefits of redemption. The child is making terrific progress, and the reason has to do with her knowledge of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The answers roll right off her tongue because of the superior brevity and clarity of the catechism. You are impressed and think what a wonderful addition she will make to the communicant membership of

the church. What a fantastic job, in addition, the child's parents have done. You are actually excited about being a Presbyterian in ways that border on indecency and disorder.

And then you proceed to questions about the Lord's Supper. The reason, of course, is that one of the privileges of communicant membership is participating in Communion. And partaking of the Lord's Supper requires some consideration of the Lord's body and how we are to discern it in the sacrament. Suddenly, the wheels on the communicant member bandwagon come off. The child fumbles questions, lacks clarity, and in some cases doesn't even understand what the elders and pastor are asking. What becomes clear is that memorization of the Shorter Catechism has not progressed to the back part of the questions and answers. The child appears to have mastered the first thirty-eight questions. But the ones about the “outward and ordinary means” are unfamiliar.

One possible reason for this gap in catechetical knowledge is that we conservative Presbyterians are a low-church bunch. We do take doctrine very seriously, and so the first third of the Shorter Catechism is our meat and drink. The three persons of the Trinity? That's an obvious doctrine in need of clarity. The two natures of Christ? Heresy is just around the corner if we don't get that right. The foundational nature of justification for Reformed teaching on salvation? Of course, that is the crux of the Reformation and will always define who we are as Protestants. But the meaning of the Lord's Supper or eligibility for baptism? Of course, these parts of worship need to be observed correctly, and our ministers attempt to explain the teaching of Scripture about these ordinances whenever they administer them. Still, conservative Presbyterians are not sacramental by temperament. We are known not for the beauty or complexity of our liturgy but for the clarity of our doctrine.

So the problem we see in the examination of covenant children may stem from the place where we put the sacraments in our corporate life. Of course, sacramental theology is doctrine and that should be red meat for doctrinalists like us. But too much emphasis on the sacraments could turn

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=144.

us into liturgical Protestants. And those who know modern church history know where that path leads—it leads to putting aesthetics and liturgy over preaching and teaching.

As plausible as this explanation is, a more likely explanation—and one that does not traffic in low-church stereotypes of conservative Presbyterians—stares straight at us in the Shorter Catechism. To get from the benefits of redemption in the catechism to the means of grace, students need to go through the Ten Commandments. This is formidable territory. Not only does each commandment have at least two questions explaining its requirements and prohibitions (of course, the Fourth on the Lord’s Day merits an entire five questions), but the content of the answers indeed reminds the believer of his ongoing sin and how far short he falls from God’s righteous standard. In effect, the section on the “duty which God requires of man” may be functioning as a speed bump to the successful examination of our covenant children. It could very well be that the questions and answers on the Decalogue prevent children from attaining to “outward and ordinary means” of the word, sacraments, and prayer.

Of course, the Westminster divines never intended or imagined such an outcome. Their effort, like most catechists before them, was to explain the three main areas of Christian understanding for the ordinary believer—the Apostles’ Creed, the Decalogue, and the Lord’s Prayer. Although the Shorter Catechism does not follow this pattern slavishly, it does cover the basic teachings and practices of the Christian religion. To remove the teaching on God’s law would not serve the aim of summarizing what God has revealed in Scripture, and it would contradict the very nature of catechetical training throughout the history of the church. So the solution to helping covenant children understand the nature of the Lord’s Supper and the privilege that will be available to them through communicant membership cannot be doing an end run around questions thirty-nine to eighty-four.

Short of encouraging sessions and parents to spend more time with the Shorter Catechism so

that children learn it in its entirety, the way around the “speed bump” of the law may lie in the very words our ministers use from our Directory for Public Worship while administering the Supper. Orthodox Presbyterian pastors rightly “fence the table” both to preserve the integrity of the meal and to warn about the consequences of eating and drinking unworthily. At the same time, our Directory makes clear that these warnings should not “keep the humble and contrite from the table . . . as if the supper were for those who might be free from sin.” In fact, the Directory reminds ministers to make sure that those invited to the table come “as guilty and polluted sinners and without hope of eternal life apart from the grace of God in Christ” and base their hope of salvation only on “his perfect obedience and righteousness” by virtue of his keeping the law.

Perhaps the road for catechumens then to the section of the Shorter Catechism on the sacraments is similar to the path to the Lord’s Supper itself. Children should not let their own sinfulness any more than their imperfect memorization of questions thirty-nine through eighty-four keep them from either partaking of the Supper or learning the catechism’s summary of the sacraments’ meaning. They should try to master the questions on the Decalogue as much as possible with an eye on the prize of the means whereby Christ communicates the benefits of redemption. Indeed, the structure of the catechism is a welcome reminder that only as we become aware of our need for Christ’s body and blood do we appreciate the benefits signified and sealed in the Supper’s provision of bread and wine. The law is no speed bump to the Lord’s Supper. It is an incentive. ©

Remembering Robert

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2009¹

by Eutyclus II

Readers of this journal are perhaps aware that there is disagreement within our little corner of the Reformed world about the nature and extent of natural law. Whatever side one takes, there is one aspect of the “light of nature” to which we all ought eagerly to express our enthusiasm: *Robert’s Rules of Order*. Oh, how I love these rules!

And why not? What General Assembly commissioner has not experienced the despair of sinking into the quicksand of corporate confusion, only to have the body rescued by a crack parliamentarian who knew his *Robert’s Rules*? Just imagine if all of the dilemmas in our lives could vanish by a two-thirds motion to “postpone indefinitely!” Or that our mistakes could be erased by pronouncing a Mulligan and doing it over—simply by moving to reconsider!

Students of American Presbyterian history may recall that 1837 is not considered our finest year. After all, it witnessed the painful Old School–New School division. Still, 1837 yielded one event worth celebrating—in that same year Henry Martyn Robert was born. Henry was graduated from West Point and eventually became a Brigadier General in the United States Army. But he would truly become famous for penning his eponymous rules.

Come to think of it, that may explain why the Presbyterian division took place. Mr. Robert (a Baptist, actually) wasn’t prepared to rescue the Presbyterians from their parliamentary morass. If there had been a timely point of order or a motion to amend, perhaps the split may never have occurred.

Of course, the experienced OP officer knows that we employ a subtly revised version of these rules. For the uninitiated, this includes one important asterisk. Orthodox Presbyterians frown upon

the parliamentary device of ending debate by “calling the question,” which brings a pending motion to an immediate vote, provided that two-thirds of the body agrees.

This motion routinely goes down to overwhelming defeat, because we have come to appreciate the value of genuine deliberation. Our proof text is Acts 15:7 (“after there had been *much debate*,” emphasis added). I grant that extensive discussion on a pending motion is often lampooned. As one cynic put it: “everything has been said, but not everybody has said it.” I suspect that cynic is now in the PCA. (Don’t argue with me here—the motion is not debatable.)

Let me take this opportunity to introduce another revision to our beloved rules. We need to exercise greater restraint in recording negative votes. A wise minister once suggested that we should imagine that each of us is allocated two of those votes in our entire parliamentary careers. Think about that. It is fewer than time-outs per football half. So spend your quota wisely.

Do I get an amen? Better yet, can I call for division? ☺

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=181.

✦ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes

*edited by David W. Hall
and Peter A. Lillback*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2009¹

by Danny E. Olinger

A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008, 506 pages, \$35.99.

A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes aims to be a conversation among informed friends concerning the theology of John Calvin's *Institutes*. Calvin's two-fold stated purpose in all editions after 1639 was to provide a sum of Christian doctrine and to offer a point of entry into the study of the Old and New Testaments. A common thread that runs through *A Theological Guide* is this understanding that the theology of the *Institutes* is based upon the Scriptures as the Word of God. More than one writer explains that the *Institutes* contain the doctrinal elaborations drawn from the exegetical work that Calvin undertook in his commentaries.

In treating Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, Robert Reymond points out that, contra Rome's view

that the church is the final authority in faith and life, Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture is the final authority in faith and life.

However, Reymond disagrees with Calvin's teaching that for God "the mode of accommodation is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us" (57). Reymond states, "I would counsel that we should not follow Calvin here since we can know on the basis of God's verbal self-revelation many things about him in the same sense that he knows them" (57).

Reymond's disagreement recalls elements of the so-called "Clark-Van Til Controversy" concerning the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, with Reymond following Gordon Clark's teaching. Clark believed truth must have a univocal, identical point of coincidence in God and man's knowledge. Van Til, like Calvin, would not force one to choose between univocal and equivocal knowledge. The knowledge of God is beyond the creature's full understanding, but that is not to say that the creature does not have a true understanding. Calvin with his statement holds to a biblical (and Reformed) view of analogy and correspondence, which allows him to maintain the distinction between the Creator and the creature in the realm of epistemology.

R. Scott Clark argues that Calvin always grounded the cause of election in God, and not in the creature. To do otherwise would be to attack the divine free will because it would condition it by something outside God. Regarding predestination, Clark maintains that Calvin always taught a doctrine of double predestination. According to Calvin, those who object to the doctrine of reprobation are marked by a refusal to be curbed by the Word of God.

Michael Horton rightly observes that Calvin's anthropology does not include the Roman Catholic teaching of the *donum superadditum*, that is, a gift of grace added to man's nature in order to orient him to God. Moral corruption due to disobedience to God, and not a deficiency in man's creation, stands at the center of the doctrine of sin. From its wrong starting point, Roman Catholicism must see man as deficient from creation, sin as not

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=130.

totally damaging man, and salvation as a synergistic effort between God and man.

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. convincingly argues that Calvin taught that justification based solely on the forensically imputed righteousness of Christ and received by faith alone stands or falls with the believer's underlying union with Christ. Calvin taught that the two-fold benefit of union with Christ is justification and sanctification. Justification and sanctification are inseparable, and only those already justified are sanctified. However, justification is not to be seen as the source of sanctification. The source of both justification and sanctification is Christ by his Spirit.

According to Gaffin, this allowed Calvin to stand against Rome's making justification (change of status) dependent upon righteousness resident in the believer. Joined in union with Christ, the believer's righteousness in justification is outside himself. Gaffin writes concerning Calvin's view, "Imputation is a judicial transfer that preserves the purely forensic nature of justification and at the same time ensures that the righteousness reckoned in justification is resident solely in Christ, in his person, and not somehow within the person of the sinner united to him" (264).

Calvin also refuted Rome's claim that the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone produces indifference in the believer to holy living and good works. Calvin argued that the faith through which the believer obtains the free righteousness of the mercy of God does not lack good works. Faith as justifying and faith as sanctifying are not different faiths. Union with Christ is both forensic and renovative. Calvin wrote, "Christ, our righteousness, is the sun; justification, its light; sanctification, its heat. The sun is at once the sole source of both such that its light and heat are inseparable. At the same time, only light illumines and only heat warms, not the reverse. Both are always present, without the one becoming the other" (268).

In regard to the government of the church, Joseph Hall writes that Calvin believed that "two genres of offices exist by Christ's mandate: the office of elder (presbyter) of whom there were three

kinds, teachers (doctors), pastors, and governing elders, and the office of deacon" (396). This leads Hall to conclude that, although Charles Hodge and Calvin both taught that pastor and elder have equal authority in church courts, Hodge differed with Calvin "in terms of the disparity between the ordained pastor and the layman, the non-theologically trained, governmental elder" (407). It appears with this statement and others that Hall would have Calvin viewed as sympathetic to the so-called "two-office" position.

For this reviewer, when Calvin argued that bishops (pastors) and presbyters (pastors/elders) were synonymous, he was arguing over against Rome for the parity of pastors. That is, no single pastor should be called a "bishop" with authority over other pastors. This is Calvin's basic point, not eliminating the disparity—or order in the offices—between ordained pastors and lay governmental elders.

Space prohibits talking about the fine contributions of K. Scott Oliphint (Knowledge), Joseph Pipa, Jr. (Creation and Providence), Peter Lillback (The Covenant), Joel Beeke (Appropriating Salvation), David Calhoun (Prayer), W. Robert Godfrey (Worship and the Sacraments), and Cornelis Venema (Last Things).

The secondary star of this book by Calvin commentators is seemingly the one Calvin scholar who did not have a chapter, Richard Muller. Whenever a particular reading of Calvin needed support, Muller was quoted as the authoritative guide, particularly his *The Unaccommodated Calvin*.

Muller's absence, however, does not take away from the value of the book. The chapters are uniformly solid, and an appreciation and love for Calvin shines. Hopefully, those who pick up the book will heed the counsel of the commentators and turn to reading Calvin's *Institutes*. But, Calvin himself would not have the reader stop there. For him, the goal of the *Institutes* is encouraging and enabling one to study the Word of God for the building up of the church to the end of glorifying God. ©

Danny E. Olinger is the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Original Sin

by Alan Jacobs

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2009¹

by David VanDrunen

Original Sin: A Cultural History, by Alan Jacobs. New York: HarperOne, 2008, xviii + 286 pages, \$24.95.

Original Sin, by Wheaton College English professor Alan Jacobs, is a very good read. Jacobs engagingly addresses one of the Christian doctrines that is most overtly offensive to the natural man: that human beings are born into this world corrupt and unable to overcome their inherent wickedness by their own efforts. He tells a delightful tale of how the stubborn reality of innate human depravity has kept rearing its head through history and imposing its will despite the best efforts of apparently well-meaning people to proclaim the goodness of human nature and to live as if this were true.

Potential readers of this book should keep a couple of things in mind. First, it is not a book of Christian doctrine. Jacobs does not aim to give an exhaustive biblical or theological exposition of the doctrine of original sin. This is not a criticism. There is a place for doctrinal treatments of original sin, but Jacobs has simply given us something different—yet something valuable. Second, Jacobs' working definition of original sin is deficient from the perspective of the Westminster standards. Whereas Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 18 describes original sin as “the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature,” Jacobs treats original

sin only in terms of the latter two (though he does not explicitly reject the historic Reformed idea of the imputation of Adam's transgression). Perhaps this book would have been even more interesting if he had considered the notion of imputed guilt, but the topic of innate corruption is certainly rich enough to provide plenty of food for thought.

Jacobs's narrative, which runs from the early history of the Christian church to the present, describes a fundamental tension that has catalyzed innumerable theological and cultural clashes throughout Western history. The Christian doctrine of original sin is downright offensive, and theologians and social activists alike have tried mightily to oppose it. Yet the fact of human corruption will not go away. Social experiments based upon the assumption of human goodness always go awry, and theological defenders of human goodness are always checked by the defenders of Paul and Augustine. The idea of original sin simply explains the experience of human life better than the idea of inherent human benevolence.

Jacobs confesses that his story is not exhaustive, but he does take us into many of the controversies that have shaped Western civilization. Many people regard Augustine as the inventor of the doctrine of original sin (though Jacobs believes that he adhered to Paul's teaching), and Augustine plays a leading role in the narrative. Jacobs discusses Augustine's clashes with Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum and shows how these clashes reverberated in subsequent history. He takes us, for instance, to the seventeenth-century polemics between the Jansenites (Roman Catholics with an Augustinian orientation) and the Jesuits (who had a more kindly view of human nature). He describes the competing eighteenth-century visions of the Great Awakening preachers (defenders of human depravity such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who tried futilely to develop an educational method based upon human goodness). Jacobs takes us into the minds of those who saw civilization as the source of human evildoing and thus romanticized the idea of the noble savage and dreamed of getting back to nature—and who

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=134.

sometimes even went to America to fulfill this dream. Yet in America their utopian communities and socialist experiments inevitably failed in short order. Jacobs also reflects on contemporary debates spurred by scientific discoveries. For example, is evil passed along through our genes?

Among the many insightful observations that Jacobs makes in the course of this stroll through history are comments concerning the social and political implications of original sin. For one thing, Jacobs notes in several places that the theory and reality of original sin has a democratizing tendency: the idea that *all* people are born corrupt has a leveling effect that restrains the temptation to elevate or to lower a certain class of people far beyond others. Another interesting point arises in the context of his description of nineteenth-century revivalist Charles Finney—no friend of original sin. Jacobs observes that Finney hated the doctrine in large part because it endangered his dreams of achieving social and political perfection through the spread of Christianity. Finney regarded original sin as “subversive of the gospel” because it discouraged people from setting cultural perfection as their goal.

Jacobs’s narrative might be described as an indirect defense of the truth of Christianity, because he shows how opponents of the doctrine of original sin have repeatedly failed to make sense of reality and have been unable to live in a way consistent with their convictions. This book may also have indirect apologetic value in Jacobs’s observation that the doctrine of original sin compels us to look to the grace of God in Christ for a solution to the problem of original sin. Jacobs points to examples—twentieth-century writer Rebecca West preeminently—of people who have reckoned profoundly with the depth of human depravity yet rejected the Christian message of salvation. Their response has been deep despair about the prospects for human history. In the face of original sin the two alternatives are faith in Christ or loss of hope.

I recommend *Original Sin* as an entertaining, engaging, and thought-provoking book about this central Christian doctrine. People teaching about

the doctrine of sin in schools or churches may find this a helpful companion to (though not a substitute for) exegetical and theological works on this topic. ©

David VanDrunen, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California.

We Become What We Worship

by G. K. Beale

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online February 2009¹

by Shane Lems

We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry, by G. K. Beale. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008, 341 pages, \$17.16

We Become What We Worship is G.K. Beale’s recent treatment of Isaiah 6 and idolatry. In this book, Beale weaves in and out of the Old and New Testaments using Isaiah 6:9-13 as his key text. The structure of the book is straightforward: from Isaiah 6, Beale goes back in the Old Testament then forward to the New Testament to discuss idolatry. He also takes a few helpful sidesteps to discuss several ancient Near Eastern parallels as well as idolatry in Judaism.

The thesis of the book is simple: people become like what they worship (hence the title; cf. Ps. 115:8). One interesting point about this book is that he deduces his thesis specifically from Isaiah 6:9-13. This is interesting because, as Beale himself notes, there are virtually no scholars who interpret this passage as describing punishment for

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=135.

idolatry (38). The first chapter is devoted to Isaiah 6:9-13 and Beale's exegesis and interpretation showing his thesis.

More interestingly, Beale uses his debateable interpretation of Isaiah 6:9-13 as a hermeneutical lens to evaluate earlier and subsequent texts that cite or allude to Isaiah 6:9-13. Beale submits that his thesis led him to isolate other passages in Scripture where he believes the thesis is present: "At times this thesis becomes a lens through which to see some passages in a way not otherwise seen. This lens may also cause me to see things in a passage that are not there. Therefore eisegesis may happen in this book, but I have tried to be aware" of it and avoid it (33). In my opinion, his thesis *does* indeed drive him too far in his interpretation of other passages, down to the very contextual fiber of allusions. The careful reader will note countless "ifs" and "probablys" and "possibles" on which Beale bases his subsequent arguments.

Concerning intertextuality or allusion, Beale is correct—there are citations and allusions to Isaiah 6:9-13 in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Beale also notes that finding allusions is based on probability, possibility, guesswork, and is more of an art than a precise science (25, 31). This should give the interpreter great reason to be extremely careful in the art of finding allusions. Beale says he is a maximalist in this area (he finds and utilizes allusions readily), and it shows throughout the book as he finds his idolatry thesis from Isaiah 6 under many idolatry passages throughout Scripture. This sometimes leads him to discuss an allusion of Isaiah 6 elsewhere in Scripture, which leads him to another allusion of the alluded text. More simply put, in a way similar to "cross referencing," he "cross-alludes," and in the cross allusions, he finds his thesis. If I may define his categories a bit more precisely, Beale is a super-confident maximalist while others who generally agree with him might be cautious maximalists in this area of finding allusions. In my opinion, while Beale did note that finding allusions was an art, he treated it like a science.

One more area that left me wondering was the subtitle of this book, *A Biblical Theology of*

Idolatry. I'm not quite sure it is that. Though Beale does note in the introduction that he discusses the theme utilizing Isaiah 6 primarily, he also makes sweeping statements like "Israel's sin was essentially idol worship," and "Paul sees idolatry as the essence of sin" (36, 203). I believe this aspect of idolatry (becoming what we worship) is more like one strand of several concerning idolatry in Scripture. Were it a thorough biblical theology of idolatry, one would expect to find themes such as idols and witness (Isa. 44:8-9), idolatry as spiritual prostitution (Ezek. 16), more discussion of the second commandment, and emphasis on how idols originate in the heart, and so forth. In this book, Beale's thesis becomes a hermeneutical Great White whale that swallows other important themes. Beale's biblical theology tiptoes on the edge of systematic theology, though he uses allusions and citations instead of proof texts to remain narrower in his scope and goal.

The book is indeed worth owning and studying. It is helpful to consider this thread of the idolatry theme in Scripture, and Beale draws out many conclusions well. However, the reader should pause and consider well the methodological bent of the book and take care not to overstate interpretations based on probable allusions. This type of biblical theology has its strengths, but it must be noted that this is *not* the Vosian type of biblical theology many readers of *Ordained Servant* are perhaps familiar with.

Finally, the book is not for the average layperson. The cross-allusions and detailed word studies are lengthy, detailed, and complex. *We Become What We Worship* is not *the* definitive work on idolatry, and I probably would not put it on my "hermeneutical shelf," but it should be on the shelf next to other such works on the second commandment and related themes. ©

Shane Lems is a minister in the United Reformed Church serving in the United Reformed Church of Sunnyside, in Sunnyside, Washington.

A Step from Death

by Larry Woiwode

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2009¹

by Diane L. Olinger

A Step from Death: A Memoir, by Larry Woiwode. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008, 272 pages, \$24.00.

A Step from Death is the second memoir by Larry Woiwode, renowned author and poet and one-time OPC elder. The first, *What I Think I Did* (2000), records Woiwode's struggle, along with his son, to keep their farm running and their family alive during a terrible winter storm. In *A Step from Death*, Woiwode records his "temporary escape" from death in an accident caused by his carelessness with a hay baler attached to a powerful tractor. Both accounts are interspersed with Woiwode's recollections of significant events from his childhood, his college days, his days in New York as a beginning writer/actor, his relationship with his literary father and editor, Bill Maxwell, and North Dakota farm and family life.

For those who may have struggled to make it through Woiwode's challenging novels, these memoirs provide a different sort of entry point into his thought. He writes that his memoir "is a way of describing how one mind, mine, moves—the most revealing aspect of autobiography" (47). Woiwode admits that his mind probably does not "move" in the same way as most. He suspects that he could be classified as borderline autistic or "the victim of a many-lettered attention disorder" (3). He has suffered a disassociative episode, ending in a minor breakdown (93). He thinks, observes, and writes from a "displaced region," a result of some sort of "slippage . . . that draws [his] attention inward" (4).

A Step from Death does not begin where the first memoir ended, moving us forward in a straight line. Woiwode is no fan of (or, in his view

of things, a captive to) "the artificial, forced imposition of step-by-step chronology" (47). He does not believe that sequential storytelling either about his life or that of his fictional characters is the best way to accomplish his purposes. He prefers to examine each event as if simultaneous, allowing him to weigh one moment against another with a "godlike gaze into mini-eternity" (47). Perhaps this approach to time and event in his writing explains why, for Woiwode, a tragic event (in his case his mother's death when he was a boy) is something you learn to live with, not something you get beyond (32).

However, there is some chronological progress from the first memoir to the second. Woiwode is older now, sixty-three, and thoughts of death disturb him. All of his children are grown, the youngest leaving for college. Thus, Woiwode's relationship with his adult children is a focal point. In fact, Woiwode's stated purpose for this memoir is to explain certain things about himself and his life to his only son, Joseph. We view the progress in Woiwode's relationship with his son through the lens of Woiwode's relationship with his own father in chapters titled "Sonship," "Child as Father," and "Father as Child." This culminates in Woiwode's poignant recollection of the time when Joseph, now a uniformed deputy sheriff, confronts him with the question, "Are you drinking again?" (151).

The book's title refers to the tractor incident with which it begins, but also to other near-death incidents in Woiwode's life and his son's life, to aging, and to the human condition. "Death is our destiny," writes Woiwode, and we either accept it or pretend it doesn't exist (157). Woiwode doesn't pretend. He accepts death, but not with a placid fatalism. He rages against it, and sometimes fears it, and this leads him to cling to the One who has conquered death.

Woiwode is a Christian and has been "from the time [he] can remember" (15). He writes of his faith in both his memoirs. However, his contemplations of Scripture and spiritual matters are not recorded as separate chapters with titles like "Why I Became a Presbyterian" or "What the Westminster Confession of the Faith Means to Me," but

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=146.

rather as organic parts of his experience. Scripture is part of his life and comes to mind as he struggles to free himself from the tractor, and once free, when he sees his flesh laid open in raw strips, “by his stripes I was healed” (24). He refers to a Psalm when describing his love of the land (84); a yellow ID tag in a heifer’s ear is a reminder of the children’s catechism question, *Why did God make all things?* and the answer, *For his own glory*.

Woiwode is intriguing. How could someone hip enough to write for the *New Yorker* and to refer to Robert DeNiro as “my buddy Bob” (203) have been drawn to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? I think the answer may be rooted in his fierce independence, a pioneer spirit. As an artist, he writes like himself and like no one else (not surprising, since he mainly writes about himself, even in his fiction). As a farmer, he adopts organic methods, regardless of whether his neighbors see the sense in it (75). As a father, he refuses to send his children to the public school, even when it means a battle with state authorities (176). As a medical patient, he leaves the hospital against doctor’s advice and refuses tests and treatments he deems unnecessary (26). As an English professor, he sees little value in a Ph.D. when he already knows how to write (244). Does this independence make him noble? Arrogant? Lovable? I’m not sure, but one can see the attraction of the Reformed faith to such a man, a return to what is pure and right, and the irrelevance to him of opinions to the contrary.

A Step from Death is beautifully written. It will be appreciated by fans of Woiwode’s fiction, but also by others interested in the life and thought of this important American writer. ☺

Diane L. Olinger is a member of Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Glenside, Pennsylvania.

Last Things First

by John V. Fesko

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
Online May 2009¹

by David R. Holmlund

Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology, by John V. Fesko. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2007, 208 pages, \$18.99, paper.

There are far too few accessible books on covenant theology and the biblical theology of the opening chapters of the Bible. The situation is made worse both by the revisionist efforts to alter the contours of historic Reformed covenant theology and by the perfect storm of controversy we encounter when covenant theology meets the opening chapters of Genesis. However, it seems to me that John Fesko’s recent book, *Last Things First*, has now altered the landscape of available books on these topics. Moreover, Fesko has written one of the clearest and most helpful works of Reformed covenant theology available to date.

Last Things First grew out of a series of adult Sunday school lectures on the opening chapters of Genesis at Geneva OPC in Woodstock, Georgia. Fesko explains in the introduction that he was motivated by a desire to get beyond the perennial debates over the length of days in order to understand the place of these chapters in the canon, particularly in presenting the Fall of Adam and the work of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. This modest explanation quite frankly does not account for the exceptionally thorough biblical and theological research which characterizes the whole book; nor does it prepare the reader for the foundational topics which are so helpfully presented—the interlocking subjects of federalism, hermeneutics, protology, and eschatology. The six substantive chapters in the book cover such things

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=154.

as the *imago Dei*, the threefold offices of Adam and Christ, the covenant of works, Christ as the Second Adam, and the Sabbath. Each of these topics would on their own offer valuable insight into both the exegetical and systematic fields of Reformed theology. Presented together, they are an invaluable resource for anyone seeking to preach or teach on Genesis or covenant theology.

What impressed me the most about the book was its interaction with a vast amount of historical and contemporary sources while giving an even, confessionally sound presentation in accessible language. This will delight pastors and teachers and possibly also provoke a few scholars and authors to mild envy for Fesko's apparent ease in doing this.

Several categories of readers will want to pick up this book: ministers, teachers, interested laymen, and students of all kinds. In particular, those who have not had the chance to formally study with one of the significant covenant theologians of recent years will find in *Last Things First* a fine place to get oriented in an economy of time. ©

David R. Holmlund serves as the pastor of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Dover, New Hampshire.

Why Johnny Can't Preach

by *T. David Gordon*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2009¹

by Stephen J. Tracey

Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers, by T. David Gordon. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009, 108 pages, \$9.99, paper.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=171.

In this little book T. David Gordon asserts that, due to the corrosive effects of cultural changes, Johnny can't preach. Preacher Johnny suffers from an inability to master either the *form* or the *content* of preaching. Dr. Gordon does not intend to be either uncharitable or ungrateful. He speaks, rather, in the mold of Baxter, as "a dying man, to dying men." For a spell he found himself on the fast track, the accelerated course, suffering from a cancerous tumor and undergoing radiation and chemotherapy. By God's grace, his cancer is in remission. His passion for soul-nourishing preaching comes from his own hunger, as well as his own calling to preach.

Dr. Gordon boldly asserts that preaching is "ordinarily poor," "incompetent," "not genuinely soul-nourishing," "in disarray," "ineffective," "defective," "in bad shape," and "poorly done." Sermons are "religiously useless," "pointless," "inadequately drawn from the text," with applications that "almost never have anything to do with the text." They are generally "listless," "rambling," "disorganized," "without clear purpose," "uninspiring," "hard to follow," "irrelevant," "poorly reasoned," and - to put it bluntly - "poor."

Here is the heart of the matter:

To preach the Word of God well, one must already have cultivated, at a minimum, three sensibilities: the sensibility of the close reading of texts, the sensibility of composed communication, and the sensibility of the significant. Without these, a person simply cannot preach... but our present culture does not cultivate any one of these sensibilities, and pre-ministerial candidates, or ministers themselves, must undertake their cultivation if preaching is to be rescued from its present moribund state. (106)

Preacher Johnny, like every other Johnny, no longer reads texts. He scans them, browses them, "Googles" them, blogs them, pastes them on his Facebook: he looks for overt content and does not notice "language well employed." Consequently, Preacher Johnny is neither sharp on rhetorical

form nor on content. He “uses” texts, but does not “receive” them.

This then feeds an inability to recognize what is significant. Says Gordon,

A culture that reads can consider what is significant because reading takes time, and what is significant ordinarily takes time to apprehend. But a culture that is accustomed to commercial interruptions every six or seven minutes loses its ability to discuss significant matters because it has lost the patience necessary to consider them. (54)

It is not simply that Johnny can’t read; the problem is not merely illiteracy, but *aliteracy*. Johnny can read, he just chooses not to read, or at least not to read anything that requires mental wrestling. The awful result of this decline is stated by Gordon in the following way,

What kinds of ministers does such a culture produce? Ministers who are not at home with what is significant; ministers whose attention span is less than that of a four-year-old in the 1940s, who race around like the rest of us, constantly distracted by sounds and images of inconsequential trivialities, and out of touch with what is weighty. It is not surprising that their sermons, and the alleged worship that surrounds them, are often trifling, thoughtless, uninspiring, and mundane (58–9).

As if that were not bad enough, Preacher Johnny has another problem, he can’t write. What Gordon means is this, “we do not compose our thoughts as frequently or carefully as we once did.” (63). We are so busy e-mailing, texting, or twittering that we become hooked on a stream-of-consciousness-speak, and that just doesn’t work in the pulpit. Furthermore, Preacher Johnny is not used to reading body language and so he doesn’t even know when people are bored and disconnected.

In a chapter entitled “A Few Thoughts About Content,” Dr. Gordon turns his intellectual weed whacker to a few of the weeds commonly found masquerading as good pasture in sermons; Moralism, How-To, Introspection (the pernicious preaching of “I Know You Think You Are a Christian, but

You Are Not.”), and Social Gospel/So-Called Culture War. He pleads for Christ-centered preaching, preaching that proclaims the fitness and competence of Christ in his mediatorial work.

Our problem is not unique. It seems that every generation laments the loss of power in the pulpit. Gordon has stepped forward to fill a gap. He does not try to do too much. Others have provided more in-depth analysis of media, or more detailed works on preaching. Gordon, with lucidity and brevity, combines the two. He offers practical suggestions on developing these sensibilities.

However, there is one area that Dr. Gordon leaves untouched: the question of *unction*. In *Preaching and Preachers*, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, leaves this to the final chapter. Explaining why he left it to the end, he says, “My reason for doing so is that I believe if we do, or attempt to do, all I have been saying first, then the unction will come upon it” (305). Perhaps Dr. Gordon agrees with Lloyd-Jones that, if we use the ordinary, God-given means, the Spirit will ordinarily come. However, some discussion of what Charles Bridges calls “the want of divine influence,” would have been helpful.

If preachers are a gift to the church, does it follow that preaching is a gift? And like every other gift it is to be improved. This is the subject Dr. Gordon addresses. Yet preaching is not simply a science or an art. Should we look for unction? Is the current problem merely a sensibility problem, or a spiritual problem? Sadly, this takes us into the shadow of the Log College and the residual tension in American Presbyterianism of defining a “churchly form of Christianity.” Should we license men to preach who demonstrate literary sensibilities and have not the Spirit? Some say “aye,” some say “nay.” Some say “do we have to choose?” Some say “the question is not well put.” This book would have been greatly enhanced had Gordon shared some of his reflections on that subject.

Some more, please, Dr. Gordon! ©

Stephen J. Tracey serves as the pastor of Lakeview Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Rockport, Maine.

John Calvin

by Robert Godfrey

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2009¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor, by W. Robert Godfrey. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009, 207 pages, \$15.99, paper.

There is no better introduction to Calvin's ministry and thought in print. Here's why. Godfrey summarizes the early life of Calvin up to the end of his ministry in Strassburg in the first quarter of the book under the heading "Pilgrim." The bulk of the book is taken up with Calvin, the "Pastor," in his Genevan ministry, which lasted to the end of his life. After describing his return from exile to Geneva, Godfrey unpacks the work of Calvin as pastor theologian. The theological content of Calvin's preaching, teaching, and writing is skillfully woven in the biographical fabric of Calvin's life.

This book is a valuable introduction not only to Calvin's life and faith, but to the Reformed faith itself, since it outlines the main themes of Calvin's theology and thus the theological tradition named after him. Godfrey signals his method by skillfully introducing Calvin's first great polemical work, "Reply to Sadoleto." Not only did this treatise successfully ward off the would-be interloper Cardinal Sadoleto, but it earned Calvin a ticket out of exile in Strassburg—an exile he was loathe to leave. Calvin's reply, written in 1539, proved to be a turning point in his ministry and writing. Godfrey is more than equal to the task of providing a cogent summary of Calvin's brilliant letter in nine pages.

Then, after exploring the young Calvin's intellectual and spiritual roots, Godfrey describes his first ministry in Geneva and his ministry in exile in Strassburg. All the while the character of the pastor-preacher is revealed: brilliant, determined,

faithful, and caring. Above all he is captive to God's revealed Word and his calling to preach and teach it to the emerging Reformed church. All of his energies were poured out on the edification of the church. His sermons, commentaries, letters, and treatises were aimed either at instructing the people or the leaders of the church. The last six chapters—making up three quarters of the book—explicate the main themes of Calvin's theology in relationship to the church. It is clear that Godfrey's own writing is aimed at helping the church today—or should I say recalling the church to its Reformation heritage.

"One of the most important tasks that Calvin took upon himself was the reform of public worship in Geneva" (69). Thus, chapter six, "The Church and Worship," covers the liturgy, congregational singing, the regulative principle, and the theology underlying these. Godfrey sums up the salient principles of Calvin's theology of worship (80–86): 1) the centrality of the Word; 2) liturgical simplicity; 3) spiritual ascent to the heavenly reality of communion with the ascended Christ by faith; 4) reverence before God.

Chapter seven, "The Church and the Sacraments," begins by identifying the doctrine and practice of the sacraments as "one of the most important issues of the Reformation" (87). This doctrine is barely on the radar of Evangelicalism. It was at the center of Calvin's concern, perhaps because it was the visible center of Roman Catholic corruption of Scripture, not only in the doctrine of transubstantiation but in adding five unbiblical sacraments, since the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The two biblical sacraments are given to raise our minds to heaven (94) in order to embrace the promises of God in Christ by faith (91). Godfrey presents this material in the context of the various debates of the day.

Chapter eight, "The Church and Predestination," presents this controversial doctrine in the proper context of Calvin's theology and pastoral care as a "vital and comforting doctrine" (113). At the heart of Calvin's concern was the sovereignty of God's grace (116). For Calvin the final decision on this doctrine was found in the Bible's clear

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=177.

teaching. That is what we must submit to (119). In the end it is through preaching the gospel that the elect are effectually called into union with Christ and his church (121). Christ is at the center of this doctrine (123). A brief discussion of Calvin’s “two covenant theology,” at the end of this chapter, is helpful (124–127).

Chapter nine, “The Church, the City, and the Schools,” addresses the Constantinian confusion Calvin inherited from medieval theology. It is in this context that Godfrey ably covers the infamous Servetus incident (132–135).

Chapter ten, “Calvin as Pastoral Counselor,” the longest chapter in the book, emphasizes a little-appreciated aspect of Calvin’s work. Calvin’s extensive counseling ministry—much of it through correspondence throughout Europe—is rooted, according to Godfrey, in his doctrine of Providence. Calvin was especially fond of using the Psalms in his counseling (142–146). As the governor of the world, God exercises his Fatherly care over his children. This knowledge builds the believer in faith and the practice of prayer (145), especially in facing suffering. Calvin’s pastoral care was often directed toward the sick, grieving, and persecuted. An essential part of the pastor’s work is being an example of “modesty and moderation” (162) in the face of opposition and of things of which they do not approve—counsel we could sorely use today.

Chapter eleven, “Calvin and the *Institutes*,” explores the development and genius of this profound work of systematic theology. The knowledge of God and self through Scripture is foundational to Christian faith. This twofold knowledge of God and self is absolutely reliable and perspicuous (170–177). The testimony of the Spirit convinces people of the veracity of the Word (180). The Bible is self-authenticating (181). Finally, Calvin develops the doctrine of Christ for the first time in terms of the offices of prophet, priest, and king in the *Institutes* (189). Godfrey concludes this chapter by showing that Calvin taught the active obedience of Christ in the *Institutes* as foundational to the doctrine of justification (190–192).

Godfrey’s poignant “Conclusion: The Unmarked Grave,” accents the remarkable humility

of one of the greatest intellects in church history. In the end Calvin depended utterly on the grace of God in Christ. His much maligned character has endured the test of time.

The indexes and layout of the book are excellent. The typography of the chapter subheadings, however, leaves something to be desired. A select bibliography of Calvin biographies and theological analysis would have been helpful.

One lays down this book inspired to take up reading or rereading the great reformer’s works, many of which are still being discovered, translated, and published today. This book should motivate a new generation to do just that. ☺

Gregory E. Reynolds serves as the pastor of *Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC)* in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

Concerning the True Care of Souls by *Martin Bucer*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2009¹

by William Shishko

Concerning the True Care of Souls, by Martin Bucer (translated by Peter Beale). Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009, xxxviii + 218 pages, \$24.00.

The Banner of Truth Trust is to be highly commended for its publication of the first English translation of Martin Bucer’s *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, which was originally published in German in 1538. The value of this book cannot be overestimated. The Protestant Reformation’s original handbook of pastoral theology, it is a

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=182.

major piece of the puzzle that shows the fascinating connection between Europe and Britain in the reformation of pastoral care.

Martin Bucer (1491–1551) served as pastor in Strasbourg from 1523 to 1549. During that time, and at the very time *Concerning the True Care of Souls* was originally published, John Calvin (who had been exiled after his first period of ministry in Geneva) came under the influence of Bucer in Strasbourg. By the time Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541 with a virtually open invitation to bring reformation to that city, Bucer's biblically developed views of the church, Christian ministry, church office, and pastoral care had greatly formed his thinking. Indeed, Bucer's ideas took better root in Geneva than they did in Strasbourg.

In 1549, after Bucer came into conflict with the political leaders of Strasbourg, he accepted an invitation to move to England, where he was appointed Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. He served in that position until his death in 1551. During that brief but fruitful time he composed his famous *De Regno Christi*, and also influenced the revisions that would become the second (and far more Protestant) edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Richard Baxter appears to have been influenced by Bucer as well, and many of the suggestions developed in *Concerning the True Care of Souls* would take flesh in Baxter's now famous ministry in Kidderminster, and would be enunciated in his classic work *The Reformed Pastor*.

Concerning the True Care of Souls (which was originally entitled *Concerning the true soul-care and the correct shepherd-service, how the same should be established and executed in the church of Christ*) consists of twelve chapters and a summary. Its chapters include treatments of the nature of the church and the nature of Christ's rule in the church, how the Lord carries out his pastoral office and the work of salvation in his church through his ordained ministers, and the principle work and activity of those who care for souls. Bucer then offers his pastoral advice concerning how the lost sheep are to be sought, how straying sheep are to be restored, how hurting and wounded sheep are to be healed, how the weak sheep are to be strength-

ened, and how healthy and strong sheep are to be guarded and fed. One easily finds here the seed of what later flowered in Reformed pastoral theology and even in much biblical counseling that has been developed in the Reformed tradition.

Why should pastors and elders in particular give attention to this heretofore obscure and inaccessible volume?

First, there is the historical value of the book. Scholars in the field of church history are showing fresh interest in Bucer's powerful influence on so many aspects of the developing theology of the Protestant Reformation. Now pastors have access to the volume written by Bucer that had similar influence on the reformation of pastoral care in the developing church life of the same period.

Second, the book is rich in its theological insights. I have not read as helpful an explanation of the meaning of "binding and loosing" as I have read here; and the well developed concept of church office and authority applied throughout the book is a refreshing antidote to the ambivalence toward these subjects that marks most contemporary treatments.

Third, the book is practical. It is a true "practical theology." Keeping in mind that by "penance" Bucer is speaking of the fruits of repentance, the treatment of this subject alone makes the book most valuable for pastors and elders. Likewise are Bucer's biblical expositions of the nature of the authority and work of ministers, elders, and deacons.

Finally, the book is motivational. Bucer addressed the book "To all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that they may rightly recognize and love his church and the fellowship of his people" (xxxix). His burden, particularly, is that those who care for souls have the heart of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Pastors will come away from this book with a fresh zeal to have just such a heart.

One suggestion: Read the summary of chapters on pages 211–214 before beginning at chapter 1. ©

William J. Shishko, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, serves as pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, New York.

✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

Too Frank by Half: What Love Should Have Covered

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2009¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Crazy for God: How I Grew Up As One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Most All) of It Back, by Frank Schaeffer. New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007, 417 pages, \$26.00.

When Mick Jagger and his Rolling Stones were wailing “Gimme Shelter (1969),” I was finding it at L’Abri. War, they intoned, which was just a shot away, could be answered by love, which was just a kiss away. By 1971, I knew better. Frank Schaeffer’s latest book questions the authenticity of what I found. It was not far from the Harvard at which Frank’s father, Francis Schaeffer, had so triumphantly lectured in 1968 that I, in the winter of 1971, had become a Christian. It was there in my “cabin room,” (actually an old coal bin I had made into a room) near Porter Square that I began reading my Bible, and shortly after read Edith Schaeffer’s *L’Abri* (1969), Francis Schaeffer’s *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1970), *The God Who Is There* (1968), *Escape from Reason*

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=132.

(1968), *Pollution and the Death of Man* (1970), and finally *Death in the City* (1969)² before traveling to L’Abri in August.

I agree with the main thrust of Os Guinness’s assessment of *Crazy for God* (CFG).³ Although I think he overstates his case, as one might expect of someone so intimately involved with the Schaeffers and L’Abri, I sympathize with Franky to some degree because his early life was lived in the shadows of his famous father. By all accounts, Franky was often neglected as he grew up during the heyday of L’Abri’s popularity. But this lack of guidance is no excuse for his behavior, or for lacing his memoir with such a strong resentment (213). He cynically notes, “The more famous, the more hip the convert, the more the Lord could ‘use that person’” (211). While he is scoffing, Frank suffuses his story with name-dropping (296). The hubris he elsewhere scorns is never stronger than in the scorning (300).

The subtitle of his book, “*How I Grew Up As One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Most All) of It Back*,” speaks volumes. Frank Schaeffer hitched his wagon to the wrong horse—as I think to some degree did his father in his later ministry under Franky’s influence. He was crazy, not for God, but for the Christian Right, and perhaps for notoriety equal to his father’s. It would be easy being raised at L’Abri to think of being committed to a cause, rather than the historic Christian faith and the God of the Bible, given the uniqueness of L’Abri and the Schaeffers’ ministry. In his preface, he says as much: “having once been a ‘professional Christian,’ my vision is muddled by the baggage I carry” (5). But this does not mitigate the sometimes poisonous picture he paints of his parents, in particular, and Reformed Protestant faith, in general. Actually the poison is largely in Frank’s own

2 All of these may be found in Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982).

3 Os Guinness, “Fathers and Sons: On Francis Schaeffer, Frank Schaeffer, and Crazy for God,” *Books and Culture* 14, no. 2 (March/April 2008): 32-33. Guinness was a worker and lecturer at L’Abri from 1967 to 1973.

perceptions. His horizontal focus radically colors his portrayal of his parents' lives. Absent in Frank's account is a transcendent reason for the ministry of the Schaeffers.

CFG has a decidedly postmodern flavor in the tell-all style of Oprah. It betrays a studied lack of certainty and at times deep cynicism. Guinness notes,

The book's revelations are taken as gospel and the book is judged in terms of its style rather than its substance. Our postmodern age is a free schooling in cynicism, so nothing is ever what it appears to be and there are no heroes once you see what really makes people tick.⁴

Frank now admits his own foibles and faults, but he is as adamant as ever in his skepticism about almost everything his parents taught him about the God of the Bible. The book then is the story of Frank's experience, the portrait of his parents is filtered through his own cynical grid—not, in my opinion, either completely accurate or appropriate.

I agree with Guinness that some of Frank's indictments of his parents are way off the mark. Guinness calls Frank the "hollow young fraud that, to his credit, he came to loathe and then repudiate. Frank himself is where the con artistry came into the story."⁵ While Schaeffer is to be commended for admitting some of his own sins, his lack of charity in dealing with the sins of others, especially his parents, who gave him so much, is to be deplored. I hope he will someday come to fully embrace the grace by which I believe his parents were saved.

It may be that such a tell-all memoir was a necessary catharsis for the burdened Francis V, now known as Frank, and apparently two of his sisters. As I have my own mixed memories of Frank, I am reminded of the proverb "Love covers a multitude of sins." I could only wish Frank had exercised such restraint in his memoir. Franky's revelations, however skewed at times by his own bitterness, will certainly disabuse adulators of Fran-

4 Ibid., 33.

5 Ibid.

cis and Edith of any idealism, and perhaps help them to realize that they were, like the rest of us, sinners saved by grace. The problem is that Frank's portrait exaggerates some faults and leaves out some of the most important colors on the pallet—those involving supernatural realities. The result is something like the bizarre distortions of a Salvador Dali painting. But even when faults are real, publicizing them can be very wrong. "Dad had a vicious temper. Mom was a high-powered nut" (38, cf. 104). Even in context, such statements are harsh and hurtful. Sin and inconsistency with our faith is a reality for all of us, but not all of it is fit to print. Frank would have served his parents and even his own interests better had his 400-page book been reduced by the removal of such material.

Despite Frank's skewed perspective, we should not dismiss some of Frank's more alarming insights into family life. For example, Frank's realization as a boy that "we were . . . snobs. . . . the overall feeling was that we were somehow displaced aristocrats" (51, cf. 76). Frank has had a love-hate relationship with this element of elitism. I was reminded as a parent of some of the ways we unwittingly, but needlessly, embarrass our children, like long prayers over food in cafes (Frank actually observes this in his autobiographical novel *Portofino*).⁶ Guinness's observation that Edith was like a mother to many of us (she bought socks for me, even though I never asked) is true enough, but may have unwittingly contributed to some of the resentment of her children. This is one of the perils of ministry. Unrealistic expectations of our children educationally and socially represent more perils to be avoided (164–165).

It is a happy irony that throughout the book Frank also recognizes many fine qualities in his parents. I witnessed both of Frank's parents caring for a wide range of needy people, and Frank gives examples of this, lending realism to his account. "My parents compassion was sincere and consistent" (76). "Dad's sensitivity was disarming" (78).

Their idea of ministry was to extend a hand of kindness . . . The result was that those gather-

6 Frank Schaeffer, *Portofino* (New York: Macmillan), 149.

ing around our table represented a cross-section of humanity and intellectual ability, from mental patients to Oxford students and all points of need in between. . . . I never heard a judgmental, unkind, or even condescending word spoken about our unwed mothers. (134)

One example, in my own experience, verified Schaeffer's sincerity. My journal entry for September 23, 1971 records a typical Francis Schaeffer open discussion in the chapel of Farel House. When asked about hell he answered, "Well, those who are lost will have experiential knowledge of eternal fire." Some began to chuckle and "Dr. Schaeffer looked slowly around the room and said, 'Don't anybody laugh. Nobody laugh.'"

I also found many chapters of Frank's memoir to be enjoyable reading, very well written with several genuine appreciations of people that Frank truly loved, covering the gamut from Jane Stuart Smith (54-65) to the mentally impaired Gracie Holmes (125-132). Frank's sharp wit injects lots of humor into the narrative, making for some very funny material.

For all of his hubris, at the age of nineteen, Franky gave me several pieces of advice, that I still remember and have lived to appreciate. He told me that hippy dress was boring, "the same every day," and, "You don't know how to play the recorder." These comments were not offered in the humblest manner, and I resented them at the time. However, I must confess that I have not excelled in playing my recorder, and I have learned to enjoy dressing appropriately for every occasion. This includes always dressing my very best to preach—as Dr. Schaeffer did in tails before us shabbily attired hippies each Sunday. The other piece of advice he offered in a very friendly way over coffee, "Get married early, it's so much more fruitful than single life." I was married a little over a year later (I would have done it without his advice).

It is odd that Frank should react so to the pietism and fundamentalism that lingered in his family life, especially since he—partly by neglect and partly by parental conviction—had such freedom and opportunity. His focus on his mother's

own artistic regrets seems exaggerated, perhaps grossly so. I guess he understands regrets. The reader can only imagine that the 2006 picture of her, the last in the book, evincing a sad stare, was intentionally meant to reinforce this impression. Frank laments Jane Stuart Smith's rejection of the operatic world, due to the residual temptations in that world, and a desire to serve the Lord. (In my case, Dr. Schaeffer encouraged my pursuit of a career in architecture.) As we grow older, who of us does not have similar regrets as we look at past opportunities? Old age tends to accentuate these, but it does not obliterate the commitment of pilgrims to deny themselves in their own imperfect ways in the service of the King. Pilgrims know they have not arrived at their final destination where perfect fulfillment will be realized.

Ultimately, at an even deeper level than Frank's resentment, it is his unbelief that characterizes the most serious parts of his narrative. He admits, somewhat cynically, "believing in 'unseen things' is tough" (100). It is with such doubts then that he observes that his father was "in a better mood" giving cultural talks than "before preaching on Sunday" (99). And his parents were always happier on vacation in Italy than when ministering at L'Abri (99). This could be said to some degree of all of us. Often the things that mean the most to us require great concentration and seriousness. Preaching is certainly that way for me. Relaxation is not the bottom line, but serves the more stressful duties of life. Once again, absent in Frank's account is any notion of a transcendent reason for his parents' behavior or their ministry.

The most foolish statement Frank makes among his cynical denials is, "The most ridiculous thing in the world is a PhD in theology, an oxymoron if one ever existed" (102). Frank divorces his admiration for his father from his father's faith. "Out of the limelight, Dad was quiet. He was sweet. Above all, he was humble and considerate. And what moved him wasn't theology, but beauty" (140).

I once went sledding in the moonlight with Frank and his father. I can attest that all but one element in Frank's description is true. The fact

that his father did not speak of theology did not communicate to me a lack of interest. I knew that at bottom, Schaeffer's appreciation of beauty was rooted in his theology. Theology, even for those Christians who don't know what the word means, is what moves them, because it describes the "final reality." Probably Frank's father knew that the conversations he had with others about God were just not what his son needed during recreational times. Suggesting that these examples are evidence of a double life gives a very false impression (203), but one that probably helps Frank fortify his own lack of certainty.

Frank at times displays an ignorance of history, as well as a superficial understanding of his father's intellectual convictions (308–312). In describing his father's experience of the split between Westminster and Faith seminaries, he opines,

Dad spent the rest of his life trying to somehow reconcile the angry theology that typified movement-fundamentalism, with a Christian apologetic that was more attractive. He maintained a rather fierce enthusiasm for an absolutely literal interpretation of scripture that I believe he held onto more as emotional baggage (out of loyalty to Machen and others) than for any intellectual reason. On the other hand even in the early days of his ministry my father had cultural interests far beyond those of the usual fundamentalist leaders (116).

Frank is probably unaware of the cultural sophistication of Machen (or the fact that he wasn't "fired" from Princeton, 115), although I'm sure his father was not. But to say that his doctrine of Scripture was rooted in emotion rather than understanding is to contradict one of Schaeffer's most cherished first principles. Here again is evidence of the horizontal focus of Frank's perceptions of his parents' lives.

As a coming-of-age memoir *CFG* is a great success—because it is so well written—but at whose expense? That Schaeffer has not arrived at a happy place is regrettable. To do so requires eternal certitudes, because the certitudes of family

and friends never provide final answers—they always, to some degree, disappoint. For all of his new-found self-understanding, he is still angry, only now he is no longer young.

CFG explains many things about the later development of Schaeffer's ministry and Frank's strong reaction (of which I was unaware). Frank's obvious complicity in the direction of his father's later ministry is illuminating. It reflects Frank's own spiritual blindness, a weakness in his father's apologetics, and as Guinness observes, "a textbook example of how Christian ministries and organizations can be ruined through undermining their own principles—in this case, through nepotism and family politics."⁷ There are also some cautionary tales beyond the nepotism for each of us here.

From the publication of *The God Who Is There* in 1968 to the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion in 1973, Schaeffer focused on an analysis of western culture that attracted us hippies to his ministry. I remember a long-haired acid-head from California—after a few weeks of listening—remarking that "Schaeffer is just a fundamentalist." This certainly seemed far off the mark to me at the time. In fact, based on things I heard before leaving L'Abri in the winter of 1972, I voted—in Vermont of all places—in my first presidential election for George McGovern. By 1976, with the publication of *How Should We Then Live?*, his focus had shifted to American politics and the Religious Right, in what seemed to me, even at the time, an odd transition for someone who had offered so much breathing space from the suffocating confines of the fundamentalism he had repudiated. By the time *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* was published in 1979 the transformation was complete (271–274). Schaeffer had hesitantly joined the ranks of the culture warriors.

Frank notes his father's quiet regrets along the way, and takes responsibility—possibly exaggerated for his part in the movement (265)—for this perilous shift in his father's ministry. It is no small irony that the very plastic American consumer culture that Frank and his dad detested, seduced them through the entrepreneurial zeal of Billy

7 Ibid., 32.

Zeoli (253) in 1972. The American evangelical transformationist and commercial agendas commodified the hippies' guru. The bottom line in this thinking or from this viewpoint is that if you want to transform culture, you must influence powerful people (284–88).

Frank has come to some insightful conclusions about the weaknesses of evangelicalism. “Evangelicalism is not so much a religion as a series of fast-moving personality cults” (358).

CFG was an enjoyable reminiscence for me, if sometimes painful for Frank's cynicism. Through many of its pages, I relived my time at L'Abri. Best of all, this reminded me of the tremendous influence the Schaeffers and their writings had on me, my Christianity, and my ministry.

I cannot agree with Betty Carter's comment on *CFG*, “His book, for all its embarrassing human revelations, ultimately *honors* the Schaeffers, as only a son's story could.”⁸ The embarrassing revelations are not honorable. Therefore, I cannot recommend this book to everyone. It is not for the faint-of-heart, the immature, or the undiscerning. For those of us who have been to L'Abri, it may help us not to idealize our experience there or the lives of the Schaeffers. But worse than the reprehensible aspects of his portrait of his parents is Frank's sad conclusion that “there are no final answers” only “frenetic desperation” (399). He ends up like one of the tragic artistic figures in his father's books. I can only hope that by God's grace his gifts might be put to better use. At least Frank still holds out hope, “maybe there is a God who forgives, who knows. I hope so” (406).

I found shelter from the spiritual and philosophical storms of the late twentieth century at L'Abri. At the human level, the love of the little, the local, the personal represented Schaeffer at his best, and demonstrated values compatible with the pilgrim mentality of the New Covenant church. However, the certitudes that were fortified at L'Abri transcended people, including Schaeffer himself. For that I shall be eternally grateful. ©

8 Betty Smartt Carter, “Son of a Preacher Man,” *Books and Culture* 14, no. 1 (January-February 2008): 15.

Gregory E. Reynolds serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2009¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life, by Colin Duriez. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, 240 pages, \$24.99.

This is the best account to date of the life and ministry of one of the most influential evangelicals in the last half of the twentieth century. It is also a true biography unlike the Dostoyevsky-length, anecdotal portrait of Edith Schaeffer's *The Tapestry*,² or her *L'Abri*,³ which only covers one portion of Schaeffer's life. Duriez also gives the reader new material from many interviews that he and both Christopher and Paulette Catherwood conducted.⁴

It should also be noted that Duriez has written after Bryan Follis's in-depth coverage of Schaeffer's apologetics,⁵ and just after Frank Schaeffer's controversial autobiography *Crazy for God*.⁶ Follis's

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=131.

2 Edith Schaeffer, *The Tapestry* (Nashville: Word, 1981).

3 Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* (Sussex: The Norfolk Press and Henry E. Walton, 1969).

4 Duriez conducted seventeen interviews between 1998 and 2007; the Catherwoods conducted ten interviews, all in 1998.

5 See my review in the October *Ordained Servant* http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=121.

6 See Duriez's comment on Frank's *Crazy for God* and his Calvin Becker trilogy (117, cf. 183).

volume makes an excellent companion to Duriez’s biography.

Duriez is emphatic in viewing Schaeffer as “undivided,” as the title of the appendix “The Undivided Schaeffer: A Retrospective Interview with Francis Schaeffer” attests (205–221). I find Ken Myers’s distinction between an earlier “bohemian” (hippie) Schaeffer and a later “bourgeois” (activist) Schaeffer more compelling.⁷ Frank Schaeffer’s memoir, *Crazy for God*, reflects the tension between these two competing tendencies. Francis Schaeffer breaks out of the fundamentalist/evangelical mold and ministers to the counterculture generation, but ends up as a spokesman for the Christian Right. What becomes apparent in Duriez’s narrative is the strong fundamentalist, separatist influence of men like Carl McIntire in Schaeffer’s early Christian life and in his preparation for ministry. Carl McIntire was a Presbyterian separatist with a cultural transformationist lurking just beneath the surface.⁸ He was seen frequently protesting on the steps of the Supreme Court on the evening news. This legacy eventually emerged in the late Schaeffer. But it was present all along.

While Schaeffer’s zeal for reaching the baby boom generation was enormously fruitful in many individual lives, including my own, several important weaknesses in his theology moved him to align himself with the Christian Right in the movement to restore Christian America. Cultural transformationists successfully co-opted Schaeffer due to the weakness of his doctrines of the church and common grace. Duriez sums up Schaeffer’s view of the latter doctrine nicely, “The Word of God is the ultimate authority, Schaeffer argues, both in the sciences and in the humanities” (referring to Scripture, 168). Duriez describes the impe-

7 Ken Myers, “The Bohemian Temptation: Francis Schaeffer and the Agenda of Cultural Apologetics” (November 2004), 2, 8. This article was originally presented at a gathering to honor the 20th anniversary of Schaeffer’s death. The event was sponsored by the Witherspoon Fellows program of the Family Research Council, but the article is no longer available on their website.

8 The influence of Hans Rookmaaker introduced a Kuyperian view of culture (79) which no doubt fed into the American transformationist agenda, already well-formed in Schaeffer’s thinking. This topic should be explored further.

tus for the last phase of Schaeffer’s ministry as “the explicit extension of his emphasis upon the lordship of Christ into the social and political realm” (182–183). This was “an idea many fundamentalists and evangelicals in America had become ready for once their quietism, cultural separatism, and pietism had been challenged by the message of Schaeffer and others” (182–183). This emphasis was articulated in *How Should We Then Live?* (1976), *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (1979), and *A Christian Manifesto* (1981).

The failure to adequately account for the place of general revelation and natural law in turn prevented Schaeffer from exploring cultural forms. As Ken Myers suggests, Schaeffer’s analysis of culture was largely restricted to the history of ideas. Thus, his apologetic was inadequate to the task of analyzing the complexity of the cultural situation. “His account of how humanistic ideas supplanted the ‘Christian consensus’ relies entirely on a history of ideas approach.”⁹

Myers very helpfully expands this concern:

It is regrettable that Schaeffer did not tackle the harder question about why certain ideas took the turn they did. A fuller explanation of the relationship between imagination and reason, between social experience and the plausibility of certain ideas, and between political and economic structures and the experience of communal belonging would have enriched Schaeffer’s explanation about how we got here, as well as the counsel he offered in how the Church should respond. . . . If the Church is going to sustain the faithfulness of her message among her members and encourage the plausibility of her message to those outside the Church, she will have to give greater attention to the interaction between

9 Myers, “The Bohemian Temptation,” 8. I deal more with Schaeffer’s apologetics in “Francis A. Schaeffer: A Unique Evangelist” (October 2008), http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=121. Duriez discusses Schaeffer’s rejection of “extreme presuppositionalism and evidentialism or foundationalism” as a matter of pastoral concern (168–179). He rejected the emphasis on antithesis fundamental to Van Til’s apologetic.

the content of belief and the forms of life.¹⁰

The other major weakness in Schaeffer's thought was his ecclesiology. This weakness was a characteristic of the fundamentalist Presbyterianism in which he was trained for ministry, especially in McIntire's Faith Theological Seminary. This influence seems to have filtered out some of his theological hero, J. Gresham Machen's thinking which might have strengthened his apologetic and immunized him against the seductions of the Christian Right. A proper ecclesiology will in turn inform cultural analysis and the church's agenda relative to culture. Ken Myers explores this twin concern:

All in all, Schaeffer's writings support a more radically individualistic Christianity than the Reformers defended. In fact, Schaeffer gives the impression that any high view of Church authority amounts to an acceptance of humanistic assumptions. The early "bohemian" Schaeffer and the later "activist" Schaeffer both seem to have a low view of the Church. The concern of the "sheltering" Schaeffer is that individuals come to faith, and not be discouraged by any conventions or habits of the Church in the process. The later Schaeffer seems more concerned with Reformation of the American political order than of the Church.¹¹ . . .

The evangelical churches in particular face the challenge of examining long-standing distortions of Christian teaching in their heritage. Their assumption of the superiority of populism over structures of authority and their embrace of the alleged virtues of authenticity at the expense of formal and deliberate patterns of shared life makes it difficult to resist the secular forms of the same confusions.¹²

The antidote to "distortions of Christian teaching in their heritage" is found in the affirmation of that heritage in the creeds of Christendom. The fundamentalists that shaped Schaeffer's early experience of ministry tended to diminish the importance of the confession in their valiant defense of a mere Christianity of the fundamentals. The formal structures of the government and liturgy of the visible church constitute the most impenetrable bulwark against American individualism and its concomitant culture wars.

None of these criticisms, which become evident as Duriez enables the reader to stand back and take the measure of Schaeffer's ministry, should diminish our appreciation for what Schaeffer contributed to the church at the end of the twentieth century. Let me mention a few of the most important contributions.

Schaeffer stood firmly for the authority of Scripture, especially opposing Barthian neo-orthodoxy in large part through the influence of Westminster Theological Seminary professor of apologetics Cornelius Van Til (40-41, 62)¹³ (cf. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*). I was surprised to learn that Schaeffer was present, with several other evangelical leaders, at a long discussion with Barth in Geneva during the first Congress of the fledgling International Council of Christian Churches in 1950. Schaeffer's address delivered at the congress was critical of Barth along Van Tilian lines. The Swiss theologian was not amused (99-100). Schaeffer's final book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (1984), warns in the plainest terms of the dangers of compromising the authority of Scripture (199-201).

Schaeffer's interest in culture in general and the arts in particular was exceptional, especially within the fundamentalist wing of Presbyterianism. His long association and friendship with art historian and critic Hans Rookmaaker cultivated this interest. The broadening of his interest helped him to understand the sixties counterculture and to encourage many of us to pursue careers in the arts. Edith Schaeffer emphasized the important

10 Ibid., 9.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 9-10.

13 Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962).

place of beauty in the everyday life of the Christian. Her book *Hidden Art* was enormously helpful to my mother as she dealt with criticisms of her interest in opera and the arts from her fundamentalist church.

Although Schaeffer was not a scholar, and despite strong pietistic influences from his fundamentalist days, he never diminished the place of the intellect or the value of formal education. This was evident throughout his life. Farel House, the study center at L'Abri, was a testimony to his broad idea of learning, involving more than merely reading and lectures. Real learning was a life long pursuit involving thoughtful discussion in a community of learners. It involved planting gardens as well as ideas.

By all accounts Schaeffer was a generalist, and as Duriez notes, "a curiously modern thinker," who anticipated postmodernism long before anyone was using the word (154–155). This led to a comprehensiveness of the L'Abri "syllabus" that really taught us students a healthy intellectual curiosity (159).¹⁴

The crisis that formed the initial inspiration of L'Abri injected into Schaeffer's life and ministry a new sense of the need to trust the Lord,¹⁵ as well as the important place of loving community as the expression of true orthodoxy (91, 103–125). In the mid-fifties, this change in Schaeffer's thinking led to a break with Carl McIntire (121–123). Oddly this salutary departure from separatism may also have contributed to a weak ecclesiology (132). But positively, the practical importance of love made visible in community set the work of L'Abri apart from the stridency of so much of the evangelicalism with which Schaeffer was familiar. During the heyday of L'Abri, and I think the most fruitful period of Schaeffer's ministry, along with hippies seeking answers, came the evangelical wounded.

14 See my "Your Father's L'Abri: Reflections on the Ministry of Francis Schaeffer," *Ordained Servant* (October 2008), http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=117.

15 This renewed trust did have a pietistic flavor (131, 133), involving something close to the idea of direct guidance by putting out "fleeces," and being marked by the influence of missionary George Mueller.

Schaeffer's thoughtful and compassionate ministry to the latter is often overlooked, but I witnessed firsthand some of the healing that his pastoral care brought. The written fruit of Schaeffer's transformation was *The Mark of the Christian* (1970), *The Church Before the Watching World* (1971), and *True Spirituality* (1971).

Duriez's book does contain a few historical inaccuracies. For example, he says that Machen died on a trip to Baltimore to encourage support for the new church, now the OPC (43). Machen actually died in Bismarck, North Dakota and is buried in Baltimore.

The bibliography and the index are well done and very useful. Three cheers for footnotes instead of cumbersome endnotes. Crossway has done an excellent job with the physical properties of the book. The binding, typography, and sixteen pages of black and white photographs are appropriate to the book's contents and make for an altogether pleasant read. ©

Gregory E. Reynolds serves as the pastor of *Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.*

Covenant and Salvation

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online March 2009¹

by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ, by Michael S. Horton. Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2007, xi, 324 pages, \$16.99.

This, the third in a projected four-volume series, continues Dr. Horton's reflections on systematic-theological topics in light of the covenant theme. The first treated eschatology, the second Christology and the fourth is to be on ecclesiology. This

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=141.

book deals with soteriology, understood as matters primarily concerning the application of redemption. Evident again is the wide reading and ongoing interaction with a similarly wide spectrum of viewpoints, past and present, that mark the earlier volumes. There are two major sections, “Covenant and Justification” (11–125) and “Covenant and Participation” (128–307). The concern pervasive throughout is to demonstrate the relationship, understood covenantally, between justification and union with Christ, between the forensic/legal and the participatory/relational/effective in salvation.

The full magnitude of the undertaking this book represents precludes doing justice to it in a relatively brief review so I will have to limit myself selectively to highlighting several matters. Part One is largely occupied with tendencies prominent within the New Perspective on Paul as well as on the Judaism of his day—tendencies that, on the one hand, accent continuity between Paul and that Judaism to the point of obscuring crucial differences, and on the other hand, stress discontinuity between Paul’s teaching on justification and the Reformation doctrine to the point of denying that the latter is true to the former. Horton provides a probing analysis and sustained critique of these tendencies in the course of arguing for the solid biblical foundation of the Reformation doctrine in its basic elements, with a concluding stress on the importance of imputation in the face of contemporary denials (102–125).

This is a welcome and profitable discussion. I mention an overall reservation I have primarily because it concerns a matter clearly important for Horton. As he alerts us at the outset (2), “Part 1, therefore, offers the most sustained and direct treatment of the particular type of covenant theology that I have drawn upon and assumed throughout this series.” At issue is not the bi-covenantal (covenant of works – covenant of grace) structure that I’m concerned with him to maintain, particularly in the face of contemporary monocovenantalisms and the errors of the New Perspective. I remain unpersuaded, however, that this structure either requires or is particularly enhanced by Horton’s view that under the Mosaic economy the

judicial role of the law in the life of God’s people functioned, at the typological level, for inheritance by works (as the covenant of works reintroduced) in antithesis to grace.

It is difficult for me to see how this way of viewing the theocratic role of Israel as God’s covenant people from Moses to Christ (*historia salutis*) avoids creating an uneasy tension, if not polarization, in the lives of his people between grace/faith and (good) works/obedience (*ordo salutis*), especially under the Mosaic economy. As far as I can see from reading the Old Testament, particularly the prophets, the reason Israel went into exile was not failure as a nation to maintain a requisite level of formal obedience to the law in all its details. Rather, Israel lost the land for the deeper reason of *unbelief*, because of the *idolatry* that was at the root of and focused the unbelieving nonremnant’s disobedience of God and his law. A further discussion of this issue cannot be entered into here.

Part Two addresses more directly the justification-union with Christ relationship. How in Horton’s covenantal outlook on the application of salvation is the forensic related to the participatory or organic, with the latter apparently seen as more or less interchangeable with the transformative and including sanctification?

The answer to this basic soteriological question lies in the “covenantal ontology” the book seeks to articulate (e.g., 182ff., 216ff., 310). That, rather than its subtitle (“Union with Christ”), may fairly be seen as much as any as its main thrust. The core notion of this ontology is that “justification is not an inert but a living Word, on a par with creation *ex nihilo*” (247, with an appeal to Rom. 4:17 and Ps. 33:6), or in the words of a chapter subtitle, “The Verdict That Does What It Says” (243). In a more detailed phrasing, “justification should be seen more clearly not merely as ontologically *different* from inner renewal, but also as the ontological *source* of that change” (198, italics original). Accordingly, covenantally understood, while union includes justification and is “the wider matrix for treating justification and sanctification” (310; “the wider field within which the Reformers recognize the integral connection of

justification and sanctification,” 141), justification is nonetheless the source of that matrix, “the fountain of union in all of its renewing aspects” (143). Justification, understood in this way as a creating and effective forensicism, Horton argues, not only provides a firm forensic foundation for the application of salvation as a whole, but as it does so also maintains justification and sanctification, the legal and the renovative, as well as the relational in salvation, in “a complementary rather than antagonistic relationship” (310).

Hoping that this summary characterization, though it hardly does justice to his detailed argumentation, is reasonably accurate, how, as we continue to process it, should we assess this covenantal ontology?

I share fully Horton’s conviction that the foundation of the application of salvation in its entirety is and must be forensic. Since something of my own views on that forensic priority as well as on the interrelationships between union, justification, and sanctification, in Calvin and in Scripture, is present elsewhere in this issue, I refer readers to those comments and limit myself here to noting several related matters for clarification or further discussion.

First, Horton’s view of the relationship between justification and union with Christ seems unclear. For instance, just prior to the statement on page 143 cited above, in discussing Reformation views of union, he says, “Regardless of whether union temporally preceded justification, Calvin is clear that the latter is the basis for the former” (as far as I can see, the Calvin citation in the following sentence does not support this statement and the quote from *Institutes*, 3.16.1 on the previous page in fact tells against it); and on page 147, “While a great deal more than justification is included as a result of being in Christ, Reformed theology has emphasized with Lutheran doctrine that justification is the judicial ground of it all.”

Considering these statements as well as others also cited above, prompts the following questions: How is it that justification is the basis of union when union is antecedent, possibly, it appears for Horton, even temporally antecedent, to justifica-

tion? How can justification be the ground of the union of which it is a result? How is justification the source or fountain of the matrix or field (union) of which it is a part? Perhaps I am missing something, but how Horton’s covenantal ontology resolves these questions is not apparent to me.

Further concerning the citation above from page 147, there is certainly important agreement between Reformed and Lutheran on the internal structure of justification (the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and the sole instrumentality of faith), and we should not lose sight of or minimize that agreement. However, Horton’s statement overlooks differences in the overall understanding of the application of redemption, all related, I take it, to different understandings of the place and role of union with Christ. To mention just one such difference, Reformed theology has not commonly seen justification as the judicial basis for regeneration, which it understands as the eschatologically irreversible origin of the faith that appropriates justification.

Second, on page 201 Horton shares Bruce McCormack’s evaluation of John Murray’s statement that “the declarative act of God in the justification of the ungodly is constitutive. In this consists its incomparable character.” Murray’s point is that justification is a forensically constitutive declaration; the declaration as such constitutes the forensic status of being righteous that it declares to be. Horton appears to support McCormack’s criticism that Murray’s understanding of the constitutive in justification is too narrow and ought to be expanded to include regeneration and the renovative, as well as the forensic.

I wish Horton had more clearly distanced himself from McCormack’s position in the article he utilizes positively for the most part here and elsewhere in Part Two. That position, as it builds on Barth and as Barth himself makes clear (e.g., *Church Dogmatics*, 4/2: 502–503), necessarily entails doing away with the distinction between the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption and its ongoing application (as well as the historical before and after of Christ’s states of humiliation and exaltation). The result is an understanding of

the constitutive or effective nature of justification and of its relationship to sanctification that differs radically from confessional Reformed orthodoxy.

This is surely not what Horton intends.

Expressed throughout is a clear concern not to confuse justification and sanctification or otherwise blur the difference between the forensic and the nonforensic (transformative) in salvation. Still, his covenantal ontology leaves me wondering what it is about the forensic, as *forensic*, that is constitutive or effective *nonforensically*. If justification (imputation), as forensically effective, is also, as *such*, nonforensically effective, what differentiates the one from the other? What *within* justification as constitutive distinguishes the forensically constitutive from the nonforensically constitutive? Does not the expansion of the constitutive in justification to include nonforensic renovation (“new being” as well as “new status,” 201) amount to a kind of soteriological overload that has the unintended effect of blurring the difference between justification and inner renewal? I do hope these questions are not posed ineptly or unfairly. (In this regard it seems to me much clearer and sounder biblically to see union with Christ by faith as what is antecedently “constitutive” in our salvation, issuing in both justification and sanctification, the forensic and the nonforensic/renovative, each with its own constitutive or effective moment, distinct yet inseparable from the other.)

Third, throughout Part Two, Horton voices reservations about the Reformed doctrine of regeneration. He agrees with its substance and intention but finds problematic the way it has been formulated, in particular the notion that regeneration produces a habitual change and involves the infusion of new habits (a new *habitus*). This he sees as a lingering residue of the medieval ontology that eventually made the Reformation necessary. These concerns, with his own proposal, are articulated especially in Chapter 10 (“Covenantal Ontology and Effectual Calling”). The promising alternative for him lies in adapting the Eastern Orthodox distinction between divine essence and energies, so that the activity of the Spirit in salvation is understood as an exercise of his energies that avoids “a causal

scheme of infused habits” (213).

I share fully Horton’s concerns about the notion sometime present in Reformed treatments of the *ordo salutis* that regeneration is prior to effectual calling and produces an antecedent state addressed in effectual calling. That notion is quite problematic and ought to be rejected. However, his view of “Regeneration as Effectual Calling” (240, italics original) as a corrective, assuming I have not misunderstood him, seems to involve a kind of actualism that prompts the following observations.

Calling as such brings into view a divine activity without yet saying anything about its results or how it is effective. Regeneration, in contrast, brings into view not only a specific divine activity but the specific result of that activity; the state of being regenerate. Having been called effectively involves having been regenerated, but the two are not identical. The exercise of the Spirit’s energies in calling produces an enduring change within sinners distinct from that exercise. The result, effected by those creating energies yet distinct from their exercise, is a permanent regenerate state marked, anthropologically, by a new and lasting disposition inherent in them, what Scripture calls a new “heart.” That is, at the core of my being, I am no longer against God and disposed to rebel against his will but, now and forever, for him and disposed in the deepest recesses of whom I am to delight in doing his will.

In view of the undeniable reality of their own indwelling sin, believers need to be exhorted not to quench or grieve the Spirit at work in their lives. But his work in the justified ungodly does not merely consist of an ongoing countering activity within those otherwise only disposed to be thoroughly resistant and recalcitrant. The definitive, nothing less than eschatological death-to-life change effected and maintained in believers by the Spirit provides a stable basis within them for his continuing day-by-day activity of renewing and maturing them according to their inner selves (2 Cor. 4:16), for his continuing toward completion the good work begun in them (Phil. 1:6). The Reformed use of “habitual” to describe this irre-

versible change, this radical dispositional reorientation, in believers seems appropriate and useful. I'm unsure whether and, if so, how these comments square with Horton's covenantal ontology.

Covenant and Salvation with its forensically-charged ontology represents an innovative proposal of major proportions for Reformed soteriology with implications for its theology more generally. This review hardly captures the breadth of its scope in tackling issues, some of them difficult and daunting, of perennial importance in the life of the church. This is not an easy book to read but those who do will find their thinking stimulated and perhaps, like mine, at places challenged. I hope my comments here will motivate others to give it their careful attention and its proposals the further reflection they warrant. ©

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

Young Calvinism with and without an Edge

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2009¹

by Darryl G. Hart

Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists, by Collin Hansen. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, 158 pages, \$ 14.99, paper.

Minority Report: Unpopular Thoughts on Everything from Ancient Christianity to Zen-Calvinism, by Carl R. Trueman. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008, 221 pages, \$17.99, paper.

Members of the OPC may be surprised to know that a resurgence of Calvinism is under way in the United States and that Orthodox Presbyterians have little to do with it. According to *Time* magazine, the “new Calvinism” is the third most influential idea “changing the world right now.” But *Time's* announcement is hardly newsworthy. Collin Hansen, a reporter for *Christianity Today*, beat the national news weekly to the punch with a 2008 article on the Calvinist resurgence. *Young, Restless, Reformed* is a book-length treatment of Hansen's initial investigation. Oddly perhaps, almost none of the New Calvinist leaders are Presbyterian; most are Baptist; some are charismatic. Perhaps even odder is that the OPC, a denomination that was founded precisely over the loss of the PCUSA's Calvinistic witness has no standing among the young Calvinists. Nor do young Orthodox Presbyterians merit Hansen's attention because the OPC's young people do not frequent the places and conferences where young Calvinism thrives.

Hansen's account begins with John Piper and ends with Mark Driscoll. In between chapters on the ever earnest Bethlehem Baptist pastor (Piper) and the tattooed, self-consciously macho, and sometimes vulgar Seattle pastor of Mars Hill Church (Driscoll) are reports on Hansen's visits to—and interviews—with Al Mohler, the president of Southern Baptist Seminary, C. J. Mahaney, leader of the Sovereign Grace network of churches, and Joshua Harris, founder of the New Attitude Conference in Louisville (the man also responsible for making courting a plausible form of finding a mate among evangelicals). Others make cameo appearances, but Piper, Driscoll, Mohler, Mahaney, and Harris—along with their various networks, Desiring God, Acts 29, Together for the Gospel, and Gospel Coalition—give a measure of coherence to New Calvinism.

The book begins with the Passion Conference, a youth gathering at which John Piper has become a fixture. The music and speakers at these conferences apparently reinforce a conception of God as transcendent and sovereign, and that conception becomes the primary qualification for conferees to self-identify as Calvinists. Hansen

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=176.

admits that among old Calvinists, high marks for contemporary P&W music are lacking. But Piper, who is not exactly a young man, welcomes the praise songs accompanied by the standard pieces of a rock band. He claims that the worship songs being written today “are about a great God” and set the stage for Calvinistic theology. “The things that nineteen-year-olds are willing to say about God in their songs is mind-boggling,” according to Piper (20). The theology in lyrics like “Wholly Yours”—“I am full of your earth, you are heaven’s worth; I am stained with dirt, prone to depravity; you are everything that is bright and clean, the antonym of me, you are divinity”—for both Piper and Hansen conveys a picture which for college students “feels new, appealing, and exciting.” This combination of a high view of God communicated in the idiom of popular culture produces excitement among believing young adults and unites the various figures in Hansen’s book. And it adds up, as he concludes, not simply to a Calvinist revival but a real revival—marked by: “Hunger for God’s word. Passion for evangelism. Zeal for holiness” (156).

These qualities were actually more characteristic generally of Wesleyan and revival-driven Protestants than Reformed and Presbyterians. That may sound like a minor quibble if not for the kind of confusion that ensues from Hansen’s description of this odd collection of Baptists, charismatics, and emergents as Calvinist. Surely the term Calvinist is not patented, but it has typically been the provenance in America of Presbyterians, Reformed, and the heirs to the Puritans. Because of the potential befuddlement in Hansen’s coverage, other books from within explicitly Reformed circles would be worthwhile for the youth who aspire to be Calvinists. Carl R. Trueman, academic dean at Westminster Seminary and Orthodox Presbyterian minister, may be precisely the author to help make young Calvinists transition into mature models. In fact, he is so close in sensibility and associations to young Calvinism that some readers might wonder why Hansen did not include Trueman in *Young, Restless, Reformed*. In the introduction to *Minority Report*, a collection of previously published pieces (many of which originally appeared in his “Wages

of Spin” column for the on-line magazine *Reformation 21*), for instance, Trueman acknowledges the help of C. J. Mahaney, one of Hansen’s young Calvinist leaders, for “prayer support, kind words, and sound wisdom” (10).

Beyond connections to real live young Calvinists, Trueman has a manner that would likely appeal to the folks who flock to Passion conferences. He is in tune with many features of popular culture, from rock ‘n’ roll to television shows. He peppers essays with sarcasm, wit, and exasperation. Even the titles of his essays are catchy and suggest an author who is much younger than your father’s Oldsmobile-driving Presbyterian pastor. For instance, his review of Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom’s book, *Is the Reformation Over?*, is entitled “It Ain’t Over ‘til the Fat Lady Sings.” Likewise, “Zen-Calvinism and the Art of Motorvehicle Replacement,” is an essay on the dangers of buying a used car from a Christian used car dealer.

Yet, Trueman’s youthful sensibility may have less appeal because the Westminster academic dean calls ‘em as he sees ‘em and his judgments are not always as uplifting or as earnest as those coming from the lips of the most famous Minneapolis Baptist since William Bell Riley. For instance, in his Zen-Calvinism piece, Trueman writes that “Christians can be horrible people; and . . . cannot be trusted to sell you chewing gum, let alone a used car” (210). Or to take another example, in his review of the Noll and Nystrom book, Trueman concludes that the fortunes of Protestantism rest on shaky legs if it depends on evangelicalism, an identity that “is in danger of becoming next to meaningless” (98). When Trueman adds that he, “as a confessional, Reformed Christian, (has) far more in common with many Roman Catholic theologians than others who routinely claim the title evangelical,” one can imagine the young Calvinists becoming exceedingly restless to the point of closing *Minority Report*. Unfortunately for Trueman, his taste in rock ‘n’ roll may not endear him to the younger set. His preferences for The Who, Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, Jimmy Hendrix, and Led Zeppelin may likely be too R-rated for evangelicals who sing the following lyrics from Chris

Tomlin's song "Indescribable": "All powerful, untamable, awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim you are amazing God" (Hansen, 20). Nor, for that matter, would Trueman's apology for psalm-singing likely resonate with teens reared on Christian pop.

Yet, if young Calvinists could mellow sufficiently to prepare for Trueman's jolts, they would learn a lot about Calvinism, especially that it has much more to say than simply being inspired to holiness by God's sovereignty. For instance, here's one passage where Trueman gives a handy description of the differences between Rome and Protestants on the nature of grace (and this from a piece about Jack Chick's comics, no less):

Catholics see grace as coming through sacramental participation in the church; Protestants see grace as coming to them through the promise of the Word grasped by faith as it is read and preached. Then, allied to these differences are others: Catholicism sees justification as a process whereby the righteousness of Christ is imparted to the believers through this sacramental participation; Reformation Protestantism sees the righteousness of Christ as imputed to the believer by grace through faith in Christ. Catholicism understands human nature in terms of substance; Protestantism understands it in terms of relation. Salvation for Catholics thus involves a substantial change; for Protestantism, it involves a change of relation or status. (146)

Granted, this may be more than young Calvinists can handle without a good youth pastor at the ready to explain the theology involved in these distinctions—all the more reason for the youthful Calvinists to seek instruction from Trueman. They will also find him very helpful on the alleged nastiness of Reformed orthodoxy: "doctrines don't kill people; people kill people. Yes, there has been much unpleasantness in the history of Reformed theology, but that is the product of the unpleasantness of theologians rather than any overly dogmatic essence of Reformed Orthodoxy" (30). Likewise,

young Calvinists could well learn from Trueman the value of creeds, that they reflect the consensus of a church which is more than a "collection of individuals" with their own interpretations of the Bible (120).

At the same time, *Minority Report* should come with a PG 13 rating because it contains elements that will be hard going for young Calvinists. For instance, Trueman can be particularly hard on evangelicals, such as when he comments on the basis of Wheaton College's dismissal of a professor who converted to Rome and sees in the decision "considerable common ground in the practice between the liberal theological tradition of Schleiermacher and the theological shibboleths of evangelicalism" (129). The author is also unimpressed by evangelical attempts to transform American society: "Modern American evangelicalism has neither critiqued nor transformed the political landscape" but has "largely bought into the polarized politics of the two party system and lost its ability to be critical of the American way" (58). Trueman also recommends psalm-singing in ways that will likely not go over well with youth. He regards life as essentially tragic, the psalms as an honest expression of life's sufferings, and contemporary praise songs as substantially incapable of expressing the depths of the human condition (154). Nor will young readers feel affirmed by Trueman's sensible critique of youth culture: "Youth is exceptionally arrogant in its self-belief. Have you ever met an eighteen-year-old male who did not think, at least in practice, that he was going to live forever?" (205). And then there is Trueman's critique of celebrity culture among evangelicals—but he also traces it back to the early church—which could be read as a good counterweight to the kind of fame and popularity that fuels the figures that loom large in Hansen's book. If you have a combination of positions of power with "crowds of adoring followers and a culture which judges success by numbers, wealth, access to the media," Trueman believes you have "a situation where the capacity for human self-love and self-deception can potentially spiral out of control" (187).

This is not to say that Trueman will not end

up in a revised edition of Hansen’s *Young, Restless, Reformed*. If the mid-sixties Piper can have appeal to teens and young adults, hope exists for all of us who are approaching retirement, even the young-middle-aged like Trueman. To be sure, Trueman’s variety of Calvinism would be a welcome addition to Hansen’s version if only because the Westminster professor shows the depths, subtlety, and scope of the Reformed tradition. At the same time, if young Calvinists are going to embrace Trueman’s rendition of the Reformed faith and be comfortable with his applications, they will need to spend more time reading Calvin, Turretin, Owen, Warfield, and even Trueman while attending less frequently youth conferences made popular by evangelical celebrity preachers. ©

Darryl G. Hart, *a ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, serves at Calvary OPC, Glenside.*

Francis Schaeffer: Reformed Fundamentalist?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2009¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America, by Barry Hankins. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 272 pages, \$20.00, paper.

If we cannot see the weaknesses, as well as the strengths, of our mentors we have probably not learned much from them. While there is much to emulate and admire in Francis Schaeffer’s ministry, the cautionary tales that emerge are rife with warnings for us all. Hankins is appreciative without being hagiographic. That is to say, the book is truly critical in the best literary sense of the word—“expressing or involving an analysis of the merits

.....
1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=183.

and faults of a work of literature, music, or art.”²

Hankins’s analysis of Schaeffer’s life, thought, and impact is the most comprehensive evaluation of this influential man that I have read to date. As one who lived and studied with him in the early seventies, I can identify with the sojourn Schaeffer took but lament where he ended. I prefer the Schaeffer I knew, who transcended his fundamentalism in the context of Europe, and for a time avoided “interpreting faith through an American lens” and hitching his wagon to American exceptionalism (228). Rising to prominence from a working class background, his inquisitive and ambitious nature, along with his fundamentalist Christian roots, significantly contributed to this conclusion.

The key to understanding Schaeffer’s ministry is to properly distinguish the phases that it went through. It is not “undivided” as Colin Duriez maintains in his biography’s appendix titled “The Undivided Schaeffer: A Retrospective Interview with Francis Schaeffer.”³ But Hankins has also convinced me that Schaeffer’s ministry is not simply divided in two, as Ken Myers asserts when he distinguishes between an earlier “bohemian” (hippie) Schaeffer and a later “bourgeois” (activist) Schaeffer.⁴ Hankins claims that Schaeffer’s strength was to adapt to his environment through three distinct periods in his ministry. In the 1930s and 1940s, he was an American Fundamentalist separatist; then during the 1950s and 1960s, he was the European Evangelical apologist; and finally in the 1970s and 1980s, he returned to America as a Christian Right activist (xiii). The book convincingly demonstrates this thesis. Because of the importance of Schaeffer’s influence on American evangelicalism I intend to summarize as well as comment on the

2 See “critical,” *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed.

3 Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 205-221.

4 Ken Myers, “The Bohemian Temptation: Francis Schaeffer and the Agenda of Cultural Apologetics” (November 2004), 2, 8. This article was originally presented at a gathering to honor the 20th anniversary of Schaeffer’s death. The event was sponsored by the Witherspoon Fellows program of the Family Research Council, but the article is no longer available on their website.

salient elements of Hankins’s appraisal.

American Fundamentalist

Schaeffer’s early exposure to J. Gresham Machen was soon overshadowed when he left Westminster Theological Seminary in favor of the MacRae-McIntire influence of Faith Seminary (7, 13). There fundamentalism thrived with its militant cultural separatism, a modified non-confessional Calvinism, and the sword of the Scofield Bible (12–15). “While Schaeffer would eventually weary of McIntire’s militancy, he never lost the separatist tendency . . . His separatism would significantly inform the Christian critique of secular culture that he developed later in life” (15). Over the next decade, Schaeffer’s fundamentalist convictions would deepen through three pastorates in McIntire’s Bible Presbyterian Church—Grove City and Chester, Pennsylvania, and finally St. Louis (16–21). He had little use for the cultural re-engagement proposed by neo-evangelicals in the early 1940s (21, 24–27). During this time, Schaeffer aimed his intellectual guns at both modernism and the Neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth (23).

He brought this message to Europe under the auspices of the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1947, seeking to get churches to join McIntire’s American Council of Christian Churches (28–29). His thirteen-country trip impressed him with the need in Europe. In 1948 he was invited by the Independent Board to return permanently (32–33, 37). He hoped that his fundamentalism would transform Europe (27). However, Europe would, in an odd way, transform his approach to ministry.

European Evangelical

At the Second Plenary Congress of the newly formed International Council of Christian Churches, Schaeffer relied heavily on Cornelius Van Til’s critique of Karl Barth and the “New Modernism” (38) to lecture on the subject. Just prior to this Schaeffer and four other ministers visited Barth, who did not appreciate their fundamentalist approach, as Hankins’s quote from Barth’s letter to Schaeffer painfully demonstrates

(39). At this point, Hankins begins to indicate both the strengths and weaknesses of Schaeffer’s public ministry.

While he utilized ideas from philosophy, Schaeffer was not a professional philosopher. Here and elsewhere throughout his career, he would get some of the details wrong when discussing western intellectual history, though his overall analysis would often be helpful for Christians trying to understand the larger picture.

. . . Neither Barth nor Hegel were relativists, but Schaeffer intuited that relativism was going to be a key problem in the second half of the twentieth century, and he began to put Christians on notice that something had gone wrong in western intellectual life and that its errors had crept into Protestant theology. (41)

As the students, invited by his oldest daughter, Priscilla, began to visit Schaeffer’s Swiss chalet in the early 1950s his real understanding of modern culture began to develop. Hankins speculates, “It is highly unlikely that Schaeffer ever actually read Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, and the other modern thinkers he would later critique in his lectures and books” (43). These students taught him much of what he knew of modern thinking.

Schaeffer’s geographical distance from his fundamentalist mentors coincided with a growing disillusionment with fundamentalism. He rejected the pride fostered by separatism. Interesting for Orthodox Presbyterians is the fact that Schaeffer defended the OPC’s membership in ICCC against McIntire’s wishes (48). At this crucial juncture, the Schaeffers resigned from the Independent Board on June 4, 1955 to begin their new mission, L’Abri (French for “the shelter”). Schaeffer’s rejection of the separatist paradigm of ministry combined with a passion to communicate the gospel to modern people in terms of an understanding of the thinking of modernity was unique to American evangelicalism. The community that formed as result of this new direction has proved an influence in a wider swath of western humanity than almost any

other ministry in the last half of the twentieth century. Hankins's account of L'Abri's early development is a fascinating montage of this influence.

By 1960, Schaeffer's ministry was noticed by *Time Magazine* as a "Mission to Intellectuals" (74). In the decade that followed, he would speak with students at Harvard and Boston University at the invitation of Harold Okenga (75), going on to lecture at Wheaton, Westmont, and Calvin colleges (76–78). The anomaly of his influence is accentuated by his becoming the first public intellectual of the evangelical movement, but without emerging from the academy. Church historian and then professor at Calvin, George Marsden observed,

For a Calvin faculty member the most startling aspect of this achievement is that Mr. Schaeffer, without displaying any particular academic credentials and with an apparent disregard for the usual academic standards and precautions, did exactly what we have always hoped to do—make Christianity appear intellectually relevant to the contemporary era. (77–78)

Then there were the books, each of which is concisely summarized and assessed along the way by Hankins. Based on his lecture notes, Schaeffer's first books, *The God Who Is There* and *Escape from Reason*, were published in 1967 by Hodder and Stoughton and in 1968 by InterVarsity in the United States. Editors did the work of making lecture notes and then transcriptions from taped lectures into readable prose (79). Hankins does a masterful job of critiquing the now famous trilogy (96–105), the third volume of which was *He Is There and He Is not Silent*, not published until 1972. A recurrent theme of the trilogy was the "antithesis," a somewhat vague concept standing over against relativism in Schaeffer's thought (81). In the first two books, *The God Who Is There* and *Escape from Reason*, the centerpiece of Schaeffer's historical argument was the "line of despair," the historical point at which people stopped believing in absolute truth (82). Idiosyncratically, he laid the blame for promoting autonomous reason, and thus separating nature from grace, at the feet

of Thomas Aquinas. Here, as elsewhere, Hankins points out Schaeffer's superficial treatment purporting to serve as proof for his apologetic assertions. In this case, his understanding was out of accord with almost all Catholic and Protestant scholarship (82–84). Especially problematic was Schaeffer's misunderstanding of the relationship between the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the Reformation. He located the problem of autonomous reason in the Renaissance rather than where it belongs in the Enlightenment (84). At this point it should dawn on the reader that one basic aspect of the fundamentalist mentality is present in Schaeffer's thought—simplistic conclusions that too easily give black and white answers that in turn define easily identifiable enemies (102). The "Reformation base" becomes the hero against the Renaissance enemy. Hankins suspects that the probable reason for this oversight is that when Schaeffer was in college, where he did most of his reading of history and philosophy, Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt was the standard in Renaissance history. Since then scholars have demonstrated much more continuity between Medieval and Renaissance thinking (98–99). So, ironically, Francis Bacon ends up on the side of the angels (85). And early modern science is only possible because of the Reformation intellectual base (86). Hankins observes, "This was difficult to maintain historically or logically" (86). By the time we get to Hegel and then Kierkegaard, according to Schaeffer, nature is so divorced from grace that the only way one can find meaning is through the "leap of faith" exemplified in the existentialism of Sartre and Camus (88). At this point Hankins shows appreciation for Schaeffer's conclusion,

Schaeffer understood and made sense of the attempts of secular existentialists to find upper-story meaning, even through drug use in the counter culture of the 1960s.

. . . He even made reference to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. He interpreted Foucault's work rightly as the recognition that the Enlightenment failed to make good on its promise to provide a unified

answer based on reason.

Schaeffer's analysis is not without its difficulties, to be sure, but on topics ranging from drug use to art and poetry Schaeffer was getting evangelical young people to think in a new way about their world. (88–89)

In *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, Schaeffer posits human rationality as the common ground between believer and unbeliever. His “coherency theory of truth” sought to prove that the triune God is a metaphysical, moral, and epistemological necessity (92–96).

Schaeffer turned his attention more directly to cultural apologetics with the publication of his 1968 Wheaton lectures in *Death in the City*. Wheaton professor of literature Roger Lundin was deeply impressed with the lectures as an undergraduate, “one of the early experiences for me of seeing someone attempt to apply biblical understanding and Christian truth to pressing cultural and political issues” (110). Schaeffer was among the first to speak of post-Christian culture. In retrospect it is easier to see the cultural transformationist emerging in Schaeffer's call for reformation and revival, a return of America to her Christian, Reformation base (111). In taking up these concerns, Schaeffer identified with the concerns of the counterculture. In 1970, he was one of the first evangelicals to go green with the publication of *Pollution and the Death of Man*.

Schaeffer rounded out his promotion of Christian worldview with an emphasis on the visual arts, especially under the influence of friend, colleague, and art historian Hans Rookmaaker (123–125). But Schaeffer's aesthetic theory could never get completely past interpreting the meaning of art in rational terms. Modern art was simply more evidence for the decline of western culture. So, too, in his analysis of music and film. But, he was the only evangelical seeking to understand Cezanne, Debussy, Antonioni, Woody Allen, and the Grateful Dead. Salvation was not just the answer for the individual, but for the culture (115). Furthermore, he exhorted Christians to identify with, rather than shout at, those caught in the “maelstrom of mean-

inglessness” (114).

In the mid-1970s, Schaeffer would take on American materialism and racism, but his progressive bent would soon take a turn to the right (130–135). When I left L'Abri in 1972, I was convinced that I should vote for McGovern. Not long after this, Schaeffer would be a leader of the American right. As Hankins says “fundamentalist concerns were never far beneath the surface of Schaeffer's thought” (136).

Christian Right Activist

In 1972, Schaeffer returned to a vigorous defense of the inerrancy of the Bible with the publication of *Genesis in Space and Time*. He rightly asserted that if the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not historical then biblical authority and faith are impossible to maintain (136–143). In 1975, he published two more books, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History* and *No Final Conflict*, as his part in the battle for the Bible (143). In 1978, he was one of three hundred signers of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (146).

In a section titled “Fundamentalist Separatism Revisited,” Hankins astutely observes that Schaeffer's “working-class populism and anti-elitism can be detected in his discussion of science” (150). In his effort to discredit secular science, he resisted being dogmatic about the length of the creation days or the age of the earth (151). Hankins maintains that Schaeffer, like Harold Lindsell, exaggerates the similarity of evangelicals soft on inerrancy to the liberals of the early twentieth century (157–159). For Schaeffer, these were “two theaters of the same war” (159). He concludes,

It appears that L'Abri and the trilogy were more of an interlude in Schaeffer's fundamentalism, rather than a dramatic turning point for his thought. Once his campus lectures and the trilogy drew him back to the United States, he jumped into the new fundamentalist battles as if he had never been gone. (159)

Schaeffer's foray into filmmaking, with activist son Franky, is a sad chapter in the book and in

Schaeffer's life, as the undisciplined young "genius" led his father into the world of evangelical filmmaker Billy Zeoli. Despite the many problems with the film, *How Should We Then Live*, Hankin declares the book it was based on, Schaeffer's "best book," as it was better written and had a "better command of the great philosophers and artists" (167). However, as in the trilogy, Schaeffer located the roots of the modern problem of human autonomy in the Renaissance, leaving the European Reformation as a pristine model to be emulated today (169). But a new element was added—the link between the Reformation and American democracy, a link that would be amplified in *A Christian Manifesto*. Hankins helpfully points out the problematic straight line logic Schaeffer employed. Whatever is good in thought and culture had a Christian influence or origin (170). Hence, modern science was "attributed primarily to Christianity" (171).

The final new ingredient in *How Should We Then Live* was a call to culture war. Franky cajoled his father from his hitherto apolitical stance to the fundamentalist militancy of the culture warrior (175). According to Schaeffer, the new relativistic sociological ethic led to the legalization of abortion in 1973. The potential for a humanist elite to take over was an ever present Orwellian danger (176–179). *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* (1979) was a logical next step for the countercultural prophet. Teaming up with Dr. C. Everett Koop, Schaeffer launched a four-month, twenty-city film tour in 1979, accompanied by a book. Abortion was the result of American culture leaving its Christian base (183). Christians must resist this dehumanizing tendency, because man is not a machine. At this point, Hankins points out a fundamental flaw in Schaeffer's analysis: his "tendency to interpret the actions of human beings as direct products of their thinking. . . . a surprising emphasis for a Calvinist," ignoring as it does the natural selfishness of even those with a correct worldview, as if Christians believe that the Bible is true because it offers the best explanation of the world (186–189).

The culture warrior came to full gallop with

the publication of *The Christian Manifesto* in 1981. Under the influence of lawyer John Whitehead and Christian Reconstructionist Rousas John Rushdoony, Schaeffer, while rejecting the idea of a theocracy, embraced the idea that a Christian consensus was the basis for America's founding. Democracy is rooted in the Reformation (193–194, 197). The Enlightenment influence is not mentioned here or anywhere in Schaeffer's works (198). The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 offered a window of opportunity for Christians to assert a Christian worldview over against secular humanism (200). Schaeffer was soon befriended by those in power, like congressman Jack Kemp and Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell (201–202). Despite public reservations about Constantinianism and private disgust for the belligerence of Falwell, Schaeffer was happy to be identified as a fundamentalist, regardless of William Edgar's friendly caution (203).

Illuminating is the conflict that erupted over the first Creation Science court case (207–208). Schaeffer cited the court's ruling against the teaching of Creation Science along side evolution as evidence of judicial tyranny. George Marsden testified in the same case on the side of the ACLU, attracting the wrath of Franky Schaeffer. Marsden challenged Francis on the inconsistency of rejecting theocracy, while at the same time maintaining that the relationship between church and state in Calvin was correct, when in fact the Reformers sought state establishment of Calvinism (209). Marsden's and Noll's pleas to get the history right were responded to with criticism that they were weak on inerrancy. Gone was Schaeffer's distaste for McIntire's attacks on fellow Christians (215). In the end the transformation of culture drove historical interpretation (220). As Marsden was to warn Schaeffer, political causes tend to "obscure the Gospel and divide the church if they are put into the forefront of a ministry" (223).

It is ironic, as Hankins observes, that many whom Schaeffer inspired to intellectual pursuits discovered the superficiality of much of his analysis. But, however, problematic in the details, the broad outlines were compelling (96). Hankins

repeats this theme throughout all of the critical sections of his account in a quest to be truly appreciative without ignoring critical analysis.

Most troubling, however, was Schaeffer's "deep sensitivity to criticism from Christian scholars" (104), and his consequent unwillingness to listen to friendly critics like Ronald Nash, Cornelius Van Til, Harry Schat, Thomas Morris, William Edgar, Mark Noll, and George Marsden. The problem was his isolation from Christian scholars. He was left placing history on the "procrustean bed of American fundamentalism," and to view it in terms of decline and fall (101).

Conclusion

Heavily referenced and well-indexed the book merits careful study by anyone interested in understanding one of the major influences in evangelicalism in the last half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Despite the fundamentalist myopia that characterized Schaeffer's "monolithic interpretation" of history, Hankins believes that his "signal achievement and most lasting influence" was calling "Christians to think in Christian ways about all of life and culture" (227).

One wonders, however, if developing a Christian worldview isn't part of the problem. Then, doesn't everything have to have a Christian base? Is there any room for common grace as the sovereign work of God's Spirit in his providence in such a quest? If "engaging the culture" is a sincere quest to understand the various aspects of culture—this is a worldview worth developing—then we may earn the unbeliever's respect and thus perhaps a hearing. But, if it means transformation of the culture, then I wonder what such a project looks like in light of the text of the New Testament. At least Schaeffer stimulated us to think carefully and deeply about this subject of understanding culture.

This book has helped clarify a basic conclusion I have been coming to as I assess Schaeffer's ministry. I would argue that we see the fruit of the later Schaeffer in the cultural militancy of some of the Reformed community today. Late in the last phase of Schaeffer's life and ministry,

Professor Ronald Wells of Calvin College wrote two penetrating critiques of Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto* (1981).⁵ Wells perceptively places Schaeffer's jeremiad within the ancient tradition of answering the question, What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?⁶ Wells concludes his first article, "It is truly ironic that evangelicalism's philosopher, who spent so much of his time on 'the antithesis,' winds up a synthesizer after all."⁷ As helpful as Wells's critique of Schaeffer's intellectual project was, he ends up sharing Schaeffer's longing for the transformation of American culture. Of course, every Christian longs for a better country, but the Bible locates it in a different realm.

Like Wells and Hankins and so many others of my generation, I can trace my enthusiasm for developing the Christian mind to Francis Schaeffer. But for me this was the beginning, not the end, of a great journey. I am especially grateful that it was the middle, or "European evangelical," Schaeffer that sent me on my way.

It should be no surprise that where ecclesiology, especially that of a confessional church, is weak the reformation of culture tends to take center stage, and in the absence of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, the reality of common grace tends to be diminished. Add to this a simplistic reading of Reformation and American history and you have a dangerous formula for understanding culture and the church's role in it. This sounds familiar to anyone observing the so-called "culture wars." So, I answer, Yes, to the question in my title. Schaeffer was a reformed fundamentalist, perhaps always underneath the surface, but certainly in the end, and now the church must live with his children. Would that the culture warriors should beat their swords into plowshares to plant the gospel in the hearts of a needy world. Or perhaps in good Pauline fashion, would that they should put down their carnal swords and take up the spiritual

5 Ronald Wells, "Francis Schaeffer's Jeremiad," *The Reformed Journal*, May 1982, 16–20; "Whatever Happened to Francis Schaeffer?" *The Reformed Journal*, May 1983, 10–13.

6 Wells, "Francis Schaeffer's Jeremiad," 17.

7 *Ibid.*, 20.

sword of the good news of Jesus Christ for sinners. As Hankins concludes, “look to Schaeffer as an example of one who lived deeply within his own time . . . while somehow keeping his eye on what was ultimate” (239).

For all of the superficial, and sometimes grossly inaccurate, treatment of history and philosophy, Schaeffer gave many of us hope in the face of the despair we had encountered in the modern world. It was just such despair that drove me to faith. He rightly identified the problem of autonomous thought. Schaeffer was the only Christian leader I knew who was addressing the modern world with any kind of penetration, and in the cultural language that I understood. Many of us would learn that within specific disciplines there are better scholars, but he was our pastor, and a deeply compassionate man, as Hankins acknowledges (107–108). Oddly his apologetics focused on ideas as the only element in people’s presuppositions, excluding other dimensions of human commitment and loyalty. Yet in his own practice he demonstrated his claim that love was the “final apologetic.” ©

Gregory E. Reynolds *serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of Ordained Servant.*

EDITORIAL POLICIES

1. *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 Presbyterianism.

2. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

3. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stand, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

ORDAINED SERVANT

Cover and layout designed by Christopher Tobias, Tobias' Outerwear for Books, Inc.

Printed and bound by D. S. Graphics, Lowell, Massachusetts.

Composed in Requiem, Helvetica Neue, and Electra.

Printed on 70# Husky Offset Text.

Bound in 80# Velvet Unisource.

