

Ordained Servant

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for
Church
Officers

Limington Congregational Church, Limington, Maine / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

Dedicated to Robert B. Strimple

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✦ From the Editor



This is the fifth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* as we enter the twentieth year of publication and celebrate our seventy-fifth anniversary as a denomination. Lots of milestones. For this we ought to be very grateful, because church officers are only “servants” of the Lord by his grace as the Servant of the Lord who gave his life as a servant to make us, contrary to our natures, servants—his servants.

I have dedicated this annual edition to one of my favorite professors, and an expert in contemporary Roman Catholic theology, Robert Strimple. Dr. Strimple’s grasp of the subtleties of Vatican II has distinguished him as an interpreter of the new theological environment. As a student, I sat in awe of Dr. Strimple’s combination of meticulous exegesis, extensive knowledge of historical and systematic theology, and commitment to Reformed theology and the visible church.

The cover photo is of the Limington Congregational Church in Limington, Maine. This congregation was one of the first in New England to begin the journey back to its historic eighteenth-century Reformed roots in the 1960s. Presently, the congregation is in the process of joining the Presbytery of New York and New England.

This year I have been able to print almost everything published online, because I have been stricter about article length. I would like to thank the many fine writers who have worked with me to revise articles in order to stay within the prescribed limits.

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 excellent formatting of the printed volume.

—Gregory E. Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Tribute

Dr. Robert B. Strimple: A Tribute

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2010¹

by W. Robert Godfrey

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the reception of the Rev. Dr. Robert Benson Strimple into the ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. It also marks forty-one years of his service as teacher and administrator at Westminster Philadelphia and Westminster California. It has been my privilege to work closely with Bob Strimple for over thirty-five years and to enjoy his faithfulness, keen insight, and good humor which has greatly encouraged me and many others.

Strimple has indeed served Christ in a wide variety of remarkable ways. He has been a minister, a teacher, a scholar, a churchman, an administrator, and an institution builder. All of these tasks he has undertaken as a Reformed Christian with a deep conviction that Reformed Christianity is biblical Christianity. Reflecting on his work at Westminster Seminary, he wrote: “We joyfully trace our theological roots to that understanding of the Bible, that understanding of the gospel message, which flowered at the time of the Reformation.”²

Strimple was born, raised, and educated in Delaware. His parents were Methodists, and he became a Baptist before studying at Westmin-

ster Seminary. He was still a Baptist at the time of his graduation from Westminster, but he had embraced most other elements of a confessional Reformed conviction.

Family has always been very important to Strimple, and his wife, Alice, has accompanied him faithfully on his spiritual and academic journeys, supporting him fully along the way. Early in their married lives, they had hoped to serve the Lord as missionaries, and at least in some ways their move to the “foreign field” of California satisfied that desire. Their four children moved with them to California, and all four now serve Christ with their families.

At Westminster Philadelphia he appreciated all his professors, but, like many others, he was significantly influenced by Cornelius Van Til, whose presuppositional apologetics helped Strimple in his scholarly work to look for the foundations of various forms of theology. The greatest influence on him, however, was Professor John Murray. Strimple was drawn to both Murray’s meticulous teaching and his godly character. Murray’s lectures, which were written out, regularly revised, and read word for word in class, were a model of thorough scholarly preparation, which particularly appealed to Strimple’s own Germanic precision. In these lectures, Strimple also experienced a scholar of great care and broad learning who grounded his theology clearly and explicitly on precise biblical exegesis.

Murray, of course, was much more than a fine theologian. He was a spiritual inspiration through the devotion to Christ that radiated from his life. Murray embodied the disciplines of Scottish Presbyterianism—including careful Sabbath keeping and exclusive psalm singing—in a way that did not seem legalistic, but rather was filled with a biblical holiness. Indeed, the Rev. Geoffrey Thomas observed that John Murray was the holiest man he had ever known. For Strimple, too, Murray lived out an attractive holiness that encouraged others to draw near to Christ. And surely it is not too much to say that Strimple was Murray’s truest successor as a Reformed systematician, blending faithfulness, learning, and piety.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=218&issue_id=58.

² Robert B. Strimple, “Our Reformation Heritage,” *The Bulletin of Westminster Theological Seminary* (Spring, 1982): 1.

After his graduation from Westminster in Philadelphia he taught one year at Eastern Christian High School in Paterson, New Jersey, and then served eight years as professor of systematic theology at Toronto Bible College (1961–1969). While teaching, he continued his formal studies, completing a Th.M. at Westminster (1965) and beginning a Ph.D. program in systematic theology at Trinity College, University of Toronto (completed in 1972). During those years in Canada, he continued his careful reflection on the Bible and theology, which led him to embrace paedobaptism. He began teaching at Westminster in 1969 and was received into the ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1970.

In addition to his teaching, Strimple gave himself to the cause of Westminster by accepting a number of administrative positions: dean of students, dean of the faculty, vice president of academic affairs, and eventually president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California (WSC). He brought rigorous discipline to these positions, which he fulfilled brilliantly and thoroughly. He clearly recognized that Reformed Christianity was more than an intellectual commitment. Biblical Christianity has an institutional form and expression.

Although an Easterner, Strimple joined the many who heard the call to “Go west, young man.” A number of Reformed leaders in California had become convinced that a Reformed seminary was needed in the West. They appealed to Edmund Clowney, the president of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Clowney decided that founding a branch campus of Westminster in California would be a wonderful part of the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of WTS. So with the support of the Board of Trustees and the faculty, Clowney in 1979—with remarkable generosity—sent his vice president for development, Robert G. den Dulk, and his vice president for academic affairs, Bob Strimple, to Escondido, California, to establish the new campus. Strimple worked particularly on gathering the new faculty, setting up the curriculum and academic life of the school, and promptly securing accredi-

tation for WSC from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

In constructing the new faculty, Strimple showed his generosity, selflessness, and commitment to excellence in a special way. He did not desire to find faculty who agreed with him at every point, but sought faithful, confessional Reformed scholars who would labor together beyond differences to advance the cause of Christ.

By 1982, it was clear that trying to have a single institution with campuses on two coasts was unduly cumbersome administratively. The decision was very amicably made for the western campus to become a fully independent institution with the name Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Strimple became its first president in 1982.

As an extension of his orthodox theology, Strimple was always forward and outward looking. At the tenth anniversary celebration of WSC, he articulated this in his address entitled “For All People—One Christ, One Gospel, One Mandate.” This passion for carrying the gospel into the world had already been expressed in his inaugural address as the first president of WSC, in which he reflected on the exciting opportunities before a seminary sitting on the Pacific Rim, with all the peoples and cultures to which it could minister.

In addition to his critical work as a full-time teacher of systematic theology, as president he continued to bear a heavy administrative load. He not only oversaw the big picture of seminary administration, but also proofread all communications and publications that went out from the seminary. By 1988, this load had become too heavy, and he gladly returned to teaching and scholarly pursuits as his full-time work at WSC.

As a churchman, he was active both in his local congregation and in the work of the higher courts of the church. His involvement with the OPC was honored by his election as moderator of the General Assembly at its fiftieth anniversary gathering in 1986. After his move to California, he worked for the founding of an OPC congregation in Escondido.

His first love, however, remained systematic

theology. While interested in historical and logical questions, his greatest concern, like Murray's, was to ground theology firmly and clearly on the Scriptures. His lectures showed, in response to liberal and evangelical challenges, how Reformed theology was not the product of a desire for a logical or rational system, but rather was developed out of the careful exegesis of biblical texts.

We can all be thankful that those lectures have been preserved in three CD courses available from Westminster Seminary California. The first course is seventeen lectures on theological anthropology, entitled "God's Created Image." The second course is thirty-nine lectures on Christology, entitled "Christ Our Savior." The third course is forty-nine lectures on soteriology, entitled "Salvation in Christ." These CDs have been provided free of charge to a large number of seminaries around the world, another way in which the Strimples' desire to be missionaries has been fulfilled.

In the best tradition of Machen and Van Til, Strimple was concerned not only to present biblical truth positively, but also to relate the theology of the Bible to some of the contemporary expressions of thought in his time. He taught a course on atheism, tracing its modern forms and attractions, while presenting a clear Christian refutation. He also studied the twists and turns of the modern search for the historical Jesus, following various developments of gospel criticism and providing a biblical evaluation. This study led to the writing of the book *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (1995).³

Another element of contemporary thought that he studied over many years was the development of modern Roman Catholic theology. His interest in this field of study was first stimulated by courses he took for his doctoral work at the University of Toronto. Those post-Vatican II days were a powerful stimulus to theological reflection and reformulation in the Roman church and colleges. At the University of Toronto, he presented a seminar

³ Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus: An Introductory Survey of the Historical Roots of Gospels Criticism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995).

on one of the leading Roman Catholic theologians of the day, Bernard Lonergan, whose 1957 book, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*,⁴ was widely discussed. He also studied with the Roman Catholic Leslie Dewart, whose 1966 book, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age*,⁵ was predictably retitled by conservatives as *The Future of Unbelief*. Strimple was impressed that these professors and the Roman Catholic graduate students with whom he studied were far from the Tridentine Romanism that most Reformed theologians knew. Rather he encountered a theology much more like the Protestant liberalism against which Westminster had been founded.

Those experiences in Toronto led to decades of study of contemporary Roman Catholicism, including membership in the Catholic Theological Society of America. He also regularly taught an elective course in this subject.

Most helpfully and incisively Strimple summarized the fruit of his extensive study of contemporary Roman Catholicism in an essay, "Roman Catholic Theology Today," published in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us* (1994).⁶ This essay remains an excellent introduction to the character and foundation of modern Roman Catholic academic thought. It shows the parallel developments in Protestant and Roman Catholic theology among those theologians convinced that they must accommodate Christianity to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking.

Interestingly, Strimple's analysis of contemporary Roman Catholicism has been carefully studied by the Roman Catholic scholar William Shea in *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (2004).⁷ In a section of the

⁴ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

⁵ Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

⁶ Robert B. Strimple, "Roman Catholic Theology Today," in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, ed. John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 84–117.

⁷ William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and*

book entitled “Hard Evangelicals and the Apostate Church,” Shea recognizes Strimple as “a serious student of contemporary Catholic theology.” Shea is remarkably familiar with the Princeton and Westminster tradition, commenting learnedly on Charles Hodge, Loraine Boettner, J. Gresham Machen, and Cornelius Van Til, as well as Strimple.

In 2001, Strimple retired from full-time teaching. In his letter announcing his plans to retire, he wrote: “Alice and I praise God for the life and ministry he has given us together, and for our four believing children and nine [now twelve!] grandchildren. The highlight of that ministry has certainly been these years at Westminster in California, especially those exciting, satisfying, early years seeing a new Reformed seminary for the preparation of men for the gospel ministry established here on the West Coast. How thankful we are for the wonderful faculty, trustees, staff, and students who have made up the very special Westminster California family!”

Strimple remains active in retirement. He continues to give lectures in a variety of courses and faithfully mentors a number of WSC alumni around the world via email. He has been honored by his academic colleagues with a valuable collection of essays entitled *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine* (2004).⁸ He was also honored—in quite an extraordinary way—when anonymous donors, through a one million dollar donation, established the Robert B. Strimple Chair of Systematic Theology in appreciation for all the ways in which he had contributed to the establishment and continuation of WSC.

Robert Strimple has served Christ in remarkable ways, and his friends, colleagues, and students hope that the Lord will spare him for years to come so that he may continue offering wise counsel and encouraging the service of others. His wisdom and passion resound in many of his writings, but an

excellent closing example can be found in the concluding words to an essay he wrote on open theism entitled “What Does God Know?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (1996):

The Reformers, on the basis of their biblical doctrine of God, presented a biblical doctrine of salvation. A Socinian view of God leads inevitably to a Socinian view of salvation, which is not the good news of salvation by God’s free grace—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone—but rather a message of salvation by one’s own efforts, a false gospel that is not good news at all. It is the *gospel* that is at stake in this debate.⁹



W. Robert Godfrey is a minister in the United Reformed Churches in North America serving as president of Westminster Seminary California.

Catholics in America (New York: Oxford, 2004), 156. See also 157 and 170.

⁸ David VanDrunen, ed., *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries: Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004).

⁹ Robert B. Strimple, “What Does God Know?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 150.

✦ Servant Thoughts

Death: An Old-New Terror

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2010¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

2009 was a year in which death insinuated itself into our congregation. Beginning in January we lost the first of four of our oldest members, each of whom was no longer able to attend worship services, and went to be with the Lord within a ten-month period. We had two near deaths, one man with a heart attack, and the other with a severe pulmonary infection. Finally, 2009 was punctuated with the sudden death of the father of one of our members, and someone dear to us all. This has served as an important reminder to me that pastors and elders are to be like their master, men of sorrow and acquainted with grief.

But how well prepared are we pastors, elders, and our congregations to minister to those facing death or dealing with the deep grief which death causes among family and friends? While most of us have the theology of death right (and that is crucial), I think we are often ill equipped to deal personally with death when it comes close to us. Our natural instinct is to avoid dealing with death. This instinct is not in itself entirely sinful. Why? Because we were not created to die. Even the most benighted sinner knows this in his heart of hearts, but without a doctrine of the Fall he is often tempted to construe death as a purely natural

phenomenon—a subtle evasion of guilt before God.

This attitude is exemplified in a well-known poem, *Thanatopsis*, written by the nineteenth-century American poet William Cullen Bryant. *Thanatopsis* simply means “a musing upon death,” or a meditation upon the meaning of death. Such meditation has been a favorite enterprise of poets throughout the ages. Bryant’s musing concludes:

By an unfaltering trust approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him and lies down to pleasant dreams.

In the true Romantic spirit, Bryant trusted in the goodness of nature—including human nature. His dangerously erroneous conclusions about death were based on this assumption. The inadequacy of this account of death is clear to the Christian, but also to the grieving unbeliever, even though he is not able to identify the nature of the problem. The Christian, on the other hand, knowing that death is an enemy, can account for our natural human revulsion. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26).

But there is also a sinful Christian response to death—one that seeks to avoid dealing with it either for ourselves or others. Our culture has been described by Malcolm Muggeridge as a “culture of death,” but perhaps the reason we are increasingly able to kill so easily is because we have covered death up with euphemisms. So abortion becomes a “surgical procedure,” and embalmed corpses are said by mourners to “look so peaceful.” Graveyards in Florida, the home of one of the great illusion creators, Disney, are purposely hidden from public view. So, as a culture, we are ill equipped to face our own deaths or the deaths of others. We do not know how to grieve, or help others grieve, very well.

Thinking about death is never pleasant; facing it in the lives of those around us or ourselves is most disturbing of all. But the church of the one who has conquered death should be different. Every enemy in our spiritual warfare should be faced with the courage and wisdom of our risen Lord.

One summer evening as I strolled through the

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=184&issue_id=51.

graveyard next to the church in which I was raised, South Main Street Congregational Church in Manchester, New Hampshire, I read the inscriptions on the stones. I noticed that the older slate stones had musings more consistent with the biblical understanding of death, musings for posterity to ponder. One read:

Though I am taken young
You elder ones must die;
Go from this place prepared
To meet your Judge on high.

Recently I visited the Valley of the Kings in Luxor, Egypt. While observing the vast array of hieroglyphic inscriptions about death in one of the sixty-two pharaonic tombs, my guide observed that the pharaohs spent their entire lives preparing for death. This is one reason that Christians have historically availed themselves of the lapidary art and left inscriptions to remind others of the need to prepare for death. It is also why graveyards have surrounded churches. It is, of course, essential for every Christian to be prepared to die, and also to know how to grieve and help others grieve. And church officers should be in the forefront of the preparation.

The subject of death and grieving should be a regular part of the preaching and teaching of the congregation. Specific instruction on how to deal with death and grief should be given so that congregations know how to relate to and encourage those who have experienced the loss of a loved one. The two biblical dimensions of responding to the death of a believer are genuine sorrow and authentic hope. This combination is clear in Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those

who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

On the hope side of the equation I recall a monument in a family cemetery on Horse Corner Road in Chichester, New Hampshire, that reads:

Hope looks beyond the bounds of time
When what we now deplore
Will rise in full immortal prime
And bloom to fade no more.

Several years ago I discovered the grave of a great-great-grandfather who fought in the American War of Independence as a teenager. The inscription on his grave beautifully captures the biblical hope:

Friends nor physicians cannot save
This mortal body from the grave.
When Christ the Physician doth appear
They cannot keep this body here.

On the sorrow side we should remember Paul's exhortation to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). Men should especially be reminded that in the Bible real men weep, especially over death. Witness David in the Psalms and Jesus and Paul in the New Testament.

Some of the fear and sorrow of the unbeliever, of course, is rooted in the deep knowledge of God's judgment on the sin of all of Adam's children. He is enslaved by this fear, as Hebrews 2:15 tells us, "who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." The Christian knows that only the righteousness of our great High Priest can free us of this fear. They have heeded the gravestone's warning, "Go from this place prepared, To meet your Judge on high." But, what the families and friends of those who hold this confidence by faith

are often not prepared for is the awful absence of the one they loved and whose presence was such a vital part of their lives.


Death, an old-new terror, hangs over the earth like a great cloud, penetrated only by “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). As Fred Holywell, Scrooge’s nephew, expounds on the goodness of Christmas to his bah humbugging uncle in Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*, he sums up one dimension of a profound perspective on life,

But I’m sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open shut-up hearts freely, and to *think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave*, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. (emphasis added)

We need to grow in our knowledge of how to face death, especially with and for others, who are “fellow-passengers to the grave,” and thankfully beyond to our heavenly home.

Only in our Conqueror can we face death with courage and wisdom in this death-en-shrouded world. The presence of ministers, elders, deacons, and family in the face of death is truly the presence of the Christ who understands death perfectly and profoundly, because he experienced it for us. The nineteenth-century southern Presbyterian pastor John Girardeau beautifully describes this,

The Sufferer, who, for us, expired on the cross of Calvary, endured a species of death which was as singular as it was comprehensive and exhaustive. In body, he suffered the keen and protracted tortures of crucifixion; and in spirit, reviled by foes, deserted by friends and abandoned of God, he descended alone into

the valley of the death-shade, which was not only veiled in impenetrable gloom, but swept by the tempests of avenging wrath. Furnished with such an experience, the Good Shepherd ministers with exquisite sympathy at the couch of the dying believer. He knows his doubts, his apprehensions, his fears; and, moved by a compassion which naught but a common suffering could produce, he makes all the bed under the expiring saint, smooths his last pillow, and “wipes his latest tear away.”² 

2 John L. Girardeau, “Christ’s Pastoral Presence with His Dying People,” in *The Southern Presbyterian Pulpit* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896), 82.

The Benediction

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2010¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

There is confusion among us regarding the benediction—its nature and performance. It is either misunderstood as a prayer or improperly performed by using a doxology. I would, therefore, like to fire a liturgical shot across the bow of informality. Liturgical traditions tend to get it right. Although we Presbyterians are not usually referred to as liturgical, we have a strong liturgical tradition, that is, a way of ordering worship based on Scripture.

Most officers are aware that only a minister of the Word is to pronounce the benediction. But many do not recognize the difference among benedictions, doxologies, and prayers. Since we forbid the unordained to give the benediction, we ought

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=187&issue_id=52.

to know precisely what we are forbidding, and especially its importance at the close of worship.

Admittedly a survey of the ways in which the Western Church has offered blessing at the close of public worship would show some variety. However, I am concerned here to articulate a narrow definition of a benediction, which is the sense most often used in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, especially among English Puritans as expressed in the original Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God, as well as the OPC's present and proposed Directory for Public Worship: "The utterance of a blessing ... was pronounced by the officiating minister at the conclusion of divine worship."²

The reason that the benediction is to be pronounced by a minister of the Word is that a benediction is God's word of blessing upon his people, the church. The Final Proposed Revision of the Directory for Public Worship (FPR) describes the benediction as an essential aspect of the ministry of the Word:

By his Spirit working through the ministry of the Word, God addresses his people in the call to worship, in the salutation and benediction, in the reading and preaching of the Word, and in the sacraments. (I.C.1.a)

The salutation and the benediction are blessings pronounced in God's name and in his own words. Accordingly, they are properly used only in a gathering of Christ's church and by a minister of the Word. (II.A.5.a)

The FPR has this to say by way of definition:

A benediction is the pronouncement of God's blessing upon his people at the conclusion of the worship service. Words of benediction taken from Scripture are to be used. The high priestly benediction, "The LORD bless thee [you], and keep thee [you]: the LORD make His face shine upon thee [you], and be gra-

acious unto thee [you]: the LORD lift up His countenance upon thee [you], and give thee [you] peace," (Numbers 6:24-26) or the Trinitarian apostolic benediction "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14) are distinctly appropriate. If, however, the minister deems another benediction taken from Scripture more fitting for a particular occasion, he may use it. (II.A.5.c)

A classic example of mistaking a doxology for a benediction is found in the KJV of 1 Timothy 1:17, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." Note the clear earth to heaven direction of this text. Similar is Jude 1:24-25:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

The trajectory of these words is not that of a benediction.

So, how may we determine what is—and what is not—a benediction? God's blessing is not a prayer or a doxology. Here is how to distinguish. The word *benediction*, from its Latin origin, literally means "a good word." It is God's good word of grace to his church. The movement of a benediction is from heaven to earth, whereas the movement of a doxology or a prayer is from earth to heaven. A doxology is the church's good word of praise to God. So, a prayer or a doxology is God's people speaking to God, whereas a benediction is God speaking blessing to his people. He must be the speaking subject addressing the church.

Several examples will illustrate the difference. The benediction in Numbers 6 reads, "The LORD bless you, and keep you." The benediction in Romans 15:33 reads, "May the God of peace be with you all." It is easy to see the heaven to earth

² Oxford English Dictionary online, "benediction," definition 1.c.

direction of these words. Now let us look at a few examples of doxologies that are often mistaken for benedictions.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Rom. 16:25–27)

The phrases “Now to him” and “to the only wise God be glory” gives us the clue that this is a doxology. The church through the inspired apostle is addressing God. Ephesians 3:20 and Jude 24 have the same clue, “now to him.” Hebrews 13:20–21 raises a question for me as to whether we are looking at a benediction or a prayer. The FPR (III.C.8), following the present DPW (IV.C.3), treats it as a benediction appropriate to closing the Lord’s Supper:

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

All modern translations (cf. ESV, NKJV, and NIV) treat it as a prayer by using the modal verb “may,” as in the ESV “Now may the God of peace . . .” The New Jerusalem Bible translates it, “I pray that the God of peace . . .” The problem is that the text used by the present and the proposed DPWs is the KJV, which treats it as a benediction, omitting the modal verb. The problem is that the main verb connected with “may” in the translation is in the next verse (21). “Equip” (*katartisai* καταρτίσαι) in the ESV, or “make you perfect” in the KJV, is an active aorist optative. This Greek mood ex-

presses a strong contingency. The particular form in verse 21 is a “voluntative optative,” which is an “expression of a wish,”³ hence a prayer. According to Ernest de Witt Burton, author of *Syntax of Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, of the thirty five times this “optative of wishing” is used in the New Testament it “most frequently expresses prayer.”⁴ A benediction, on the other hand, is never contingent because it is given directly by God to his people. In their commentaries on Hebrews, Calvin and John Owen each refer to Hebrews 13:20-21 as a prayer.

Finally, I believe that the presence of what is clearly a benediction at the end of the letter in verse 25, “Grace be with all of you,” is one indication that this text, located prior to verse 25, is a prayer. Most benedictions in the New Testament come at the end of letters. Other prayers that may be mistaken for benedictions, but are followed by what are clearly benedictions, at the very end of the letters, are found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23–28 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18.

Similar uses of the optative that give the appearance of benedictions, while in fact being prayers, are:

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:5–6)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do

3 H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 172–73.

4 Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), 79.

for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thess. 3:11–13)

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 5:23)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (2 Thess. 2:16–17)

May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Pet. 1:2)

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pet. 1:2)

These latter two are examples of how the location of the text at the beginning, rather than the end, of the letter determines that this is not a benediction or a prayer, but rather an apostolic greeting or salutation. Both salutations and benedictions are God's word to his people, but the former begins worship, while the latter concludes it.

A benediction is performative. Forms communicate spiritual realities. The forms themselves are not distinct from the substance they impart. Performative language refers to speech as an act performing a specific function. The utterance itself is the act intended. When someone makes a promise or forgives, this is performative. When a minister during a wedding service says, "I declare you husband and wife," this is a performative statement. The FPR describes this performative power:

Public worship should be conducted in a manner that enables and expects God's people by faith actively to embrace the blessing of the Lord in the salutation and benediction. (I.C.2a)

Thus, it is appropriate for congregations to hold up their heads and for pastors to hold up their

hands for the benediction. As Professor Edmund Clowney once told my class on worship, as he held up his right hand, "Don't do this. You're not stopping a train." Then he held up both hands over the class, saying, "This is the way to bless God's people." Scripture does give instances of raised hands as the appropriate posture for prayer. But, raised hands are clearly used in Scripture for corporate blessing. "Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them" (Lev. 9:22). Christ, before ascending, "lifted up his hands and blessed them" (Luke 24:50). Notice that in both of these instances not one but both hands are used.

When in doubt opt for those Scriptures that are clearly benedictions. The best New Testament counterpart to the Numbers 6 benediction is found in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Num. 6:24–26)

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. (1 Cor. 16:23)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Gal. 6:18)

Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. (Eph. 6:23–24)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25)

Grace be with you. (Col. 4:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (1 Thess. 5:28)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. (2 Thess. 3:18)

Grace be with you all. (Titus 3:15)

Grace be with all of you. (Heb. 13:25)

Peace be to all of you who are in Christ. (1 Pet. 5:14)

Peace be to you. (3 John 15)

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (Rev. 22:21)

In a culture that is in love with informality such distinctions may fall on deaf ears, even in our circles. But if we believe, as I think we do, that worship is where heaven meets earth, then we will want to get this right in order to be a blessing to our Lord's church. ☺

Hearing the Word in the Modern World¹

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

As covenantal communication, preaching is always two-way. The hearer is always to be a worshipper. It is never preaching *and* worship. Preaching is the supreme act of worship.³ Along with the internal work of God's Spirit, the effectiveness of preaching depends, in part, on the attitude and preparation of the listener. This two-part essay is meant

1 Adapted from Gregory Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 345–53 (under the section “Hearts of Flesh: The Committed Hearer”).

2 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=192&issue_id=53; http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=198&issue_id=54.

3 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1: *The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

to help those who regularly hear the Word of God preached to take their covenant responsibilities more seriously. It also provides an outline of issues which the preacher should regularly address in his preaching.

Dangers to Avoid

“Take care then how you hear” (Luke 8:18).

Every attentive hearer of God's Word must be on the lookout for idolatrous tendencies in the culture of which he or she is a part. The apostle John was keenly aware of this danger when he issued this pastoral warning at the close of his first letter: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). The following are examples of some of the worst dangers to avoid.

Avoid Being a Consumer of Entertainment

Among other unbiblical expectations of the minister in our age, the preacher is expected to be an entertainer. Television and all of the visual media have cast much of modern life in the entertainment mode. Neil Postman has described all media as metaphors: “Media-metaphors classify the world for us.”⁴ We have moved from the “Age of Exposition” to the “Age of Show Business.”⁵ Thus, we are a culture which is regularly engaged by talk show and game show hosts. Entertainers have become the role models and spokesmen for our culture. They lecture at colleges and universities. Their opinions on a variety of “serious” subjects are regularly sought. We have come to expect all of life to be entertaining. This may color the way you look at the preacher, as it does the way the preacher often looks at himself.

I have a book in my library which I received in a box from the library of a retired minister. I keep it with the spine turned toward the wall because it is titled: *The Preacher Joke Book: Religious Anecdotes from the Oral Tradition*.⁶ I comfort myself

4 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 10.

5 *Ibid.*, 63.

6 Loyal Jones, *The Preacher Joke Book: Religious Anecdotes from*

with the thought that I do not recognize any of the names of the contributors. I recently attended a conference at which the main speaker began with a lengthy joke, obviously meant to loosen up the audience, and assure us that he is, after all, a “regular guy.” Just before presidential elections it is common for the two candidates now to do a comedy spot.

Humor is a wonderful gift, but it strikes me that only in the Age of Entertainment would humor be an expected part of the preacher’s repertoire. When we think of the tone which ought to be set in the act of preaching, especially in the Age of Entertainment, we must conclude that it should be one of extreme seriousness. As our culture entertains itself to death, we must attach to the preaching of the Word a solemnity which we rarely find in the modern world. The analogy of the ambassador gives us biblical boundaries in this regard.⁷ Preachers have been given a very serious message from the King of kings. We are to communicate as *his* messengers. As we bring the message of reconciliation to sinners, we must speak in the words and way of the King who sovereignly proffers amnesty. As we enter the very presence of our augustly holy God in worship, dealing with issues of life and death, we must labor to be as unlike the “house of mirth” as possible. Every faithful hearer must expect this, and thereby encourage the preacher with that expectation.

As a Christian you must never expect entertainment in worship or from the preacher. The proper mode of worship is the holy presence of our Lord. The committed hearer will look for substantive exposition of the Word of God. Exposition, not entertainment, is the mode of the preacher. That is the point of our favorite verse to prove the inspiration of the Scripture, “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim.

the Oral Tradition (Little Rock, AR: August House, 1989).

7 I owe the suggestion of this analogy to T. David Gordon.

3:16–17). This is the profit we must seek from preaching in the Age of Entertainment.

Avoid Being a Personality or Managerial Cultist

The pervasive power of celebrity is a uniquely modern problem. As media critic and historian Daniel Boorstin notes, celebrity is manufactured fame. Instead of the hero, who is known for his extraordinary character and deeds, the celebrity is a product of the Graphic Revolution. “The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name.”⁸ The celebrity is known for being known. He has an impressive persona. This has created a great temptation for the church. If the celebrity has become the role model for the world, the preacher may be expected to be the same, an image of the modern leader—just an image. Thus, the church is at times almost as superficial in its expectations of the pastor as the world is of its celebrities, looking for the “nice” personality.

It has been observed that the two vocational heroes of our time are the manager and the therapist. The ideal of the “professional” has become an idol of modern culture. This is no less true of the ministry. David Wells observes: “Technical and managerial competence in the church have plainly come to dominate the definition of pastoral service.... [T]he minister’s authority or professional status rides not on his ... character, ability to expound the Word of God, or theological skill in relating that Word to the contemporary world, but on interpersonal skills, administrative talents, and ability to organize the community.”⁹ This is reflected in one of the premier journals for evangelical clergy, *Leadership*, launched by *Christianity Today* in 1980. David Wells observes that 80 percent of its articles from 1980 to 1988 dealt with problems encountered by ministers, and 13 percent were devoted to “techniques for managing the church.

8 Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image or Whatever Happened to the American Dream?* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 47, 61.

9 David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 233–34.

...[L]ess than 1 percent of the material made any clear reference to Scripture.”¹⁰ If the pastor is truly called to imitate the ministry of his Lord, who is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (1 Pet. 5:1–4), one need only replace Christ’s title with Chief Executive Officer, to get a sense of how out of accord with Scripture the modern conception is.

Your attitude, combined with the expectations of the rest of the congregation, will either tempt the minister to consider himself, and therefore act like, a celebrity or manager, or it will encourage him to be what God has called him to be: a minister of the Word. There can be little doubt that the professionalization of the ministry has led to a decline in preaching passion and skills. The less God-centered the church’s view of the ministry and preaching, the more man-centered the sermons will tend to be.¹¹ What is worse, as the church expects the pulpit to meet its needs, the pulpit becomes simply “a sounding board from which the Church hears itself.”¹²

The temptation to esteem the “famous” preacher is one of the greatest threats to preaching today. The preacher who has made a name for himself on the conference circuit, even though that may not have been his motive, makes the everyday preacher look drab and dull. There is no glossy photo in the bulletin, no recognition beyond the local church. This undermines God’s basic institution. What God has provided for his people in the local church week after week, through thick and thin, is the greatest blessing of all. How can celebrity recognition be important in light of the message of a Savior who was crucified as a despised and rejected criminal?

Avoid Looking for Therapy

In our age, the devil simply caters to an age-old addiction when he promotes the therapeutic. This same anthropocentrism was evident in Calvin’s day. In seeking to bring a biblical concept

¹⁰ Ibid., 113–14.

¹¹ Ibid., 251.

¹² Ibid., 253.

of the church to expression in Geneva, he noted of his opposition: “They were entangled in so many errors, because they would not follow that form which God had appointed.... The first difference between true worship and idolatry is this: when the godly take in hand nothing but that which is agreeable to the Word of God, but the other think all that lawful which pleaseth themselves, and so they count their own will a law.” Instead they “forge to themselves a carnal and worldly God.”¹³

How much of our modern attitude toward worship reflects this self-oriented pleasure quest? How many judge the preacher and his sermon in terms of the question: “Is it meeting my needs?” This is usually what the slogan “relevance” refers to. The market-driven church has as its motto: “Find a need, meet it, find a hurt, heal it.”¹⁴ The entire “self-esteem” philosophy which permeates every cultural institution reverses the biblical concern when it claims that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a call to first love ourselves. This falls hard on the central ethical implication of the cross: self-denial. The gospel message, from the modern perspective, is irrelevant by its very nature. It demands repentance from our preoccupation with self, and brings with it a liberating call to a God-centered life, rooted in the kingdom of heaven. As George Macdonald poignantly observed, “that need which is no need, is a demon sucking at the spring of your life.”¹⁵ Expect and pray for preaching which will challenge and root out such demons.

Avoid Being a Passive Listener

One of the great dangers of the entertainment and therapy modes is that they make us used to being passive. We are entertained, or have our problems solved for us. Our participation is simply to enjoy or feel better about ourselves. In the consumer mode we are “programmed” to

¹³ John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* (1540–1563; ET, Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 298, 299, 303 (on 7:44–50).

¹⁴ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 62–67.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

view everything, every situation or person as a product or service to be consumed. We ask questions like: “What can this church do for *me*? How can this preacher make *me* feel better, or solve *my* problems?” So we tend to sit, waiting to be entertained, waiting for our *needs* to be met. This is not the mode, position, or attitude of the true worshipper.

The cry for “participation” in worship is one of the most misdirected quests of worshipping communities. It is often motivated by the desire to share the spotlight “on stage,” or to feel the excitement of an emotionally charged group experience. Covenantal participation, on the other hand, is first of all an inward reality. Outwardly, it means being prayerfully engaged in every element in the order of service. This is especially true of listening to the sermon. “Hearing a sermon correctly is an act of religious worship.”¹⁶ Physically you may be passive, but spiritually and intellectually you are called to listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd in the ministry of his Word. This takes an intense effort, which challenges the “couch potato” mentality of our day. Listen to Sietsma:

Hearing God’s Word is not only an activity of the first order but the only activity befitting humans in relationship to their God. A relation of equality never exists between God and His people; however that fact in no way detracts from the dignity or office of the believer. Therefore, when in the administration of the Word, this relationship between speaking God and listening man shines forth, then the office of believer is most beautifully displayed and exercised.

Thus we are not called to find a liturgy in which preaching is minimized so that the congregation can be given a more obvious role. The congregation’s duty is to listen. Rather, we are to practice improving and increasing our ability to listen, so that the congregation may listen to the

16 T. David Gordon, “Presuppositions regarding Preaching,” unpublished manuscript, n.d.

Word with all its heart and soul and mind. That is not a slight task.¹⁷

Attitudes and Practices to Cultivate

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Ps. 119:18).

Elizabeth Elliot, in discussing worship song, speaks wisely about our attitude toward the parts of worship, especially that singing is not the whole of worship:

Hymns constitute a crucial part of worship, but not by any means the whole. In churches which use almost exclusively what are called ‘praise songs,’ that part of the service is usually referred to as ‘Worship,’ as though prayer, preaching, offering, and listening were something else.¹⁸

As I said at the outset, the reading and preaching of Scripture is the supreme act of worship, and should thus be approached with great seriousness. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Question 160) gives hearers of the Word excellent comprehensive instruction in this matter:

What is required of those that hear the Word preached? A. It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

How seriously our forefathers took the responsibilities of the listener. In light of the following suggestions, meditating on the Scripture references provided by the authors of the Larger Catechism will be an important aid to becoming a better hearer: Proverbs 8:34; 1 Peter 2:1–2; Luke 8:18; Psalm 119:18; Ephesians 6:18–19; Acts

17 K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, trans. Henry Vander Goot (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1985), 99.

18 Elizabeth Elliot, “Whatever Happened to Hymns?” <http://www.elisabethelliott.com/newsletters/1999-05-06.pdf>.

17:11; Hebrews 4:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; James 1:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Luke 9:44; Hebrews 2:1; Luke 24:14; Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Proverbs 2:1; Psalm 119:11; Luke 8:15; James 1:25.

Come Prayerfully Expectant to Worship

Prayer in preparation for worship is essential. It should be noted, as we will see below in connection with the Scriptures, that praying in the Bible, even in private, was with the voice. David, in countless places in the Psalms, says that he cried out to the Lord with his voice. The voice lends concreteness to our words and to God's Word. Paul pled with the Ephesian church: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:18–20). As the Larger Catechism instructs, we are to come to attend to preaching with diligence, preparation, and prayer. Certainly both diligence and prayer must be part of our preparation. Preparing with prayerful reading of God's Word, especially on the eve of the Lord's Day, will cultivate the diligence to hear when the public worship begins. We will come expecting to hear from our Good and Great Shepherd.

Be Engaged in Listening as a Reader

The regular habit of good reading will help prepare you to be a good listener to good preaching. The very act of reading helps us to think more clearly, logically, and cogently. It helps the reader to develop depth through contemplating what is being read. It provides a counter environment to the simultaneity of the electronic media, which tend to bypass thought processes. The nonreader will be prepared only for content-light preaching. Like Bud Lite, lightweight preaching is nonfattening, and will not build the soul in Christian faith. This, of course, is especially true of Bible reading. Disciplined Bible readers will bring a store of knowledge of biblical concepts and teach-

ing to their listening. They will also bring the art of worshipful meditation to the pew, which is a requirement for engagement in biblical preaching. The Bereans profited from Paul's ministry precisely because they were good readers of God's Word.

Listen for the Voice of the Good Shepherd

"The 'book religion' of the Hebrews, as Siegfried Morenz points out, lay in the Hebrew 'genius for hearing.'"¹⁹ In the modern world there are many other voices competing for our attention. This has always been the case since Adam and Eve listened to the wrong voice in the Garden. The environment of this world is cultivated by the voices of communication. The world now has a heightened ability to impose its environment of thought, one which is contrary to the Word of God, on the church.

Psalm 1 is instructive in this regard. The psalmist frames his inspired poem in negative terms. The believer is distinguished by his opposition to the entire environment of unbelief. He does not walk in the counsel, stand in the way, or sit in the seat of the scornful unbeliever. He has a whole different approach. The world is the environment into which he is born. That environment is the given. But, as a person of the covenant, he is part of the Lord's invasion of history through the seed of the woman. The psalmist cultivates an "anti-environment" by meditating on the Word of God day and night. Through redemption, the believer is to develop a completely different approach to God and to all of life. He is to work at the development of a Christian mind so that he can withstand the environment of this "present evil age," based on the written Word of God.

One of the elements of poetry in the Bible which is largely lost on contemporary people is that it was written to be read aloud. The correlation between the written and the spoken word in the Bible is essential to cultivating the anti-environment. Its *writtenness* protects the Word from the

¹⁹ Walter Ong, review of *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, by William A. Graham, in *America* (Mar. 4, 1989): 204.

corruption of the fallen mind. But the individualizing tendency of writing/print, while important in its own way, needs to be balanced with the hearing of the Word, as well as the seeing/touching/tasting of the Word in the sacraments. Along with preparation for hearing God's Word read and preached each Lord's Day, as outlined above, it is important to read the Word in private and family devotions. Remember, catechizing, in oral culture, meant to teach by "sounding in the ear." Oral instruction was the staple of ancient pedagogy. God has made us to know him through all of the *natural* media of communication.

In listening for the voice of Jesus Christ, the committed listener must cultivate respect for his ordained undershepherds. Many in our day believe that reading the Bible on their own is sufficient. But if you believe Paul's great statement: "faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:17), you will recognize the absolute necessity of the preacher in his office as minister of the Word. In fact, we would be hard-pressed to find instances of conversion through mere reading the Bible, *in* the Bible. What we find, rather, are people like the Ethiopian eunuch, who need an interpreter or preacher to explain its meaning. You should always take the position of the eunuch who, when asked "Do you understand what you are reading?" answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30–31). Even the Scripture-searching Bereans received the gospel by *hearing* Paul (Acts 17:10–11).

One of the dangers we have seen in the printed book as a medium is that there is a tendency to undermine the authority of the spoken word, and the authority of the speaker. This should never be the case in the church, because God has designed the means of grace, as well as the church itself, to overcome this democratizing, privatizing tendency. Long before printing, this sinful tendency of the human heart was addressed by the writer of Hebrews: "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24–25).

In hearing the voice of your Savior you should be prepared to obey all that *he says*. Whatever attitudes, ideas, words, and activities need to be repented of, changed, or practiced, be ready to respond in repentance and faith. Remember that the biblical idea of "hearing" is obedient response to the Word of God: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." If he is the Lord of your life, this should be your *only* response to biblical preaching. An unrepentant attitude tends to create bitterness toward preaching and the preacher (Heb. 12:14–17).

Worship, with its covenantal order, is meant to provide an anti-environment to the ordinary life of the fallen world. The Sabbath is God's antidote to idolatry, as it teaches us our connection with heavenly realities (Lev. 26:1–2). It is God's way of cultivating his call, in the life of God's people, to live connected with Christ. We are called to reenact the heavenly pattern of Lord's Day worship in everyday life. Careful attention to God's Word preached is meant to inculcate moment-by-moment hearing and heeding of the Word of God as the applied Scripture rings in our ears in everyday life. Our attitude as worshippers, and thus as hearers, is summed up by the hortatory refrain of the glorified Lamb to the seven churches: "If anyone has an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13:9). The power of the electronic environment is no match for this voice. The power of modern images in their tendency toward idolatry is nil for a people of the Word. ❧

The Importance of the *Book of Church Order*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June–July 2010¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

As a young ministerial candidate, I was impressed with the late John Mitchell’s exhortation to take the *Book of Church Order* seriously. He quoted (in italics) from the first paragraph of the preface of *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*:

It is our prayer that as this book is used in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the great King of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, will use it in maintaining his Word as its supreme rule of faith and life. *Although the standards of government, discipline, and worship are subordinate to the Word of God, they may not be neglected without resulting in serious impairment of the life of the Church.* They have been adopted by the Church as part of its constitution. Moreover, they have been received as being based upon the Scriptures, and even the elements not drawn directly from the Word have been acknowledged as being in accordance with the general rules of the Word. Their design is not to take the place of the Word, but to provide effective means for the application of its teaching in the government, discipline, and worship of the Church.²

I was impressed because the remnants of biblicalism—just give me the Bible, not confessions or books of church order—tempted me to view these tertiary standards as relatively unimportant. At the very least, I did not feel strongly bound by them.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=209&issue_id=56.

² This paragraph has been part of our church order since at least the Seventh General Assembly in 1940, when the three tertiary standards were bound in one volume.

Especially poignant is the qualifying statement, “Although the standards of government, discipline, and worship are subordinate to the Word of God, *they may not be neglected without resulting in serious impairment of the life of the Church*” (emphasis added). Recently I heard a candidate for ordination answer a question about his adherence to some aspect of the present Directory for Public Worship by noting its subordination to the Bible. The implication was that, insofar as a given practice required by the Directory is determined by a minister or session to be biblical, it is binding.

Let me aver that the very reason we have a *Book of Church Order* is that some matters are agreed upon *not* to be left up to the discretion of individual ministers or sessions. Many things are, but not these, or else why would we call them standards, or part of our constitution? Put another way, there are some aspects of government and worship that we agree should not be left to local prudence because deviation from these principles and practices will result in “*serious impairment of the life of the Church.*” This is why we are a confessional church—our *Book of Church Order* is part of what we agree to confess together. This is the way we agree to do certain things in government, discipline, and worship.

This brings me to the question of what is—and what is not—biblical in these standards, especially in areas where they mandate certain practices. Must all such practices be expressly mandated in Scripture? Well, yes and no. Some may be expressly mandated, like the preaching of the Word, or the plurality of elders. These are obviously binding. Others may be mandated by using the logic of good and necessary consequence, such as infant baptism or making a public profession. These too, although not as obvious, are as binding as those things expressly mandated.

But there is a third category that I think is especially useful in thinking about our tertiary standards. This category is often overlooked in our laudable effort to ground all doctrine and practice in the Bible. All three categories are covered in Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that *there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed* (emphasis added).

Things like the use of *Robert's Rules of Order* and worship times would fall into this category of "circumstances" of our practice. These are to be ordered by natural law within the boundaries of the "general rules of the Word." These are "always to be observed." If the session calls the congregation to worship at 11:00 a.m. each Lord's Day, even though it may be inconvenient for some, it would be sinful to choose to arrive at a time of one's own choosing.

I use this obvious illustration to point up the importance of taking similar guidelines seriously as they are set forth in the BCO, in general, and in the present and newly approved DPW, in particular. Obviously in the case of some things not mandated, but suggested with varying degrees of emphasis, in these DPWs it is not necessarily sinful for a session to choose not to practice them. However, in what is mandated, the proper ordering of worship is at stake. If there is something in these standards that is out of accord with the Word of God, there is a proper procedure to amend them. Unlike our secondary standards, they are frequently amended for various reasons, usually for clarification, but sometimes for correction.


So, not everything necessary to the ordering of church government and worship, according

to WCF 6.1, must be expressly or by good and necessary consequence set forth in Scripture to be binding on the consciences of ministers and elders. There are matters that need to be agreed upon, even among those aspects of the BCO that are mandated, that are in the third category of circumstances determined by the "light of nature."

It has been argued that there is far too much detailed guidance in the new DPW, much of which, it is alleged, unnecessarily binds the consciences of church officers. While I might agree on some details of this allegation, I think there is a tendency among us, as part of a democratic society, to employ the concept of individual conscience as an excuse to avoid submitting to the consensus of the church. This is in no way meant to impugn the legitimate concerns that have been expressed in this debate over recent years. But it also needs to be kept in mind that the preface of the new DPW takes this into account by calling attention to its careful use of language, distinguishing between what is mandated and what is not mandated (in which three levels are distinguished).

My real concern here is for the former—what is mandated. The Directory for Public Worship has always been on a par with the Form of Government and the Book of Discipline, as reflected in our third ordination vow: "Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?"³ What was assumed in the old vow (as was argued by Westminster Theological Seminary church history professor Paul Woolley), prior to the revision of the Form of Government (FG) in 1979, was made explicit in the new FG by adding "worship" to government and discipline. But we have a history of not treating it so. I do not believe that among the mandated elements of the new DPW there are any significant new mandates that violate the regulative principle or the essential tenets of historic Presbyterianism. The problem is that we have for so long often

³ Note that the ordination vows are numbered in the order of their subordination to Scripture. The first vow is to an unamendable standard; the second vow to a difficult-to-amend standard; and the third vow to a more easily amendable standard.

failed to take the DPW seriously. Now the prospect of the new directory is causing us to reconsider some of our cherished practices or elements we have neglected. Since worship is where heaven and earth meet, this rut is a good one to get out of. Let's get to know our new DPW, apply it to our worship, and amend it where needed. 

Kindle: A New Horseless Carriage? An Assessment

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Kindle: Wireless Reading Device (6 inch display with free 3-G wireless), by Amazon. Seattle, WA: Amazon, 2010, \$259.00 (\$189.00 as of June; w/ only Wi-Fi wireless, \$139.00).

Kindle is a new “horseless carriage”—a “paperless book.” Of course, “horseless carriage” is what the first automobiles were called. This is what Marshall McLuhan called looking in the rearview mirror. Such naming of new inventions is partly due to technological naïveté, but it is also a way of easing people into accepting new technologies, the effects of which make some people apprehensive and others enthusiastic. But nobody knows what lies ahead. The automobile, as is now obvious, was much more than a horseless carriage. As the good natured Eugene—salesman of early automobiles—admitted as he was challenged by the skeptical young George in Booth Tarkington’s *The Magnificent Ambersons*,

“I’m not sure he’s wrong about automobiles,” he said. “With all their speed forward they may be a step backward in civilization—that is, in spiritual civilization. It may be that they will not add to the beauty of the world, nor to the life of men’s souls. I am not sure. But automobiles have come, and they bring a greater change in our life than most of us expect. They are here, and almost all outward things are going to be different because of what they bring. They are going to alter war, and they are going to alter peace. I think men’s minds are going to be changed in subtle ways because of automobiles; just how, though, I could hardly guess. But you can’t have the immense outward changes that they will cause without some inward ones, and it may be that George is right, and that the spiritual alteration will be bad for us. Perhaps, ten or twenty years from now, if we can see the inward change in men by that time, I shouldn’t be able to defend the gasoline engine, but would have to agree with him that automobiles had no business to be invented.”²

The effect of Kindle and its e-reader counterparts on the world is certainly not of the same magnitude as the automobile. Nor should we necessarily think that the automobile had no business being invented. The broader phenomenon of digital screen reading, however, is a matter of great moment for us all. Just as the automobile has altered our perception of space and time, so screen reading alters those same perceptions. Moreover, such technological changes alter the very structure of society.

The Kindle represents a small part of this technological transformation. I can carry around 1,500 books in this small Kindle (3,500 on the larger). It may mean that my library and study are obsolete and should be replaced by a “media room.” The change initiated by the ease with which so many words can be transported is similar to the change from clay tablets to papyri in the ancient world, or

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=212&issue_id=57.

2 Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1918), 199–200.

manuscripts to printed books in the Gutenberg era. The range and importance of these effects will be much easier to discern a hundred years from now. In the meantime, I offer the following observations on this particular e-reader.

A Brief History

Kindle First Generation, was released only in the United States on November 19, 2007. It featured a 6 inch (diagonal) 4-level grayscale display and retailed for \$399.00. Amazon subsequently lowered the price to \$359.00. The 250 MB of internal memory could hold approximately 200 non-illustrated titles.

On February 23, 2009, Amazon launched the Kindle 2 (\$359.00). It featured several improvements, such as a 16-level grayscale display, longer battery life, 20 percent faster page-refreshing, a text-to-speech option to read the text aloud, overall thickness reduction from 0.8 to 0.36 inches, and an enlarged internal memory (2 GB, of which 1.4 GB was user-accessible).

On May 6, 2009, Amazon announced the Kindle DX, which retailed for \$489.00. The second generation now retails for \$379.00. The DX is the first Kindle model with an accelerometer, automatically rotating pages between landscape and portrait orientations if the device is turned on its side, unless automatic rotation is disabled by the user. (In the Kindle under review one must choose this rotation from a menu.) It is slightly over 1/3 inch thick, has a 4 GB (3.3 GB user-accessible) storage capacity, holding approximately 3,500 non-illustrated e-books, a 9.7 inch (diagonal) display with 1200 x 824 pixel resolution, and a battery life of up to one week while using wireless or two weeks offline (the same as the Kindle being reviewed).

In 2010, the latest generation of the 6 inch screen—simply called “Kindle” (the model I am reviewing)—was selling for \$269.00. In June the price was reduced to \$189.00 in order to compete with the comparable Barnes & Noble Nook and the Sony Reader PE, each selling for \$149.00. This indicates the rapidly growing popularity of e-readers, and is just the beginning of the development

of this new reading format. The Kindle under review is sure to become a technological fossil shortly, so I will not focus so much on its technical aspects. That’s the obvious part. I would like, rather, to consider the experience of reading on such a device as compared to that most stupendous of all inventions: the codex (pages bound together in a cover), as well as the new iPad.

Amazon has pioneered a brilliant business venture with the introduction of the Kindle e-reader. With over 620,000 titles (this number will have grown by the time you read this), the Kindle store contains the largest selection of the books people want to read in e-book format at considerably less cost than their printed version (from \$9.99). Along with today’s bestsellers, the Kindle store offers thousands of free popular classics, making over 1.8 million free, pre-1923, out-of-copyright titles from other websites available. The Kindle store is readily accessible on the Kindle, or via the owner’s computer. “Shop in Kindle Store” is the second item on the menu after “Turn Wireless off/on.” The convenience of book buying makes this a very powerful commercial endeavor. “Get Books in as Little as 60 Seconds.” But, how does it compare to the book?

Kindle Is Like a Book

Everything about this device is designed to say “this is a new kind of *book*.” At the outset in the personal greeting to “Gregory,” Jeff Bezos, the founder and CEO of Amazon, promotes this idea by stating that he hopes

you’ll quickly forget you’re reading on an advanced wireless device and instead be transported into that mental realm readers love, where the outside world dissolves, leaving only the author’s stories, words, and ideas.³

Why try to imitate a book? Simple—when we think of serious reading we think of books, that is codices—that paginated device that made manu-

³ “Welcome Gregory,” in *Kindle: Books in Sixty Seconds*, by Amazon (Seattle, WA: Amazon, 2010), 16.

scripts remarkably more accessible, especially after the book-multiplying invention of the moveable-type printing press. Book lovers regularly express this when we register disgust at the thought of curling up in a comfortable chair to read a text on a computer, even if it's a laptop.

How then does Kindle attempt to be like a book—a paperless book? And does it succeed? It weighs about the same as a 250 page paperback (10.2 ounces). Marketing appeals to a literate crowd. Attractive ads with the flavor—the elegant simplicity and sophistication—of Apple and Bose have been skillfully calculated. Only three items come in the box: the device, a cord, and a nicely designed starter manual. Pictures in sleep mode are all images of high literature, mostly photographic or artistic portraits of famous authors. Amazon knows its audience.

My main concern prior to buying the Kindle was the problem every computer user encounters regularly—distraction: check the weather, the stock market, the news, or email. I was surprised to discover that the Kindle is very unlike my computer in several important ways. The AT&T wireless 3G network, “Whispernet” for Kindle, may be turned off easily. Since battery life is enhanced by this move, the reader is motivated to stay disconnected, and thus does not have the sense of being on the Internet. The major reason for turning on the wireless connection is to download a book, periodical, or newspaper, or to seek text-related information. Furthermore, there is essentially only one thing on the screen at a time, a page of text, a black and white picture, or a menu (of which there are very few). I found myself able to focus on reading a lengthy text without distraction.

The little Kindle screen focuses the reader on the words. Kindle is a smooth and solid little device with buttons well placed so as not to be easily pushed inadvertently. Because of the flatness of the buttons and keyboard, one does not have a strong sense of using a computer. So the distraction factor is not what I would have expected. Since periodic content is downloaded daily, usually in the morning, the frugal and focused person will turn off the wireless as soon as the download is complete. I

found myself rarely wishing to go on the Internet for information about something in the text I was reading, even though that is possible. The dictionary—which every reader needs close at hand—is located at the bottom of the page.

The black and white (gray) screen has a retro effect, hearkening back to the black and white televisions I was raised on, perhaps almost like a daguerreotype photograph. Its low definition diminishes its screen-like qualities. Even when one goes to the Kindle Store, the visual experience is very unlike an Internet commercial site on a computer. It is in black and white and very simple. E-readers that offer a more web-like experience will consequently be more like a computer than a book. Finally, the E-ink technology makes the screen almost page-like since it is not backlit and may be read in sunlight, just like a book. But, alas, it is not a book.

Kindle Is Unlike a Book

Just as horseback riding can never be replaced by automobiles, so electronic reading devices can never replace the experience of reading a book in codex form—the form it has taken for half a millennium.

The slight glare of the screen of the Kindle, similar to that of a glossy magazine, is probably necessary for the durability of the polymer surface, but there's no escaping the feeling and sound of plastic. Real books don't click. I can imagine a room full of Kindle readers sounding like the random bleeps at the grocery store cash registers. I suppose then that the best books read on the Kindle would be referred to as real page clickers. The page-turning click is an ever present reminder that one is holding a device, not an artifact with a history—provenance—and a unique presence. When I finished my first e-book, I was faced with the question of where to put it. It lacks the physical presence of a book. It is a nearly disembodied experience, like the Internet in particular and computing in general. Kindle is to books what an iPod is to music. The physical presence of books is more like the presence of a trio or an orchestra.

In the end, the horseless carriage and the e-reader differ in one crucial respect. The horseless carriage was happy to do away with the horse, whereas the e-reader wishes at all costs to be like the book. At least Kindle does not capitulate to the ersatz flummery of the iPad's iBooks application by attempting to simulate page turning. Not yet, that is.

The iPad puts tremendous pressure on e-readers to become more computer-like and less book-like. Technology critic Nicholas Carr observes, "To compete with the iPad, the current top-selling e-reader, Amazon's Kindle, will no doubt be adding more bells and whistles to its suddenly tired-seeming interface. Already, Amazon has announced it will be opening an app store for the Kindle later this year." Carr concludes, "[Steve] Jobs is no dummy. As a text delivery system, the iPad is perfectly suited to readers who don't read anymore."⁴ I'm sure he doesn't mean that every iPad user has abandoned substantive reading. But the device itself and the iBooks app are unsuited to serious concentration.

What's So Great about the Book?

Convenience is a two-edged sword. Most people see only the happy efficiency associated with it. But even measured by standards of efficiency, books still come out ahead in many categories.

The Kindle works hard at creating the illusion that it functions well off the grid. It doesn't need to be recharged frequently, so by keeping the graphics very simple and encouraging the reader to stay off the wireless network, the battery lasts for a long time. But at least every two weeks, electricity is required. Nor, as every computer user knows, is it as easy to navigate the pages of a digital text as with a book. Newspaper navigation on the Kindle lacks the ease of its paper counterpart, where one can scan whole pages and return to different articles and sections without buttons and batteries. This is somewhat ironic since, as noted earlier, the layout

⁴ Blog of Nicholas Carr, "The post-book book" (April 1, 2010), http://www.rougthype.com/archives/2010/04/the_postbook_bo.php.

of the modern newspaper is uniquely electronic in its scattering of context and sequence; whereas the Kindle is more like the continuous text of early newspapers. Searching may be more efficient, but even that is not always true in the presence of a good index. And the more search capabilities, the more potential for distraction. Page referencing is a related problem for scholarship. In contrast to the PDF format, there is no pagination due to the continuous text, since the type size may be altered by the reader. Also when reading a book it does not take long to realize where you are in relation to the end. Kindle compensates for this by a graphic at the bottom of the page indicating the percentage of the text the reader has completed.

On the matter of speed, Allison Flood of the *Guardian* reported recently: "E-book readers might be heralded as the future of literature but a new report shows that it's still quicker to read the old-fashioned print version of a book." The study by Jacob Nielsen of the Nielsen Norman Group concluded that the book is still a faster read than either the Kindle or the iPad. Nielsen also noted that readers "felt that reading the printed book was more relaxing than using electronic devices."⁵ Serious readers have never counted speed to be a virtue.

My inner typographer is pleased with the Kindle's ability to resize type; but the font, PMN Caecilia® Std, which is used in most texts, is boring, although easy on the eyes. The ability to change type size has a downside: fully justified texts often leave large spaces between words, especially in titles. The best texts are justified left only.

The gray background is aesthetically uninteresting, but also easy to read. The efficiency of having the wireless service off in terms of battery life, works against the aesthetic qualities of the book, since that efficiency does not favor illustrations and photographs. All the romance of the book is absent. Kindle is aesthetically prosaic. It has physical weight but lacks gravitas.

For the growing number of people who have never taken the time to read actual books or

⁵ Allison Flood, "Print v iPads: books win!" (July 10, 2010), www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/08/print-ipad-kindle-books.

newspapers, e-readers will be addictive because so convenient—at least apparently convenient—that is, unless compared to the convenience and the delight of the real thing.

But in the end nothing can replace the experience of reading a book. The extent to which the technology of e-books and reading devices becomes a horseless carriage remains to be seen. Only time will tell the difference between the book and these electronic supplanters. Perhaps they will create a yearning for the original—perhaps not.

While the aesthetic of the book may not be equally important to every serious reader, it must, at least subconsciously, play a part in the attraction of reading. Should there come a time in which books of the quality of those produced by Alfred A. Knopf are no longer published, then that will be a time in which I should not wish to live. But my suspicion—and, yes, my hope—is that digital technology will enhance our appreciation for the book, much as it has already enhanced the craft of typography. Kindle and its ilk will never replace the book, because it will ordinarily be owned by book lovers who like its portability and are perhaps tired of taking armloads of newspapers to the trash bin. Thus, portability and the ease of accessing periodical literature will probably be the most appealing aspects of the Kindle for serious readers. And in the spirit of Mark Twain, the book insists, “Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”

Besides, how many more gadgets can we sustain in our lives? Each distracts initially by the time taken to learn how to use the new device or application. Then the multitude of choices this opens to us serves as an endless domain of distraction.

Finally, there is the subtler matter of cognitive diminution. In this regard, Kindle lurks somewhere in the netherworld between the book and the Internet. The first article I read on my new Kindle was Nicholas Carr’s “Does the Internet Make You Dumber?”⁶ Good question. Ironically the CEO of

6 “The Saturday Essay,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704025304575284981644790098.html?KEYWORDS=nicholas+carr>.

Google, Eric Schmidt, harbors similar fears,

I worry that the level of interrupt, the sort of overwhelming rapidity of information—and especially of stressful information—is in fact affecting cognition. It is in fact affecting deeper thinking. I still believe that sitting down and reading a book is the best way to really learn something. And I worry that we’re losing that.⁷

For those interested in the comparison between a Kindle and iPad: The iPad is a cross between a laptop and an iPod Touch. With the growing phenomenon of cloud computing (data storage online rather than on the personal computing device), it probably represents a prototype of future computing devices. Perhaps it is a large iPod Touch. But because it is more like a computer with its backlit screen, rather than E-ink, it is not really comparable to the Kindle. The reader is much more “connected” while using the iPad, thus, potentially much less able to concentrate on a lengthy and demanding text. As Nichols Carr observes regarding iPad’s iBooks application, “The book itself, in this model, becomes an app, a multi-hypermediated experience to click through rather than a simple sequence of pages to read through.”⁸

The more ephemeral, the less substance, or as my mother used to say as she was serving healthy food, “This will stick to your ribs.” It used to be that printed periodical literature was considered too ephemeral for serious reading, since such literature is by definition *ephemera*—used for only a short time. Digital technology, and the iPad in particular, gives new meaning to the quality of ephemeral. The more quickly words pass before us, the less concentration and serious thought they stimulate. The dull aesthetic of Kindle is no match for the lots-of-interesting-things-happening-at-once of iPad. Just as the horseless carriage enlarges the landscape, it also diminishes local realities of com-

7 Transcript: Charlie Rose, March 6, 2009, interview with Eric Schmidt, Google CEO.

8 Blog of Nicholas Carr, “The post-book book” (April 1, 2010), http://www.routhtype.com/archives/2010/04/the_postbook_bo.php.

munity and space. So perhaps the real horseless carriage in this arena is the iPad, where most of the attraction is in the gadget and its myriad apps—an invitation to what is external to the user; whereas the book and its near kin, the Kindle, invite the user to the interior life, in which the reader is connected in depth with others in other worlds and in other times and places.

Carr asks the question that his new book, *The Shallows*, addresses: “What makes a book a book?”⁹ This is the most important question of all. The standard answer is the one Carr challenges: a book is just a “delivery system.” It doesn’t matter whether the message is delivered via a stone tablet or an iPad tablet. This popular pabulum blithely asserts that the forms of things, whether, art, music, or texts, are just a matter of taste or style. Harold Bloom in his brilliant anthology *The Best Poems of the English Language* laments that “by reprinting only half a dozen poems published after 1923, I have largely evaded our contemporary flight from all standards of aesthetic and cognitive value.”¹⁰

I believe that the serious reader will always opt for books, enjoying e-readers like Kindle for their portability when necessary. The experience of reading books will never be replaced for those who wish to be drawn into the minds and worlds of others.

I can only hope that John Updike is not as prescient as his dying words predict,

A life poured into words—apparent waste
intended to preserve the thing consumed.
For who, in that unthinkable future
when I am dead, will read? The printed page
was just a half-millennium’s brief wonder,
Erasmus’s and Luther’s Gutenberg-
perfected means of propagating truth,
or lies, screw-pressed one folio at a time.¹¹

9 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

10 Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 13.

11 John Updike, *Endpoint and Other Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 8–12. One of the finest reflections on reading in the electronic environment is Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg*

Whatever happens to the book and the reader, however technologies may change, nothing replaces the now-so-threatened reality of personal presence as the most powerful mode of communication, as John so long ago reminds us, “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 John 13–14).

A few words of practical advice. If you can live without one, wait until several more newcomers arrive in the market. This promises to bring the price down even further, while hopefully improving Kindle’s best features without making it more computer-like. Purchase one of the better covers, since Kindle is easy to drop and the screen is unprotected without a cover.

The best use I have found for the Kindle during my experimental period is for travel. In remote locations you can still get your *Wall Street Journal*—that is, as long as you can access the AT&T 3G network, which is available in almost all parts of the continental United States. I wrote part of this review in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. You can’t get much more remote than that. Kindle will also lighten the load for air travel. ☺

Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994).

Servant Work

Pastoral Care for the Dying

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January and February 2010¹

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

- Hands and feet becoming increasingly cool
- Sleeping more and sometimes difficult to be aroused
- Increasing disorientation, an inability to identify time, place, even one's own name
- Incontinence
- Congestion, gurgling sounds
- Restlessness
- Breathing becomes harsh and irregular, sometimes too fast, but more often too slow with long periods between each breath
- Lack of appetite and thirst
- Decrease in urine output and dark colored urine
- Emotional withdrawal even from closest friends and family
- Vision-like experiences, often seeing loved ones
- Decreased desire for socialization
- Unusual communication, often expressing their "good-bye" either directly or indirectly

These are the signs of impending death.²

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=185&issue_id=51;
http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=191&issue_id=52.

2 Drawn from a document entitled "Preparing for Approaching Death," copyright © North Central Florida Hospice, Inc. 1996, http://www.hospicenet.org/html/preparing_for.html. Most hospice organizations have and make use of some variation of this

Some of them will be stretched out over several days or even weeks. Others may appear only at the very end of earthly life. Some people pass naturally without showing any of these signs. Most will display at least some of them before death.

Those of you who have been present for the death of another know that it is often hard to tell just when death has occurred. A minute or more has passed with no breath, no movement, no sound. You find yourself holding your breath, almost unable to breathe. Then another gasp, labored, harsh, unexpected, and your mental clock is reset again. "It is appointed for man to die once" (Heb. 9:27–28).

The Psalmist says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14). God has created our bodies with ten basic systems: musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, respiratory, neurologic, digestive, lymphatic, endocrine, reproductive, and urinary. We all learned this in biology class. It seemed so academic back then. A breakdown in any of these systems can be disastrous for our lives and the lives of those we shepherd. A serious breakdown in most of them can lead to death.

I knew that my sister's health was declining. I saw her infrequently, largely due to distance and the busy schedule of a pastor. I got my wake-up call when she was rushed to the hospital after being found in respiratory arrest. When I arrived, hours later, she was in the ICU on a ventilator, unconscious, dying. Hands that once hugged me were cool and clammy. The giggles which once had brought smiles were silent. Her breath was controlled by a machine. The sister, who used to delight in picking on her older brother, lay silent, unresponsive, seemingly oblivious to my presence. There is nothing academic about the death of someone you love.

The ICU was a familiar place to me. I had spent many hours there during my chaplaincy training. I had prayed with many people, some in the very room where my sister lay dying. It was very

document in order to teach families what to expect when a loved one dies. You can read the entire document at www.hospicenet.org.

different to pray for Joyce there. When it involves someone you know and love, a family member or a dear church member, it gets very personal, very painful. “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet. 5:10). Joyce lay dying, but I was one of many who were suffering that day.

When I entered the ministry, I had visions of preaching great sermons, teaching the deep truths of our Reformed faith, reaching the lost for Christ, leading God’s people in worship, administering the means of grace, building up the church of God. Somehow being in the sterile confines of a hospital room, listening to a machine pump air in and out of my unconscious sister, never entered into that picture. It was hard to pray in that room, and harder yet to pray, “not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39). Few of us think of ourselves as called to minister to those who are dying.

An evangelical minister once asked me to visit one of his church members who was dying. She was a dear, saintly lady with a profound faith who had known and served the Lord for most of her life. The minister sheepishly admitted that he was not very comfortable with death and dying. At least he was honest. Yet God did not call us to be comfortable.

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.”
(1 Pet. 5:2)

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to *all* the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

For another patient, as a chaplain, I called the pastor of a rapidly growing evangelical church several times, asking him to visit one of his church members who was actively dying in a local extended care facility (they used to be called nursing homes). Each time he promised that he would come. Each time he failed to arrive. He was just too busy building the kingdom to be concerned

with one man who was dying. He actually lost several families because of his unwillingness to serve this one godly man. Remember Jesus’ warning,

For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. (Matt. 25:42–43)

You know the rest of this story.

We all face the issues of approaching death in our families and covenant communities. God does not limit his kingdom to young people and families with children. God is glorified even in the death of his saints (Ps. 116:15). For all who live in this broken and fallen world, death is inevitable. The wise woman of Tekoa may have deceived King David, but she spoke truthfully when she said: “We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (2 Sam. 14:14). Death was the terrible price for Adam’s first sin. The apostle Paul draws the right conclusion: “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). Everyone dies. For that matter, as a pastor you are always ministering with people who are approaching death. To understand the importance of ministry to those who are dying, you need only consider that Christ died for dying people.

Death is common to all, but not all approach death in the same way. Many Christians seem conflicted between resisting death at all costs and accepting death as God’s will for their life. Some Christians engage in heroic struggles against death. Some go to great lengths (and great expense) to ward off the inevitable as if this were their Christian duty. I fear this attitude has more in common with Dylan Thomas’s challenge, “Do not go gentle into that good night,” than it does with the teaching and examples set forth in Scripture. Scripture does not contemplate the extraordinary means provided within our modern healthcare system for warding off physical death. There is a simple truth in Scripture, the number of our days is set by God’s perfect will.

Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass, look away from him and leave him alone, that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day. (Job 14:5–6)

And thus the godly prayer, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12).

Another finds a quiet acceptance of her own impending death. A friend had endured the loss of her beloved husband to a stroke several years earlier. She developed a form of cancer that caused her bones to break from within, resulting in intense pain. I visited her on a day when the pain was terrible. She just smiled at her pastor as always. I noted that the nurse had spoken of her pain and asked how she could smile. She smiled again and said, “You remind me that Jesus is always right here beside me.” On another occasion she mentioned Christ’s presence reassuring her that it was okay to die. “But you haven’t told me that yet.” She was right, I hadn’t. She was ready to go to be with the Lord. I was not ready to let her go. That was the first time I ever prayed that God would gently take one of his children home. Have you ever prayed that prayer? “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). It is precisely during the struggle within our own hearts that we should be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18). “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die” (Eccl. 3:1–2).

One author speaks from extensive experience about the spiritual work of dying.³ Four tasks are outlined: remembering, reassessing, reconciliation, and reunion. I would add one further task—preparing for the journey.

³ Barbara S. Derrickson, “The Spiritual Work of the Dying: A Framework and Case Studies,” *Hospice Journal* 11.2 (1996): 11–30.

Remembering

Many people share a strong need to tell their life’s story. A missionary nurse wanted to tell her story so that others would be encouraged to labor in foreign missions, as she and her husband had done for many years. A sweet Christian gentleman wanted to tell his life’s story so that people would not forget the farm where he had grown up, a farm that had been demolished by the Navy for an airbase. A lady who was born in Indonesia and lived extensively in Holland before coming to the United States wrote her autobiography to make sense out of the many personal uprootings which had occurred over the course of her life. If one thinks of life as a tapestry, much of our lives are lived looking only at the back side with its seemingly random threads. At the end of life, many seek to turn the tapestry around to see the picture that God has created in their own lives. The faithful shepherd is willing to sit and listen to these stories, and be present while the person reflects on the meaning of his or her life.

Reassessing

Some people find it challenging to find meaning for their final days. No longer able to be productive or to do the things they once did, their sense of personal identity is challenged. Combine this with physical discomfort, financial stresses, and declining energy and these people find it hard to keep on living. Interestingly, as a chaplain I am asked, “Why hasn’t God taken me home yet?” far more often than the question, “Why is God letting me die?” Sometimes the faithful shepherd will need to use the authority of his office to give permission to the person to seek and find meaning in other things. For example, the elderly man who always thought of himself first as a businessman, may now need permission to find new meaning as a great-grandfather. The retired pastor who longs to return to preaching may need permission to turn his full attention and energies to prayer and the loving care of his wife. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you

will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Eccl. 12:1).

Reconciliation

I hardly need to tell any of you about the broken relationships which occur in the lives of the flock. Even the godliest among us has experienced these breaks firsthand. Christ has entrusted to his church a precious ministry of reconciliation. We know that true reconciliation begins by our being reconciled to God in Christ, and continues through repentance and both the seeking and granting of forgiveness.

A World War II hero was struggling in his final days. He was troubled by dementia and recurring nightmares in which he saw again the faces of the enemy soldiers whom he had shot. “They were only boys,” he kept repeating. “Boys and old men.” Night after night he would awaken his wife with his screams. His health was declining, his dementia made it difficult to make any progress in pastoral counseling, and his wife and family were exhausted. One afternoon as we were talking, he recalled a grandmother, a dear Baptist woman who had taken him to Sunday school and worship, and prayed for him. I spoke to him of that precious faith, as I had done before, and left doubting that my visit had made any lasting impact. Very early the next morning I received a phone call from his wife. She was very excited. He had slept quietly through the night. No nightmares. No screams. In fact, before he slept he had asked his wife to pray with him for his salvation. When I visited again he was a very different man. I told him that I believed that God had answered the prayers of his grandmother some eighty years earlier. He died in complete peace a few weeks later, ready to meet his Savior, and perhaps also the enemy soldiers he had killed. He had found peace in the blood of Christ.

I also remember a delightful woman of faith who had a very broken family. The East Coast siblings did not get along with the West Coast siblings. As this woman approached death, the children from California flew out here to Maine. The hospital here is only a medium-sized facility.

So it felt very cramped as we sought to keep the two groups apart. I met and prayed with each and urged them to put aside their differences at least long enough to support their mother. It seemed to work, and on the day of her death, the entire family gathered around her bed holding hands as I read Scripture and prayed with them. As she peacefully slipped from this life, there were tears and hugs all around. I thought to myself, this is a good example of reconciliation. After a time the family members drifted out of the room until just two daughters remained, one from the East Coast, one from West. I stepped out to give them some privacy, but they followed. As they walked by me one said, “We’ll have to go shopping for something for her to wear in the casket.” The other retorted, “What she has in her closet will be just fine.” Maybe it’s not the perfect example. The faithful shepherd will seek to facilitate reconciliation, recognizing that in this life it does not always come.

This provides a good place to pause before continuing to discuss the spiritual work of dying. In the next article we will consider the fourth task, reunion, and finally preparations for the journey. Then we will turn to the role of the pastor at the bedside, as part of the hospice or palliative care team, and even in assessing pain. May the Great Physician make us faithful stewards of his gifts to bring his love and compassion even to those who are dying.

Now we turn to the fourth task, reunion, and a fifth, preparing for the journey.

Reunion

Many people report seeing loved ones coming to them prior to death. However this may or may not fit into your understanding of the world around you, it generally is very comforting to those who approach death. At the very least, it expresses a common human desire to be reunited with loved ones.

One man had struggled with his Christian faith for many years. At the root of the problem was the sudden infant death of his son. Some bear heavier burdens in this life than others. Yet

he persevered in faith. As he approached his own death, the memories of his loss returned and made his days intolerable. Part of him was afraid to die. Another part wanted to take his own life. It was a nurse who raised the question of whether he thought he would see his son again in heaven. He raised the same question with me, and I responded by reading with him 2 Samuel 12, allowing him to draw his own conclusions. From that point on, his attitude completely changed. His interests turned to heaven, reaffirming his faith, preparing his soul to meet the Lord, and hoping that this would one day include a reunion with his son.

Preparing for the Journey

In some literature, the metaphor of the journey is so misused that I am somewhat reluctant to use the language here. Nevertheless, many people as they approach death see themselves as preparing for a journey and speak of “going home.” Jesus uses similar language in John 14, a passage which I sometimes share with these people.

Preparations include setting things in order, providing for loved ones, concluding business affairs, making funeral and burial arrangements, and the like. It can also include saying good-bye, expressing love for family and friends, asking for and granting forgiveness for past offenses, and saying thank you to those who have supported them. In the final days of life this need to take a journey may be acted out physically as the person seeks to get out of bed (actions which place the person at significant risk for falling and incurring painful injury). The medical professionals often respond to this with medications. Simply affirming that the person is ready for this journey and that Christ will soon welcome his servant may be sufficient to inspire the patient the endurance that is needed during these times of restlessness.

For many believers, preparing for the journey also involves reaffirming their faith. This is not necessarily some formal reaffirmation, but rather a simple desire to share their spiritual journey and continued trust in the Savior with others. The faithful shepherd will listen to this reaffirming of

faith and offer reassurance.

Still others will use their last bit of energy to confess their sins, seeking God’s forgiveness and reassurance of pardon.

This is not the time for profound theology, extensive teaching, or elaborate ritual. It is the time to listen with an open and loving heart and to provide that reassurance and comfort that comes from God’s Word.

Some simply cannot wait for the glories which lie ahead. It becomes the focus of their final days. These Christians have learned the secret of Paul’s words “to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Sometimes they are so eager to move on to glory that they alienate themselves from family and friends who desire them to stay longer. Encouraging such a person to enjoy the days of life which God gives here in this world may provide a healthy balance to a preoccupation with glory, allowing the person to remain connected with family and loved ones. Gentle reminders of the Scripture’s teaching on the intermediate state and the promises of a future bodily resurrection when we will be reunited with loved ones who have died in the Lord are appropriate here. I do not tend to challenge the many popular misconceptions which the person may hold, but only to reshape them in terms more consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

Some express fear of death, even though they profess their faith. One man’s daughter approached me expressing confusion. “My father has always been a firm believer in Christ, a leader in the church, and a wonderful man. But now he seems afraid to die. What is wrong?” I talked with the man at some length. Sure enough, he made a very credible profession of faith in my presence, but shared his own concern that when he thought of dying, his whole body would tremble with fear. “Is there something wrong with my faith?” he asked. (This is one of those questions which often indicates that there is nothing wrong with a Christian’s faith.) When we talked further about this and particularly about his past experience with those who are dying, I asked about the passing of his wife. He began to shake. Later he told me that his wife, also a strong Christian woman, had died

of lung cancer. “She made me promise to stop smoking. But I couldn’t keep my promise. When I get up there, she’s going to kill me!” I assured him that those who die in the Lord are made perfect, therefore she will not be angry with him, and he will not have to die all over again. We then spent some time talking about grace and about how nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. He died peacefully several days later.

God’s answer to anxiety is prayer. Pray with those who cannot pray for themselves. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6–7). I once thought that everyone can pray. I now know that sometimes the confusion and restlessness of approaching death can hinder even the most devout person in prayer. Don’t rebuke them, pray with them!

Being Present at the Moment of Death

One of the great privileges of the ministry—and one of its burdens—is that pastors are often welcomed into families as if they were full members. This means that when death is imminent or immediately after death has occurred, the pastor is expected to be present with the family. Unless the family tells you otherwise, if at all possible, be there with them, at least briefly.

In those final hours, no words may be necessary. Your silent presence will be appreciated, and your quiet prayers will be a comfort to all who are present. Some will desire quiet Christian music, others may appreciate readings from Scripture, many will prefer quiet.

One day I came into the hospice unit at a VA Hospital. The nurses were furious. The day before, a hospice patient had died, while his family members sat in the next room watching a football game and cheering for their favorite team. The nurses thought this was hopelessly inappropriate. I reassured them that only weeks earlier, the patient had shared with his family in this tradition, undoubted-

ly with some liquid refreshment in his hand. Each family is different in how they approach these last moments, which often feel very awkward for all of those present.

If I can give you one piece of advice, memorize the Twenty-third Psalm. We cannot begin to count the number of times that Psalm has brought comfort to the dying, and to the family after a death has occurred. Memorizing it allows you to use it before, during, or after prayer without having to find it in your pocket Bible or your iPhone Bible app. (One word of caution about this, many associate the Twenty-third Psalm strongly with death and grief. Because of this, if you use this Psalm with someone who is not actively dying, they may misinterpret the situation, which in turn may produce an unintended personal crisis for them.)

Becoming Part of the Team

Two terms which you should be familiar with are hospice and palliative care. Both provide comfort care for persons in crisis. Hospice is an organized program of healthcare professionals and well-trained volunteers who provide care for people in the final months of life. It supports those who desire to die at their home or at their residence in an extended care facility. Hospice can also provide care within a specialized hospice facility or hospital if a patient’s symptoms get out of control. For those who have a prognosis of less than six months of life, the hospice benefit found in most insurance plans, including Medicare, provides significant healthcare and financial assistance. Palliative care is a mode of healthcare which focuses on the alleviation of pain and suffering, rather than aggressive treatments focused on a cure. Palliative care concerns itself with quality of life, rather than prolonging life. Most hospitals have a palliative care team which works with patients who are actively dying and with their families.

Hospice and the palliative care team both share a commitment to provide spiritual and religious support for the people they serve. They will be interested to know that you serve as the person’s

pastor and will encourage your visits with the patient and the family. Within the bounds of confidentiality, the team can help to keep you informed of the needs of the patient and family, and will be both interested in—and responsive to—your perceptions of spiritual needs. I would encourage pastors to make themselves known to the hospice chaplain or other members of the hospice or palliative care team. This team can help you better understand what your church member and his or her family are experiencing. The team can also notify you of times when it may be important for you to be present with the family.

The Assessment of Pain

One concern that many people have regarding approaching death is pain. The desire of many people as they approach death is to just go to sleep and not wake up. Some people actually die this way with very little discomfort. For others, approaching death is accompanied by a great deal of pain and discomfort. Hospice and palliative care professionals have a wide variety of medications and interventions that can help to keep people as comfortable as possible. These medications, when used appropriately, do not hasten death, but bring much needed comfort to those who are dying.

The challenge for the healthcare professional is that their patients who are approaching death are not always able to speak for themselves to give verbal indications of discomfort and, thus, of a need for medical interventions. They need the help of family members, friends, and pastors to identify people who need additional pain relief. Some people will share their experience of pain far more readily with the pastor who they know and trust than with a doctor or nurse. Sometimes such a person will identify his or her level of pain as a prayer request. If a dying person tells you that he or she is having pain, I hope that you will report this to the family or to the nurse who is providing care. Don't just pray about it and walk away. God can—and often does—use medications and other very simple interventions to alleviate pain in his children. Something as simple as a hospital bed in

the person's home may make a huge difference in his or her comfort at the end of earthly life.

Others are unable to speak about their pain, but show signs of pain that you may recognize. Behavioral indicators of pain include:

- facial expressions such as grimacing, wincing, and the like
- vocalizations such as outcries, groans, or moaning
- bodily movements—continual restlessness, rubbing an area of the body, and the like
- changes in interpersonal interactions—withdrawal from social situations, irritability, combativeness, declining a pastoral visit when these visits have been common
- mental status changes—increased confusion, inability to concentrate

Your observations of change in any of these behaviors are of particular importance. If you have never seen this person behaving like this before, please pass this information on to a healthcare professional, either directly or indirectly through the family.

My sister was on the respirator for three days. She had asked never to be placed on such a machine. When doctors finally had turned the machine down, the expectation was that she might die. But God had other purposes for Joyce. She awoke from her coma, weak but alive. She continued for almost a year. During that time, she and I enjoyed a most precious fellowship in the Lord, writing to each other almost daily, reflecting together on the Psalms and on the gospel of our Savior. It was hard for both of us, but a true gift from God.

Then came the call. Joyce was actively dying and the family was gathering. My wife and I traveled over to Vermont to be with her during her final day. When we arrived, she was unresponsive and actively dying. Once again I sat with her, reading what had now become familiar passages of Scripture, and offering prayer on her behalf (and on mine). I am grateful for the wise counsel of an older pastor to thoroughly memorize the Shepherd Psalm (Twenty-third). It is helpful when you can no longer read the pages before you, and it is as

comforting to my soul as it is to the others present in that moment.

Joyce's passing into the arms of a loving Savior was quite peaceful. However, I was surprised how very difficult it was to watch the funeral director remove her body from her home. The pastor's task does not end when the person dies. Now there is a family to comfort. But I will reserve this for another article.

As for my sister, her soul rests securely in the Lord, awaiting that day which we all await. ☺

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A Pastoral Response to Grief

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by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

Our Common Experience of Grief

Grief is wave upon wave of strong emotions, interrupted by moments of total emptiness: tears—anger—guilt—fear ...

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible

blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me.²

Difficulty concentrating—mental fatigue—overwhelming feelings of helplessness—confusion and disorientation—numbness ...

It is almost impossible to set down in writing how we felt. Even as we try to do so now, there is a recurrence of that first awful numbness, as well as the actual physical pain our bodies endured as we let the words of the dean race through our minds over and over again. It was absolutely impossible that David was dead; yet we were assuring one another that this was indeed the case.³

Dizziness—nausea—sleep and appetite disturbance—dryness or a lump in the throat—isolation—lack of care for one's own personal needs—difficulty with prayer or Bible reading—difficulty returning to a church gathering ...

You cannot fix grief. It has a timetable of its own. It comes with surges that are unpredictable, punctuated by periods of deep emptiness. It often involves spiritual distress that can shake faith to its very foundations. Significant loss changes everything for us and grief is our natural response.

We usually think of grief as occurring after the death of someone we love. But grief may also occur in anticipation of such a loss. When my sister lay hovering between life and death, I experienced more intense grief than after her death a year later.

Many kinds of loss produce grief. My son

² These are the opening words of *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber, 1961), by C. S. Lewis, a journal of his experiences in the loss of his beloved wife, Joy Davidman. If you have never read this short work, it is well worth your time. But make no mistake, this is not *Narnia*! It was so controversial that it was originally published under a pseudonym, N. W. Clerk.

³ C. Everett and Elizabeth Koop, *Sometimes Mountains Move* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1979), 11. This book was written in response to being notified of the death of their son, a college student, in a hiking accident on Mount Washington.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=207&issue_id=56.

recently lost his apartment and most of its contents in a fire. As an artist and collector of books, he lost many things of great personal value. During the weeks following the fire, he experienced many of the same symptoms of grief which I had experienced in the loss of my sister.

Other losses often produce grief of varying intensities: a miscarriage; the diagnosis of infertility or of a terminal disease especially in a loved one; amputation or the loss of function of some part of one's body; the death of a pet, friend, coworker, associate, teacher, student, pastor, roommate, or another with whom one has a special relationship; separation or divorce from one's spouse; loss of employment or personal resources; the loss of the ability to drive a car, or engage in an important activity; or the personal experience of a disaster. It is vitally important that a pastor recognize signs of grief, regardless of the type of loss which has produced it, so that we may "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15).

Christians and Grief

Scripture has numerous examples of intense grief. Abraham and Isaac mourned the loss of Sarah (Gen. 23:2; 24:67). The Israelites grieved the death of Jacob (Gen. 50:10), Aaron (Num. 20:29), Moses (Deut. 34:8), Samuel (1 Sam. 28:3), Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:12, 17), Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25), along with many others. Many of the psalms express intense grief (e.g. Pss. 6, 35, 38, 42, 43, 88). In the New Testament, Jesus withdrew privately to grieve the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:13). He openly wept in grief and in empathy with his friends Mary and Martha at the tomb of their brother, Lazarus (John 11:35). Devout believers mourned the death of the deacon Stephen (Acts 8:2). Godly women wept openly for the loss of Tabitha in Joppa (Acts 9:39). Paul had anticipated "sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. 2:27) and was spared this only by the mercy of God in the illness of Epaphroditus.⁴ Yet too often the church

4 For more detail on these and related matters, consider Geoff Walters, *Why Do Christians Find It Hard to Grieve?* (Bucks, UK: Paternoster, 1997).

discourages grieving. We are made to feel that it is inappropriate to grieve openly. Well-meaning pastors end up sounding more like Job's friends than good shepherds who comfort the sheep (2 Cor. 1:4).

Some cite the Apostle, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). This has led some to assume that a truly spiritual Christian does not show grief openly. They turn the meaning of Paul's words into a summons to Stoicism,⁵ rather than to a proper Christian grief, which has an unshakable hope grounded in the resurrection of our Savior. Paul does not mean that Christians should not grieve the loss of loved ones, but rather our grief should be tempered by the certain hope that we share in the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. Paul offers these believers encouragement specifically because they are experiencing grief in the loss of some of their members.

Our firm belief in a bodily resurrection supports us in our times of grief. Our faith in Christ sustains us as we experience grief's troubling feelings. God's word comforts us in the midst of the emptiness. If grief makes us appear weak, then we look to God's grace. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). Those who grieve deeply know what it is to rest in the strength of Christ in the midst of our weakness.

Our own expressions of grief are shaped by our personalities, culture, gender, family traditions, and maturity. A group of daughters wailed at the funeral of their mother, and the sound of their wailing was heard for miles up and down the valley from the little country church. A son stood silently

5 Stoicism condemned all passions in favor of virtue. "The sage does not feel sympathy: when his wife or his children die, he reflects that this event is no obstacle to his own virtue, and therefore he does not suffer deeply." No attachment is allowed to threaten the Stoic's "holy calm." Cf. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 252-70.

before the coffin of his father, to all outward appearances unmoved, only sharing his feelings privately with his pastor. One family holds a private service at the graveside. Another asks for calling hours, an elaborate funeral, and formal military honors. Siblings create a memorial along the road, marking the spot where their brother died. Devoted fans put flowers at the doorstep of a beloved celebrity. Parents create a park in memory of their daughter who died too young. On Thanksgiving Day, I stop by the grave of my sister to remember and to spend some quiet time with God.

The Work of Grief

Providing pastoral care for a grieving person begins with an understanding of how people work through grief. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross studied this matter extensively and popularized her results in the book *On Death and Dying*.⁶ Her focus was on the anticipatory grief experienced by dying persons. She identified five stages of grief (shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) which continue to be cited in books about grief. However, people do not always move smoothly through stages of grief, often repeating these “stages” many times over. Her greatest contribution was in offering a research-based approach to the subject.

It was Kübler-Ross’s students, Therese Rando and William Worden, who have offered clinically accepted definitions which are widely used by professionals today. Therese Rando focuses upon a process which includes a time of denial and confusion, followed by a time of intense grief, and then a time of diminished grief and reengagement in the world as a changed person.⁷ Our society, which tends to deny death and true grieving,⁸ usually

6 New York: Macmillan, 1969. Her work, as well as that of her students, builds upon the systematic approach to the study of grief begun by Erich Lindermann in 1944.

7 Therese Rando, *Grief, Dying, and Death: Clinical Interventions for Caregivers* (Champaign, IL: Research, 1984); and *Treatment of Complicated Mourning* (Champaign, IL: Research, 1993). In her later work, Rando defines her three phases as “avoidance,” “confrontation,” and “accommodation.”

8 Companies in the United States are not required to provide

measures these periods in terms of days or weeks, when the research suggests months and years.

William Worden has set the standard for grief counseling with his careful distinction between normal grieving and complicated grief. He postulates four tasks of grieving: 1) accepting the reality of the loss; 2) working through the pain of grief; 3) adjusting to a new environment after the loss; 4) emotionally relocating the deceased or other changed condition and moving on with life.⁹

Beverly set her table for two every afternoon, and every evening she was furious with her husband for not being home on time for dinner. She was angry that he cared more about his work than about her. Sometimes she wondered if he was with someone else for dinner. Jim never came home because he had died tragically in an auto accident on a snowy day in January five years earlier. On one level, Bev knew that Jim had died in that accident. But on another level she had not accepted the reality of her loss.

We all think we know a pastor’s worst nightmares, but few do. For an evangelical pastor it was a mysterious disease which took the life of his three-and-a-half-year-old son. In his book *Jonathan, You Left Too Soon*,¹⁰ Pastor David Biebel courageously chronicles not only the decline of his son, but of his own plunge into grief and depression. He candidly chronicles his struggles with God. This is not easy reading, the hurt is raw and unprocessed. Eight years later, the same illness struck a second son, born just a year after the death of his brother. This second event opened old wounds still unhealed. Pastor Biebel writes, “After Jonathan’s death, I fought the pain. I never let it overwhelm me. What held me back was the fear that if I truly

any bereavement leave. Many companies provide three bereavement days. The question has been raised as to whether the Family and Medical Leave Act can be used to provide additional unpaid bereavement leave. But in its present form it can only do so if a family member has suffered a medical emergency as a result of the stress of grief.

9 J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (New York: Springer, 1991).

10 Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981.

let myself go, I might never get back again to sanity. The problem was, however, that in fighting it, I never really felt it.”¹¹ It was in this second book that Pastor Biebel finally worked through the pain of his grief.

One day the nurses asked me to visit a man recovering from hip surgery. Every afternoon he became depressed. He shared with me how he had visited the grave of his beloved wife every day at about 4 p.m. for more than twenty years. At first it was convenient as he drove home from work. But after his retirement he continued this well-established habit. He would talk with her about the issues in his life. He would pray with her, as they had so often done before her death. In the hospital, unable to visit the grave, he found himself feeling distressed. He shared vivid memories of his beloved wife. The chaplain then visited daily to pray with the man at about 4 p.m., and made a referral to a grief support group. Adjustment to new environments after loss is an ongoing process.

Not all people grieve in the same way. There are several studies that demonstrate that men grieve differently than women,¹² often a source of misunderstanding within the church. Age, personal experiences, culture, and personality also factor into the process of grief in an individual.¹³ Even the circumstances surrounding the loss can profoundly influence our experience of grief. Was the death the result of suicide or criminal foul play? Was it unexpected, sudden, or violent? Was it the death of a child, a miscarriage, or a death which is considered untimely?

Helping People Grieve

As a pastor, how you respond to grief in others will reflect on every aspect of your ministry. You have the privileged position of being welcomed into the intimate core of the families you serve.

11 David A. Biebel, *If God Is So Good, Why Do I Hurt So Bad?* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989).

12 Carol Staudacher, *Men and Grief* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 1991).

13 Helpful here is Wayne Oates, *Your Particular Grief* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1981).

Misusing this privilege can mean the end of your ministry. Few things you do will have greater impact on your ability to administer God’s grace than how you react in a setting where there is intense grief.¹⁴

Here are some important guidelines:

- Be present without becoming intrusive. Call or go, expressing your condolences, offering them as much support as would be helpful for them. But don’t push your way into a situation where you’re not wanted.

- Be respectful of everyone, both the members of your church and those who are not.

- If you are not sure what to say, then don’t say anything. If you are sure what to say, probably keep it to yourself, as this is the path of wisdom.

- Listen! Listen! Listen! (James 1:19).

- On that first visit with a grieving person, ask him or her about what happened at the person’s death or about how they first heard the news. In the course of that first visit I will try to hear that story several times over. Repeatedly sharing that story helps the person begin to process their loss and their grief.

- Reassure people. Grieving has such a wide range of feelings and responses that almost anything that is not hurtful to themselves or others falls within the “normal range.”

- Avoid judgments. Sometimes pastors and families get into long discussions of what ifs or should haves. These are rarely helpful and often leave families unnecessarily burdened with guilt feelings.

- Be sensitive to those around you. This is not usually a time for excessive humor, but neither should the pastor be overly morose.

- Encourage others to tell their stories. They are likely to bring both tears and laughter, as they serve to affirm the loss and how this loss impacts our lives. Stories can be told verbally, or in writing, or even through artistic or craft expressions.

14 The points that follow are just a few of the important points described in detail in J. Shep Jeffreys, *Helping Grieving People When Tears Are Not Enough: A Handbook for Care Providers* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2005).

- Later, after the first stage of grief has passed, encourage others to find positive ways of expressing their feelings: writing a letter to their loved one, making a memorial quilt, putting together a slideshow of pictures for the calling hours. A woman I was working with recently found great comfort in planting a garden like the ones her mother used to plant, and including a birdhouse because of her father's love of ornithology.

Perhaps most important of all is to deal with your own personal grief. I don't have to tell you that pastors are people too. You have feelings. If you knew the person and had any kind of relationship with him or her, then you will experience grief yourself. Pastors often feel that they need to be strong for others. That may be true as you work your way through the initial process of supporting the family or church members and bringing them through a funeral and the like. But you also need to process your own grief. Give yourself time and permission to grieve. Find a good friend or even a counselor to share your stories with. Write a piece about the deceased, or create your own artistic memorial in their honor. Pastors who neglect this may find themselves introducing grief into settings where it is inappropriate. They may also find themselves on the fast track to stress and burnout.

If the deceased is a member of the church, and especially if he or she was prominent in the life of the church, the church as a whole will also grieve. It is important to provide the congregation with opportunities to talk about their loss and their feelings of loss. Sometimes something as simple as planting a tree or flower garden in honor of a deceased elder or deacon can afford the congregation a focus and positive outlet for their grief. Like individuals, the congregation's grief will continue over a period of months (rather than days).

Two final points. Grief and the holidays do not mix well. Particularly the December holidays with their glitz and glitter are very difficult for people who are grieving. You should be aware of this and seek to provide a quieter comfort for grieving church members at this time. As a chaplain, I do several "Blue Christmas" gatherings. They include the biblical material regarding the birth of the

Savior, but without the "deck the halls" stuff. It is much quieter. And it is more meaningful even for some who are not in active grief.

In the northern reaches of our denomination, cemeteries are often closed from December through April. This means that if a loved one dies during these months, the body is kept in a vault until the committal service in the spring. This is a very awkward time for those who are grieving. It feels like there is something unfinished. Caution families to expect these feelings. Then when you do the committal in May, weeks or even months after the funeral, make the graveside service a little more like the regular funeral service. Usually, I do not include a second homily, but I do remind those gathered of what was said both about the deceased and about the gospel. After the committal many of those awkward feelings will end. Usually mourner's grief goes back to the normal process of grieving.

Normally the work of grief will occur over the course of a year or two. When it's over, those who have processed their grief will feel a sense of relief and closure. ☺

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Crossroads: Your Life and the Medical Community

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by Jennifer Foley

At some point, your life intersects with the medical community. Sooner or later, you hit that crossroads, whether it is with regard to your own health or the health of someone you hold dear. Chances are, that moment may come at a time when you least expect it. It can hit at full speed, like a sudden hurricane or tornado. It will take your breath away. And, as you try to stand to face what you must, the relentless, crushing waves keep hitting you, and you keep trying to stand, again and again. You must live this tragic moment with whatever coping skills, tools, and resources you have obtained in life up until that very moment. There is no time, not even a second, to recuperate, educate, regroup, consider, before the next breaker hits. You must live the suffering until it is finished, and you have no control over when that happens. Then, when it is finished, you must face the devastated landscape of your life.

At least this is what happened to me when I learned that my father had cancer. He was in otherwise good health, facing a few health uncertainties, when suddenly his life and our lives changed with the violent and swift turn of cancer. Two weeks and three days later, he died. We had no idea tragedy was coming, yet we were forced to face the suffocating panic of it all.

The purpose of this article is to share some of the personal experiences my family had with the medical community. Some insight may prepare you to provide comfort and guidance to others. Whether or not the experience you face is as

sudden or as fast-paced as my experience with my dad, I pray that you will both receive blessings and share blessings in some way as a result of this article.

Tearing Down Futile Walls and Standing Strong as an Advocate

When my father faced difficult medical issues, and then suddenly, cancer, both he and his wife were entirely consumed with tremendous emotion. My dad, of course, was at the very epicenter of the storm, and his sweet wife's unwavering attention remained fixed on my dad's needs. Their raw emotions and confused minds birthed an urgent need for a primary family support person and advocate in the midst of the medical crossroads. It was crucial for me to have complete access to his medical records and medical team without the futile and burdensome walls of privacy laws getting in the way (for instance, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA] of 1996). HIPAA is now the law and all healthcare providers must abide by it. However, consider signing privacy waivers in your medical files now, in advance of any crisis, to give your loved ones access to your records and to allow them to talk openly with your doctors and nurses should an urgent need suddenly arise. Your family members will be on the front lines as your advocate, and they need to be armed with the ability to freely communicate with the health care providers.

The Weight of Another's Life

Thankfully, my father had thought soberly about and decided upon his personal viewpoint regarding critical ethical issues well before facing the news of cancer. I cannot underscore enough how much assurance it gave me to know his specific decisions on such issues as artificial nutrition and hydration once he became mentally unreachable. I certainly did not want to make a "best guess" for him on those heartbreaking issues once I was in a position to support his wife as she made those decisions as his personal voice.

Be sure to complete a detailed durable power

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=208&issue_id=56.

of health care well before you ever face a medical crossroads. Have a specific *out loud* conversation about these sobering issues with trusted members of your family who will be a direct part of navigating through the medical community. Repeat this conversation from time to time so that your loved ones know with certainty that your decision remains the same. Give copies of the paperwork to several trusted family members. This type of clear communication may help diminish the family feuding that often arises among family members who disagree with these precarious end-of-life choices.

Note also that you should tell your family members where your original will is located. Also, consider drawing up a power of attorney to leave with your lawyer to put into effect for temporary illnesses. Tell your family members the name of your lawyer.

One last point, if you have legal questions about wills/estates/guardianships, check to see if your state has a website for the state judicial branch—typically, many questions can be answered there.

Knowledge as a Double-edged Sword

It is impossible to predict whether your medical crossroads will be filled with physicians and nurses who are candid, forthright, and timely about giving you critical information regarding your medical diagnosis and prognosis. Unfortunately, my dad's experience was filled with inconsistent messages, unintended false hope, and foggy partial disclosure. Without the most complete information, my dad was left severely hindered in his ability to intelligently, calmly, and prayerfully consider his medical options in light of God's will. Remember, you have no control over *when* your last day of life will be, but timely and accurate information can help you best steward the quality of each day within the medical limits that you might face. Face the facts without fear and cast all your burdens on the Lord. Take courage. Insist that your medical providers give you full information with candor, even though your instinct may be to hide from

the truth and their instinct may be to “sugar coat” it. Your family members who are supporting you should be assertive about having private conversations with medical personnel outside of your presence, given your emotional distress, so that they can be sure you are receiving the “straight up” facts regarding your medical status. Your family advocate should be prepared to ask the tough questions and to receive tough information in order to enable you to make the tough decisions by God's grace and through family guidance.

The Labyrinth of Institutional Red Tape

Hospitalists, primary care physicians, emergency department (ED) doctors, medical specialists—who has the authority; who is in charge of your care? Perhaps this legal construct does not exist everywhere, but this is what I have learned: 1) your primary care physician is in direct control of your care when you are *outside* of the hospital; 2) the “hospitalist” doctor (or licensed nurse practitioner) is in direct control of your care when you are *admitted into* the hospital (leaving your primary care physician out of the loop, but perhaps receiving information about you); 3) the ED doctor is in direct control while you are *in the ED*, but before you are admitted into the hospital (then, the “hospitalist” would have the control); 4) specialists are consulted for opinions, but do not normally have the ultimate control over your care (see 1, 2, or 3). As one doctor recently admitted to me, the medical field now consists of an array of independent towers and stand-alone silos, and does not operate as an integrated and interdependent community. Why does this matter?

Only the doctor in control of your care has the authority to issue “standing orders” regarding medicine, tests, and other decisions about the care provided to you. On occasion, specialists at the hospital will assume responsibility for the portion of care which focuses upon their specialty; for instance, the oncologist may take responsibility for the person's cancer treatment while the hospitalist continues to monitor any other issues for the patient. The oncologist would write the orders for

chemotherapy. Either doctor might write the orders for nausea and pain management. Watch out for falling between the cracks. When you are in the hospital, you often must wait and wait for the hospitalist to make rounds. When you are released from the hospital and are at home, the hospitalist is no longer in charge, and you must rely on your primary care physician.

This matters because, if your medical condition involves the real potential for suffering pain, what do you do if your physical symptoms suddenly change in the middle of the night? You need to know in advance who is in control of your care and what is the *direct and immediate access point for necessary help*. Ask for “just in case” instructions on who to contact and what additional pain medicine you can have *on hand at home* to take in the event that your pain unexpectedly changes. Get a clear picture from the doctor about the use of pain medicine under potentially changed conditions. The doctor may prescribe an amount based on your present pain experience; but if your regular dose isn’t working, what next?

Note that home health or hospice “bridge” programs are available to provide regular at-home care for your loved one and teach you how to help in caring for them. To account for unexpected changes, “bridge” programs sometimes can provide you with pain medication or “comfort packs” (a collection of medications which are kept on hand in case symptoms change rapidly) and twenty-four hour phone hotlines for any-time-of-day-or-night questions. These “bridge” programs can provide real comfort in the home environment.

Compassion, Comfort, and Human Dignity

I found that the medical industry often needed strong reminders that human dignity prevails over medical convenience. When my father could walk, he needed to walk and not be whisked away in a wheelchair for their convenience. When my father could not walk, he should have been accompanied in a wheelchair and not lying flat in a hospital bed on display throughout the hospital. After all, Dad was made in God’s image and whatever measure

of dignity can be preserved, should be. Be a bold advocate for your loved one’s dignity.

Also, seize moments to read Scripture and pray, even when it means causing physicians or nurses to wait momentarily before hustling your loved one to the next test or procedure. Pray specifically for the physicians, nurses, and other staff who work with your loved one; but also be respectful of the tight timetables associated with many of those tests and procedures—delay too long and your act of love for your family member can become a real liability for other patients and families in need of those limited resources.

Many hospitals now include a palliative care team which looks at comfort and quality of life issues for persons being treated in their facility, particularly those who are considered near the end of life. When your loved one is in the hospital, members of the team make rounds just like other doctors; they are not present with you all of the time. Family members and friends still serve as the best front line for ensuring that human dignity is at the center of your loved one’s care. Many hospitals also have “patient advocates” who will meet with you privately to assist you with any concerns that you may have about the care your loved one is receiving.

Medical Tests and the Clash of Differing Worldviews

Doctors may be a lot more interested than you are in collecting as much information as possible about your physical status as possible. On the other hand, you may be more interested in ignoring the painful truth about your physical status simply because you may believe deep down that ignorance is bliss. How the balance is struck between these two positions probably depends on who you are and what kinds of decisions you want to make. How do you decide whether the medical tests may be a waste of your time, or whether the tests may give you the information that you need to make sound decisions about the quality and dignity of your life?

Remember that *diagnosis* is necessary for *prog-*

nosis. Diagnosis requires testing, and, prognosis leads to possible treatments. So, both diagnosis and prognosis involve much, much time at the doctor's office, at the hospital, at the pharmacy, and so on. The tests themselves can be lengthy, invasive, uncomfortable, painful, and even frightening. If you are not interested in the treatment that ultimately could be offered, then why go through the tests to begin with? Or, at what point have the tests generated enough information that is sufficient for you to make a relatively informed decision without exploring *all* tests recommended? Be bold in asking the purpose of the tests offered: what information will be gathered; how will the information prepare you for making decisions; when will you be told the results and by whom? Each test is a choice that you make about properly stewarding your time and the quality of your life. If you are not intentionally getting involved in the decision making, then you are leaving that decision for someone else to make.

Tracking Changes and Managing Information

Your normal life may already be full enough with appointments and routine commitments. Once your life becomes entangled with the medical field, keeping track of the onslaught of new information and managing new medications can become overwhelming very quickly. From one appointment to the next, you can soon lose track of changing physical symptoms or the important questions that have been floating around in your mind. As new medications are prescribed or continually changed, the fear of missteps increases. The constant changes and new information creates intense stress as you try to sort it out and manage your care or the care of your loved one.

Use a blank calendar to document appointments, tests, and any change in physical symptoms. For example, has the pain moved from the upper back to the lower back? Has the pain gone from a three to a six on the proverbial pain scale? Also, *keep a chart* with a daily time schedule to document regular medications and new medications. For example, some pills may be given twice a day, while others may be required every four hours.

List the different physicians/nurses and contact numbers, along with pivotal family/friend/church contacts. *Keep a list* of questions to ask for upcoming appointments or new information to tell the doctor. This organization provides comfort to the one who is sick and to his/her emotionally drained spouse. This organization also helps family members and friends who are taking shifts with caretaking to stay in the loop on necessary appointments and other information. Take the calendar and charts with you to every doctor's appointment so that you can effectively and consistently communicate with doctors.


Steadfast Support

Health struggles and the end-of-life journey are times filled with emotional, mental, and physical suffering, solitude, and loneliness. The crossroads at which my dad and family encountered the medical community was sudden and intense, like being hit by a freight train. Your experience may be slower and steadier. Nevertheless, your crossroads will be filled with difficult decisions. The experience can swell with suffocating intensity, given the core differences each person brings to it: the loved one who is facing end-of-life decisions, your own reaction to that reality, the various family members who may want to be helpful, or those who constantly show a critical and contentious spirit.

In the midst of the tangle, the need for God's strong, tender arms can be beyond the person's ability to recognize and articulate intellectually. To serve and support someone who is traversing this road is a heavy load. It takes pure, unwavering, steadfast commitment. God provides his comfort, his strength, his light, and his prayers in a significant way, through his people here on earth—pastors, elders, deacons, church family members.

While I journeyed along the path of suffering, it was pivotal to have people come alongside me and be present: people who were outside of the circle of chaos and had clearer minds and stronger hearts, people with the courage to face the intense emotions of grief, emptiness, solitude, and anger.

There is no need to find the perfect words—only to be present, often times silently, sometimes suggesting practical wisdom for navigating a particular situation, and always offering prayer and Scripture. Share the well-worn Scripture verses to comfort the person’s mind and heart. Remind him that our most merciful Father, the Living God, Abba, will provide protection and carry him through each minute, each hour, and each day to where God wants him to be—for his good and for God’s glory.

“If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. When I thought, ‘My foot slips,’ your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul” (Ps. 94:17–19). 

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The Past, Present, and Future Work of Christian Education in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2010¹

by Danny E. Olinger

Prior to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC),² Christian education was

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=213&issue_id=57.

2 Originally named the Presbyterian Church of America, the

on the minds of many supporters of J. Gresham Machen in the Presbyterian conflict. In a series of articles that appeared in the Machen-edited *Presbyterian Guardian* in early 1936, the question was asked whether the educational policies and programs of the Board of Christian Education in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) were sound and worthy of support.³

The *Guardian* writers, in seeking to answer that question, examined Board publications to see what was being taught. The mission of Jesus was said to be the remaking of this world, rather than saving men’s souls for the next.⁴ Students were told that Christianity’s focus should not be on the preaching of sin and salvation, but on complimenting man on what he is and telling him to live his best.⁵ Accepting without reservation the doctrines of the modern church—the infinite value of human personality, the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and desiring to build the kingdom of God on earth were the great marks of being a Christian.⁶ Youth should not pray to God for power equal to their tasks, but for tasks equal to their power.⁷ Old hymns with worn-out theology (“There Is a Fountain,” “He Lifted Me,” “It Is Well with My Soul”) should be discarded

young church was forced to change its name when the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia ruled in favor of a suit brought by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The new name chosen February 9, 1939, at the Fifth General Assembly was the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

3 Ned B. Stonehouse, “Modernism and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.: Part I,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 1 (Jan. 6, 1936): 108. The editor’s note for the article reads, “The *Presbyterian Guardian* presents herewith the first of an important series of articles to be published under the same general title. They will endeavor to appraise the attitude of the above mentioned Board as expressed in actions, attitudes, and publications.”

4 R. Laird Harris, “Modernism and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.: Part VI,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (April 6, 1936): 7.

5 Ned B. Stonehouse, “The Crisis in Christian Education: What Will the 148th General Assembly Do?” *Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (May 18, 1936): 72.

6 John P. Clelland, “Modernism and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.: Part V,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 1 (Mar. 16, 1936): 198–99.

7 Robert L. Atwell, “Modernism and the Board of Christian Education: Part VIII,” *Presbyterian Guardian* (May 4, 1936): 51.

for newer hymns (“There Is a Quest That Calls Me,” “Follow the Glean”) that reflect the modern faith.⁸ A *Young People’s Quarterly Teacher’s Edition* advised leaders against teaching the doctrine of the total depravity of man. The lesson stated, “Many of the older creeds of the church contained the doctrine of the total depravity of man. This has been interpreted as meaning that man is wholly defiled, incapable of any good, inclined wholly to evil, and unable in his own accord to better himself in any way. The Christian church has moved away from the belief, realizing that it is not in harmony with Jesus’ teaching about the worth of man.”⁹

The authors concluded that the Board was compromised by modernism, characteristically indifferent to the gospel, and unworthy of confidence. What was needed was not the correction of this or that error, but the creation of a new organism.¹⁰ The action of the 1934 General Assembly, however, demanded unconditional support of all Boards of the PCUSA. This left Presbyterians who believed that modernism stood against the Christian faith without a biblical option. As Ned Stonehouse argued, members of the church were left with the necessity of deciding whether (1) to accept the mandates of fallible men on a level with the authority of Christ in his Word, and (2) to contribute to the proclamation of modernism, a perversion of the gospel of Christ. Stonehouse concluded, “An affirmative decision on either of these issues is equivalent to a denial of Christ.”¹¹ Machen and seven other ministers were suspended from the gospel ministry in May 1936 for questioning the scriptural authority of demanding complete support of the boards of the PCUSA.¹²

8 Atwell, “Part VIII,” 50.

9 Ned B. Stonehouse and John J. DeWaard, “Modernism and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.: Part IV,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 1 (Mar. 2, 1936): 179.

10 Calvin K. Cummings, “Modernism and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.: Part III,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 1 (Feb. 17, 1936): 162.

11 Stonehouse, “Modernism,” 108.

12 For a full account, see Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1992), 143–48.

Developing a Doctrinally Sound Program

It was understood, then, that developing a doctrinally sound program on Christian Education would be a high priority if the new church desired its life and witness to be faithful to God’s Word. But, it was more than battling liberalism that drove the OPC to emphasize Christian education. There was also the understanding that the Great Commission could not be fulfilled apart from the obligation to teach. Going to make disciples of all nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded. R. B. Kuiper articulated this belief: “A noteworthy feature of the Great Commission is that it bids the apostles and the church of all ages to teach. In fact, teaching is spoken of as their chief missionary task. They are to go in order to teach. Going is but a means to the end of teaching. And they are to baptize those who accept their teaching. But they must teach whether or not men give heed. And, significantly, they are told not once, but twice, to teach.”¹³

Consequently, one of the first actions of the First General Assembly of the OPC was to request the moderator, Machen, to bring back nominees for the creation of a Committee on Christian Education (CCE).¹⁴ He knew exactly which men to nominate, men who had written openly in the *Guardian* about the liberal theological stance of the old Board—Ned Stonehouse, Calvin Cummings, John Clelland, Robert Atwell, R. Laird Harris—and ruling elder Gordon Clark. The Assembly without dissent approved the moderator’s nominees the next day and appointed them as the committee to bring back a report to the next Assembly.¹⁵

Six months later, the committee’s report to

13 R.B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966), 245.

14 The Orthodox Presbyterian Church established “committees” answerable to the General Assembly and not “boards” given power beyond the judicatories of the church.

15 *Minutes of the First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America* (1936), 14, 16.

the Second General Assembly started with these words:

The Committee on Christian Education wishes to express its conviction that the triumph of unbelief in the old organization was due in no small measure to the prostitution of existing educational agencies through compromise with unbelief on the one hand, and to the lack of a full-orbed and consistent system of Christian education on the other. Consequently, if the Presbyterian Church of America is to be a truly reformed church, activities in the sphere of education, however humble, cannot be initiated too soon.¹⁶

And, indeed, humble were the activities that followed, for the OPC had little to no money to spend on home and foreign missions, much less Christian education. One year into its existence, the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the OPC had a balance of \$221.54.¹⁷ The Committees on Foreign Missions and Christian Education did not yet have operating funds.

The lack of financial resources, however, did not prevent the OPC from seeking to develop a comprehensive program of Christian education. It focused on promoting Sunday school and catechetical instruction, vacation Bible school,¹⁸ and Christian schools,¹⁹ helping with teacher training, and producing scriptural tracts. *Presbyterian Guardian* articles were also written to build

up believers in their understanding of the whole counsel of God on the one hand, and to expose liberal unbelief on the other hand.²⁰

Cornelius Van Til helped as much as anyone to advance the cause of Christian education by tying it to the future of the OPC as a whole. In “What Shall We Feed Our Children: A Plea for Christian Education,” Van Til wrote, “Humanly speaking, then, one cannot honestly be enthusiastic about the future of the [OPC] unless its people will realize that a new and far more intense policy will have to be adopted in the field of Christian education.”²¹ Proving himself to be more than a friend of the committee in word, Van Til spoke at Christian Education–sponsored rallies to raise funds.²²

Slowly emerging from its fiscal limitations, the OPC moved forward in 1942 to authorize the CCE’s hiring of a general secretary, Floyd Hamilton, to supervise the work. Once a general secretary was in place, attention turned to what was meant by the term “Christian education,” with various definitions given over the next decade. John Galbraith argued that what was needed during the present time was not education per se, but Christian education, “education that reveals not only the ‘that’ of things but the ‘why’; education that teaches the origin and purpose of the things that are—that ‘of him, and through him, and to him are all things.’”²³ Leslie Dunn wrote, “Strictly speaking, Christian education is the Christian training given to children of Christian parents.”²⁴

16 *Minutes of the Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America* (1936), 23.

17 *Minutes of the Third General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America* (1937), 20.

18 Vacation Bible school was seen as an essential means of outreach to unchurched homes with the message of salvation. See Lawrence B. Gilmore, “Vacation Evangelism,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 12 (April 10, 1943): 104.

19 A standing recommendation of the CCE to the General Assemblies in the late 1930s was to recommend to pastors and members of the Church the formation of Christian school societies, which have as their purpose the establishment of Christian day schools. In the last article written before his death, Machen urged the establishment of Christian schools looking to the example of those associated with the Christian Reformed Church. See, J. Gresham Machen, “Shall We Have Christian Schools?” *Presbyterian Guardian* 3 (Jan. 9, 1937): 133.

20 Although officially an independent magazine, the *Presbyterian Guardian* was the undisputed house organ of the OPC. Machen helped establish the magazine in 1936 when it became apparent that Samuel Craig’s *Christianity Today* would not support a reform movement. See Neb B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2004), 407, 443–44.

21 Cornelius Van Til, “What Shall We Feed Our Children: A Plea for Christian Education,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (Oct. 24, 1936): 24.

22 *Minutes of the Sixth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1939), 20.

23 John P. Galbraith, “Christian Education,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 12 (Apr. 10, 1943): 105 (quoting Rom. 11:36, KJV).

24 Leslie A. Dunn, “Our Covenant Children,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 12 (Apr. 10, 1943): 101.

Edmund Clowney drew attention to the joint responsibility of the home and the church when he wrote that “most of the actual religious training of the child must be done by the Christian parent, but the church must prepare and direct the parent in this sacred task.”²⁵ Clowney further explained what Christian education is. He said, “We may limit the term to the Christian day school, or even to the publishing activity of our Committee. But Christian education must mean nothing less than Christian edification, the great saving process by which Christ builds up His people in faith and new obedience. We dare not lose sight of this God-centered unity in Christian education.”²⁶

Robley Johnston, who succeeded Hamilton as general secretary,²⁷ summed up the committee’s position by the mid-1950s when he wrote, “Christian education, then, is the divinely ordained means of achieving the goal at which the missionary program of the church is aimed, for it is

25 Edmund P. Clowney, “Sunday Schools for Salvation,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 15 (Feb. 10, 1946): 35. A subtle debate took place in the pages of the *Presbyterian Guardian* in the 1940s about whether Sunday school was primarily for instructing covenant children or evangelizing non-Christian children. Clowney represented a mediating position that prevailed in the end. He maintained that the primary responsibility of the church’s teaching is to bring covenant youth to full realization and avowal of the covenant claims and blessings. However, he asserted that the church also shares in Sunday school teaching a solemn obligation for the evangelization of non-Christian children. See also, “A Formulation of Specific Principles of Christian Education and Pedagogy in Terms of Which the Work of the Committee on Christian Education Is to be Guided,” *Minutes of the Twelfth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1945): 42–48.

26 Edmund P. Clowney, “God-Centered Unity in Christian Education,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 23 (July 15, 1954): 125. John Murray would later argue that education, if it is Christian, must find its focus in all that is involved in Jesus Christ’s person and work, Christ being not only Christian education’s unifying principle, but also its interpretative principle. Murray added, “That the glory of God and the enjoyment of him is the goal of all life is surely an axiom of Christian profession. Education cannot be an exception.” See John Murray, “Christian Education,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 44 (Oct. 1975): 142.

27 From mid-1947 until 1954, the CCE labored without a general secretary overseeing the work. During this time, Orthodox Presbyterian minister Lewis Grotenhuis was hired as part-time publications secretary. Grotenhuis’s tireless efforts—on top of pastoring a church and delivering mail daily—allowed the CCE to continue publishing its materials. The trade name “Great Commission Publications” was chosen during this time.

the work of Christian education to provide for the growth of the church in unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God.”²⁸

In seeking to achieve this goal, one means the CCE repeatedly stressed was teaching covenant children the Catechism. Stonehouse acknowledged the word “catechism” has a stuffy sound to some. But, as he also explained, if the church is to have a vibrant faith, then making clear the truth of Scripture to the youth of the church by use of the Catechism was a “rock-bottom essential.”²⁹ To those new to such an approach, Glenn Coie explained, “A catechism is an orderly, systematic statement in simple, question-and-answer form of the truths of God’s Word as to (1) what we are to believe concerning God, and (2) what duties God requires of man.”³⁰

The person, however, who did more to organize catechetical training for the OPC than any other was Everett DeVelde. Designing a *Covenant Children’s Catechumen Course* that was published by the CCE, DeVelde put together a course of study for Orthodox Presbyterians to use that covered a youth’s catechetical training from infancy to high school graduation. If taken from beginning to end, four hundred and twenty-two Bible verses, the Children’s and Shorter Catechism, and ten hymns would be memorized, and, in addition, the whole Bible and the doctrinal standards of the church would be read.³¹

The CCE also sought to provide OPC members with Christian literature and tracts to combat secular teaching. Edward Young argued that that newspaper and magazine articles universally presented a view of man that magnifies man and his powers. He concluded that through the written word, a climate of opinion had been created in which God was not considered necessary. Young

28 Robley J. Johnston, “Perspectives in Christian Education,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 24 (Sept. 15, 1955): 118.

29 Ned B. Stonehouse, “Christian Education,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 13 (Apr. 25, 1944): 125.

30 Glenn R. Coie, “A Message to Christian Parents,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 13 (Apr. 25, 1944): 122.

31 Everett C. DeVelde, “Something New for Covenant Children,” *Presbyterian Guardian* 13 (Sept. 25, 1944): 297.

recommended the CCE's tracts as one way to combat such teaching. He wrote,

These tracts are distinctive. They are Scriptural. They avoid the error of merely telling a story to arouse the emotions and of then making an appeal, though there may be a place for such stories in some tracts. They are positive and instructive, and an endeavor is made to keep them absolutely true to the Scriptures. The tracts are issued upon the assumption that what the world needs is not entertainment, not amusing anecdotes, not emotional appeal alone, but truth.³²

Sunday School Curriculum

Johnston's main objective as general secretary, however, was for the CCE to deliver a Sunday school curriculum that could be used for children from first grade to twelfth grade. The committee had heard from the churches for years that there was a need for Sunday school material that was both theologically sound and pedagogically correct.³³ Finally, the CCE decided in 1960 to embark on developing a total Sunday school curriculum despite the great challenges such a program presented for a church the size of the OPC.³⁴ The capital outlay required to initiate the program on a limited scale envisaged was over \$50,000.³⁵ To put the cost of the proposed Sunday school project in perspective, the purchase price the previous summer of the new OPC administration building at 7401 Old York Road was \$49,627.³⁶ Within a year,

32 Edward J. Young, "The Power of the Printed Page," *Presbyterian Guardian* 12 (Apr. 10, 1943): 103.

33 *Minutes of the Ninth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1942), 36.

34 It should be added that while the OPC saw the desperate need for a complete Reformed Sunday school program, it never advocated elevating Sunday school to a nonbiblical status. Edmund Clowney argued: "If Sunday school becomes a substitute for systematic instruction by Christian parents and the Christian pastor, it becomes a menace to the youth of the church. Exactly this has been the case in countless churches throughout our country" ("Sunday Schools," 35).

35 *Minutes of the Twenty-eighth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1961), 47.

36 *Ibid.*, 45.

however, it was determined that at least \$100,000 would be needed to write, print, and promote just the first segment of the work.³⁷ Special offerings for the CCE were held, a Sunday School Publication Loan Fund was established, and CCE (along with Home Missions) petitioned the Thirtieth General Assembly to consider the establishment and operation of a combined budget for the program committees, which was adopted.³⁸

A staff was hired and work began in earnest.³⁹ Senior High (grades 10–12) material was published in 1963, then Primary (grades 1–3) in 1964, Junior High (grades 7–9) in 1967, and Junior (grades 4–6) in 1971. The seemingly audacious goal for such a small church—the completion of a school curriculum for grades one through twelve—was realized.⁴⁰

Immediately, however, the realization set in that the first lessons published were a decade old and in need of revision. But, where would the funds come from for such regular maintenance? The outstanding debt for the program by 1972 was \$138,000 in a church that had a combined budget of \$450,000.⁴¹ Could the CCE maintain the Sunday school program that it had established? The three options that the committee put before the General Assembly were to enlarge the percentage of giving to the CCE, borrow more money, or abandon the program altogether.⁴²

In the end, the committee did not abandon the program, but this was not by route of increased

37 *Minutes of the Twenty-ninth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1962), 19.

38 *Minutes of the Thirtieth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1963), 8–12, 72–76.

39 John Mitchell was hired as the main writer-editor. John Tolsma worked as the art editor. Dorothy Partington Anderson and Penny Pappas served as staff writers.

40 Upon the completion of the Sunday school materials in the grades 1–12 sequence, 133 of the 140 congregations making up the OPC in 1973 were using the curriculum. See D. G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1995), 161.

41 *Minutes of the Fortieth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1973), 58.

42 *Ibid.*, 59.

giving or borrowing money. The solution was to enter into a joint venture in 1975 with the newly created Presbyterian Church in America to publish Sunday school materials under the trade name Great Commission Publications (GCP). The CCE-developed materials formed the starting point and basic building blocks for GCP materials.

Time of Transition

While it retained the responsibility of overseeing GCP's work, the CCE no longer had the daily task of producing the materials. This reduction in workload allowed the OPC to think about Christian education in a wider manner once more. The Assembly gave the CCE the responsibility in 1980 of producing a denominational magazine, *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. As editor, CCE general secretary Roger Schmurr was tasked with promoting the work of missions and Christian education, providing theological articles, and printing news of events in and around the OPC.⁴³ A decade later, the committee created a second publication, *Ordained Servant*. Edited first by G. I. Williamson and then by Gregory Reynolds, *Ordained Servant* is a quarterly journal that endeavors to help ministers, elders, and deacons in the fulfillment of their offices.

In 1980 the Assembly also transferred the work of ministerial training to the CCE. The CCE now had the responsibility of seeking out men for the gospel ministry, helping presbyteries develop men under care, supervising internships, and providing continuing education opportunities for pastors. There was concern initially about lack of funding for ministerial training with this transfer of oversight, but the church responded with abundant support, and ministerial training in the OPC actually flourished.⁴⁴ The intern program, under the leadership of general secretaries Thomas Tyson

43 The motivation behind producing a denominational magazine was twofold. First, the *Presbyterian Guardian* had ceased operations in 1979. Second, the Assembly's program committees had been promoting their ministries through so many separate publications and letters that chaos was beginning to reign in this area. See Roger W. Schmurr, *New Horizons* 26.1 (2005): 4.

44 Roger W. Schmurr, *New Horizons* 5.10 (1984): 15.

and Larry Wilson, became an essential part of the training of prospective ministers in the OPC.⁴⁵

In recognizing the changing landscape of Reformed seminary training, the CCE also established the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC (MTIOPC) in 1998. Deliberately an institute and not a seminary, MTIOPC provided supplemental training in OPC distinctives through the use of the Internet and then in-person meetings. Around the same time, the committee launched the website OPC.ORG to provide a presence for the OPC on the Internet.⁴⁶

The newest additions to the work of the committee are the OPC Timothy Conference and the OP Summer Institute. The OPC Timothy Conference assists Orthodox Presbyterian churches in identifying and encouraging young men aged 16–21 years old with apparent gifts for the gospel ministry. Local sessions nominate young men from their midst to participate in the Conference, which includes visiting Reformed seminary campuses and classes, being introduced to the gospel ministry by OPC ministers, and fellowshiping with a host OP congregation. The OP Summer Institute is designed for seminary students interested in learning more about the OPC and its distinctives.

Despite these new additions in the area of ministerial training, the CCE has continued its long history of providing resources for the church. Among its many print publications are the OPC's *Book of Church Order and Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. It

45 Intern funding now represents the largest single expenditure yearly for the committee. The committee financially assists on average seven to ten yearlong internships and twelve to fifteen summer internships. The committee also sponsors the Intern Mentoring Conference to help mentoring pastors in the supervising of interns.

46 The stated purpose of OPC.ORG reads, "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall, through its Committee on Christian Education, maintain a presence on the World Wide Web through its website known as OPC.ORG, in order to: 1) Provide public information concerning the description, beliefs, structure, ministries, and publications of the OPC; 2) Promote the cause of Christ within the OPC; 3) Provide Reformed theological material for consideration by other Reformed churches around the world; 4) Evangelize and teach the gospel to the world." *Minutes of the Sixty-fifth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1998), 116.

also produces books, booklets, and tracts that focus on the basic teachings of the church.

To the Future

Times have changed, but what has not changed is the CCE's desire to serve the church through teaching all that Jesus has commanded. CCE has grown from very humble roots to conduct a comprehensive program of Christian education. And yet, the committee recognizes the challenges that face the church in the area of Christian education. For instance, when Edward Young pointed out the power of the printed word in the 1940s, the impact of technological innovations on education in general was not envisioned. Experts agree today that the World Wide Web is for scanning, not for sustained reading. On average, individuals spend less than two minutes reading on any one site, which might explain why the most indispensable app of the Web is the "browser." The lessening of attention spans—or reading just for entertainment purposes—is alarming. And yet, the message proclaimed by Google, the reigning king of the new media, is adapt or die.⁴⁷

For the purposes of Christian education, that ultimatum rings both true and false. It would be foolish for the CCE not to utilize new media forms. And yet, what must always be safeguarded is the primacy of the Word of God in the church, especially in regard to preaching. The alarm sounded today is that the church must ditch the old top-down model of proclamation for more user-friendly models of communication in worship such as drama, dance, and dialogue. Added to the pressure to abandon preaching as Word proclamation is the popularly held opinion that the next step in reading is tablet reading where images will fill the page along with the text, much like watching a foreign movie with subtitles. It will not be long before a Bible is produced along these lines, one where you will see an image of Jesus feeding the five thousand superimposed over the words.

Many raised in the Internet generation already

question the hard work required to memorize the kings of Israel, Luke's birth narrative of Jesus, or the Shorter Catechism when the information is a few clicks away. But there is no substitute for memorization or meditation. Having access to God's Word is not the same as hiding it in one's heart.

Encouraging the OPC to remain Bible-based in the modern age undoubtedly will be part of the future work of the CCE. Seeking both to serve the Lord and his people faithfully, the CCE is endeavoring to develop media ecology sensibilities that will encourage the wise use of new media. But while our response to societal change will have an impact on the success of our future efforts, what will be even more important is the necessity of keeping Christian education ever before the church, not just a working general secretary and committee. As Ned Stonehouse warned Orthodox Presbyterians in his era, "A vigorous committee and an energetic secretary will not guarantee progress." Rather, Stonehouse argued, "True progress will materialize in the proportion that the churches and their individual members come to love the cause of Christian education." But lest anyone think that such a stance might result in indifference, Stonehouse concluded, "Such love will express itself in the generous support of the Committee."⁴⁸

Privileged to serve as the sixth general secretary of the CCE, I rejoice that members and friends of the OPC have supported the work of Christian education in the generous manner that Stonehouse deemed necessary. May our prayer be that the Lord would continue to bless the ministry of Christian education in the OPC for generations to come. ☺

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47 See Ken Auletta, *Googled* (Penguin: New York, 2009).

48 Ned B. Stonehouse, "Christian Education," 125.

✦ Servant Technology

Missing the Messages of the Media

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2010¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

God's Technology: Training Our Children to Use Technology to God's Glory, by David Murray.
Grand Rapids: Head Heart Hand Media, n.d.
DVD, 40 min.

Professor Murray teaches Old Testament and practical theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The seminary is governed by the Heritage Reformed Congregations (Netherlands Reformed Churches) and Free Reformed Churches. The DVD is produced by Head Heart Hand Media, which seems to be connected to Reformation Heritage Books, although there is little identification on the DVD or its package. The stated purpose of this DVD is highly commendable: “*God's Technology* is ideal for families, schools, and churches that want to train their children to use God’s good gift of technology in a God-glorifying way.” Sound theology clearly undergirds the effort at every point.

The structure of the presentation reminds me of a Bill Gothard seminar: four biblical principles, three possible responses to digital technology, and seven steps to teach children to develop disciplined discernment in using digital technology. Murray seeks to make practical advice clear and memorable for parents.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=228&issue_id=60.

While the term “common grace” is not used, it is clear from the four biblical principles and three responses to technology that Murray understands technology to be a gift of God to be used with “discerning discipline.” There is much moral and practical advice to help parents guide and teach their children the responsible use of electronic communication technologies, including technical advice about antivirus software, firewalls, time limits, and filters. Murray wisely warns that “digital supervision” (software filters) is not enough. Building trust and discernment through parental mentoring is essential in discipling children to use the Internet prudently.

The DVD concludes with an application of the seven steps to the use of social networks. Here, again, there is much sound advice that will be very helpful to parents. But it is at just this point that the greatest weakness of this DVD becomes evident. There is no critique of the media themselves—their benefits and liabilities, the ways they change our perceptions and relationships, which are inherent in their nature as creations, or extensions, of man. This part of the presentation is a borrowed segment, reporting the pervasive and lasting presence of social media, and promoting the necessity of simply accepting this. This is supposedly an answer to those who say that Facebook and its ilk are just a fad. Although we are told that 96 percent of millennials use social networks, the ways in which digital technologies change us and our world are never explored. Of special importance to the task of parenting is the way in which access to information alters social structures. For example, Neil Postman deals with the way television has radically altered childhood in *The Disappearance of Childhood*.²

Part of Murray’s advice at this point is for par-

2 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: Allen, 1983). Situational sociologist Erving Goffman explored this concept in his ground-breaking work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959). Goffman provided Joshua Meyrowitz with the conceptual link between McLuhan’s “medium theory” and culture and behavior in his book *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

ents to join Facebook. Fortunately, he emphasizes the priority of face-to-face friendships, but never explores the ways that Facebook as a medium may inhibit or undermine such relations, apart from the time factor. Furthermore, the possibility of opting out is never mentioned. The lack of media consciousness weakens the appeal of this DVD. Media ecology—stewardship—would go a long way to enhance the kind of essentially sound advice Murray gives. He gets it half right, but misses the message of the medium, thus diminishing the development of the navigational abilities of his students.

The videography of this production is not very appealing. Many of the elements used appear to be “video clip art.” Most of the “action” shows a parent (Mr. Murray) hovering over a child in front of a computer screen. The presence of text is very similar to PowerPoint, but when the text disappears the blank white spot making up half of the screen remains with the action taking place to the left of the screen. The background music is a strange electronic mix almost like a digital version of “elevator music” known as Muzak.

Overall, I would recommend this DVD, but I would give it to members of my congregation with a copy of *The Disappearance of Childhood*. I only wish a single book or DVD by a Christian parent could provide the whole package in a popular style. ☺

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Servant Living

The Church-Integrated Family

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by Matthew W. Kingsbury

We are at the beginning of the end of the American family as it has been known for generations and generations. As I've discussed this over the years with other pastors, we can no longer assume husbands and wives know the duties they owe one another, let alone how the Bible defines those duties. Parents do not teach their children basic manners, let alone the catechism. Hence, it seems to me churches and pastors will be increasingly obliged to teach congregation members what they never learned at home (that is, how to be families), or they will never find men who rule their households well to serve as elders (1 Tim. 3:4).

Some have responded to this crisis by moving toward "family-integrated churches," whose purpose is to organize the local congregation so as to inculcate and support healthy families. By implication (and sometimes by flat-out statement), the church exists to support the family. While I share the heartfelt grief over the consequences of cultural sin in the lives of Christian families and the sincere desire to see covenant children grow up in our holy faith, this perspective gets the relationship between the church and family exactly backward. Instead, as I seek to demonstrate in what follows, the Christian family exists to support the Christian church.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=226&issue_id=60.

Families Are of This World, but the Church Is of the Next

We begin by observing that marriage is a temporary, for-this-life-only institution. Although marriage is given us by God for several reasons, its main purpose is to symbolize the relationship between Christ and his church, as the apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:25–32. This primary and exemplary purpose is more central to the institution of marriage than childbearing, which is the means by which a marriage becomes a family.

What do the Scriptures say?

Interestingly, no text in Scripture teaches that bearing children is a universal purpose of marriage, that is, something which should characterize every marriage. While Psalms 127 and 128, among other passages, say children are a blessing, they do not say every marriage ought to produce children.

Genesis 1:28 records the "dominion mandate" given to the first married couple: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Some assume, therefore, that married couples ought be about the business of filling the earth with more people. However, God gave Adam and Eve this commandment not because they were a married couple, but because they were the married couple—that is, all mankind. Hence, the dominion mandate is given to all humanity and is to be carried out by humanity as a whole, but not necessarily by every human being. To put it another way, if Genesis 1:28 means every marriage ought to produce children, then every marriage ought also to be dedicated to agricultural productivity.

For some, Malachi 2:15 (God seeks "godly offspring") clearly proves God wants every Christian marriage to produce children. Although the proper translation of the text is in dispute, as a comparison of Bible translations will show, we will assume this version of the verse is correct. Of course, to interpret it correctly, we must consider its context. Malachi's overall theme is God's indictment of Israel for not following his law and not serving him

alone. In our text's immediate context, the problem is that Judah's men have been divorcing their godly wives and marrying pagan wives; there is no indication the Israelites were refusing to bear children. Hence, the focus here is not on "seed," but "godly"; that is, faithless Israelites were not raising children trained in the Word of God and taught to love him alone. The sin indicted by Malachi 2:15 is wicked child-rearing, not an absence of child-bearing.

Thus, while Scripture and common sense acknowledge a close tie between marriage and the creation of a family, the Bible does not teach that God instituted marriage for the sole, or main, purpose of bearing children. The clearest texts on marriage's purpose are Genesis 2:24 and 1 Corinthians 7:1–9, both of which clearly emphasize the creation of a one-flesh relationship; in other words, sexual union. Referring back to Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31–32 says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." In other words, the constitutive act of marriage is given to teach us about the church's union with Christ. Thus, a marriage which produces no children and, accordingly, never becomes a family (properly speaking) has nonetheless fulfilled its God-ordained purpose.

The Family Is Temporary

Marriage's symbolic function will be moot in glory when we have perfect union with Christ, and so it will pass away: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30). If marriages pass away, then so do families. The family, in its nuclear form, grows out of and depends on a marriage for its existence; therefore, whatever is true of the greater (marriage) is true of the lesser (family).

Even in this life, families are temporary. They are regularly broken up and reorganized as children marry and form their own families. In fact, whenever children grow up and go out into the world, their parents' authority ends. For practical

purposes, this also effectively dissolves the family. Of course, I do not deny the enduring nature of kinship ties which persist as family members go their own ways, or even when a divorce occurs. When I speak of family dissolution here, I am using the word "family" in its most narrow, technical sense, i.e., the nuclear family.

The Church Is Eternal

If marriage is for this world only, then families too are temporary and will not continue into glory. They are unlike the church, which is eternal. For the Christian, this life is an ongoing search to enter the permanent Sabbath, which is to say, permanent worship. "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (Heb. 4:9–11). In Revelation, especially beginning in chapter 19, we see the church continuing her essential work of worship forever. Christians are now gathered into a worshiping community so they might worship for all of eternity as part of Christ's church.

Here we turn to a central biblical principle: the eternal is more important than the temporary. This is brought out in Hebrews 11:10, 13–16:

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.... These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

These were able to abandon their temporary city

because they had a better one which is heavenly and eternal.

Families are like the rest of this world: impermanent and continually passing away. Therefore, families have a diminished importance within a Christian taxonomy of values, especially when compared to the church. While the church is eternal and will not find her perfect expression until glory, she has begun and lives out that life already, in the here and now. The church manifests the eternal and heavenly in the middle of a temporary and earthly world. Because she is eternal, the church is more important than the temporary family.

Hate Your Mother and Father

In light of these considerations, we turn to Matthew 10:34–37 and 12:46–50:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Because the eternal church has precedence over the earthly and temporary family, Jesus demands loyalty to himself first and last. In a decision

between Jesus and his church versus the family, Jesus wins. This is simple when parents are unbelievers and guilty of obvious sin, but less obvious when one has Christian parents who attempt to usurp the church’s authority.

For example, a father is offended that the pastor’s wife wore pants to Sunday worship, instructs his family to stop attending services at the church of which they are members, and begins leading worship at home on the Lord’s Day. In that instance, his fifteen-year-old communicant son should respectfully defy his father and attend the worship service called by his elders in order to receive the ordinary means of grace (Word, sacraments, and prayer) which are necessary for all Christians and can only be found when the church has gathered together. To the extent a family serves the church, one should gladly obey one’s parents; but to the extent they rebel, one must choose Christ’s eternal family, the church.

Jesus has set up the church as the Christian’s new family: our only Father is God. “And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9).

The Temporary Family Ought to Serve the Eternal Church

Here, then, is the proper relationship of the family to the church: because the church is eternal, the temporary family must work to make its members better church members.

While fathers have authority to rule their families, they do not have spiritual authority over them the way elders of churches do. A father is qualified to rule his family by virtue of impregnating his wife and by the covenant of marriage. An elder is qualified to rule in the church by virtue of possessing spiritual gifts recognized and tested by the congregation and other elders. Thus, families are not, technically speaking, small churches, but gatherings of believers who can either help or hinder one another’s Christian walk.

Husbands and wives, parents and children, are bound to certain duties within their families by God, but each of these relationships is informed

by and subsumed into their eternal Christian-to-Christian relationships. When the apostle Paul enumerates family duties in Ephesians 5–6, he begins with “[submit] to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21; he does something similar in Col. 3–4). With all its particularities, the family is just like every other sort of Christian relationship: an opportunity for mutual exhortation and encouragement so that through our labors the Holy Spirit might prepare each of us for the glorious wedding of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, with his bride, the church.

Rather than family-integrated churches, the Scriptures call us to have church-integrated families, in which service to our Lord and faithfulness to his bride are modeled and taught daily. Such families, I believe, will not simply produce elders, but, if it pleases God, generations of believers who rejoice in their heavenly citizenship. ☺

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Covenant Blessings for Singles¹

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2010²

by James S. Gidley

Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” For thus says the LORD: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.” (Isa. 56:1–8)

1 Originally delivered at Single-Minded Service Group, January 24, 2003.

2 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=227&issue_id=60.

Our text comes in the “afterglow” that follows Isaiah 53, perhaps the greatest messianic text in the Old Testament. After speaking so fully of the atoning sufferings and death of the Messiah to come, the Spirit of God gives his people remarkable promises of blessing to come. From Isaiah 54:1 to the end of our passage (56:8) there is an extended description of those blessings. The Westminster Catechism picks up on this pattern in speaking of the benefits that Christ has purchased for us by his redemption. In Isaiah 52:13–53:12 we have the accomplishment of redemption by the sufferings and death of Christ. In Isaiah 54:1–56:8 we have the application of the benefits of that redemption promised to the people of God.

Not surprisingly, the language of the covenant is pervasive in this passage. To trace some of the highlights: In 54:5 we read, “Your Maker is your husband,” speaking of the relationship of God to his people in terms of the marriage covenant. In 54:9, we find a reference to the oath that God swore to Noah, the very pledge of God’s covenant with him. And like the covenant with Noah, so shall be God’s covenant with his people again: “My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed” (54:10). The covenant blessings will descend to their children (54:13), and no weapon or enemy will prevail against God’s people (54:17). In 55:3, God promises to “make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” The blessing of this covenant will come upon a nation that did not know God (55:5), and God will abundantly pardon those who return to him (55:7).

In our text (56:1–8), the obligations of the covenant become prominent. Twice we read of the promise coming to those who “hold fast my covenant” (56:4, 6). Three times we read of the blessing coming to those who keep the Sabbath (56:2, 4, 6), the sign of the covenant. So the grand themes of biblical religion unite in this passage: redemption in Christ, the blessings of redemption, even the blessings of the covenant, the bond between God and his people, and the obligations that arise from the covenant.

Yet we can be even more specific about the

contours of this covenant. Isaiah is speaking of the new covenant. To be sure, his language is colored by the forms of the old covenant. Yet his promises burst the bounds of the old covenant forms. There is new wine here that will not be held in the old wineskins!

Again, we can survey a few highlights in 54:1–56:8. The people of God are called upon to “enlarge the place of your tent,” for “your offspring will possess the nations” (54:2–3). And as the passage progresses, it becomes evident that the nations will not merely be subjugated to national Israel, like a new race of Gibeonites to hew wood and draw water. No! Isaiah prophesies of the Messiah, as it were, saying, “You shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you” (55:5). The text of that call is given in 55:1, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” Everyone! Not just ethnic Israel. And again in 55:6, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near,” for now he is coming near to all the nations.

Perhaps the God-fearing Gentile listener is not quite ready to believe in the expansiveness of the blessing being promised under the new covenant. After all, the law had severely restricted Gentiles from access to the temple, which meant access to the typical presence of God in the Old Testament (see Deut. 23:1–8). Perhaps he trembles in himself, not quite daring to believe what sounds too good to be true. Is it only high-flown rhetoric, designed to impress the Israelites with a sense of their great privilege among the nations? As if to answer such doubts and fears, the Lord addresses the foreigner in 56:3: “Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people.’” And the promise is given to them in all its fullness in verses 6–8: they shall be brought to God’s holy mountain, and into his house of prayer—that better, heavenly temple, which, far more than the earthly temple ever was, has become a “house of prayer for all peoples” (56:7). No, the new wine will not be held in the old wineskins!

But there is another class of people in our text whose trembling hope is satisfied by the over-

flowing blessing of the new covenant. Eunuchs also shall enter into the fullness of the blessing. Eunuchs also, who, like the foreigners, were debarred from the temple courts (Deut. 23:1), shall be brought within the walls of the house of God (Isa. 56:5). And not only shall they be brought in as if by special allowance, to glimpse holy things for a moment and then be hurried out again into the profane world to which, presumably, they belong. No! They shall be given an honored and permanent place, even “a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.”

Now I hope you will understand that the “eunuch” in the Bible is not merely one who has been physically castrated. Jesus follows up his teaching on marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:1–9) with mysterious words about eunuchs (Matt. 19:10–12) that will not suffer a narrow interpretation:

The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.” (Matt. 19:10–12)

In the larger sense, the eunuchs spoken of here are the unmarried. Whether they remain unmarried because of an accident of birth, the demands of men, or the circumstances of life, they leave no posterity to the world, and are thus effectively eunuchs. And those who have been married, but are now again unmarried, may also take comfort that they are not forgotten. For the tent of the covenant has been enlarged to include all who will come under its shade.

But Jesus adds another category: those “who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” There are those who will sacrifice what no Jew would have willingly sacrificed for the kingdom; there are those who will remain in a single state for the sake of service to God and

his kingdom.

Of course, this is a radical departure from the forms of the old covenant, in which blessing depended so much on the possession of the land, and the opportunity to pass it on to the children and to the children’s children. In that covenant, blessing depended so much on the hope that the Messiah would be born from one’s own tribe and lineage; in it the bearing of children was elevated and spiritualized by the hope of the coming of that One Child, Jesus Christ. But now that One Child *has* come, and by his coming, even the dry trees run with sap, even those with no earthly hope are given a heavenly one!

All of this has the deepest significance for singles in the church of Jesus Christ. Particularly in Reformed circles, the doctrine of the covenant is wrapped up with our view of the obligations descending to the children of the covenant, with the practice of infant baptism, with the inclusion of our children in the membership of the church. In such an atmosphere, a single person, a eunuch, may begin to feel like the odd man (or woman) out.

But the new covenant will not be bound within the confines of the Christian family. The eunuchs, too, have a monument and a name in the house of God, better than sons and daughters. If God has joined together Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, and made them all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), he has also joined together the married and the unmarried in Christ.

What does this mean? Let me draw out a few implications:

1. Our view of the covenant should not make the nuclear family the fundamental unit. That is to say, the church has priority over the family. There are tendencies in the Reformed and evangelical world today that are overturning that priority and putting the family before the church. Family worship and home-schooling, while far from being evils in themselves, may begin to vie with the church for preeminence. The New Testament, first-century *house* church, with a family or single person serving as host (Rom. 16:3–5, 14–15; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15), has become the twenty-first-

century *home* church, a family set apart with the father and husband as patriarch, elder, priest, and preacher.


2. The single person must not be viewed as, or made to feel like, a second-class citizen in the church. The single person, as much as the married person, is a full-fledged participant in the covenant. The single person is not “incomplete” or lacking ability to participate fully in life and service of the church.

3. The single people and the married people of the church must not be divided, as though their interests and needs were fundamentally different. We are one in Christ.

4. And yet on the other hand, the particular needs and gifts of single people ought to be recognized in the church, just as the particular needs and gifts of married people are. For example, we have a nursery that single people do not need. We have a program of instruction for children that single people do not need. Likewise, we may, and in many instances should, have special programs for singles.

5. Programs for married folks and single folks need not be and should not be exclusive. Just as single people can take an interest in the nursery and in the instruction of the children, and serve effectively in those areas, so also married people can take an interest in the singles program, and serve effectively there. There is a communion of the saints that transcends our particular condition or circumstances in this life. In the modern world, it is assumed that only the single person can understand and sympathize with the single person, only the widow with the widow, only the black man with the black man, etc. This is not so. While there are many members in the body, and we do not all have the same gift or function in the body, we have all been made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12–13). The modern view, while it seeks to bring helpers alongside who have “walked in my shoes,” ultimately divides people. The Spirit unites people.

Now, I conclude by posing a question: how shall we now live and serve together in the church of Jesus Christ? No doubt we as a church have not

done all that we should have done to welcome singles. Perhaps we have acted as if we were a “family” church, in the unhealthy sense of making families feel first class and singles second class. Can *single-minded service* help us to get beyond that? 

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✦ Servant Viewing

Dis-integrated? *The Social Network*: A Review

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

My interest in *The Social Network* is not as a movie reviewer—because I’m not one, although I enjoy well-crafted films—but as a media ecologist. This is my principal interest in the movie; and the movie delivers lots for the media ecologist to contemplate. I will assume knowledge of the characters and plot and focus on the highly important message of this movie.² Perhaps there is a message within a message—movies, like television, direct us away from those sitting next to us. They are a

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=222&issue_id=59.

2 Cf. these excellent reviews: David Danby, “Influencing People: David Fincher and ‘The Social Network,’” *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2010/10/04/101004crat_atlarge_denby?printable=true#ixzz12Cd8i3NI; Joe Morgenstern, “‘Social Network’: Password Is Perfection,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 1, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704483004575523822326312414.html>; Roger Ebert, “The Social Network: Calls Him an Asshole, Makes Him a Billionaire,” *Chicago Sun Times*, September 29, 2010, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100929/REVIEWS/100929984&template=printart>. For the background of Facebook itself, cf. Charles Peterson, “In the World of Facebook,” *New York Review of Books*, February 25, 2010, 8–11, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/feb/25/in-the-world-of-facebook/?pagination=false&printpage=true>; Zadie Smith, “Generation Why?” *New York Review of Books* (November 25, 2010): 57–60.

whole new way of knowing, inviting not so much reflection as total participation. This movie is a medium about a medium. As such it concentrates our attention even as it embellishes the story of Facebook and its inventor(s).

The Movie

Portraying at least four of the seven deadly sins—lust, greed, envy, and pride—the movie reveals the dark side of human nature in a brilliant, if not entirely intended, tour de force on original sin. The characters, their milieu, and their electronic creation are emblematic of an epoch dis-integration. The remarkable intelligence of those made in God’s image is also on display—even as that image is so tragically distorted by sin. The brilliance accents the sin and makes it all the more egregious.

The depiction of Harvard undergraduates is perfectly accurate. A cross section of students at this hubris incubator includes the well-endowed WASPs and the ethnic outsiders. There is a beautiful symbolic summing of this social reality in the scene where Mark Zuckerberg, the eventual creator of Facebook, is allowed, through pure *noblesse oblige*, to enter the lower lobby of the premier final club—Porcellian. The movie could have done more with the mirror that hangs over the door to allow club members to view those desiring entrance. There is no sign indicating the name of the club, only the ordinary-looking street number 1324—dramatic understatement in the old New England way. But then the director was probably an outsider, perhaps even snubbed—since Franklin Delano Roosevelt was famously blackballed by Porcellian.

The “Pig Club” got roasted in this instance. The WASPs, the Winklevos brothers, are depicted as overbearing, privileged undergraduates, with only slightly above average intelligence. Their assumed success in every endeavor is disappointed, especially by the socially awkward Jewish sophomore Mark Zuckerberg. It’s a theme everyone who did not go to Harvard loves, but watch your gloating—hubris restrained by civilization may prove superior to the same without it. The broth-

ers, who are outwitted by Zuckerberg, work hard at suppressing their basest instincts. But the hubris is there like a Columbo movie, on both sides of the social equation.

The opening scene proves this point with our villainous hero larding on his superior intelligence and education. Zuckerberg's date (supposedly fictional) wants none of his adolescent one-upmanship. So a majority of the deadly sins fuel the nascent creation of Facebook, although Zuckerberg would leave one form of greed to others. Money never seemed to motivate him.

The world's most successful social network was borne of antisocial instincts. It was inspired by the quest to meet co-eds without the embarrassment of attending parties, resulting in the creation of elite circles in which one must be "punched" (friended) to be accepted—our own little Porcellian Clubs. Revenge against adult maturity, social conventions, and face-to-face interaction all start with a date's rejection of Zuckerberg's puerile behavior. Facebook is ironic, if not cynical; but the original name, invented in a drunken mania, is more brutally revealing—Facemash—a kind of egalitarian dissing.

Framed by lawsuits, the movie pits the young technocrats against the adult world, which is regularly outwitted, with the exception of the Porcellian twins, who are simply young adults put in their place by Harvard president Lawrence Summers. Surly Napster inventor Sean Parker proclaims, "We rule the grownups." In geek world the apotheosis of adolescence is signaled by the casual yard-work attire—never, of course, worn for anything but keyboards or beer bottles. It is ironic that the gravitas of an elite educational institution is depicted as no longer rooted in a well-rounded brilliance, but in a limited sort of genius. The awe is created by a spectacle, rather than something profound. As reviewer Zadie Smith observes, when Zuckerberg is dazzled by the hubris of Parker's vision, "Zuckerberg is too hyped on the idea that he's in heaven to notice he's in hell."³

3 Zadie Smith, "Generation Why?" *The New York Review of*

Remember that as a medium a movie is not like a book. In this case the book upon which the movie is based, *The Accidental Billionaires*,⁴ provides the narrative account of the "facts" as reported by Zuckerberg's spurned business partner, Eduardo Saverin.⁵ Neither movies nor books are replicas of reality. But a well-crafted movie, as a work of art, accents aspects of reality worthy of careful inspection. This movie's concentration on one of the great stories of our time illuminates themes in modern culture that demand our attention. Among those is the disintegrating tendency of social networks. Self-worship has been given new outlets of expression—social networks chief among them.

One of the main players in the real-life drama said of the film something to the effect that the real story was a lot more mundane. There's a theme. Facebook promises a kind of constant excitement. It draws users into a digital social network. Ironically it narrows the world in which users live. They become absorbed in the network, and, like the users of drugs, addicted to the fleeting high that participation gives.

The Network

David Denby is one of the few reviewers, besides Zadie Smith, who identifies the real message:

By focusing on the moment of creation, Fincher and Sorkin are getting at something new. From the first scene to the last, *The Social Network* hints at a psychological shift produced by the Information Age, a new im-

Books (November 25, 2010): 57.

4 Ben Mezrich, *The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook: A Tale of Sex, Money, Genius, and Betrayal* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

5 Danny Olinger, email, October 29, 2010, "The movie is a lot like the book. Aaron Sorkin appears to pick whole sections out of the book, and both rely upon Saverin's testimony. David Kirkpatrick's *The Facebook Effect* is Zuckerberg's side of the story. Saverin's role, and Zuckerberg's dumping of him, lends credence to the thesis that this has something very nonsocial in a biblical sense at its heart. Friendship is not as important as the promotion of self, which is what Harvard teaches above all else. Harvard's arrogance, which Zuckerberg mirrors, is that we're not interested in working for others; we aspire to have others work for us."

personality that affects almost everyone. After all, Facebook, like Zuckerberg, is a paradox: a Web site that celebrates the aura of intimacy while providing the relief of distance, substituting bodiless sharing and the thrills of self-created celebrityhood for close encounters of the first kind. Karl Marx suggested that, in the capitalist age, we began to treat one another as commodities. *The Social Network* suggests that we now treat one another as packets of information. Mark Zuckerberg, as interpreted by this film, comes off as a binary personality. As far as he's concerned, either you're for him or you're against him. Either you have information that he can use or you don't. Apart from that, he's not interested.⁶

This reminds me of the corporate advice of megalomaniac Dogbert in the Dilbert comic strip, "In phase one we'll dehumanize the enemy by calling them data."⁷ Zuckerberg has been referred to as a villain-hero. Is he not the *Übermensch* of Nietzsche, whose only god is his art, which in turn bestows power on him to dominate, especially those who have offended him? Control is a major issue. The godlike pretensions of this new breed of digital inventors make the conceit of the final clubs seem tepid. Zuckerberg rejects the decadent partying of Parker, not to seek mature adulthood, but rather to achieve superiority in the world he is able to alter and direct. But Parker draws Zuckerberg into a subtler conceit when he challenges him, "Do you like being nobody?" In a kind of ironic insight into the social nature of people, his own social pains make him realize people are hungry for social identity formed by networks of friends. In querying about the motive that drives Zuckerberg—girls and money don't do it—Zadie Smith zeroes in:

6 David Denby, "Influencing People: David Fincher and 'The Social Network,'" *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2010/10/04/101004crat_atlarge_denby?printable=true#ixzz12Cd8i3NI.

7 *Dilbert*, October 13, 2010, <http://www.dilbert.com/>. Lieutenant Commander Data is a fictional character in *Star Trek*, designed and built by Doctor Noonien Soong. Data is a sentient android who struggles to imitate humans.

The striking thing about the real Zuckerberg, in video and print, is the relative banality of his ideas concerning the "Why" of Facebook. He uses the word "connect" as believers use the word "Jesus," as if it were sacred in and of itself, "So the idea is really that, um, the site helps everyone connect with people and share information with the people they want to stay connected with . . ." Connection is the goal. The quality of that connection, the quality of the information that passes through it, the quality of the relationship that connection permits—none of this is important.⁸

Communication technologies alter social space as access to information changes. It is telling that the initial network became so popular so quickly—one night—that its 22,000 hits shut down the entire Harvard computer network. This was in 2003. Social networking and texting are closely linked as personal presence is increasingly diminished. Ironically, as expanded connection with the mundane activities of "friends" increases, knowledge of the world, especially the past world, is diminished. Lives already disordered by sin face new challenges in this environment—a dramatic disruption.

The self may be promoted in new ways. This self is largely unverifiable, because largely unaccountable. And the self that is promoted can be redesigned at will. Every nobody can become somebody. This techno-anthropology views man, like artificial intelligence scientist Alan Turing, as a machine, whose impulses can be calculated and manipulated at will with the proper programming.

If you fail to participate, you will be unfriended by default. Email and cell phones become your father's Oldsmobile. But the social rearrangement involved here must not be overlooked. The principle is that the further human faces are separated from interaction, the less accountable the participants seem to be. The example of job loss due to an employer, or potential employer, checking Facebook accounts is a case in point.

8 Smith, "Generation Why?" 58.

The Facebook user wrongly assumes that “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” But, of course, it doesn’t, because what happens on Facebook, or in the world depicted on Facebook, is predominantly public. As benign as grandparents viewing their grandchildren’s latest pictures may be, the larger picture is not as happy.

Marshall and Eric McLuhan, and especially son Eric, have given us a very helpful paradigm for media analysis.⁹ The four “laws of media” inhabit every human invention simultaneously. Every innovation has a linguistic structure that is discerned by observing its effects. The first of the “Tetrad,” or laws of media, is Enhancement. So Facebook connects the user with more people than possible before and enhances daily contact, creating a network among networks of “friends.” The second law is Reversal or “flipping,” when enhancement becomes the norm and invites a reaction. Facebook connects the user with too many friends and crowds social space, so as to undermine connectedness. The third law is Obsolescence—the displacement of older technologies and social structures. Just as email obsolesces regular mail, Facebook obsolesces face-to-face interaction. Law four is the law of Retrieval. Facebook retrieves the long-lost friends from childhood or high school, including the use of older technologies or social connections. The renewed friendship may invite an actual visit. These four laws are meant to help us understand each new medium.

The oddest aspect of social networks is that “going out” into the wide world through a screen gives the illusion of broadening one’s exposure to the world. And yet, because social networks focus on a circle of friends, very little is learned about the context of those friendships—what is going on in the present or what has gone on in the past. Personal relationship defines the circle of one’s world—a small circle indeed. Furthermore, the

9 Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). The laws were worked out in the last decade of Marshall’s life in collaboration with his equally brilliant son Eric. Eric’s *Electric Language* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998) was an attempt to communicate the Four Laws in popular presentation.

outgoingness of this medium tends to crowd out the kinds of spaces that cultivate depth of personal reflection or relationships, human or divine. “Information systems need to have information in order to run, but information underrepresents reality.”¹⁰ I am continually amazed at the resistance people exhibit toward the idea that digital connection is not essentially different from personal presence, as if people were data bases. The complex mystery of human and divine presence is not reducible to bits and bites or even words. Software, however, forms human relations and social spaces in ways we are not quick to notice. But failing to notice opens us to serious diminishment. In the end social networks may be like the gold rush, leaving users with a few flecks of nearly worthless dust—and a yawning emptiness.

Yes, I know, Facebook helps people stay in touch. Plus almost everyone I know is on it. But being in constant “touch”—what an ironic metaphor—in many instances keeps users from being in touch in other ways, i.e. phone, in person, or even email. I would argue that the most valuable connections on Facebook are those that already have a strong face-to-face origin. Personal presence is a key to evaluating our use of all media. “The last defense of every Facebook addict is: *but it helps me keep in contact with people who are far away!* Well, e-mail and Skype do that, too, and they have the added advantage of not forcing you to interface with the mind of Mark Zuckerberg—”¹¹ and I might add giving away your profile and privacy to advertisers and who knows who else. Smith, who by the way was a student at Harvard with Zuckerberg, concludes her review,

The Social Network is not a cruel portrait of any particular real-world person called “Mark Zuckerberg.” It’s a cruel portrait of us: 500 million sentient people entrapped in the recent careless thoughts of a Harvard sophomore.¹²

10 Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget*, quoted in Smith, “Generation Why?” 58.

11 *Ibid.*, 60.

12 *Ibid.*

In order to navigate the whirlpool of social networks, we must ask several hard questions of the media and of ourselves. How does the social network alter our social and spiritual space? Is our participation enhancing our relations with church, family, neighbors, friends, and the Lord, or detracting from these? If the later, how may we modify our use to tip the scales toward enhancement? How does a social network change our perception of the church and its importance in our lives? How does it modify our relationship to texts, especially the Bible?

Church officers must ask these questions of themselves and their congregations. How do social networks affect the ministry of the church? To what degree should the session encourage or limit the use of these networks? How do social networks affect our relationships to God, humans, family, church, creation? Sessions as well as youth groups, for example, should be challenged to think these issues through. What are the benefits and liabilities of these networks in our lives? Then sessions should articulate policies that help guide congregations through this very challenging new terrain.

The Social Network is a must-see movie, both because it is superbly crafted and because wittingly or unwittingly it prods us to ponder our place in the midst of the electronic revolution. “It’s the true digitization of life” —or should I say “dis-integration”? I wonder what the apostle John would have thought of social networks: “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 John 13–14).

Reviewer’s content caveat: sexual content and rough language, certainly not worse than what is omnipresent on network TV, but also not glorified or promoted. 📺

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✦ Servant Truth

Preachers in Lab Coats and Scientists in Geneva Gowns

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by Bryan D. Estelle

Introduction

It is well known that J. Gresham Machen avoided direct comment on the subject of evolution. This may have been for several reasons.² For example, Machen was content to make reference to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield's works when asked about the subject of evolution. Even so, according to D. G. Hart, Machen garbled some of the subtleties of Warfield's views.³ Perhaps Machen would have thought differently if he had seen the effects of social Darwinism on so many aspects of civilization, including the rise of the Nazis.⁴

I am not a trained scientist. Although I have taken a number of science courses at the University of Oregon, of which my favorite was a geology class on glaciers, my training has been almost entirely in the humanities. I do think that the humanities have many things to say to the scientific

community on the subject of evolutionary theory. In my opinion, Marilynne Robinson's recently published Terry lectures are a case in point. They are nothing short of brilliant!⁵

Therefore, following Machen's lead, I will not pretend to speak authoritatively on matters outside my training and expertise. Even so, because I am a minister and trained in Semitic languages and literature, and because I have been called by God to prepare ministers for the gospel ministry, I have been interested in the relationship between science and Scripture. I have recently followed some of the discussions on this relationship and will make a few comments on how I think this discussion should be framed in the future, at least with respect to tone among officers in the OPC. What I have observed through the years in the secondary literature and in personal conversations is that people in the church are vexed by this relationship between science and Scripture, which is ultimately a challenge of how to relate general and special revelation. As officers in the church, we need to think through our response to such concerns raised from trained and untrained scientists. The secondary literature touching on this issue is voluminous. To cite only a few examples from our own small circle, the recent resignations of Old Testament professors from Reformed seminaries and the flurry of writing in the blogosphere indicate that there is much thinking in the future that needs to take place in these crucial areas.⁶ Furthermore, despite the fact that our denomination went through a

5 See Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

6 The readers of this journal are probably well aware of the firestorm created by the publication of Peter Enns's book, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*. After leaving Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, Enns became a biblical studies fellow at the Biologos Foundation, a science and Scripture think tank, and has published on the "Biologos Forum" regularly on the Web on issues pertinent to creation and the historicity of Adam. Other examples could be cited as well. For example, the most recent edition of the journal of the American Scientific Affiliation, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (September 2010), is devoted to reflection on the historicity of Adam, genomics, and theological reflection in light of evolutionary science.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=220&issue_id=59.

2 See D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), especially 96–107.

3 Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 98.

4 See Marilynne Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (New York: Picador, 1998), 40.

lengthy trial of a ruling elder who was charged with “the public offence of stating that Adam had primate ancestors, contrary to the Word of God (Genesis 2:7, 1:26–27),”⁷ and whose appeal reached the highest level of our church courts, and despite the fact that a committee’s report on the doctrine of creation was received by the General Assembly of 2004, it doesn’t appear as though issues surrounding creation as recorded in Scripture and the relationship of science to biblical revelation is going to disappear anytime soon. My goal in this article is to describe an attitude I’ve observed among conservative Christians and some scientists and suggest a way forward for productive dialogue with people in our churches. I think that the Scriptures have things to say on this issue, but they are also silent on certain current questions, and we would do well as officers in the church to remain silent on these questions as well, at least insofar as we claim scriptural support for our positions.

For most Christians, this area is of most vital concern when it touches on matters of creation, especially our doctrine of man. This is true especially in recent days, since the historicity of Adam has always been crucial to our theology; it just hasn’t been a disputed point until recently in conservative Reformed and evangelical circles. Therefore, towards the end of this article, I venture into one area of application of the Scriptures to suggest a posture that I think should inform and influence a church officer’s thinking in this area. What does Scripture say with regard to the issue of the historicity of Adam, and how can we set forth some parameters that should guide our thinking, reflections, and especially our attitude and posture towards this hotly debated topic?

Preachers in Lab Coats

I was struck by my brother-in-law’s comment several years ago (he is a trained scientist and not a professing Christian), when he claimed that the creationists (he had in mind certain ICR—In-

stitute for Creation Research—representatives) are “preachers in lab coats.” This was his way of saying they had a pretty slick way of presenting their material on the university campus in debate, which to the untrained ear sounded good; however, those creationists were not doing real science, and for one that was a scientist, they were basically charlatans.

Creation Science became popular with the publication in 1961 of *The Genesis Flood*, by Whitcomb and Morris.⁸ This book presented a view of the world whose starting point was God’s revelation in the Bible. What God had told us about creation in his Word was enough: a young earth, with no animal death possible before the fall of mankind, with observation of the present deposits of huge fossil beds being the result of a catastrophic global devastation, etc. But legitimate interpretation of the Scriptures and of general revelation may offer different results than these previously mentioned opinions of the Creation Science movement. Indeed, these views are in stark contrast to positions presented in most universities: the present form of the world came to be through a slow, gradual, uniform process. In 1974, Morris published *Scientific Creationism*. A dramatic shift occurred with this publication. Now the movement of creationism was making claims, it alleged, based on scientific observation independent of Scripture. With the formation of the ICR, the goal was to develop a fair hearing for creationism in the public schools. Baptized under the banner of Christianity, a major parry in the culture wars was begun. With the formation of the ICR, it seems that the goal was to develop an equal or fair hearing in the public schools for an alternative view to evolution. With this publication, and ensuing ones as well, the argument becomes allegedly “more scientific.” Creationist approaches are often concordist; that is, they seek to find harmony between the

7 For details, see the *Minutes of the Sixty-third General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, June 6–13, 1996, especially pages 296–300.

8 Some of the following summaries are helpfully described in *Science and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Richard F. Carlson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), and Del Ratzsch, *The Battle of Beginnings: Why Neither Side Is Winning the Creation-Evolution Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Scriptures (as they interpret them) and the findings of modern science (as they interpret them) with examples ranging from disciplines in cosmology, chemistry, physics, and biology.

Scientists in Geneva Gowns

In contrast to the preachers in lab coats are what I am calling “Scientists in Geneva Gowns.” Here I have in mind practicing scientists who depart from the rigors of their respective disciplines and make exaggerated claims with an overstated degree of certainty with respect to the contemporary scientific picture. Sometimes they will even make grandiose claims for a particular cosmological worldview. They have left the realm of science and entered the realm of “folk science.”⁹ Carl Sagan and his views on the cosmic structure of the universe are a good example of this.

Having discussed the extremes, we now enter the world of real scientists. These are scientists who may not be donning Geneva gowns; rather, they are merely wrestling with what it means to be a Christian scientist. They may be Christian scientists who question inerrancy and invoke a common sphere in which they claim there is really not a different way that Christians and non-Christians do science. They may even invoke Stephen Jay Gould’s NOMA principle, the principle of non-overlapping magisteria, in which “science and religion are not in conflict, for their teachings occupy distinctly different domains.”¹⁰ In the view of nonoverlapping magisteria, “Each subject has a legitimate magisterium, or domain of teaching authority and these magisterial [*sic*] do not overlap.” What is the danger here?

Stephen Meyer, who used to teach at Whitworth College but now is part of the Intelligent Design (ID) movement, advocates a position of “qualified agreement.” He states that “scientists often affirmed the agreement between the ‘book

of nature’ and the ‘book of Scripture,’ both of which were understood to be mutually reinforcing revelations of the same God.”¹¹ Other scientists who are Christians, such as Howard Van Til at Calvin College, argue for a kind of partnership between theology and science. Van Til contends that the community of scientific scholars and the community of theological scholars are partners in theorizing, each making its own unique contribution in the search for truth.¹² For Howard Van Til, there is not any *one* doctrine of creation, but many *portraits* of creation.¹³ There are also secular scientists with whom we engage in conversation or who wander into the corridors of our churches. All these different groups raise important issues for officers in the church on how we should posture ourselves regarding debate on the relationship between science and Scripture.

A Way Forward for Officers in the Church

What is the way forward in the midst of these constant questions and this tendency for preachers to don lab coats and for scientists to don Geneva gowns? I propose that the way forward is for officers in the church, especially ministers, not to fall into either of these inclinations. They should be preachers in Geneva gowns, no more and no less. Of course, if they are trained as scientists, then it may be permissible for them to speak on matters scientific. However, the utmost care should be taken not to make dogmatic scientific statements as if speaking *for* or *out of* the church, since our interpretations of the book of nature may be mistaken. After all, scientific paradigms are in constant flux and worldviews will change once a significant amount of data generates a paradigm shift, as Thomas Kuhn taught us so many years ago.¹⁴ It seems to me that several things can be affirmed here.

9 See Howard Van Till, Davis A. Young, and Clarence Menninga, *Science Held Hostage: What’s Wrong with Creation Science and Evolutionism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), chaps. 1–2, 9.

10 Carlson, *Four Views*, 71.

11 *Ibid.*, 131.

12 *Ibid.*, 198.

13 *Ibid.*, 203.

14 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Second Edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

One thing we can affirm from Cornelius Van Til's work is that all data in God's revelation, whether in Scripture or in the material world, needs interpreting.¹⁵ He also claimed that many non-Christian scientists may actually have a better grasp of this world than Christians in scientific matters. These points deserve emphasis in the present climate as we are surrounded by those that would try to posture themselves as preachers in lab coats or as scientists in Geneva gowns.

Herman Bavinck made similar points. When dealing with the issue of harmonizing Scripture with science, he claimed that there is the book of nature and there is the book of Scripture. When conflicts arise, it is usually due to our own misunderstandings. "Conflict arises only because both the text of the book of Scripture and the text of the book of nature are often so badly read and poorly misunderstood."¹⁶ It may sound somewhat striking to our ears, but that same theologian said, "No one has any objection, no one *can* have any objection, to the facts advanced by geology. These facts are just as much words of God as the content of Holy Scripture and must therefore be believingly accepted by everyone. But these facts must be rigorously distinguished from the exegesis of these facts that geologists present."¹⁷ These are striking statements advanced by a Reformed theologian of the highest caliber.

But what should we make of those today who are questioning the historicity of Adam or suggesting that Adam had primate ancestors in some form? This, it seems to me, is an area in which ministers and officers in the church may speak authoritatively. At least one of these issues was brought home to the courts of the church in the OPC during the Terry Gray trial, alluded to above. I do not hold Mr. Gray's views. Because of the speeches I heard at that General Assembly, my own view is that Terry Gray's views were some-

15 Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1974), especially chaps. 6–7.

16 Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 120–21.

17 Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 126.

times misrepresented during that trial; nevertheless, that case did force the following topic to the foreground: did Adam have biological ancestry? Or, more precisely from Terry Gray's perspective: is it possible that Adam was created from some pre-existing genetic material?

Prior to the appeal process at the General Assembly, I tried to persuade Terry Gray by arguing from Genesis 2:7 and presented Murray's argument based on that verse to show him that his own position was faulty.¹⁸ In other words, with Machen, I draw back from the notion that "the human species may have evolved from lower forms of life."¹⁹ Meredith G. Kline had engaged in private correspondence with Mr. Gray on these matters as well in an attempt to dissuade him from his erroneous position. Some of the following points are derived from Professor Kline.

It is possible to argue that the human species had no biological continuum with some lower life form in the creation of the human being, Adam. Although there may have been some kind of continuity or affinity from subhuman creation to the human Adam (Kline called this typological-teleological continuity, a continuity designed by the Creator's wisdom, but not biologically continuous), I think that one is hard pressed to argue exegetically from the scriptural data that that continuum was biological.²⁰ To argue thus would seem

18 Mr. Gray was already very familiar with Murray's argument, but disagreed with it. See John Murray, "The Origin of Man," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2: *Selected Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 3–13. It may come to be, based on further reflection on the dust metaphor from the standpoint of analysis of how the metaphor functioned in the Bible and ancient Near East that our understanding of Gen. 2:7 may grow with rereading. But I do not see presently how it can take away from Murray's points touching on the issues at hand. Germane to this might be Delbert Hiller's work, "Dust: Some Aspects of Old Testament Imagery," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, CT: Four Quarters Publishing Company, 1987), 105–110, and Giovanni Pettinato, *Das altorientalische Menschenbild und die sumerischen und akkadischen Schöpfungsmythen* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1971), 17–160.

19 Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 98.

20 Murray, "Origin of Man," also affirmed that "Man has affinity with other animate beings on this earth," 7. Notice, however, Murray's maintaining a careful balance between the distinctive-

to be an overinterpretation of the text in question (Gen. 2:7). After all, the result of the action described in that verse was the *animating* of the man-creature, not the transformation of something already animated into man as man (see Ezek. 37:6, which seems to be relevant). As an ancillary note, even if one were to argue that Genesis 2:7 allowed for the origin of humankind through some kind of biological parentage (it seems a condition contrary to fact), such a process is not within a responsible exegesis of Genesis 2:21 in light of the origin of Eve on the basis of the analogy of Scripture (see 1 Cor. 11:8 and 1 Tim. 2:13). Furthermore, although I do think it is possible to argue for the assumption of ordinary providence being present in operation during the creation week, based on the exegesis of Genesis 2:5–6,²¹ nevertheless, it does *not* seem permissible to appeal to the process of evolution operative and accessible to scientific testing and demonstration during that creation week. Why is that so? Because, according to Genesis 1 and 2, the creation of humankind was part of a process that has ceased now.²² In other words, the process of creation described in Genesis 1 and 2 as a six-day creation week, followed by God's seventh-day cessation of that process, apparently consisted of ordinary providence punctuated by supernatural fiat creations. It is, strictly speaking, a terminated, closed period of time. It is wonderful: God spoke the creation out of nothing and into nothing. The result was very good. The magisterial creation week, a week in which ordinary providence and the supernatural were both operating is a unique week, different in kind from every other week thereafter, although analogous to subsequent weeks in human history.

ness of Gen. 2:7 and Gen. 2:19 correlated with other integral verses while maintaining yet that “the difference must not be allowed to obscure for us the all-important lessons of affinity implicit in the consideration that God formed the man dust from the ground [sic].”

21 But not mere ordinary providence, also supernatural divine fiats are evidenced in the text.

22 Ordinary providence continues of course punctuated by occasional supernatural occurrences, e.g., the Red Sea event, the resurrection of the dead.

In conclusion, I myself am happy when the Intelligent Design scholars marshal evidence that pokes holes in the pretentious positions of the scientific community, which acts as if an evolutionary position is the only possible position in today's world.²³ Even so, the ID movement has its own background and presuppositions that should not be neglected in our appraisal of it, even as the checkered history of the creationist movement should not be neglected.²⁴ We don't want preachers in lab coats, and we don't want scientists in Geneva gowns; we want just the opposite.

It is neither safe nor advisable for the church to make claims that go well beyond scripturally warranted data to argue against the scientific guild. As Marilynne Robinson claims, “Creationism is the best thing that could have happened to Darwinism, the caricature of religion that seemed to justify Darwinist contempt for the whole of religion.”²⁵ On the other hand, the church must speak where her Lord gives her authority to do so: it seems self-evident to me based on the Apostle's treatment of Adam, among other reasons, that one cannot build a historical gospel on a nonhistorical Adam. On this we should not be silent as officers in the church. ☺

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23 See the author's reviews forthcoming in *Ordained Servant* of Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: Harper One, 2009), and William A. Dembski, ed., *Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2004).

24 See, for example, Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design, Expanded Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 373–98.

25 Robinson, *The Death of Adam*, 40.

Servant History

The Huguenots: Calvin Comes to America

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October and November 2010¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The European Reformation and the Huguenots

The history of the New Rochelle Huguenots really begins in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517. On October 31, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, nailed his famous Ninety-five Theses on the Wittenberg Castle door. The spark that ignited an already volatile Europe, Luther's statement confronted the corruption of the Roman church. It was a call to search the Scriptures and return to faith in the Christ who was sent by God to save his people from sin and death.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Reformation had been firmly established in Geneva under the spiritual leadership of Jean (John) Calvin. This Swiss city and its church became a haven for British and French exiles and a center of religious education and training for pastors and laymen returning to those lands. So influential was Calvin's Geneva upon the Reformation that the Scottish Reformer John Knox called it "the most perfect school of Christ since the apostles."

Nineteenth-century church historian Philip Schaff notes three religious beliefs that competed for the hearts of French citizens in the sixteenth century: (1) the "reactionary and unscrupulous

fanaticism" of the leaders of the Roman Church like Jesuit Ignatius Loyola; (2) the "elegant Renaissance culture and frivolous skepticism" of men like Rabelais; and (3) the "high intelligence and uncompromising virtue" of leaders like Calvin.² More than any other Reformer, Calvin influenced the French Huguenots.³ The very name "Huguenot," though probably originally a term of reproach, became synonymous with "professor of the Reformed or Calvinistic religion in France."⁴

The Reformation movement proved a tremendous threat to the political status quo of Europe. In France a long history of tension existed between Gallican nationalism and Roman Catholic influence. The Huguenots simply exacerbated that tension on the Gallican side of the conflict. Since France's political structure was predominantly Roman Catholic in allegiance, the history of the Huguenots in France is a history of intense struggle.

In 1559 the first synod of the Huguenot church met secretly in Paris. It was there that the original draft of the Confession of La Rochelle was penned. During the next three years the church grew by about 2,000 percent!⁵ But then a decade later, in 1572, on the eve of the feast of Bartholomew the Apostle, a persecution of startling severity took place, known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (Massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy). Many of the most prominent Huguenots had gathered in Paris, a Catholic stronghold, for the wedding of the king's sister Margaret to the Protestant Henry III of Navarre (the future Henry IV of France). Assassins attempted to kill Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, the military and political leader of the Huguenots. Two days later, on August 23, the king ordered the assassination of Coligny and other Huguenot leaders. The massacres spread throughout Paris and to other French cities, lasting

2 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 3:356–82. Originally published in 1877 by Harper & Bros.

3 William Watson Waldron, *Huguenots of Westchester and the Parish of Fordham* (New York: Kelly and Bros., 1864), 54.

4 *Ibid.*, 52–53.

5 Andree Longieret, "France's Huguenots: Survivors of Persecution," *The Presbyterian Journal* (Oct. 16, 1985), 9–10.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=216&issue_id=58;
http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=221&issue_id=59.

several weeks. Estimates of the dead vary between 5,000 and 30,000.

After years of conflict, the Huguenot churches were officially tolerated by King Henry IV under the terms of the Edict of Nantes in 1598. The edict mandated a freeze on Protestant places of worship in an effort to keep peace between Roman Catholics and 1.5 million Huguenots.

This legal settlement was short-lived, however. After twenty-eight more Huguenot synods and many wars, synods were prohibited by the staunch Roman Catholic Louis XIV, “The Sun King,” in 1660. He delivered the final blow to the Huguenot church when he revoked the supposedly irrevocable Edict of Nantes in 1685. The Protestants of France became even more of a persecuted remnant, calling themselves “The Reformed Church of the Desert.” A royal law issued in 1686 made attendance at secret meetings of Huguenots punishable by death. Gray’s history of the French Huguenots reports, “Royal administrator Louvois looked on the breaches of the law with fury. He directed Foucault, in Poitou: ‘... let orders be given to the dragoons to kill the greatest part of the Protestants that can be overtaken, without sparing the women, to the end that this may intimidate them and prevent others from falling into similar fault.’”⁶ Many Huguenots were pulled apart on the rack, burned at the stake, or consigned to the infamous French galleys where no one survived more than a few years; others who sought to leave France were refused permission to emigrate and subjected to numerous restrictions and atrocities instead.

In the years immediately following the Revocation, between 200,000 and 800,000 Huguenots fled from French tyranny; no one knows the exact number.⁷ Thousands of these Huguenots eventually settled in the American colonies. New Amsterdam (presently New York City) was a major refuge, and it was from that colony that a small band of Huguenots came to settle New Rochelle in 1688.

6 Janet Glenn Gray, *The French Huguenots, Anatomy of Courage* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 247.

7 *Ibid.*, 245.

Calvinism in France: The Confession of La Rochelle

The beliefs of the New Rochelle Huguenots were the same as those to which their Huguenot forefathers had subscribed more than a century earlier. “The Huguenots adhered to the pure principles of their pious forefathers, as contained in the ‘Articles, Liturgy, Discipline, and Canons, according to the usage of the Reformed Church in France.’”⁸

The doctrinal foundation of their beliefs is found in the Confession of La Rochelle, also known as The French Confession of Faith or *Confessio Fidei Gallicano*. The rough draft of this confession was written by John Calvin himself. Calvin’s pupil, Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, assisted him and brought the draft to the Synod of Paris in 1559, where it was revised and approved. Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, delivered the confession to Charles IX at Poissy in 1561. In 1571 the Synod of La Rochelle (seventh Huguenot synod) adopted it as the doctrinal basis for the French Reformed churches. From that point it was called the Confession of La Rochelle. It was “solemnly sanctioned” in La Rochelle by King Henry IV in the presence of the ardent Huguenot Queen of Navarre, Theodore Beza, and Admiral Coligny.⁹

The doctrinal substance of the confession was essentially that of *Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion*, though the synod slightly revised the order of topics, placing the doctrine of Scripture first, instead of the doctrine of God. The forty articles that make up the confession sum up the biblical faith of the Protestant Reformation.

The confession begins, where all the Reformers began, with God. Articles 1 and 2 set forth God as one who speaks in creation and in his written Word. Articles 3-5 define the Word as synonymous with the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. This and this alone is the final authority by which “all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed.” Therefore, the ancient creeds (the

8 Gray, *French Huguenots*, 260.

9 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:356.

Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed), being in accordance with the Word of God, were confessed by the Huguenots. The sixth article sets forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as expounded by the ancient church fathers Hilary, Athanasius, Ambrose, and Cyril.

The French Confession begins to deal with the works of God in Article 7. He is the sovereign Creator of all things visible and invisible. Article 8 declares that God in his providence controls his entire creation, "disposing and ordaining by his sovereign will all that happens in the world." This doctrine is meant to comfort God's children.

Articles 9–11 expound the doctrine of man as God's image. Since Adam's historical fall, all men are totally corrupted by sin in their natures as well as in all of their activities (contrary to the heresy of Pelagius). Man is a rebel against God, but God has graciously chosen to save his elect by his free mercy through Jesus Christ (Article 12).

Articles 13–16 set forth the completeness of the salvation that is provided in Jesus Christ. He is the eternal Son of God who took to himself a human nature by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he is both fully God and fully man in one person (contrary to the heresy of Servetus). In sending his Son, God shows "his love and inestimable goodness towards us."

Articles 17–20 show the work of Christ on behalf of his people. Through Christ's perfect sacrifice alone his people are fully justified and pardoned of all their sins. It is only through Christ's merits, not any of our own, that sinful man is declared righteous by God. Christ, the only mediator between God and man, provides the confident access of his people to the Father. This justified state is realized by faith alone. Faith depends on the free promises of God revealed in his Word by which he "declares and testifies his love to us."

Sanctification by the Holy Spirit is the subject of Articles 21–23. The Spirit enables the elect to believe and persevere in faith to the end. He gives God's people new life and therefore the power to do good works. These works do not merit justification, however, for the elect are acquitted by Christ's atonement alone. The law of God is the

rule of life for the Christian.

Prayer, according to Article 24, is to be offered to God alone through Jesus Christ, our only advocate. Prayer to the saints is contrary to the model of prayer revealed in the Word of God. All other human institutions, such as purgatory, celibacy, indulgences, and works-salvation, are rejected as "imposing a yoke upon the conscience."

Articles 25–28 demonstrate the importance of the church. The church is instituted by Christ's authority and ordered so as to provide the "ministry and preaching of the Word and sacraments." All Christians are to submit to Christ in the church. Only churches that are faithful to the Word and promote growth in their practice of it are true churches; even such churches are prone to be imperfect and harbor hypocrites in their midst. Because the "pure Word of God is banished" from the "papal assemblies," they are not true churches.

Biblical church government (Articles 29–33) establishes the offices of pastors, overseers, and deacons. All pastors are equally under the "one head, one only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ." No one should appoint himself to the offices of the church. Those men who are recognized as qualified and elected to office by the church should govern wisely and not according to human inventions.

The sacraments (Articles 34–38) are "added to the Word" as aids to confirm and seal God's grace in Jesus Christ to believers. The new covenant reveals only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Spirit uses these to nourish and strengthen his church through faith.

Articles 39 and 40 declare the civil state to be ordained by God for the restraint of sin. The just magistrate has the power of the sword to "suppress crimes" against the Ten Commandments. Civil rulers exercise a "legitimate and holy authority." Christians should therefore submit to, honor, and reverence them by obeying their laws and paying taxes, even if the authorities themselves are unbelievers.

The text of the Confession of La Rochelle is peppered with Scripture references, demonstrating the seriousness of the Huguenot effort to ensure

that their beliefs were “decided by the Word of God.”¹⁰ It is praiseworthy that their effort to remain faithful to God’s Word became a matter for which they were willing to die. In the dedication of the confession to King Henry IV, the king is reminded “of the persecutions that we have suffered, and suffer daily, for wishing to live in the purity of the Gospel and in peace with our own consciences.... And this is the only reason, Sire, why the executioners’ hands have been stained so often with the blood of your poor subjects, who, sparing not their lives to maintain this same Confession of Faith, have shown to all that they were moved by some other spirit than that of men, who naturally care more for their own peace and comfort than for the honor and glory of God.”¹¹

The French Confession of Faith is a fine summary of what has historically been called Calvinism. And since it was essentially penned by the very man whose name has become associated with that faith, our notion of what was distinctive about Calvin’s theology needs to be revised, if not entirely corrected. Calvin was not merely interested in “double predestination,” as many have unfairly characterized him. He focused on the larger idea of God’s greatness and glory manifested in his marvelous sovereign grace toward needy sinners. Hence Calvin was interested in the totality of God’s self-revelation in Scripture. And though Calvin certainly believed that man is a depraved sinner, he also believed that man redeemed by Christ finds his true humanity and potential realized as the image-bearer of God. In short, Calvin submitted his great intellect to the whole counsel of God. And such is the religion our forefathers in New Rochelle brought to these shores in the late seventeenth century.

The Church in New Rochelle

It was quite appropriate for New Rochelle to be named after its French sister city since fifteen

10 “Dedication to the King,” which begins the French Confession of Faith.

11 Ibid.

of the forty-two original families in New Rochelle were natives of La Rochelle, and fifteen more families came from within a twenty-five-mile radius of that stronghold of French Calvinism.¹² In any case, all of the original settlers of New Rochelle were French Calvinists.

From the beginning, the Huguenot settlers demonstrated that their lives centered around their religion. William Waldron, in his book *The Huguenots of Westchester*, notes, “It is much to the credit of the Huguenots in New Rochelle that under all difficulties they attended to the interests of the church.”¹³ Even the layout of the early settlement was indicative of the centrality of their faith. In 1727 Huguenot Pastor Pierre Stoupe remarked in a letter that there were “about a dozen houses round the church.”¹⁴

The year after their arrival in New Rochelle (1689), the Huguenots settled their first pastor, the Rev. David de Bonrepos, D.D. He had come to America with refugees from France.

Somewhere between 1692 and 1697, the first wooden church building in New Rochelle was erected near the Old Boston Post Road, close to the site of the present Trinity Church. It is believed that in the interim the early congregation met in the Guion house on Bonnefoy Point (presently Hudson Park).¹⁵

In 1695 the church called its second pastor, the Rev. Daniel Bondet, A.M. Born in France in 1652, he studied divinity in Geneva under the famous Calvinist theologian Francis Turretin, who taught theology there from 1653 until his death in 1687. Turretin’s influential, systematic, three-volume theology, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, was published in 1688. This became the basic theological textbook in Princeton (New Jersey) Theological Seminary until Charles Hodge’s three-

12 Peter Steven Gannon, “Our Huguenot Foundation” (unpublished paper, 1988), 5.

13 Waldron, *Huguenots of Westchester*, 51.

14 Ibid., 34.

15 Henry Darlington, Jr., “The Significance of New Rochelle as a Huguenot Settlement,” in *Huguenot Refugees in the Settling of Colonial America* (New York: Huguenot Society of America, 1985), 237.

volume work superseded it in the late nineteenth century.

Bondet was widely known for his work with the Indians of eastern New England around Boston. Governor Stoughton and the Reverends Increase and Cotton Mather commended him for his “faithfulness . . . industry and . . . unblemished life.”¹⁶ As a missionary for the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, under the Church of England, Bondet came to New Rochelle.

In 1709 Bondet led all but two members of the Huguenot church in New Rochelle to conform to the Church of England, the established church of the Province of New York. This congregation became the forerunner of the present Trinity Episcopal Church on Huguenot Street. Those few who did not conform continued as a French Calvinist congregation, out of which grew the present Presbyterian Church of New Rochelle on Pintard Avenue.

The record indicates that the reason for conformity to Anglicanism was purely practical. The small Huguenot congregation was unable to pay its pastor a living wage. Bondet was an Anglican minister, and the funding from his denomination’s “Venerable Society” solved the monetary problem.¹⁷

In 1710–11 Bondet oversaw the building of a thirty-foot by forty-foot stone edifice near the site of the present Trinity Church. Every member contributed to the cause: “Even the females carried stones in their hands and mortar in their aprons to finish the sacred temple.”¹⁸ The mural on the lobby wall of the present New Rochelle Post Office depicts this scene of industry and dedication—a clear example of the Huguenots’ devotion to the church of their Lord.

In 1723 Rev. Pierre Stoupe, A.M., replaced the deceased Bondet. Stoupe, born in 1680, had also studied divinity in Geneva. He was pastor until

16 Gabriel P. Disosway, *The Earliest Churches of New York and Its Vicinity* (New York: James G. Gregory, 1865), 262.

17 *Ibid.*, 262–63.

18 *Ibid.*, 264.

his death in 1760, when Michael Houdin took over until his death in 1766.

Meanwhile, the little French Calvinistic church continued to worship with support from the Huguenot church in New York City.

A perusal of Seacord’s *Biographical Sketches and Index of the Huguenot Settlers of New Rochelle 1687–1776* reveals how deeply involved the early settlers of New Rochelle were in their two churches.

Calvinism and the Conformity in New Rochelle

As we have seen, the Huguenots were confessional Calvinists, and they brought this faith to New Rochelle. The two congregations that emerged from the conformity of the majority to the English church in 1709 were both doctrinally Calvinistic. As Darlington observes, “The Church of England was the established church of the Province of New York. In those days the church was more Calvinistic than it has been ever since the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century.”¹⁹ Due to this confessional similarity, combined with the fact that the Anglican church was the established church of the English colonies, most Huguenot churches throughout the colonies conformed to the English church.²⁰ The New Rochelle church was no exception.

Pastor Moulinars of the French church in New York City, who also ministered in the French church in New Rochelle, objected that the English church was as similar to despised Rome as “two fish.”²¹ The similarities that disturbed him the most were probably in the areas of church government and liturgy.²² In any case, he and the dissenting French church in New Rochelle strongly opposed the conformity of 1709. This resistance caused many problems during the ministry of the

19 Darlington, “Significance of New Rochelle,” 238.

20 Gray, *French Huguenots*, 253–54 (cf. South Carolina Act of 1706; most French churches in the colonies conformed to the English Church).

21 Disosway, *Earliest Churches*, 266.

22 *Ibid.*

Anglican Pastor Bondet (1695–1723).

Moulinars's predecessor in the New York City church, Pastor Paul Roux, had taken a different view. He believed the schism between the two Reformed churches in New Rochelle was a scandal. Since his consistory agreed with the separation of the New Rochelle French church, however, Pastor Roux was dismissed and replaced by Moulinars.²³

Pastor Roux's acceptance of conformity was characteristic of Calvin's advice in favor of not separating from the English church because of the Reformed doctrine expressed in the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles. In 1764 the French consistory of New York City expressed a mediating position when it declared, "We cannot change the form of government of our church. Not that we do not consider the Anglican Church a true church of Jesus Christ but out of respect for our predecessors."²⁴ On one hand, it was understood that it would be wrong for the Huguenots to separate from the English church. On the other hand, one might in good conscience maintain the Huguenot form of government and worship and refuse to conform without going to Moulinars's extreme of rejecting the validity of the English congregation.

Examples of Calvinism in New Rochelle

One of the most fruitful primary sources of the beliefs of the New Rochelle Huguenots is found in a collection of manuscript sermons written in French by the successor of Pastor Bondet, Pastor Pierre Stoupe, and now located in the library of the Huguenot Society of America in New York City. The fact that Pastor Stoupe took the time to write the complete text of all of his sermons in longhand is a testimony to the importance he placed on preaching of the Word.

Stoupe's theology was no doubt strongly in-

23 Ibid., 265–66.

24 Alfred V. Whittmeyer, ed., *Registers of the Births, Marriages and Deaths of the Eglise Francoise a la Nouvelle York from 1688 to 1804* (New York: Huguenot Society of America, 1886). Introduction, xlix.

fluenced by Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (1688). He would have been exposed to this influential work of systematic theology during his studies in the divinity school in Geneva, where Turretin was a professor until his death in 1687. The strongly logical character and order of his sermons indicates this. Stoupe's confessional Calvinism is even more obviously confirmed by the fact that his sermons were biblical expositions of Calvin's Catechism of the Church of Geneva, first published in French in 1541, which was "divided into fifty-five lessons, for the fifty-two Sundays of the year and the three great festivals." The catechism begins with a question similar to the first question of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism (1647):

Q. What is the chief end of human life?

A. To know God by whom men were created.²⁵

On Sunday, August 7, 1737, in New Rochelle, Pastor Stoupe expounded the twenty-seventh lesson of the catechism, which deals with the fourth commandment. His text was Exodus 20:8–11. Stoupe explained that man's Sabbath rest is patterned after God's rest following the six days of creation. God's people are to follow this pattern because he is the "Sovereign Legislator." In the new covenant the Sabbath is changed from the seventh day to the first day because Christ has come and calls his church to celebrate his glorious resurrection, which signals the fulfillment of all the old covenant types and shadows. Hence, though the ceremonial distinctives of the fourth commandment are passed away with Christ's coming, the substance of the commandment is continued in public worship on the Lord's Day. The New Testament examples of our Lord and his apostles (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2) as well as the testimony and practice of the early fathers, such as St. Augustine and Justin Martyr, establish Sunday as the proper day of worship for Christians. Retention of the seventh-day worship would be a rebellious step backwards in the history of redemption, nullifying

25 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:467–71.

the “glorious accomplishment” of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath. The “new Sabbath” is a day of rich blessing, which believers gladly keep as “our most sacred day.”

Stoupe’s sermon is full of Scripture references. It is notably God- and Christ-centered, clearly articulated, and very practical. Several decades later, sixty members of the Venerable Society testified that “his preaching is much to our satisfaction and edification, his doctrine being very sound and his pronunciation full, clear, and intelligible.”²⁶

That the New Rochelle Huguenots took Sabbath worship seriously is evidenced by the fact that several Sundays a year (probably for the Lord’s Supper when a minister wasn’t available in the local French congregation) they walked, shoes in hand, twenty-three miles to the French church in New York City.²⁷

The last wills and testaments of New Rochelle Huguenots clearly evince their strong religious convictions. These documents prove to be much more revealing than modern wills, as the wide variety of wording indicates that they expressed the actual beliefs of their authors.

On April 17, 1694, John Machett, a “ship carpenter” from New Rochelle, testified in his will, “In Primis I Commend my soul to God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.”²⁸ He was quoting the Apostles’ Creed.

On February 27, 1790, Jacob Coutant, a chairmaker in New Rochelle, began his will by declaring, “First of all, I give and recommend my soul into the hand and keeping of my most merciful Creator hoping for Salvation through the Merits and Suffering of my blessed Redeemer.” He requested his body to be buried “in a Christian like manner,” in the hope that “at the General Resurrection I shall receive the same again by the

²⁶ Disosway, *Earliest Churches*, 269.

²⁷ Lucien J. Fosdick, *The French Blood in America* (New York: Rochelle Press Almanac, 1880), 236; Waldron, *Huguenots of Westchester*, 43–44.

²⁸ Westchester County, N.Y., *Record Book of Deeds*, Liber B, 173.

mighty power of God.”²⁹

In a newspaper article written in 1885, Charles Lindsley, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in New Rochelle, related the story of the Dubois family, who moved from New Rochelle to the wilderness of New Paltz in the early 1700s. While Dr. Dubois was away, his wife and daughter were captured by the Indians. Tied to a tree and about to be burned, the two women began to sing French psalms, a practice that persecuted Huguenots in France had often resorted to in similar circumstances. So amazed were the Indians by this behavior that they ceased their planned execution—and Mr. Dubois soon came to the rescue. Lindsley went on to record the fact that “many of the children of these sturdy old defenders of the faith of Calvin and the early reformers are today among the most zealous and consistent members of the various Protestant churches, both here in New Rochelle” and elsewhere.³⁰ Lindsley himself was probably a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, which in his day was still a bastion of American Calvinism.

The Decline of Calvinism and the Impact of Thomas Paine

In the eighteenth century, a strong force was at work that consciously undermined the Christian faith of the heroic Huguenots. Known as the Enlightenment, it was a movement that sought to find truth based on reason alone, independent of the revelation of God in Scripture. Its initial form, known as deism, posited a god who created the “laws of nature” and left the world to run on its own. At its heart, Jesus Christ was rejected as the divine Redeemer of sinners.

In the late nineteenth century, Pastor Lindsley noted the fruits of the Enlightenment in the decline of Huguenot faith in the New York area. After extolling the ardent Christian faith and dedication of the early Huguenots, he lamented,

²⁹ Westchester County, N.Y., *Record Book of Wills*, Liber B, 58.

³⁰ Charles E. Lindsley, “The Huguenot Settlement of New Rochelle,” *New Rochelle Pioneer*, Sept. 5, 1885.

“It is a matter for regret that some of these, while surrounded by all the means and facilities for religious worship, have so far degenerated from the pious practices of their forefathers as to be seldom or never found within the walls of any church, or any denomination, upon the Christian Sabbath. They have inherited the names without some of the highest virtues of their ancestors.”³¹

It is ironic that New Rochelle is also known as the home of Thomas Paine. He is an excellent example and an important perpetrator of the “new faith” of the Enlightenment.³²

In his book *The Age of Reason*, Paine declared his radical departure from the Christian faith embraced by the Huguenots. For Paine, creation was his Bible.³³ “My own mind is my own church,”³⁴ he declared confidently. There are “three frauds: mystery, miracle and prophecy.”³⁵ The book of Genesis, according to Paine, is “an anonymous book of stories, fables and traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies.”³⁶ “The New Testament is a forgery of the councils of Nice and Laodicea, the faith founded thereon, delusion and falsehood,”³⁷ he stated. The majority of Paine’s book is a virulent denial of the integrity, authenticity and authority of the sixty-six books of the Bible. As a deist, Paine believed in God as Creator, but that was, according to him, the extent of his creed. “I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life,”³⁸ he said.

31 Ibid.

32 Robert Bolton, *A Guide to New Rochelle and Lower Westchester* (1842; repr., Harrison, NY: Harbor Hill Books, 1976), 28–34. Bolton not only reveals Paine’s virulent opposition to Christian faith, but also is critical of the reasoning of *Common Sense* and *The Age of Reason*, especially as he contrasts Paine’s radical assertions with the wiser position of the British statesman Sir Edmund Burke, whose support of the American War of Independence was prudently cautious of its tendency towards a pure democracy, which was at the heart of his criticism of the French Revolution.

33 Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, in *The Complete Religious Works of Thomas Paine* (New York: Eckler, n.d.), 29, 67, 186.

34 Ibid., 6.

35 Ibid., 174.

36 Ibid., 89.

37 Ibid., 190.

38 Ibid., 5.

Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death and historical resurrection, fall into the category of pagan myth for Paine.³⁹ He did believe in the afterlife, however, but hoped to achieve happiness in it by “doing good,”⁴⁰ instead of through faith in the Redeemer. Bolton testifies that on his deathbed Paine cried out for help from the Lord Jesus.⁴¹

“The religion of Deism is superior to the Christian religion,”⁴² wrote Paine. “He that believes in the story of Christ is an infidel.”⁴³ “As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me as a species of Atheism—a sort of religious denial of God.”⁴⁴

Paine curiously wished to retain much of the morality of the Bible while emphatically denying its supernatural redemptive religion. This, of course, was true of other prominent eighteenth-century American deists, such as Thomas Jefferson (see *The Jefferson Bible*). As a deist, however, Paine was unique in his blatant denial of the historic Christian faith.

The great mistake of Paine, like Jefferson, was his hope to retain biblical ethics without special revelation and its supernaturalism. In radically denying the foundation of Scripture as God’s infallible Word, however, the superstructure of Christian morality is doomed to collapse. *The Age of Reason* was a virulent attack on the Christian faith, and one that we should not gloss over, however much we may admire Paine for stirring popular sentiment to favor the American War for Independence. The saddest result of denials like Paine’s is not the loss of Christian ethics, but the loss of the only narrative that gives life meaning and offers the hope of the good news that God has invaded history with the redeeming power of his Son’s perfect loving and just life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection as the first born of a new humanity.

39 Ibid., 9.

40 Ibid., 262.

41 Bolton, *A Guide to New Rochelle*, 34.

42 Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 404.

43 Ibid., 249.

44 Ibid., 34.

The Huguenots would not have been sympathetic with Paine's religion at all, as he was not with theirs. The Huguenots rightly believed that divine revelation (i.e., God's written Word) is a divinely inspired account of the historical incarnation of Jesus Christ. Their courageous lives were motivated by this central concern of their religious beliefs. I think it safe to say that the Huguenots would be saddened by the lack of hearty biblical faith among us today. In celebrating their settlement of New Rochelle they would want—and expect—their belief in the God of the Bible to be memorialized above all else. ❧

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A Primer on Vatican II

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by Danny E. Olinger

In the last major review article written before his death in early 2009, former Missouri Synod Lutheran minister turned Roman Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus examined two books about the history and continuing meaning of the Second Vatican Council.² The first was John O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II*,³ and the second was *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, edited by Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering.⁴ The two

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=217&issue_id=58.

2 Richard John Neuhaus, "What Really Happened at Vatican II," *First Things* (October 2008): 23–27.

3 John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007).

4 *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering (London: Oxford University Press, 2007).

books, according to Neuhaus, represent the main lines of the disagreement within Catholicism on the meaning and lasting impact of Vatican II. Both view Vatican II as a watershed event in confronting modern science, historical scholarship, and the world, but they differ on the significance.

O'Malley presents the progressive understanding of Vatican II, that the Council was more than the sixteen documents it produced. It was a sea change in regard to the spirit and theology of Roman Catholicism, an outworking of Pope John XXIII's stated goal at the Council of *aggiornamento* or "updating." New definitions deriving from a new spirit were implemented for the Church in its worship, ecumenical relations, and outreach to the world.

Neuhaus saw O'Malley spinning a marvelously interesting tale: a sociological, psychological, and linguistic study of the workings of the Council that made for entertaining reading.⁵ However, Neuhaus also observed that O'Malley "comes very close to saying explicitly what is frequently implied: that the innovationists practiced subterfuge, and they got away with it."⁶ Neuhaus summed up O'Malley's argument: "The council was a radical break from tradition and proposed what is, in effect, a different Catholicism."⁷

On the opposite side, Lamb and Levering maintain that Vatican II reconciled Christian faith with modern science through a hermeneutic of reform, not through a rupture from past teaching. The "spirit of the council" approach of O'Malley is an indifferent matter when it comes to understanding the legacy of Vatican II. What counts is what the council actually said.

Neuhaus strongly endorsed Lamb and Levering's view, and argued that they held the undisputable trump card in the whole debate—they had Pope Benedict XVI on their side. In his essay "A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council," Benedict XVI writes that the problems

5 Neuhaus, 25.

6 *Ibid.*, 27.

7 *Ibid.*, 27.

in Vatican II's "implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face-to-face and quarreled with each other."⁸ The hermeneutic of discontinuity has caused confusion and is to be rejected. The hermeneutic of reform is not only a correct understanding of how to interpret Vatican II, but also is quietly bearing fruit.⁹

Even with Benedict's approval of the conservative hermeneutic of reform approach, Neuhaus recognized that nothing was simple regarding the interpretation of Vatican II. He acknowledged O'Malley's observation that both the "traditionalists" and the "progressives" pivoted before, during, and after Vatican II. Traditionalists entered the Council reluctant to change and often decried the novel character of the Council while it was taking place. Once the Council ended, however, they immediately changed their tune and stressed the Council's continuity. Progressives insisted before and during the sessions that they were working in continuity with the church's tradition. Once the Council ended, they stressed the newness of Vatican II's declaration.¹⁰

Evangelical Protestants also find themselves split over Vatican II. They agree with O'Malley that real change occurred. They cite the opening up of the Bible in Catholic worship, the ecumenism in the trenches of cultural causes ("The Manhattan Declaration"), and doctrinal statements such as "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." But, like Lamb and Levering, they conclude that Catholicism has not changed. The pope is still the head of the church, tradition is just as important as Scripture, and believing in justification by faith alone is still anathema.

If Roman Catholics themselves are deeply divided over the significance and meaning of Vatican II, and Evangelicals waver back and forth in reaction, what should be the understanding of Reformed believers? Many do not even know where

8 Pope Benedict XVI, "A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council," pp. ix-x in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*.

9 Benedict, ix-x.

10 Neuhaus, 27.

to start, much less on which side they should come down, or even if it makes a difference.

Reformed believers should be neither ignorant of nor indifferent to the impact of Vatican II upon the Roman Catholic Church. O'Malley is correct when he asserts that Vatican II changed the spirit and theology of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, Vatican II has further removed Rome from a biblically based Christianity and has necessitated a new understanding of Catholicism.¹¹

The hope of this article is to serve as a primer on Vatican II, with the dual purpose of defending O'Malley's thesis and providing a Reformed critique. The article will look at the historical setting of the Council, the workings of the Council, the documents that the Council produced, and the aftermath.

Historical Setting

At the start of the twentieth century, Rome was dealing with its own modernist uprising. In such books as *The Religion of Israel* (1901) and *The Gospel and the Church* (1902), Catholic priest Alfred Loisy sought reconciliation between critical methodology and Catholic doctrine. Loisy openly admitted that he had lost all faith in orthodoxy, such that from the Apostles' Creed he could only affirm that Jesus suffered under Pontus Pilate. Loisy also lambasted any notion of divine revelation, any belief that God had revealed himself in his Word.¹²

In response in 1907, Pope Pius X issued the papal decree *Lamentabili* and the papal encyclical *Pascendi*, both of which condemned the methodology of modernism as anti-Christian. A year later Loisy was excommunicated, and in 1910 the "Anti-

11 This has been the consistent argument of Reformed theologian and critic of Catholicism Robert Strimple. See Strimple, "The Relationship between Scripture and Tradition in Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (Fall 1977): 22-38; "Roman Catholic Theology: Thirty Years after Vatican II," *New Horizons* 13 (October 1992): 3-6; and, most significantly, "Roman Catholic Theology Today," in *Roman Catholicism*, ed. John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 85-117.

12 Roger Aubert, "Modernism," in *Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 971.

Modernist” oath became a requirement for those entering the Roman priesthood.¹³ The message was clear that a denial of traditional Catholic teaching among the clergy would not be tolerated.

The hostility towards modernism seemed to abate with the pontificate of Pius XII, whose 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* granted permission for the limited use of new literary, philological, and historical methods of biblical exegesis. “At points,” says O’Malley, “it hinted at something like *aggiornamento*.”¹⁴

What did not hint at an updating, however, was Pius XII’s 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*, which condemned the multiplying theological falsehoods and novelties that were threatening to undermine Catholic teaching. Pius XII was particularly concerned about loose views circulating on ecclesiology (one could be in the church outside of communion with the pope) and creation (the advocacy of evolution). The crackdown that resulted from *Humani Generis* put such theologians as Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Karl Rahner on the forbidden to publish or censored list.¹⁵ Behind the placid façade that Catholicism presented to the world, O’Malley writes, “a clash of epic proportions was waiting to happen.”¹⁶

Pius XII’s successor, John XXIII, did not wait even three months before announcing in January 1959 that he intended to convoke a council. He declared that while there must be conformity with the past, doctrine should be made more intelligible, given advances in modern methods of research and philosophical thought.

Workings of the Council

In his opening speech on October 11, 1962, John XXIII immediately set the tone for the Council by proclaiming that, rather than condemning error with severity, the validating of the Church’s

teaching should be done through the medicine of mercy. He elaborated: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the *depositum fidei* is one thing, and the manner of presenting is another.”¹⁷ Along with the Council speaking in a softer, more positive tone, John XXIII also advocated “collegiality,” the bishops working together with the Roman Curia.¹⁸ In order to maintain the peace of the Church, three issues—clerical celibacy, birth control, and the reform of the Curia—were withheld from consideration because of their potential divisiveness.¹⁹

John Courtney Murray, whose essays appeared in the *New Yorker* under the pseudonym Father Xavier Rynne,²⁰ declared that the “development of doctrine” was the issue under all the issues at Vatican II.²¹ The standard line in Catholicism was to affirm John Henry Newman’s 1845 *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, in which Newman attempted to show that the teaching of the church could evolve and yet remain true to its historical roots at the same time.²² However, the reality for Vatican II was that proper development was what the magisterium defined as proper development.

Thus, a power struggle emerged between the Curia and the bishops as a whole. When the composition of the ten conciliar commissions was announced at the first plenary meeting of the

17 Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 23. Alberigo’s unparalleled five-volume *History of Vatican II*, ed. J. A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2006) is the major source of historical study on Vatican II.

18 The Roman Curia is the name given to the collection of secretariats, congregations, tribunals, councils, offices, committees, and commissions that officially assist the Pope in his governing of the Roman Catholic Church. See Richard McBrien, *The Church* (NY: HarperOne, 2008), 461.

19 O’Malley, 6.

20 The essays are collected in Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968).

21 O’Malley, 9.

22 Catholic theologian Gregory Baum points out the historical and pastoral weaknesses of Newman’s position in *New Horizon* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972). Baum comments, “If the present development, partly endorsed by Vatican II, were simply the passage from the implicit to the explicit, why would it give rise to so much conflict in the Church?” (26).

13 The oath remained in place until its abrogation after Vatican II in 1967. See O’Malley, 70.

14 O’Malley, 84.

15 Ibid., 87.

16 Ibid., 89.

Council on October 13, 1962, the list of nominees suggested by the Curia was challenged. Reading a prepared statement, Cardinal Lienart moved to delay the vote until the commissioners got to know one another. Lienart's motion received overwhelming support, and a message was sent that this was not going to be a council dictated by the Curia alone.²³ Vatican II would be marked by the doctrine of collegiality, a move that John XXIII supported.

The other important up-front decision was John XXIII's granting to the Secretariat the status of a full commission, which lessened again the powerful reach of the Curia.²⁴ After John XXIII's death on June 3, 1963, the new pope, Paul VI, continued his predecessor's vision for the Council.

Documents

During its sessions over four years, Vatican II produced sixteen documents, four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations.²⁵ While disagreements might take place about the proper understanding of Vatican II's legacy and continued teaching, there is universal agreement that it is around the four constitutions—*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (On the Sacred Liturgy), *Lumen Gentium* (On the Church), *Dei Verbum* (On Divine Revelation), and *Gaudium et Spes* (On the Church in the Modern World)²⁶—that any study of the Council must revolve.²⁷ The constitutions possess the highest rank and provide the interpretative key for the proper exegesis of the decrees and declarations.

Sacrosanctum Concilium (On the Sacred Liturgy)

The opening topic of Vatican II was liturgy,

23 O'Malley, 97. See also McBrien, 161.

24 O'Malley, 116.

25 The documents of Vatican II are available at www.vatican.va.

26 The naming of the documents comes from the first words in the Latin text. This explains why, for instance, the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* is given the title "Gaudium et Spes" ("The joys and hopes"). See Edward Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony's Press), 66.

27 O'Malley, 2.

and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was the first document issued.²⁸ Increasingly the use of Latin in the liturgy had caused concern. Prayers were in a dead language that many in the church could not understand. The Mass was conducted in Latin with the priest's back to the congregation. The vast majority of bishops attending Vatican II, then, were eager to move worship services into modern times with the use of the vernacular.

Sacrosanctum Concilium took an ambiguous position on the use of Latin, but provided the higher principle that full and active participation by all in the liturgy was paramount. When the vote was taken on Nov. 14, 1962, to approve the document, 2,169 men voted yes and 46 voted no.²⁹

Dei Verbum (On Divine Revelation)

Dei Verbum represented a break with Catholic past regarding the doctrine of revelation. The opening draft of *Dei Verbum* put before the Council by the staunchly conservative Doctrinal Commission repeated the traditional position. The majority at the Council, however, overwhelmingly voiced their displeasure with the document, arguing that it was defensive in tone and suspicious of biblical scholarship. The document also was criticized for retaining a two-source theory of revelation and a view of revelation that was propositional.³⁰ The debate was whether the document could be salvaged with major revisions or if the commission needed to start anew. John XXIII, who did not favor the document's traditional understanding, ordered that the document be withdrawn after a procedural motion to remove it failed.³¹

A new mixed commission was appointed, and it set about the task of rewriting the document with three main issues involved: (1) the relationship of Scripture and tradition, (2) the inerrancy

28 The reason that the Council proceeded first with the discussion of the liturgy was that it was the draft document deemed to be in the best shape at the opening of the Council. See Hahnenberg, 13ff.

29 Hahnenberg, 16, 26.

30 Harrington, 10.

31 Hahnenberg, 28.

of the Bible, and (3) the historical nature of the Gospels.³² For the next three years, work on *Dei Verbum* continued until it was approved and promulgated on November 18, 1965.

The final text reflected the triumph of progressives in the Church. By moving away from revelation as propositional truth—seeing the Bible as giving information about God—to an inspired testimony to the living Word of God (Jesus), the Church no longer needed to protect the Bible from accusations of historical or scientific error.³³ *Dei Verbum* declared that Scripture is inspired, but inerrancy only concerns the religious message and not the historical information conveyed by its human authors.³⁴ The Gospels may be accurate in portraying Jesus as resurrected from the dead, but they also may be wrong when they state that Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper when he was anointed. What was at issue was no longer the nature of inspiration but the nature of revelation.³⁵

In explaining the nature of revelation, *Dei Verbum* affirms the Catholic belief that the Bible and the church are one, excluding the Protestant belief in the sole authority of Scripture.³⁶ That is,

32 Ibid., 29.

33 The rejected first draft had maintained that the Bible is without error in all things religious and profane. Of the final document, Hahnenberg comments, “DV avoids dividing the Bible into sacred and profane truths, and says instead that it depends on one’s perspective. The whole Bible is without error—but with an eye to salvation, not with an eye to historical or scientific accuracy” (32–33).

34 And yet, even the veracity of the religious message could be questioned because *Dei Verbum* declared that the entire Bible was time conditioned, and thus, human and flawed. Post-Vatican II theologians such as Karl Rahner, Hans Kung, and a young Joseph Ratzinger would recognize this time conditioning, that all words partake of historical limitations. See Strimple, “The Relationship between Scripture and Tradition in Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology.”

35 Strimple, “Revelation,” 95.

36 *Dei Verbum*’s full recognition of the historicity or time-conditioned character of all human writings—including the Bible—and its denial of *Sola Scriptura* make Mark Noll and Carol Nystrom’s assertion in *Is the Reformation Over?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) that ecumenically minded Roman Catholics and Evangelicals “trust equally in the full inspiration and final authority of the Bible” (231) rather empty on both accounts. Not only does *Dei Verbum* deny full inspiration, but it places the church above the Scripture in its interpretation. The

Catholicism does not restrict divine revelation to the biblical text.³⁷ Revealed truth comes through the one channel of Scripture and tradition together, neither of which can function without the other.³⁸

Since certainty is not to be found in Scripture alone—the doctrine of the formal insufficiency of Scripture³⁹—the authentic interpretation belongs to the bishops with the pope (the magisterium). The way that *Dei Verbum* attempts to blunt the transcendence of the magisterium above Scripture is to declare that the magisterium is the servant of divine revelation and can only teach what is drawn from the single deposit of faith constituted by divine revelation.⁴⁰

Lamb and Levering see *Dei Verbum*’s genius as offering a more nuanced position, one that recaptures the church’s ancient understanding of revelation, but putting it into a more textured historical framework, thus integrating fresh exegetical insights but still avoiding the pitfalls of modern rationalism.⁴¹ Vatican II historian John Komonchak writes, “Vatican II vindicated the historical-critical approach against the suspicions of the dogmatists—a fact most often pointed out as the real achievement of *Dei Verbum*, particularly when its history is thought to end with its promulgation.”⁴²

Reformed position is that the Bible is fully inspired and that the unique authority of Scripture rests on the truth that Scripture’s interpretation is not simply the first interpretation, but God’s interpretation.

37 Harrington, 24.

38 *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

39 Strimple explains, “The ‘formal insufficiency’ of Scripture means that the Bible is not sufficient in itself to give anyone a knowledge of God’s will because that cannot be understood apart from the authoritative understanding and interpretation of the Scripture. The debate in the Roman Catholic Church concerns only the question of the *material* sufficiency or insufficiency of the Scripture. All are agreed that no one can understand revelation except through the Church and through tradition.” See Strimple, “Scripture,” 24–25.

40 *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

41 Lamb and Levering, 8–9.

42 John Komonchak, “Vatican II as an Event,” in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007), 42. Reformed theologians have been less enthusiastic about *Dei Verbum*. Robert Strimple says pointedly, “Scripture in the Protestant sense has not been affirmed”

Lumen Gentium (On the Church)

Lumen Gentium changed the Roman Catholic philosophy of the church. No longer would the Roman Catholic Church be seen as the perfect society.⁴³ Rather than being against the world, the Roman Catholic Church would be in the world. Protestants were no longer heretics, but departed brethren.

More time in the Council sessions was spent on debating *Lumen Gentium* than any other document, and it went through three drafts from 1962 until its approval in late 1964.⁴⁴ Understanding the church as an institution (one belongs to the church) was replaced with understanding that the church is a mystery or sacrament (one participates in the life of the church). The church might embody the presence of the triune God, but it does not yet possess it in fullness, an error that led to the triumphalistic ecclesiology of the past.⁴⁵

But, lest one think that Catholicism totally abandoned its exclusive stance, *Lumen Gentium* still maintained that in her bosom was where salvation was found. Neuhaus declares, *Vatican II* teaches that “if one believes that the Catholic Church is what she says she is, then one cannot be saved except by entering into and remaining in full communion with the Catholic Church.”⁴⁶

In a close vote (1,114 to 1,074), the Council also determined to include in *Lumen Gentium* a Marian chapter. The debate was not whether to say anything about the Virgin Mary, but whether a separate document concerning her should be constructed.⁴⁷ *Lumen Gentium* teaches that Mary does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ but on the contrary fosters it. That is, Mary always includes Jesus, and Jesus always includes Mary.⁴⁸

(“Scripture,” 101).

43 Alberigo, 33.

44 Hahnenberg, 40.

45 McBrien, 165.

46 “RJN 12.23.05 The 16th Century . . .,” *First Things Online*, December 26, 2005.

47 Hahnenberg, 51.

48 *Lumen Gentium*, no. 52–69.

Gaudium et Spes (On the Church in the Modern World)

If *Lumen Gentium* treated the nature of the Church, then *Gaudium et Spes* dealt with the mission of the Church.⁴⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* intended to demonstrate Catholicism’s solidarity with humanity in regard to the problems evident in the modern world.⁵⁰ The debate at the Council was not whether the Church should address the world, but how it should do so. The French representatives believed the proper method was dialogue, while the German representatives urged proclaiming Christ. The “dialogue” proponents emphasized the incarnational aspects of creation, whereas the “proclamation” proponents emphasized sin and the cross. The Council determined in *Gaudium et Spes* that the Church can do both.⁵¹

In addressing the world, the Church cannot impose upon others a law demanding that they vote a certain way. But, it does have a “responsibility to address the whole of humanity on issues that are of concern to all.”⁵²

William Shea puts into perspective the newness of this teaching in Catholic history. Since the fourth century, the Catholic ideal in regard to the church’s place in society was that of a single true church in a single just state. That is, the church must be one with culture. Shea writes, “To put the matter with no subtlety whatsoever, they wanted a society and culture cheek and jowl with the Bishop of Rome, ordering everything and everyone in line behind them. This seems to me the specter that haunted modern popes until John XXIII. For good or ill he let go of the dream.”⁵³

Aftermath

Catholic scholars agree that something new happened at Vatican II. The previous two ecu-

49 Hahnenberg, 56.

50 Alberigo, 25.

51 Hahnenberg, 69.

52 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

53 William M. Shea, “Modernity as a Stimulus of Reconciliation between American Evangelicals and Catholics,” *Horizons* 31.1 (2004): 153.

menical councils—Trent (1545–63) and Vatican I (1869–70)—were legislative and judicial bodies that delivered sharp and unambiguous pronouncements. Vatican II did not meet to confront doctrinal heresy. Its tone was gentle and not sharp, and its pronouncements were often ambiguous and debatable. Protestants were declared separated brethren, although the anathemas of Trent towards any who believed in *sola fide* still stood. Latin was to be preferred in performing the Mass, but, at the same time, communicating in a way that brought active participation to church members was emphasized as paramount. The Church was no longer a perfect society against the world, but a pilgrim people in the world, and yet it had a responsibility to speak to the world about the social problems of the world.

The testimony of many is that such ambiguity left Roman Catholicism in confusion in the decades that followed Vatican II's conclusion. In *A People Adrift*, Peter Steinfels notes that prior to Vatican II “when pastors opinionated politically in their pulpits, parishioners either nodded or nodded off, depending on their preexisting prejudices. Heaven and hell were not at stake.”⁵⁴ After Vatican II, however, politically motivated homilies were common in that the Council had insisted that “this world was a place of God's presence and not a place of preparation for the next.”⁵⁵

Others concluded a general malaise had settled over Catholic proclamation in the post-Vatican era. Peggy Noonan states it well when she comments regarding preaching in the 1980s, “The Catholic Church could not decide if its job was public policy or the redemption of souls so it failed at both, offering pilgrims hungry for sustenance tepid homilies on defense spending. The nation's churches had nothing to say about sin.”⁵⁶

Whether Steinfels's and Noonan's observations remain true, Vatican II did not change Catholicism's position that the church and the Bible are

54 Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 101.

55 Ibid.

56 Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (New York: Random House, 1990), 119.

one. Church power remains magisterial and legislative, not ministerial and declarative. But, Vatican II has added to the problem by adopting historical-critical methodology and discrediting the authority of the Word of God. And yet, Rome feels safe in following this path because it believes infallible teaching rests with the Church. The historical limitations and errors of the Bible should not be a concern because the final word belongs not to the Bible, but to the magisterium speaking through the church. Consequently, the imperative of Rome more than ever remains, “You must obey us.” From the magisterium's ruling there is no appeal, not even to the self-attesting Christ of Scripture.

Some have argued that the triumph of liberalism in Roman Catholicism at Vatican II, particularly with worship in the vernacular, has released the Word of God in that Church. But the questions remain, “What word was released?” and “Who remains authoritative in the church, God or man?”

Those very issues should be of interest particularly to members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), for both were at the forefront of the Presbyterian conflict. Part of the liberal theological agenda in Presbyterianism concerned a belief in the historical unreliability of the Bible. God did not work supernaturally in history. He did not reveal himself perfectly through human authors inspired by his Spirit. Rather, the Bible should be viewed as any other book, written by men and marked by human imperfections.

J. Gresham Machen led those who believed otherwise, that the Bible was different from other books. The Bible was God-breathed and inerrant. Scripture was the direct verbal self-revelation of God, the *ipsissima verba Dei*, the very words of God. Prior to Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church agreed with that assessment of the Bible. It did not afterwards.

But where the PCUSA most directly resembled the teaching of Rome was in its declaration that Machen and others had to obey the declaration to cease in their support of the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions. The question before Machen was whether to obey the voice

of the church speaking through its general assembly or the voice of God speaking in the Bible. The PCUSA declared that its assembly was the official interpreter of the constitution and the Bible, and that members of the Presbyterian Church must obey its decisions fully. Machen appealed to the secondary standard of the PCUSA at that time, the Westminster Confession of Faith. Machen argued that the Bible itself is the final judge for doctrine and life (WCF 1.10), and that the declarations of assemblies and councils are to be received only when they are consistent with the Word of God (WCF 31.3).⁵⁷

This is why Edwin Rian in *The Presbyterian Conflict* argued that Protestantism was the issue at stake with Machen's trial. He stated, "In this difference between the two parties lies the fundamental difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism."⁵⁸ He explained, "Roman Catholicism believes in an infallible Bible, but it adds to this an infallible church as the final interpreter in doctrine and in life."⁵⁹ Protestants, however, believe that the Bible is the supreme judge in faith and practice and all commands of councils must be tested by their adherence to Scripture. Consequently, Rian proclaimed, "The Protestant must obey the voice of God in the Bible rather than the voice of the church speaking through its councils."⁶⁰

The demand upon Machen to submit to the General Assembly's declaration to desist from participation in the Independent Board apart from the Word of God was a denial of the Protestant prin-

ciple that all church power is ministerial ("Thus says the Lord") and declarative. With his defrocking on charges that were based on a magisterial view of church power, Machen knew that the PCUSA had done more than tolerate theological liberalism in its bosom; it had also lost its Reformational heritage, its adherence to the principle of *sola Scriptura*.

Now, nearly seventy-five years later, those same issues are evident in modern-day Catholicism. Rather than bringing Rome closer to a biblically based Christianity, Vatican II has moved it further away. ❧

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57 Westminster Confession of Faith 31.3, "All synods or councils, since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both." Westminster Confession of Faith 1.10, "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture."

58 Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992), 144.

59 Rian, 144.

60 Ibid.

✦ Servant Life

The Uniqueness and Challenges of the Minister's Wife

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by Ginger Graham Dennison

Pastors' wives, in commiserating together, will sometimes agree on one thing: they are no different than anyone else in the congregation. They have no special responsibilities, no different obligations, no uniqueness. In fact, when asked what it's like to be a pastor's wife, they will reply, "I'm *not* a pastor's wife! I'm just a wife, no matter what my husband does for a living."

There is truth, but also obligation in that declaration. The truth lies in the fact that your primary obligation *is* to serve your husband and help train your children to be obedient. The obligation is that as followers of Christ, *all* Christians are called to lives of service. Matthew 20:25-26, 28 states, "Jesus called them [the disciples] to Himself, and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" Christ's life is the paradigm for our lives, whether pastors, elders, or laymen. The authority our husbands have, however, gives

them greater opportunities and more responsibility in serving, and as wives of those in authority, we also have greater opportunities to serve the body of Christ.

An Opportunity to Serve

My encouragement to ministers' wives is this: By the very fact that you are married to a minister, you have unique opportunities to serve, to sacrifice, and sometimes to suffer. But, your husband does not just have any job. He has an ordained office—a position of authority and awesome responsibility given to him through the church by God himself. He carries a heavy burden in preaching God's word accurately and clearly, and in shepherding the sheep. This is how he's been called to serve.

Your role as a suitable helper to a minister will include some things that any wife would do, but other roles are unique to the congregation your husband serves—some things, in a well-established church, by way of "tradition," and others by way of necessity. I would encourage you to embrace each of these obligations with a "joy in serving" attitude.

When you are chafing at the bit, meditate on Romans 12:6–8, 11–13:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: ... if service, in our serving; ... the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.... Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

In the paragraphs to follow, I hope to fill out some these imperatives using my own experience, thoughts I wish I'd had at the time I needed them, along with the input of two younger wives.

Be a Helper to Your Husband

As your husband's helper, there are many ways to lighten his load. Don't make his burden heavier and bring dishonor to his name (and the name of Christ) by your speech or behavior.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=203&issue_id=55.

This seems obvious, but it is easy to belittle him when you're with a group of women who may be criticizing their own husbands. You can instead discourage gossip among women about their husbands, in this way serving your husband and Christ as well.

In positive ways, you can serve him by relieving him of mundane tasks, some of which you may have always considered to be the husband's responsibility.

Understand that he doesn't have a regular nine-to-five job. This may mean you do not understand his schedule—why he's going to a movie in the afternoon or spending time on Facebook (shouldn't he be working on his sermon?!). Every minister handles his schedule differently. If you are blessed to have a regular family dinnertime and he spends adequate time with your family, be thankful. Be understanding. You will learn you don't need to manage his time (in my case, this took a few years!)

Sometimes you need to be his listening ear as he works through problems in a sermon text, or needs to vent about a particular pastoral problem he's having. These times unfortunately may coincide with particularly busy times in your own schedule.

No doubt the most important thing you can do is to pray with and for your husband. You and he will both be targets of Satan over the years. Ministers have been lost to kingdom service by temptations they have been unable to overcome. Pray without ceasing.

Remember You Are Being Observed

You and your family are uniquely positioned in the eyes of the congregation. Instead of fearing or resenting this, embrace it! Consider it a privilege to be able to lead by your own example. Your attitude in attending services and meetings, your demeanor in worship, and the discipline of your children will serve either as a help and encouragement or as a stumbling block to others.

You might consider it a hardship, or a challenge, to be alone with your children during

worship, for example. I grew up with my dad in the pulpit, so sitting by myself with children seemed a normal way of life, but I realize this can be a challenge or cause of suffering to others. Discipline during worship is on your shoulders, although I have heard of pastors who have directed a timely word or two from the pulpit that chastised their offspring—at the same time teaching the congregation a lesson concerning their own children's behavior. Growing up, I could feel my father's eyes on me during the service; woe to me if I misbehaved in church!

Do you have to be at church for every service, meeting, and social event? It may be hard for your husband to convince others to attend if his own family doesn't make an effort to support them, too.

Be Hospitable

Hospitality is an important part of your role as a minister's wife. ("Practice hospitality.") Charlie and I aimed to have each family over once a year. This may not be possible for every pastor's wife or in every church situation. Many other families in the church were also regular in offering hospitality, and when a new family came in the door, they were often invited to Sunday dinner by at least one family. This is so much more effective than a handshake and "come visit us again." If the families in your church are not in the habit of regularly inviting other church families, and especially visitors, into their homes, you need to set the example. Hopefully your elders and other church families will come to see the importance of this, too. True fellowship takes place during the worship services on the Sabbath, but spending time around the table opens up unique lines of communication.

Inviting people into your home can leave you open to criticism—your housekeeping isn't up to their standards, your children don't know who Emily Post is and their table manners show it, or you are a mediocre cook at best. First of all, I would encourage you to improve in each area. Then persevere despite criticism. Your loving service to the church and kindness to others will make the lasting impression.

Be Discreet

You are the unique recipient of much confidential information and on the inside of controversial issues. You may not go out seeking information, but information has a way of coming to you. Some people may come to you and expect you to be a “backdoor” to your husband or the session. This may be disturbing, but take comfort in knowing these problems are not, and should not be, yours to solve. It may sometimes be necessary to direct their concerns to the appropriate person, either your husband or the session.

In being uniquely aware of problems in the church, you can privately bring these concerns before your Father in heaven in prayer. Pray for wisdom in the session, for submission on the part of those having problems, for the ability of those concerned to continue to “love one another with brotherly affection” (Rom. 12:10).

Be Gracious to All

The biggest challenge for you may not be in loving and showing kindness to the people who might be difficult to love by worldly standards (the alcoholic, the mentally unstable person, the one who comes in from the outside to claim this church isn’t meeting her needs). It’s rather those whom you expect more from, those members you’ve had no reason not to trust, who can be the hardest to love. Also, for a wife, it is those who are critical of your husband, who have the greatest capacity to hurt. They don’t see the outpouring of himself that your husband has given to others, and the hours of worry, prayer, sleepless nights, and tears shed for others. We all have our stories. A couple from an Episcopal background starts attending church regularly and raves about the sermons. Your husband spends week after week in their home, instructing them in the confession and the doctrines of the church, only to be told at the end of this time that they feel they need to stay in the Episcopal Church. Their daughter, who has joined, marries a Roman Catholic, despite the admonition of the session. Your husband suffers, but you are emotionally bruised.

It’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking yourself better than these ungrateful sinners, but in the end, it’s Christ in us that keeps us from these sins and not something we do ourselves. Praying for these souls, despite the pain, will strengthen and sanctify you far more than you may realize at the time.

There is a practical aspect to not fighting your husband’s battles for him, too. Sometimes people leave the church, angry over polity or doctrine, but God works in their hearts, and years later they come back and say, “Pastor, you were right.” If you had bitten back with unkind words, how much more difficult or impossible might that return have been?

Criticism of your children’s behavior cuts deeply too. If your children are obedient, you are also being obedient to the Word. The advice above applies here too; respond with love. I know this oversimplifies a sometimes extremely complicated and divisive situation, but because these situations are so diverse, a simple answer is better than none.

Be Ready for Unspoken Expectations

What about those unspoken expectations of the congregation? Are you expected to play the piano, lead a women’s Bible study, teach Sunday school, pick up others’ responsibilities that have been “dumped” on you, be in charge of an open house, a gift, or a reception because you are thought by many to be de facto in charge? There are some things you will have to humbly admit you just are not gifted to do. My husband felt that anyone else who could serve in the capacity of leadership, organizing dinners, etc., should take precedence over the minister’s wife, because others should be given the opportunity first. There were very few things that I had to manage single-handedly. You may have an uphill battle in fulfilling expectations, but if the women aren’t already organized into service committees, that’s a good place to start. In a well-established congregation, these expectations may not be changed during your time with them, but you can work towards shifting them—continuing to pray for a heart that can have

joy in service.

Be Careful of Friendships

It's a challenge to know what your friendships should look like. Many wives crave a close friendship with another woman or a few women. Some husbands warn against this. Some women are content in the circle of their own families, some find companionship with other ministers' wives or their own elders' wives who share your roles to some degree. I believe this problem is particularly keen for younger wives who have had a wider base of friends in the past. Good friends can share much without sharing too much. Hopefully your good friends in the church will not want to know more than they should.

It's Not Only Challenges

I don't want to leave you with the impression that there are nothing but challenges, or that these challenges happen all at once. Some seasoned minister's wife may not see herself at all in some of the things I've mentioned. There are also great blessings in being a pastor's wife, that others may not know: the joy of having people over, getting to know them, and celebrating their joys; saying good-bye to dear congregants, keeping in touch over the years and watching their children grow; getting to know the elder saints of the church; being the recipients of the kindness, thoughtfulness, encouragement, and acts of service of various members; listening to your favorite pastor preach Christ-centered sermons week after week.

God, in blessing us with these good works to do, will also give us the grace and strength to persevere to the completion of each task. As you encounter difficulties, your pastor-husband can point you to the sufferings of Christ and remind you that you and he do not labor for the praise of men, but for the glory of God. As you labor, your love (the greatest gift) will grow as you grow in the likeness of Christ. ☺

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✦ Servant Exchange

T. David Gordon's Essay "Evangelistic Responsibility" in *Ordained Servant Online*: A Critique and an Alternative

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by R. Fowler White

I have always appreciated T. David Gordon's work, especially his willingness to be an iconoclast. He regularly forces me to think and rethink my positions and assumptions, and he has done it again with his recent essay, "Evangelistic Responsibility," in *Ordained Servant Online*.² In that essay, Gordon evaluated the biblical support for—and practical ramifications of—the dominant view of evangelistic responsibility (also known as "universal evangelistic responsibility," which affirms that evangelism is a responsibility incumbent upon every believer). In what follows, I offer a two-part response to his essay: first a critique of his arguments, and second an alternative.

A Critique of Gordon's Arguments

In section 1, "The Selective View of Evangelistic Responsibility," Gordon frames his analysis

and presentation of an alternative to the dominant view of evangelistic responsibility. Gordon appeals first to the diversity of gifts, discussing the bearing of Rom. 12:4–8, 1 Cor. 12:4–7, and Eph. 4:11 on the subject. Summarizing his discussion of these three passages (the latter of which is one of the clearest texts related to the question of evangelistic responsibility, clearest in that the text refers specifically to evangelists), Gordon concedes that they do not prove his "selective" alternative to the dominant "universal" view of evangelistic responsibility. What these passages do establish, however, is that no gift is intended for everyone in the church: all are not one thing; all do not have the same gift, function, or responsibility.

With his appeal to Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, Gordon introduces a critical shift in the terms of the discussion, implying that duty is a consequence of gifting. Agreeable as we are to all of Gordon's points, there is one looming question: does proof of differentiated service constitute proof of differentiated duty? Gordon is intent on saying that, if individual gifting is different, individual responsibility is different. Is it the case, however, that responsibility is necessarily a consequence of gifting? In fact, should activities done by those with gifts ever be done by those without gifts? Gordon's contention is thought provoking, but in section 1 he leaves unexamined the question of how individual (particularly official) gifts and corporate duties relate to one another. More on this below.

In section 2, "Analysis of the Universal View of Evangelistic Responsibility," Gordon examines representative arguments that have been presented in favor of the universal view. The most common and influential arguments come from Matthew 28:19–20, 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Corinthians 5:18ff., Acts 1:8, Matthew 9:37ff., 2 Timothy 4:5, and Philipians 2:15–16. Let us consider Gordon's treatment of each passage.

Gordon's overall discussion of Matthew 28:19–20 is, in my opinion, compelling and sensible. The Great Commission cannot, and indeed should not, be fulfilled by every individual in the same way. To get a sense of this fact, take the two main aspects

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=193&issue_id=53.

2 *Ordained Servant Online* (June-July 2009), http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=155.

of the Commission, baptizing and teaching. With respect to baptism, all should agree that not every individual is qualified to baptize others: baptism is a duty of the church that should be fulfilled through the office of elder. With respect to teaching, all should agree that Scripture establishes the teaching office and that not every individual is qualified for that church office.

Despite these points of agreement, additional questions arise when it comes to teaching in the church. Texts such as Colossians 3:16 and Hebrews 5:12 can be plausibly read as establishing a responsibility to teach that is broader than the teaching office. Should we, then, distinguish a general responsibility from an official responsibility? If so, how would general teaching take place? Presumably, not all general teaching occurs in the midst of corporate worship, as an exegesis of Colossians 3:16 might imply. In Hebrews 5:12, ostensibly at least, the readers are presumed to have an obligation to become teachers. Whatever else we may say about the fulfillment of this obligation, contextually, teaching ability and activity are marks of maturity acquired by practice (Heb. 5:14). The larger question remains, then: how do general (not gift-related) obligations relate to official (gift-related) duties? We shall return to this question later.

Regarding 1 Peter 3:15, Gordon convincingly points out that Peter envisions Christians under persecution and then instructs them on how to respond to it. Is Gordon right, however, to say that there is nothing evangelistic in the Christian's response or in the persecutor's shame? What would the Christian's defense of the hope in him be if not, in some measure, evangelistic (e.g., Paul's defense in Acts 26)? And what would the persecutor's shame be if not, at least in some cases, a prelude to or evidence of repentance unto life (perhaps an analogy is found in 1 Cor. 14:24–25)?

Gordon takes us next to 2 Corinthians 5:18ff. Here he contests the universal view (represented by Stott) on the point that the “we/us” of this passage is a general reference to Christians, preferring instead to see a reference to ministers or to the apostolate. Gordon's challenge here is reason-

able but incomplete. To identify the “we/us” of this passage as only a part of the company of the reconciled and not the whole of it, we need more evidence.

Next Gordon directs our attention to Acts 1:8, where he compellingly urges that “you will be my witnesses” does not refer to the general evangelistic “witness” function of Christians, but to the unique legal “eyewitness” function of the apostles. Still the counterpoints made in response to Gordon's discussion of Matthew 28:18–20 can be made here. Even granting the vital distinction between the apostles' role as witness and the church's role as witness, how does the official role of the gifted relate to the general role of the church as a whole? Does the former render the latter unnecessary? If not that, what is their relation?

Coming to Gordon's analysis of Matthew 9:37ff., he persuasively contends that this text enjoins no duty on Christians to become laborers and only a duty to pray for God to raise up laborers. If there is a duty for all Christians to be laborers in the sense described in this text, it will have to be established from other passages and considerations.

Looking also at the claim that all Christians should follow Timothy's example (1 Tim. 4:12, 16) and “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5), Gordon demurs, noting (1) that Timothy engaged in this work as one gifted and called to be a helper and fellow worker of the apostle, and (2) that, as it relates to the work of evangelist in particular, the text implies that this was Timothy's specific ministry (“do the work of an evangelist; fulfill *your* ministry”). Gordon's approach to Timothy himself and his ministry itself is sensible. However, Gordon poses but does not answer the question of whether and how Timothy would be an example to Christians generally. As a crucial point in this discussion, this omission is surprising.

Responding to variations on the preceding arguments for a universal evangelistic responsibility, Gordon makes two good observations: (1) that what the church is (a witness) and does (bear witness) corporately is not necessarily what each Christian is and does individually, and (2) that

there is no biblical basis adequate to substantiate the equation of the terms “witness” and “testimony.” There are other points to consider, however. For example, in Revelation 6:9 and 12:11 we hear of Christians who died for the witness that they had borne and who conquered by the word of their testimony. Such texts might not justify the identification of every other Christian in these exact terms, but is there any warrant for limiting the identification of these martyrs to those specially called and gifted to bear witness? Such a limitation does not seem at all likely, in which case the question arises as to how we account for the fact that in Scripture Christians other than the gifted and called are said to bear witness.

Lastly, Gordon analyzes Philippians 2:15–16, which has been offered as one of the plainest texts in favor of the universal view, and argues persuasively that this one is not as plain as the universal view would like. The text enjoins Christians to steadfastness in the face of hostility, not to evangelism. We have to ask, however, if steadfastness in evangelism in the face of hostility would not be a distinguishing characteristic both of the steadfast church and of the steadfast individual believers who make it up.

Turning to practical considerations, Gordon highlights three problems for the universal view: (1) the wrong of placing the burden of evangelism on believers who do not have the gifts and calling to do so, (2) the wrong of disrupting the church’s harmony by placing an unbearable and unbiblical requirement for evangelism on all believers, and (3) the corruption of evangelism by those unable and unwilling to evangelize properly. There is much to agree with in these three concerns. However, Gordon frames his response to them by making evangelism the duty only of the gifted and called, even though he has not established the correlation that makes that duty solely a function of gift and calling. Moreover, he has not proved that poor quality in evangelism is traceable to the universal view of evangelism. The culprit is, more probably, poor training, a malady that can afflict even the gifted and called.

An Alternative to Gordon’s View

The most basic argument that runs through Gordon’s essay is his claim that responsibility is a consequence of gifting and calling. The duty to evangelize is, thus, to be fulfilled by the gifted and called of the church, not by every member of the church. In my judgment, this analysis is biblically incomplete and the thesis unproven. As we noted in his treatment of Timothy and his ministry, Gordon raises but does not give adequate attention to the biblical statements that the gifted and called of the church are given as instructors and examples to the rest of the church. He would agree that, to lead the church in fulfilling her charge to be the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15–16; see also Jude 3; 1 Pet. 3:15; Eph. 4:3–6, 13–16), Christ gives to the church men who by their instruction and example distinguish themselves as those with a faith and practice worthy of imitation (Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Tim. 4:12, 16; 2 Tim. 2:2, 24–25; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Pet. 5:1–3). Thus, it is Christ’s provision of leaders to the church that is designed to ensure the impartation of worthy faith and practice to those who are not leaders. How this truth affects the church’s evangelism is at the heart of the issues that Gordon raises.

The role of the church’s leaders as instructors and examples upholds the differentiation of gifts and calling that Gordon is rightly concerned to protect. Let me be clear: we should join him in affirming that there is no invitation to egalitarianism in the Bible. At the same time, as suggested by 1 Timothy 4:12–16, the correlation of gifts and graces with example and instruction is demonstrably basic both to the idea of the pastoral office and to the idea of being a disciple. Consistent with 1 Timothy 4:12–16, Ephesians 4:11–12 indicates that in the church there is a division of labor manifested in differing gifts. Those gifted in the Word and leadership are said to equip the saints without those gifts, and the result of that equipping is that those without said gifts are faithful and fruitful according to their own gifts (4:7, 16) and in their own places and relations (4:17–6:20). Those with gifts, then, stand in relation to others as instructors to

learners (disciples), and the result of that relationship is that “everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (note: *κατηρτισμένος* *katērtis-menos* in Luke 6:40 and *καταρτισμόν* *katartismōn* in Eph. 4:12). In other words, learners imitate their instructors’ faith and practice.

The upshot of the preceding observations is that, agreeable to Gordon’s concerns, different gifts do bring about at least one key difference of responsibility: all who serve in the Word and leadership, including evangelists, ought to be examples and instructors to others. This consideration also addresses Gordon’s concerns for church unity and for the quality of the church’s evangelistic activities and results. In Ephesians 4:12–16, as in 1 Timothy 4:12–16, Paul focuses on the contribution that the gifted make to the edification of others. To be specific, edification involves the church’s mature unity in faith and practice (Eph. 4:13–14), and that unity results as the gifted train the church’s other members in the truth and thereby make all members better able to speak the truth in love. Truth-speaking, in turn, is the manner and means by which the whole body progresses (Eph. 4:15–16) from the immature faith and practice of its childhood (Eph. 4:1–6) toward the mature faith and practice of its adulthood (Eph. 4:13). Among other things, then, the church’s unity in faith and practice is properly a product of the instructor-learner relationship within her membership. Unless there is evidence to the contrary, we shall have to presume that this unity extends to the practice of evangelism.

Gordon, then, is right: no gift—“evangelist” included—is intended for everyone in the church. This fact, however, does not mean that all Christians should not engage in activities performed by the gifted and called; nor does it mean that all Christians do not have duties in common. If we recognize the correlation of gifts with instruction and example, Gordon’s most basic argument against the universal view is substantially answered. Knowing that the church is responsible to speak with one voice in evangelism and should be faithful therein, those who lead are responsible to impart to others the faith and practice needed

for this effort. Knowing that those with gifts are instructors and examples in the church, evangelists and other leaders serve the church’s members, in part, as their examples and trainers in evangelism. The quality of the church’s activities and results in evangelism is, thus, traceable to the quality of the instruction and example provided by her leaders: they serve the common good by setting an evangelistic pattern for all Christians to follow according to their own abilities and in their own relations and callings.

Gordon has served us well by pointing out the inadequacies and errors in the case for the universal view of evangelistic responsibility. The needed correction, however, comes not as we circumscribe evangelism by gift and calling, but as we embrace the truth that the proper function of gift and calling includes being examples and instructors to others in the church. If the gifted and called will embrace the work of preparing others for evangelism, Christians, individually and corporately, will bear their witness, as God enables, and will do so more faithfully and more fruitfully. ☞

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Reply to R. Fowler White's "Critique and Alternative"

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by T. David Gordon

I was gratified that Dr. White took notice of my thoughts in my recent article, "Evangelistic Responsibility."² Dr. White is one of the most judicious reasoners in my communion, and one of the most knowledgeable of the Bible. We each contributed to a volume assessing the so-called "Auburn Theology," where we shared similar concerns. I suppose it is not inappropriate to indicate that Dr. White served for a number of years at Knox Theological Seminary, which was associated with D. James Kennedy's church in Florida. The late Dr. Kennedy was well known for his Evangelism Explosion program, a program that embraced the view that I have attempted to refute. Dr. White's critique of my position is simultaneously, in some sense, a defense of his ministerial colleague and a critique of my view, and ought to be both respected and suspected as such. *Ordained Servant* cannot continue this discussion interminably, but I am delighted that the discussion is taking place at all. In my original essay, and in Dr. White's reply, we have both reasoned from the Scriptures as our primary authority, which I regard as entirely appropriate. I do note, however, that the Westminster Standards nowhere regard evangelism as a universal duty, even though they do regard some other, nonethical matters as universal.³ In response to

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=194&issue_id=53.

2 *Ordained Servant Online* (June-July 2009), http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=155.

3 Larger Catechism 156, for instance, raises the question of whether all are permitted to read the Scriptures publicly, in worship, and replies: "Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation, yet *all sorts of people are bound* to read it apart by themselves, and with their families."

Dr. White's thoughtful comments, I would like to make one clarification before making two or three comments about where our differences probably reside.

I begin by suggesting that for something to be a duty there must be some biblical ground for that duty. That is, my view (that evangelism is *not* a universal responsibility) obliges no one. My view tells no one to do anything. But the alternative view, that evangelism is an obligation upon every believer, *does* oblige all believing people. Therefore, the alternative view has the burden of proof. To oblige others to do something requires positive biblical warrant, and not merely question begging. Dr. White refers to my comments about 2 Corinthians 5:18ff, for instance, and says, "Gordon's challenge here is reasonable but incomplete. To identify the "we/us" of this passage as only a part of the company of the reconciled and not the whole of it, we need more evidence." Just the opposite. Those who argue that, in the epistle where Paul mounts his lengthiest defense of his own ministry, we are to take his "us/we" *not* as ministerial (Paul and those who labored with him) are the ones who have the burden of proof. They, not I, "need more evidence" to persuade others that something is *every* believer's duty simply because Paul candidly said that it was *his* duty. Further, the evidence here is substantial. In chapters 4 and 5 of 2 Corinthians, there are sixty-four uses of the first person plural pronoun, the vast majority of which rather plainly refer to the ministry of Paul and his collaborators, which he is defending before the Corinthians, e.g.:

4:1-2 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, *we* do not lose heart. But *we* have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. *We* refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth *we* would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight

Note, then, that in addition to our common *moral* duties, as articulated in the Larger Catechism's exposition of the Decalogue, Westminster sometimes refers to other religious duties, such as Bible reading. But the Standards nowhere say that "all sorts of people are bound to evangelize."

of God.

4:7–8 But *we* have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to *us*. *We* are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair ...

4:16 So *we* do not lose heart ...

5:6 So *we* are always of good courage.

5:11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, *we* persuade others ...

5:20 Therefore, *we* are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through *us*.

Even more compelling evidence from these chapters is the fact that this first person plural pronoun often appears in combination with the second person pronoun, as Paul contrasts himself with the Corinthians, plainly excluding the Corinthians from the “we/us”:

4:12 So death is at work in *us*, but life in **you**.

4:13–15 And so *we* also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise *us* also with Jesus and bring *us* with **you** into his presence. For it is all for **your** sake,

5:11–12 But what *we* are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to **your** conscience. *We* are not commending *ourselves* to **you** again but giving **you** cause to boast about *us*, so that **you** may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance.

5:13 For if *we* are beside ourselves, it is for God; if *we* are in our right mind, it is for **you**.

5:20 Therefore, *we* are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through *us*. *We* implore **you** on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

To Dr. White’s challenge, “To identify the ‘we/us’ of this passage as *only a part* of the company of the reconciled and *not the whole of it*, we need more evidence” (emphases mine), I think we have

plenty of evidence in the passages above that the “we” is different from the “you.” The “we” in the passages above is plainly not “we all, *including* you Corinthians,” but rather “we ministers, and *not* you Corinthians.” Note that even when 2 Corinthians 4:14 refers to the eschaton, the two parties are kept distinct: “will raise us also with Jesus and bring *us with you* into his presence.” Even when talking about a common Christian reality in the life to come, Paul is intent on distinguishing the ministerial “us” from the general believing “you.”

As popular as the universal view of evangelistic responsibility has become recently, it does not enjoy “squatter’s rights” for that reason. If no positive warrant can be found for my view, that does not injure my view, because my view obliges no one. But the alternative view, precisely because it *does* obligate others, must establish itself by sound biblical reasoning.

Foundational to my understanding of “gifts” in the relevant passage(s) is that the “gift”-language is used interchangeably with “function”-language: “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” (1 Cor. 12:47).⁴ That is, Paul does not use “gift” as we do; to designate some competence or ability, as in “she is a gifted musician,” or “he has the gift of gab.” Rather, he perceives consecrated Christian service as *Christ’s* gift to his bride, the church: “And he *gave* the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). He calls these differing functions “gifts” because they are the gifts of the ascended Christ to his militant church. Thus, Paul does not distinguish function,

4 “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same *function*, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having *gifts* that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom. 12:4–6). Here also, “gifts” are spoken of as “function.” For Paul, a “gift” is not an innate *capacity* to do something; it is an operative work, the actual *doing* of something. If it does not “function,” it is not a gift. And Paul’s general point is clear: All do not perform the same functions: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts” (1 Cor. 12:29–31).

working, and gift; they are the same. A nonfunctioning gift is no gift from Christ at all; until believers, constrained by his love and empowered by his Spirit, actually *do* something, they are not a “gift” to Christ’s church. So, when Dr. White raises the question, “In fact, should activities done by those with gifts ever be *done* by those without *gifts*?” my reply is that the question is nonsensical. For me, if an activity (in this case, evangelism) is done, and if that thing edifies or builds the church, then it is a gift.⁵

So, it isn’t quite the case that I teach that “responsibility is a consequence of gift and calling.” Some responsibilities derive also from positive biblical command, such as “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Others may derive from our being created in the image of God; and still others may derive from God’s providence, if it places us in a situation where we can aid and assist those who are needy. My point in citing the Pauline passages about gifts was merely to make the general point that Paul teaches that we have *diverse* gifts, *diverse* functions, *diverse* workings. Therefore, if there is some gift/function/working that is universal (*not* diverse), yet is not moral (deriving from divine command or the divine image), such a gift/function/working would be and is contrary to Paul’s most commonly-repeated statement that, in fact, we do *not* all have the same functions. If everyone is to perform the function of evangelism, there must be some clear teaching somewhere, because Paul plainly says otherwise, that we do *not* have the same functions.

So, let me now turn to Dr. White’s comments about church leaders “as instructors and examples.” Church leaders are indeed instructors and examples; but they are moral and ethical examples, not examples of particular forms of service. Paul said: “Be imitators of me, as I am of

Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. also 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6; 3:7, 9). But Paul did not imitate every function Christ performed: Paul did not walk on water; he did not die on a cross for sinners; he did not feed the five thousand; he was not baptized by John in the wilderness; he did not overturn tables in the temple. Paul *did* imitate Christ’s love of God and love of neighbor. Similarly, the Corinthians should imitate Paul by imitating those two things (love of God and neighbor) that Paul imitated in Christ. Saints are also called to follow the example of the faith of the officers in the church: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7). Dr. White says, “Gordon poses but does not answer the question of whether and how Timothy would be an example to Christians generally.” Here’s my answer: Timothy is to be an example and model of Christian ethical behavior and faith, but not necessarily an example of what *functions* are to be performed in the church’s overall ministry. A pastor instructs his flock regarding Christian duty, but he also baptizes and administers the Lord’s Supper. He is not an example to the flock of how to baptize or how to administer the Lord’s Supper (Dr. White concedes this point). His function, in those specifics, is distinctive to his calling. His distinctive gift/function/working in those examples is to administer Christ’s sacraments. Similarly, he preaches and teaches, but he is not an example for his flock of how *they* should preach and teach. So I conclude that the universal view (and I have difficulty distinguishing Dr. White’s view from it) must have some biblical warrant for stating that evangelism is the duty of the flock, *other than* the alleged warrant that pastors evangelize and they are examples to the flock. If being an example means that the flock must do anything/everything the pastor does, then the flock must administer the sacraments, read or preach the Word of God to the congregation, and perform weddings and funerals.

Dr. White and I differ also in our translation of Ephesians 4:12. As I argued many (too many!) years ago, Ephesians 4:12 does *not* teach that the duty of the gifted ones is to “equip” the saints to do

5 Much more work needs to be done here, because I recognize that almost everyone but myself understands “gift” in Paul’s letters as an innate *capacity*; and I probably should write an essay at some point devoted exclusively to proving the contrary, that Paul uses “gift” with Christ as the understood giver, the church as the understood recipient, and the gift itself to refer to some edifying *function* or *working* that someone actually *does*.

anything.⁶ The saints have many duties, of course, but Ephesians 4:12, properly translated, does not *teach* anything about ministers “equipping” saints to do anything. The translations that suggest so face three extremely difficult exegetical problems, all three of which must align to come to this conclusion. The three difficulties are these:

- 1) That the three purpose clauses, so obviously parallel in their grammatical structure, have different implied subjects (thereby disrupting the parallel);
- 2) That *καταρτισμόν* (*katartismōn*) is translated “equip” here;
- 3) That *ἔργον διακονίας* (*ergon diakonias*) refers not to acts of service in the general sense, but to the overall “Christian ministry.”

I won’t repeat here the arguments I made in *JETS* in 1994, but, to summarize, in all three points, the “equipping-the-saints” translation faces significant hurdles, hurdles that do not exist for translations such as the Authorized Version, which says: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Dr. White and I could engage in a lengthy conversation about this passage alone, but space prohibits this here.

A number of Dr. White’s points strike me, from my point of view, as question begging, especially since the issue in question is another individual’s *duty*. That is, to argue that another believer has a duty to do something, one would think it would be necessary to demonstrate not merely that a given text *could* be construed in such a way, but that it *ought* to be construed that way, because no other construal is as good. That is, if a duty were based on a text that were capable of more than one construal by the admitted standards of exegesis we all embrace, that text would not be an adequate ground for obliging others (though it would be an adequate ground for obliging those who construed

6 “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37.1 (March 1994): 69–78.

it that way). Dr. White says, for example, “Texts such as Colossians 3:16 and Hebrews 5:12 can be plausibly read as establishing a responsibility to teach that is broader than the teaching office. Should we, then, distinguish a general responsibility from an official responsibility?”⁷ Well, if the texts can be plausibly read in such a fashion, they can also be plausibly read in other fashions, especially in light of James’s warning: “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). And, while I concede that not every function in the church is official (much teaching takes place outside of the teaching office), I still look for a text related to *evangelism* that requires it as a general duty. It is not enough to oblige others by this reasoning: *some* functions (teaching) that are official in the church are plausibly read in some texts as general duties; therefore, the *specific* function of evangelism is *also* a general duty.

That simply does not follow. We might as well say that because baptizing is an official function of officers in the church, there is also a general/universal obligation upon all believers to baptize. Precisely at issue is the very question of whether the specific function of evangelizing (not the specific function of teaching or baptizing) is a general duty of Christians universally. Since we both concede that *some* official functions (teaching) *may* have more general application and that *other* official functions (baptism) do *not* have more general application, neither of us can draw any inferences regarding another function (evangelism) without some biblical ground.

Dr. White raises interesting and important points about martyrs, and about 1 Peter 3:14–15,

7 I note here also that Dr. White selects his language carefully, and uses the word “general” rather than the word “universal.” Even if we judged that a given function was “general,” or “broader than the teaching office,” this would not be the same as “universal,” which admits of no exceptions. While instruction, in the informal sense of discussing the Christian religion, may be general in the sense that many believers do it, it is not a universal duty in the sense that we would begin disciplinary processes against people who merely listened to such conversations but did not participate verbally in them.

and they are closely related (each involves the persecution of nonofficers in the church). A martyr, by definition, is a “witness.” But a witness is not necessarily an evangelist. “Witness,” in both Greek and English, is a term that designates one’s solemn public testimony when required to give it.⁸ We are sometimes called to be witnesses in civil trials or in ecclesiastical trials, for example. In the first century, if a Roman official asked a person if he were a follower of Christ, it was indeed his duty to say that he was such a follower. This is the same situation as 1 Peter 3:14–15: “Have no fear of them (the persecutors), nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Of course, if someone “asks you” why you are willing to suffer their persecution, you solemnly and publicly testify that Christ has power to resurrect you even if your tormentors take your life. On this point, Dr. White and I again heartily agree. We agree that we have a universal duty not to deny Christ, but rather to confess him when called upon to do so. But this is not evangelism; it may have evangelistic *consequences*, but it isn’t evangelism.

I am gratified that Dr. White has honored his late ministerial colleague by continuing to promote what Dr. Kennedy promoted. I am also delighted that he took the time to interact with my reasoning, conceding some points while graciously disputing others. And, because he is such a judicious reasoner, I found here as always material that stimulated my own thinking, material that will undoubtedly contribute to more nuanced discussions in the future. But I found nothing that bore the burden of proof. Many evangelical churches have placed a positive moral duty (with its attendant sense of guilt and shame for failure) on believers without adequate biblical warrant.

At some deep level, I think some who profess to disagree with me actually agree with me, and here’s why I think so. If a person failed, let us say,

to attend church, we would begin disciplinary proceedings against him, on the ground that he had failed to perform a duty mandated in Holy Scripture. But has anyone anywhere ever been disciplined by any church for failing to evangelize? Well, I think we should fish or cut bait. If we regard it as a duty, we should discipline those who do not fulfill their duty. And if we do not discipline them, I believe we should stop telling them it is their duty. ☹

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⁸ Alison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: University Press, 2004).

✦ 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.

Life after Christmas

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by Eutyclus II

April is the cruelest month, at least according to T. S. Eliot. When he wrote that line in “The Wasteland,” of course, he had not experienced the seasonal doldrums that mark the month of January, now that we have merged Thanksgiving and Christmas into one monthlong party. After almost five weeks of parties, preparing for them, recovering from them, and considering resolutions to counter the pounds those parties have added, January hits like a ton of bricks. Actually, a roller coaster ride is a more apt analogy, with January the trough between the Christmas season and March Madness.

This is the seasonal affective disorder that

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=190&issue_id=52.

afflicts practically all Americans, whether they belong to churches that observe the liturgical calendar or not. Advent and Christmas have created a crater in the American experience that rivals—if not surpasses—the nation's founding or its pastime of baseball. Talk about cultural transformation.

The liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church hovers in the background of December's excitements. Although conservative Presbyterians are duly squeamish about following Rome's cycle of holidays, for the better part of a century Christmas and Easter have been fixtures in most American Protestant congregations. Some now even flirt with Advent. Most draw the line there and refuse to countenance Lent. Is it because Lent is too demanding in its call for self-denial?

Maybe, but December can be fairly relentless in its indulgence. The last month of the year gets a head start with Thanksgiving, arguably the greatest of U.S. holidays. It is a time when the duties are few—unless you are the cook—and when consumption is contained within one huge meal to be digested while snoozing through the National Football League's unrelenting search for mediocrity under the guise of tradition. (Why would anyone watch the Detroit Lions after Barry Sanders if they weren't numbed by tryptophan?) Even for cooks who are feeling haggard by the time the NFL's second game starts, they have usually cooked a bird big enough to cover meals until Sunday—when the turkey sandwiches run out and when Advent begins.

Even if conservative Protestants do not employ the candles and wreaths that mark the Advent season in liturgical churches, they generally experience the pull of preparations for Christmas, thanks to the activities of church families—the cards, the gifts, and the congregational singing that turns to the part of the hymnal dedicated to Christ's birth. Some churches will even sponsor programs of special music, drawing upon the wealth of Advent and Christmas songs generated by those Protestants mindful of the liturgical calendar, namely, the Anglicans and the Lutherans. To assist these activities, schools, both private and Christian, take off as much time at Christmas as accreditors and state

agencies will allow. Nonprofits do their part by imitating the schools' schedule. Businesses may be open, but holiday parties and reduced workloads make employees look foolish who take vacation time in December. Working in December is like a holiday at the office.

By the time the wrapping paper has been recycled, the cookie tins emptied, and evergreens make their way to the curb, along comes New Year's Eve, as if anyone over thirty had any party left in them. Some churches still hold the Watch Night service to offer a pious alternative to the over-rowdy parties. But, with youth activities and a service lasting until early into New Year's Day, not many church members are adhering to the regular routines supplied by work and vocation. Others without Watch Night services usually find some form of wholesome revelry to keep abnormally late hours and so start the New Year with brunch—breakfast is just too early.

And then, as if the month of December were not enough, along comes New Year's Day. In addition to offering a welcome chance for rest before returning to the normal pace of life from January until July 4th, the first day of the year provides another excuse for more parties, rich food, and inactivity. The college football bowl games used to function for this holiday the way the second NFL game on Thanksgiving worked for the meal of fowl and pumpkin pie. New Year's Day was a day of twelve hours of football that became the cushion between December's indulgence and the year's regular discipline. But now that the Bowl Championship Series officials have decided to parcel out over several days the games that all used to be played on one, the buffer of twelve hours has swelled into three nights of prime time television. By that time, the cushion of the New Year has also become a bit hard and is in need of fluffing.

This leaves the average American Christian on January 2 facing a low similar to that experienced by many evangelical youth after their time away at summer camp. Many a Protestant teenager has gone off to camp to be challenged to take his or her faith more seriously, has risen to the challenge with the assistance of the camp's activities, speak-

ers, and atmosphere, only to find that life back at home during the school year is not nearly as intense or emotional as summertime with paid camp counselors and new friends.

Whether the highs of summer camp are higher than those of the liturgical calendar is likely an unfair question. What happens to Christian youth during a week is much more personal and vigorous than what happens corporately to Christian parents, children, officers, and church members during the period between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. But the lows following the devotional high of summer camp and the semiliturgical high of December are similar. Coming down from a renewed commitment to Jesus and others can be as painful as facing an entire month—and a cold one to boot in most parts of the United States—without any festivity to which to look forward.

Or course, one way to rebound from January's blues is to look forward to Super Bowl Sunday. But this is an option that is harder to square with Presbyterian practices than singing Christmas carols and meditating on Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives. Although the liturgical calendar clearly contravenes older Reformed teaching about man-made holy days, cancelling a service to allow church members to see the Super Bowl, or incorporating it into an evening service, is akin to welcoming the money changers back into the temple after Jesus went to bed.

Of course, the other remedy is to avoid the highs altogether by recognizing the value of routine and regularity. This recognition gains plausibility from the weekly cycle of two services a Sunday and the intervening six days of disciplined work. This weekly pattern is not inherently flashy, and that is a good thing if avoiding spiritual highs also means not facing spiritual lows. But, linked to the pattern of the creation week and to the Sabbath rest that awaits God's people, the week-in, week-out observance of Sunday as a holy day dedicated to rest and worship may gain some of the exuberance that December and campfires produce, minus the lows. ❧

Naming Rites

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2010¹

by Eutychus II

As much as the preachers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may seek to practice John Calvin's hermeneutic of *brevitas et facilitas* in their biblical exegesis, it is a principle that has not applied to our name. I was painfully reminded of this recently when I fell into a conversation during a high school baseball game with a mother of one of my son's teammates. When she asked where I went to church, I proudly replied, "Reformation Orthodox Presbyterian Church."

"Wow," she gasped, "That's a mouthful!"

When I posed the same question to her, "Northside Grace" was her quick reply.

"Wow," I thought. "Three syllables!"

Those who are familiar with the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church know that our name was neither original nor has it appealed to some within and beyond the church as particularly attractive. Forced to change its name by a judge's decision in a lawsuit brought by the vindictive mainline Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Presbyterian Church of America adopted "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church" in 1939, narrowly selecting the moniker over several alternatives. (I still chuckle over the one-upmanship in this nomination proceeding: "The True Presbyterian Church of the World" [emphasis added, but doubtlessly in the mind of the nominator] was another proposal.)

I am not that bothered by the name myself. I do not buy the charge that it is implicitly boastful (as if the emphasis falls on the definite article that precedes it: *The* Orthodox Presbyterian Church). Still, I concede that the name remains a stumbling block for at least a few in the church. And so, in order to remove unnecessary offense, I put myself

to work imagining how the OPC might change its name and give its image a long-overdue update at the same time.

What is needed is a smart sounding name that grabs attention. Let's abandon the futile effort to find a way to describe ourselves as Presbyterian and American. Not only are all those permutations and combinations exhausted, but that sort of nomenclature is entirely passé and will simply not communicate to a media-savvy audience. No, we need something a lot livelier. How about a number? "Reformation 360" has a global hue to it, don't you think? Oh, but wait: isn't conversion a 180-degree turn? Or does "Reformation 180" sound half-hearted? Hmm, numbers might make too many heads spin.

Another possibility invokes the old DuPont wisdom of better living through chemistry. An "emerging" church in my neck of the woods has branded itself "H₂O." Get it? As in water, that is, living water? So how about NaCl—you will recall from high school chemistry that is the symbol for salt—as in salt of the earth! I tested this with a focus group of a few friends and they wondered if it stood for some obscure cult like the National Association of Christian Libertines. So scratch that thought.

Maybe the trick is to combine two words and create a trademark neologism. Something like "Reformergence." Why can't we be both Reformed and emergent? Who is to say this is an either/or? On the other hand, what if folks focus on the "merge" in the middle? And suppose this puts pressure on union with another body? Then what becomes of my branding genius? I do not want it to go the way of "Cingular."

I finally settled on following Mark Driscoll's lead. The Seattle ecclesial entrepreneur has coined his hip network of followers the "Acts 29" network. It seems that the OPC might want to call itself "Acts 27." After all, that chapter was all about a shipwreck. ☹

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=206&issue_id=55.

✦ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

Calvin

by Bruce Gordon

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2010¹

by David A. Booth

Calvin, by Bruce Gordon. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, xiii + 398 pages, \$35.00.

Few volumes have been as eagerly anticipated in the Reformed world as Bruce Gordon's major biography of John Calvin. The wait is over and Professor Gordon² has surpassed our highest expectations. Gordon's *Calvin* will rightly become the standard biography of the Reformer in seminary and college classrooms. This work deserves the widest possible audience.

Gordon's most distinctive achievement has been to situate Calvin firmly within the labyrinth of complex ecclesiastical relationships and shifting political realities that characterized sixteenth-century Europe. For example, Gordon deftly reveals the implications for Calvin of Geneva's political reliance upon Berne in the late 1530s and upon Basle a decade later (124). Calvin was no Lone

Ranger. His "position in Geneva was dependent on the other Swiss churches" (75) as well as upon how he navigated unpredictable shifts in the political landscape. The reader meets Calvin both as shaper of events and as one who chafed under the judgments of other men. For example, Gordon movingly presents the horror which the young Calvin experienced when he and Farel were admonished by the leading Swiss churchmen for sowing discord within the church (82-83). By weaving such experiences into the portrait he paints of Calvin's life, Gordon magnifies the reader's appreciation for how skillfully and resolutely the mature Calvin would later fight for the unity and peace of Christ's church. Rather than Calvinism unfolding as the inevitable result of some grand theological scheme, the reader feels the rough and tumble of the all-too-real conflicts in which Calvin, at least at first, was commonly viewed and treated as a junior partner.

On a personal level, Gordon shows us Calvin as an exceedingly demanding friend who pushed some of his friendships to the breaking point. "All his life Calvin would define friendship in terms of commitment to a common cause" (29), and, aware of his own extraordinary intellect, Calvin expected his friends to subordinate their judgments to his. Not all of his friendships survived the strains such expectations imposed. For example, Pierre Viret was one of the men who actively campaigned for Calvin's return to Geneva (121). A gifted preacher and scholar in his own right, Viret not only provided critical assistance to Calvin's reform efforts in Geneva, but also served as a loyal lieutenant in Calvin's struggles with the Bernese (172). Yet, in the late 1540s, Viret's iconoclastic approach to reform in France, in direct contradiction to Calvin's advice, cemented a drifting apart in their relationship (323-24). With the possible exception of Bullinger, Calvin never saw any of the other Reformed churchmen as his peer, and his lieutenants were expected to remain loyally in that role until death. Nevertheless, it is a remarkable fact that Calvin maintained close relationships with men as diverse as Bucer, Farel, and Bullinger over extended periods of time. A driven man, Calvin was at times

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=188&issue_id=52.

2 He is professor of Reformation history at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut.

impulsive, petty, and even vindictive. Gordon does not shield the reader from such less than flattering elements in Calvin's life; however, he so skillfully presents the strains of his vocation, and Calvin's zeal for the glory of God, that few readers will imagine themselves bearing such burdens more gracefully. Indeed, what emerges is a man who is all the more extraordinary because he wrestled, not always successfully, with the passions that are common to us lesser mortals. Gordon draws the reader a fuller portrait of Calvin as a man than any other biography I have seen.

A second great distinctive of this work is how vividly Gordon portrays Calvin's labors to reform the church beyond the city of Geneva. While still in Strasbourg, Calvin received a favorable greeting from Martin Luther with the indication that Luther had read his *Reply to Sadoletto*. This deeply moved Calvin. "The fully understandable response was part of a discernable shift in Calvin's attitudes towards the German reformation.... Calvin was becoming receptive to the Lutheran world" (99). Years later, Calvin would bend over backwards to avoid criticizing Luther. When it became necessary for him to criticize some of Luther's teaching, Calvin attributed Luther's views to the medieval scholastics in order to avoid creating a rift with the Lutherans. Whether such behavior is diplomacy or duplicity is something each reader is left to decide for himself. Gordon adroitly unfolds how Calvin's zeal for Protestant unity flows from his own experience of being an exile from his native France. The reality of exile pervaded both Calvin's ecclesiology and his theology proper. On the one hand, his experience of exile taught Calvin that Christians are to be a pilgrim people. "Home, for the exile, is not a location, but union with God" (57). On the other hand, exile stripped Calvin of parochialism in his approach to ecclesiology. While Luther was German to the core, and Zwingli died in battle for his Swiss canton, Calvin struggled for the reformation and unity of all the Protestant churches. The genius of Gordon's narrative is how vividly he reveals Calvin's efforts as both heroic and ultimately a colossal failure. Modern readers should remember that where Calvin failed, subsequent generations

of Protestants have yet to succeed. The biblical requirement to be valiant for truth without being sectarian has challenged Christians in every generation. As heirs of the Reformation we have much to learn from Calvin's labors for *both* the peace and the purity of the church. Utterly unwilling to compromise God's truth, "Calvin never regarded his theological formulations as nonnegotiable" (179). In this, and so many other ways, Calvin is a model worthy of emulation.

Professor Gordon begins this work by telling us that Calvin "never felt he had encountered an intellectual equal, and he was probably correct" (vii). The Lord rarely gives such exceptional men to his church. We are wise to learn as much as possible from them. This beautifully written volume is a reliable and enjoyable guide to help us with this task. I could not recommend this work more highly. 📖

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Bioethics and the Christian Life

by *David VanDrunen*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2010¹

by William Edgar

Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions, by David VanDrunen. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009, 256 pages, bibliography, general index, Scripture index, \$19.99, paper.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=195&issue_id=53.

There is an abundance of literature published on bioethics. A respectable amount of it is written from a Christian point of view. Most often, though, we are made to choose between solid science and sound theology. Books that are good scientifically are often written by people who are in the field, and confront the hard data every day. Their empirical observations have great merit. But they are usually weak or superficial in matters of theology. Often complex issues are funneled into a few simple ethical principles, and there is little real biblical exegesis. Conversely, we find good biblical studies, but with insufficient knowledge of the field of biology.

What a pleasant surprise it is to discover this book, which is competent in both areas, biblical hermeneutics and scientific data. More than competent, it is authoritative. On top of that, it is elegantly written. David VanDrunen, who teaches Christian ethics at Westminster Seminary California, carries the credentials to accomplish this rare feat. As someone who teaches ethics and also works on a couple of committees in our local hospital where I have to face tough medical conundrums in the trenches, I can say, after a long wait, that this is the book to read!

In the opening chapter VanDrunen compares several possible Christian attitudes toward participation in public healthcare. He concludes that, although the world's agendas are often different, even at loggerheads with the biblical approach, Christians need to be active in healthcare, if only because we are called to defend God's justice in a hostile environment. More positively, as VanDrunen articulately demonstrates, cultural activities are still enjoined, alongside the duty to proclaim the gospel.

Chapters 2 and 3 compellingly set forth the principal doctrines and virtues that Christians can bring to the table. Among the most important are the goodness of God, the dignity of human life, and the need for hope and courage as we stand for these values in the fallen world. His discussion of wisdom is particularly strong and appropriate, since we must make decisions based on wise applications of God's law, particularly as there are

no Bible verses on such things as the status of the embryo or stem cell research. VanDrunen's exegetical skills become especially valuable when handling difficult passages such as Exodus 21:22–25 in relation to the status of an embryo (see 155 ff.).

VanDrunen affirms the Reformed view that there was an eschatology to the creation, and that the probation, had our first parents succeeded in obeying, would have been a passage for the entire human race to a higher, consummate life beyond the Garden. Though in the event this did not happen, the covenant promises of God culminating in Christ are not entirely outside that same eschatology. This underscores the great intentions of the Creator, now the Redeemer, who desires not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his sin and receive life, life eternal. The life that Adam failed to obtain is now given to God's people as a free gift, through justification. The importance of the doctrine of life becomes clear in the following chapters, which investigate bioethical questions in depth. Along the way, too, VanDrunen reminds us of the inevitability of human suffering. Thus, there can be no utopian dreams for the present dispensation, even as we must strive to improve healthcare.


Space prohibits fully exploring the rich materials in chapters 4–9. They are divided simply into "The Beginning of Life" and "The End of Life." The contents are rich, wise, informative, and, I hope this comes across sounding right, non-alarmist. One reads so many works on bioethics that are so emotionally charged that there is more heat than light. VanDrunen is not lacking in conviction, to be sure. He is passionate about the sanctity of human life, the rights of the dying patient, etc., but he is marvelously sane in his arguments.

Take, for example, his discussion of marriage and contraception. He is a strong defender of the creation ordinance of marriage and procreation, yet he recognizes the value of celibacy and of stewardship in having children. He helps the reader decide which kinds of contraception devices are permissible, and which are not. He steers a nice balance between the legitimate desire for children and the danger of idolizing the family. Or, take

the chapter on assisted reproduction. VanDrunen is aware of the emotional ironies involved: “What many can attain to they do not want, and what many want they cannot attain” (119). But he is also aware of the technological opportunities along with their advantages and pitfalls. He has great compassion for the plight of couples who are infertile. And while not forbidding the use of certain assisted procreation techniques, he, first, warns against using them as a panacea, and, second, issues strong reservations about such methods as AID (artificial insemination by donor), because it introduces a third party into the mix. In the discussion of adoption, which he highly favors, he raises the question of adoption by single parents. There, he subtly, and in my judgment rightly, distinguishes between “creating” a child by assisted procreation for the purpose of having one’s own biological progeny, and adopting an already born child. The former is unacceptable. The latter is better than leaving a child defenseless. Similarly with freezing an embryo. While not morally out of bounds, it presents such a host of difficulties that the couple considering this procedure must exercise great caution.

VanDrunen is at his best, which is saying a lot, when treating end-of-life issues. He shows both exegetical skills and pastoral sensitivity toward those facing such difficulties as whether to withhold or even withdraw treatment from a dying patient. Never maudlin, nor rosy (“It was such a blessing!”), he presents death as the result of the Fall. Death is an event that is horrendously telling of a world cursed by God. And yet there is for the believer a way to handle death, indeed, something to understand about it, that makes it the passageway to eternal bliss promised to all those who love Christ’s appearing. As he does throughout, VanDrunen reminds us that participating in the life of the church can be the best preparation for the reality of death. At the least, the sacraments are a regular microcosm of death, followed by life. Perhaps his most eloquent pages, though, are centered on love. The love of God and neighbor is the ultimate self-sacrificing virtue. Though it is never easy to depend upon others, yet, “by learning

to live in community with love for our neighbor we prepare ourselves for dying. The person who has cultivated the virtue of love for a long time and thus has learned to give *and* to receive is much better prepared to face difficult periods of dependence upon others” (182). Someone who is dying is indeed going to have to receive the care and nurture of others, which is not enjoyable for a would-be autonomous person.

Our author puts these grand principles into practice marvelously in the tough situations where there are advanced directives, ventilators, feeding tubes, financial issues, and much more. I commend this treasure of a book to pastors, believers in the pew, and both believers and unbelievers in healthcare. I do not believe there is anything quite like it, nor is there likely to be for a good while. 

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A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel

by John Colquhoun

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2010¹

by John V. Fesko

A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel, by John Colquhoun, 1835. Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2009, 320 pages, \$25.00.

C. S. Lewis once commented that reading old

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=196&issue_id=53.

books was to be preferred to reading new books because old books brought the fresh breeze of the centuries into our minds. They show us truths that might not be prevalent in our own day. The fresh breeze of the centuries comes off the pages of this wonderful reprint of a classic work on covenant theology by nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian minister John Colquhoun (1748-1827, pronounced *ka-hoon*).

Colquhoun begins his work with an exposition of the moral law, which he also calls the law of nature, and argues that the law of nature was given to Adam as a covenant of works. With man's fall, only Christ fulfills the law's demands, and it is only in Christ's hands that the moral law becomes a rule of life. Colquhoun explains that God did not give the moral law to Christians for their justification but for their sanctification so they might be informed on how they could walk worthy of their union with Christ. Colquhoun proceeds to explain the publication of the law at Sinai in the Mosaic covenant (part of the covenant of grace), which was published in the form of a covenant of works. In the subsequent chapters, Colquhoun elaborates upon the properties and principles of the moral law, the uses of, differences between, and harmony between law and gospel. In the concluding chapters Colquhoun treats the believer's response to the law.

What commends this book is that it is very clearly written and straightforward. Ministers, elders, and laymen alike can benefit from this work. The work is replete with exegetical support for its claims, as well as ample scriptural citations. It is also comprehensive in scope, as Colquhoun begins with creation and the law of nature and then works out the implications of the Fall vis-à-vis the moral law throughout redemptive history as it relates to the covenant of grace and its various administrations (the Mosaic and new covenants). Moreover, unlike some contemporary Reformed theological works that affirm the covenant of works but then never raise the doctrine once the Fall is introduced, Colquhoun constantly presses and connects the covenant of works throughout redemptive history. For example, Colquhoun

argues that when ministers preach the gospel, they must preach the law in subservience to the gospel. Preachers must preach the law as the covenant of works to press its demands of perfection and its curse for disobedience upon the minds of sinners and self-righteous formalists (136). Preaching the law as the covenant of works drives sinners to the gospel of Christ and his fulfillment of the law on their behalf. Colquhoun writes, "Believers are, in their justification, delivered likewise from the condemning power of the law as a covenant" (211-12). "As long as a man continues alive to the law," writes Colquhoun, "he is dead to God; but when he becomes dead to the law in point of justification, he begins to live unto God in respect of sanctification" (232). For Colquhoun, justification breaks the power and dominion of sin and frees the redeemed person to live out his sanctification (237, 240).

What is striking about this book, however, is how relevant it is on a number of controversial fronts in Reformed circles. Natural law has been called Roman Catholic. The doctrine of republication of the covenant of works has been labeled Pelagian. Law and gospel and giving priority to the doctrine of justification have been labeled as Lutheran. Yet all of these doctrines flow effortlessly from Colquhoun's pen without the slightest hint that they were anything less than Presbyterian confessional orthodoxy. The following quotations might be regarded as troubling for many, but for Colquhoun, they were orthodox:

Natural Law. "The same [natural law] is also manifest from the laws which, in countries destitute of the light of revelation, are commonly enacted for encouraging virtue and discouraging vice, and for preserving the rights of civil society. Men in heathen countries can have no standard for those laws but the relics of natural law, which all the descendants of Adam bring with them into the world" (9).

Republication. "The covenant of the law from Mount Sinai, then, was the covenant of works; which contains a method of obtaining the inheritance inconsistent with that of the promise, but which cannot disannul the promise or covenant of

grace” (59).

Law and Gospel. “To distinguish truly and clearly between the law as a covenant and the law as a rule is, as Luther expressed it, ‘the key which opens the hidden treasure of the gospel’” (40).

Priority of Justification. “To pretend to sanctification, and then to rely on it for justification, is to derive the fountain from the stream, the cause from the effect, and so to invert the order of the blessings of salvation. It is necessary that our sins are forgiven, and our persons accepted as righteous in the sight of God, in order to our being capable of yielding the least degree of acceptable obedience to Him” (309).

Colquhoun’s little book is immensely helpful because it does bring the fresh breeze of the centuries before the mind, the breeze of historic, classical, Presbyterian, confessional theology. What makes it quite useful is that Colquhoun has no interest in the present debates over the aforementioned issues—he has long since joined the church triumphant. But this also means that his book is probably capable of spreading more light than heat. Aside from its usefulness as an aid to present debates, Colquhoun’s work is a wonderful tonic for the soul, as he so clearly presents the demands of the law and the promises of the gospel that anyone who reads this book is bound to walk away with a greater appreciation for the gospel of Christ. ☺

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God’s Word in Servant-Form

by *Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2010¹

by John V. Fesko

God’s Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture, by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008, 107 pages \$12.95, paper.

Ever since the serpent in the garden-temple of Eden hissed the words “Hath God said . . .,” the word of God has been under attack. The challenge to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is not new, but it does appear that every generation has to struggle with challenges to these truths. The republication of Richard Gaffin’s journal articles on the doctrine of Scripture in Kuyper and Bavinck is, therefore, a welcome contribution.

Gaffin’s studies were originally two journal articles written in celebration of the birth of J. Gresham Machen. These articles were a riposte to a book published by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*.² In their book, Rogers and McKim made the claim that the doctrine of inerrancy was a scholastic innovation foisted upon the Reformed tradition by the likes of Francis Turretin and Charles Hodge. This rationalism-induced stupor also drove Machen to a scholastic split of Old Princeton to form Westminster Theological Seminary. In the course of their study, Rogers and McKim try to enlist Kuyper and Bavinck as allies to their cause.

The study is divided into four parts. Part I addresses background issues, part II covers the views of Kuyper, part III treats the views of Bavinck,

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=201&issue_id=54.

2 1980; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999.

and the book concludes with a postscript. The main strength of Gaffin's treatment of Kuyper and Bavinck is his in-depth look at the primary sources, a significant weakness for the Rogers and McKim book. Gaffin, for example, carefully unpacks Kuyper's views from his untranslated *Dictaten Dogmatiek* (1891) and Bavinck's from the then untranslated *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (1895). Gaffin's analysis is informed by a thorough knowledge of the two Dutch theologians. Gaffin's overall conclusions are that Kuyper and Bavinck stand in continuity with their Reformation and post-Reformation heirs, even those from Old Princeton, Hodge and Warfield. He also shows how both theologians affirm the necessity of the testimony of the Spirit for people to accept the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Among the other conclusions he draws, two stand out as vital to a solid doctrine of Scripture.

First, he argues that for Kuyper and Bavinck both the form and content of Scripture are fully divine and human—these traits are indivisible. This is an important point given the recent claims, not only of Rogers and McKim, but also from those such as Peter Enns in his book *Inspiration and Incarnation*.³ In his book Enns claims, echoing something of Rogers and McKim, that Scripture is a human product and, therefore, susceptible to human foibles. In Enns's case, he contends that New Testament authors misquoted Old Testament texts. While such claims can be made, enlisting Kuyper and Bavinck cannot be done. For both Dutchmen, "The form, in its genuinely human character, expresses the specifically authorial intention of the Spirit. The form/content distinction does not parallel the human/divine distinction" (101).

Second, Gaffin highlights the ethical dimension of the historic debate surrounding the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. The careful, disciplined, and intense study of Scripture is absolutely necessary, as there are some genuine challenges that are difficult to explain. However, "the crucial issue raised by contemporary biblical criticism is


³ Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.

primarily ethical. Much of this criticism is heart-directed rebellion against the authority of Scripture as God's word" (101). Here Gaffin hits the proverbial nail on the head.

What makes Gaffin's contribution a worthwhile read is that now that Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* has been translated into English, those interested in studying his doctrine of Scripture can use Gaffin as a helpful guide. However, the debate over the inerrancy of Scripture ebbs and flows with the theological tide, but it will never disappear. Not only is the Enns book evidence of this trend, but so is a recent entry by Andrew McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*. Once again, in this book McGowan levels the same disproven canard that inerrancy is the illegitimate child of rationalism and Scripture. In the attempt to make his case, McGowan tries to employ Kuyper and Bavinck. So Gaffin's book is a helpful antidote, once again, to the claims that Bavinck and Kuyper did not hold to inerrancy.

The one area where Gaffin could have improved and strengthened his argument is when he claims that Reformed orthodoxy in its later development did have an overly mechanical and atomistic approach to the doctrine of Scripture. Gaffin does highlight the overall continuity between Reformed orthodoxy and the Reformation, but *mechanistic* and *atomistic* are not quite historically accurate adjectives to attach to the Reformed orthodox doctrine. Here Gaffin's study would have been greatly aided by reference to, and perhaps engagement with, Richard Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, especially volume 1 on Scripture. In volume 1, Muller amasses the primary source material to show the profound continuity between the Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy. Particularly helpful in this volume is how Muller treats prolegomena and the relationship between reason and revelation. His conclusions represent a dagger into the heart of the claims that the likes of Turretin were given over to rationalism.

Over all, Gaffin's book should be read with enthusiasm, as he ably refutes the claims that Kuyper and Bavinck only believed in the infallibility and not the inerrancy of Scripture. Gaffin's

book should be placed on the shelf of must-reads alongside B. B. Warfield's *Authority and Inspiration of the Bible* and John Murray's *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*. Gaffin's volume is a worthy addition to these two classics which stand as sentinels against the attempts to mitigate the authority and inspiration of Scripture. 

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Exploring the Origins of the Bible

Edited by Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2010¹

by James W. Scott

Exploring the Origins of the Bible, edited by Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 272 pages, \$22.99, paper.

A special spring session of the Hayward Lectures at the loosely evangelical Acadia Divinity College (the theological faculty of Acadia University) in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, brought together eight scholars in 2006 to address various aspects of the canonical formation of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Four of the lecturers were Acadia faculty members, two others were also Canadian

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=202&issue_id=54.

professors, and two were prominent nonevangelicals from warmer climes: Emanuel Tov and James H. Charlesworth. Two of the lecturers, Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, edited the eight lectures as *Exploring the Origins of the Bible*, which Baker Academic has now published.

Anyone who is seriously interested in the literary-historical origin of the Bible, especially as that is understood from a generally conservative (if not necessarily theologically Reformed) point of view, will find much to think about in these essays.

Emanuel Tov, the leading Jewish authority on Old Testament textual criticism, starts off with "The Septuagint as a Source for the Literary Analysis of Hebrew Scripture." Looking at some of the major differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text, he argues that the translators of the Septuagint used Hebrew manuscripts that often differed from (and sometimes were antecedent to) those upon which the Masoretic text was based. Both textual traditions need to be considered in literary analysis of the Old Testament, he insists. This should have been clear to Christians all along from the New Testament's heavy use of the Septuagint.

In "Writings Ostensibly outside the Canon," James H. Charlesworth commends the study of the Jewish writings not included in the Old Testament canon. There is background information to be gained from these writings, to be sure, but he goes too far when he denies the crucial distinction between canonical and noncanonical writings, claiming that "God's Word" (whatever that means to Charlesworth) can be found in the latter as well as in the former.

Stephen G. Dempster's "Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon" is the longest and most footnoted essay, as is appropriate for a Westminster Seminary graduate. He makes a solid case for the view that the Old Testament canon developed in three parts (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings), a view that has come in for considerable criticism of late.

R. Glenn Wooden addresses "The Role of 'the Septuagint' in the Formation of the Biblical Canons." He surveys the various Greek books of

the Old Testament (and their variant forms) that existed in antiquity, how they differed from the Hebrew, and their use in the church. This complex situation he imagines is problematic for the traditional views of verbal inspiration and a fixed canon; it shows, rather, that the boundaries of Scripture have not always been properly respected. His solutions—multiple canons and texts of divine authority, and a continuing “inspiration” in those canons and texts over the centuries—are inconsistent with Scripture being the word of a truthful and self-consistent God.


In “The Apocryphal Jesus: Assessing the Possibilities and Problems,” Craig A. Evans argues that extracanonical gospels (such as the Gospel of Thomas) are of dubious historical value as independent sources for the life and teaching of Jesus, and have been given far too much credence by certain (more radical) scholars. This essay is a welcome dose of sanity.

Stanley E. Porter presents the intriguing essay “Paul and the Process of Canonization.” He argues that the Pauline collection of epistles was assembled toward the end of Paul’s life or shortly thereafter, and was instigated by Paul or one or more of his close associates. This controversial thesis is probably correct, in my judgment. It tends to refute the modern denials of Pauline authorship of a number of epistles attributed to him (such as Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles).

“Wherein Lies Authority?” asks Lee Martin McDonald. It lies not in the text of Scripture itself, he says, but in Jesus Christ, who comes to us through the biblical text (in the church’s various canons, texts, and translations). However, the authority of God (or Christ) and his word are the very same authority. It is true, as McDonald argues at length (though I would dispute some of his assertions), that we do not have a perfectly certain original text or a perfectly reliable translation, but our Bibles are still the authoritative Word of God to the extent that they represent the inspired text, and that extent is quite high.

Jonathan R. Wilson concludes with a short essay on “Canon and Theology: What Is at Stake?” He argues that both classical Protestantism, basing

authority on the biblical text, and classical Catholicism, basing authority on the church, do not acknowledge the messy realities of history (including canonical formation), and thus dehistoricize Scripture and the church, respectively. Modernism (or “high Modernity”), on the other hand, basing authority on reason or experience, dehistoricizes humankind. And now postmodernism (or rather “late Modernity”) historicizes everything. Wilson seems to accept this historical flux, but wants to find historical redemption in it, without the faulty universals of doctrine, as the Holy Spirit works in history. This is a conceptually profound, but deeply non-Reformed essay. If historical flux is ultimate, there is no redemption in it.

This collection of essays is a challenging read. It deals with current scholarly controversies, but often from a distorted perspective. I would recommend the book only to those who are already quite knowledgeable on the subject and well-grounded in Reformed theology. 

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Books on Grieving: A Bibliographical Essay

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2010¹

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr., and Gregory E. Reynolds

There are several good books on the subject of grief and many more that are disastrous. Here we

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=211&issue_id=56.

discuss the strength of the good books and their intended audiences.

Helpful are two booklets which we would feel comfortable giving to someone who is newly bereaved: Elizabeth Elliot's *Facing the Death of Someone You Love* (Westchester, IL: Good News, 1982, 14-page pamphlet); and Donald Howard's *Christians Grieve Too* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979, 29-page booklet). The latter is especially good for a husband losing his wife, particularly if she is young and leaves children. But it is applicable to all Christians facing grief.

If the person is ready to examine their grief (often a year or more later), the pastor may help them by reading Wayne Oates's *Your Particular Grief* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1981, 116 pages) as a nice antidote to the one-size-fits-all self-help books on the subject.

Two longer, popular books that are often helpful to grieving people, especially those who have lost a spouse, are written by J. I. Packer and C. S. Lewis. Packer's *A Grief Sanctified: Passing through Grief to Peace and Joy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1997, 208 pages), presents Puritan Richard Baxter's memoir of his wife's life and death with extensive commentary. Another Puritan, John Flavel, wrote a classic (1674) tract on grief, *A Token for Mourners*. This may be found in the fifth volume of his *Works* or in a new Puritan Paperback by the Banner of Truth Trust. A contemporary rendition of Flavel's work similar to (and taking its title from) Baxter's is C. S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber, 1961; first published under the pseudonym "N. W. Clerk," 151 pages).

David Biebel is an Evangelical Free pastor and Gordon-Conwell seminary graduate. His book *If God Is So Good, Why Do I Hurt So Bad?* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989, 175 pages) shares his personal experience of the death of his oldest son and the serious illness of a second. He writes with a tested Christian maturity which still struggles with the issues. At points his broad evangelicalism comes out, but this is a book which is well worth reading.

The classic text which every pastor should have in his library is J. W. Worden's *Grief Counsel-*

ing and Grief Therapy (New York: Springer, 1991, 183 pages). This book helps a pastor identify when grief has crossed the line into complicated grief, grief that is not likely to resolve with time, and which probably requires pastoral or other counseling. This book has a good bibliography and index.

Another favorite for pastors is a book by a Jewish rabbi, J. Shep Jeffreys, *Helping Grieving People, When Tears Are Not Enough* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2005, 347 pages). This book has all the current theories about grief and how it resolves, plus hundreds of practical tips on how to approach grief among various groups. Jeffreys taught this material at Johns Hopkins and it shows. This book has an extensive bibliography and thorough index. If you only get one book on the subject, make it this one. These last two volumes are not inexpensive, but they are each worth the price. ☺

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Thandabantu

by J. Cameron Fraser

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Thandabantu: The Man Who Loved the People, by J. Cameron Fraser. Belleville, Ontario, Canada: Guardian Books, 2010, 70 pages, \$7.25, paper.

This sweet little book tells a large story in a very modest but poignant way. Adding to its moving content is my own association with the author and vicariously with the various Orthodox Presbyterian missions in Africa. J. Cameron Fraser was a classmate of mine at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, graduating a year ahead of me in 1978. He and his wife, Margaret, left a lasting impression on my wife, Robin, and me.

The book is a personal supplement to an earlier, more complete biography by Alexander McPherson published in 1967 by the Banner of Truth Trust, *James Fraser: A Record of Missionary Endeavor in Rhodesia in the Twentieth Century*.

Faithfulness in the cause of Christ is the theme of the book and the characteristic of the man, James Fraser. His African nickname, Thandabantu, means “the man who loved the people.” His unflinching love for his Lord moved him to love the Rhodesian (now Zimbabwean) people, as the wonderful black and white photographs of the homes of the Frasers quietly testify. The family home in Strathpeffer, Scotland (23), is an elegant country house, standing in stark contrast to the thatched hut in which James Fraser, and eventually his wife, lived in Zenka, Rhodesia (39) from 1938 to the year of Cameron’s birth, 1954. For the last five years of his short life, James lived, with his family, in a slightly more commodious dwelling in Mbuma (52).


¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=229&issue_id=60.

In persuasively presenting the need for the gospel in Rhodesia to the 1946 synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Fraser recounted an exchange with an African travel companion, Paul Ncube:

Throughout the trip this man, who is of a very solid and unemotional type, had been very happy in his own quiet way. I said to him, “You looked very happy throughout the journey. Why were you so happy?” “Well,” he said, “it is not so long ago that the Reserve was in total darkness, and even now there is only a little light, but the Word of God is in this Reserve and the Holy Spirit is at work here too, and there is no hope for the powers of darkness. Christ must prevail. The whole Reserve will yet be lit up with the Glory of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.” If we go forth in that spirit we can be sure that the Lord will acknowledge our efforts. (35–36)

James and his wife, Christine, gave their lives to this effort. Making way for gospel preaching and the building of the churches were the twin labors of education and medical assistance, the latter being the labor to which Christine devoted most of her energies. Indefatigable workers, the Frasers wore themselves out by their mid-forties, most likely making them more susceptible to the diseases that caused their deaths. But their labor was not in vain. Several touching stories of conversions enrich this very personal account.

My only regret is that the 1967 biography is out of print and rare on the used market. This missionary narrative stands with the best works in that inspiring genre. The clarity of the gospel articulated in the Reformed confessions is, as John Nevius and John Paton attested, the only sure foundation for missions. I highly recommend this little book.

The book is available in the U.S. from Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org. 

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✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

In What Sense?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2010¹

by Mark Jones

The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant, edited by Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009, 358 pages, \$16.99, paper.

It is true, the Lutheran Divines, they do expressly oppose the Calvinists herein, maintaining the Covenant given by *Moses*, to be a Covenant of works, and so directly contrary to the Covenant of grace. Indeed, they acknowledge that the Fathers were justified by Christ, and had the same way of salvation with us; only they make that Covenant of *Moses* to be a superadded thing to the Promise, holding forth a condition of perfect righteousness unto the Jews, that they might be convinced of their own folly in their self-righteousness. But, I think, it is already cleared, that *Moses* his Covenant, was a Covenant of grace.²

Reviewing a book with multiple authors often presents a daunting challenge, especially when the contributors manifest some disagreement with one another. Perhaps this disharmony prevents *The Law Is Not of Faith* (hereafter *TLNF*) from ever

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=199&issue_id=54.

2 Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis* (London, 1647), 251.

setting forth a clearly stated thesis. While I am not persuaded by all of the arguments in this book, the editors, to their credit, provide the Reformed community with a work that will lead to more, I hope friendly, discussion on what has historically been a complicated and much-vexed issue. This review offers some analysis and asks some questions in the hope that both the authors and readers can properly assess the merit, or lack thereof, of the book's argument, namely, that the Mosaic covenant is "in some sense" a republication of the prelapsarian covenant of works (6).

TLNF is divided into three sections: (1) historical studies by J.V. Fesko, D.G. Hart, and Brenton C. Ferry, (2) biblical studies by Bryan D. Estelle, Richard Belcher, Byron Curtis, Guy Waters, T. David Gordon, and S.M. Baugh, and (3) theological studies by David VanDrunen and Michael Horton. The goal of the book is to show that the idea that the Mosaic covenant is in "some sense" a covenant of works has a rich Reformed history. The book is, in part, a response to John Murray's contention that to view the Mosaic covenant as a "repetition of the so-called covenant of works" is a "grave misconception" (16). Thankfully the introduction exercises some caution in applying the term "monocovenantal" to Murray (16), but T. David Gordon thinks Murray goes in that direction (254). The introduction also makes clear that the present volume is needed because the republication thesis has "received much hostility in books, peer-reviewed journals, and trials in the courts of the church" (17). The goal, then, of the book is to: (1) legitimize certain views on the Mosaic covenant as orthodox, that is, primarily with regard to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and (2) foster continuing discussion on the question of Sinai's relation to Eden.

In general, my major concern regarding this book has to do with its basic thesis. The suggestion that the Mosaic covenant given at Sinai is "in some sense" a covenant of works originally made with Adam (6) is not really disputed in the history of Reformed covenant theology, if by that we mean that the moral law first given in Eden is revived and declared at Sinai on tablets of stone. Few in

Reformed circles would disagree with “that sense.” The more significant question centers on how precisely the Mosaic covenant may be viewed as a covenant of works. *TLNF*, because of its numerous contributors, does not easily lend itself to a clearly defined thesis. In the end, readers are still left with the question: in what sense is the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works? Do we agree with Anthony Burgess—Guy Waters adopts his position (211, fn. 2)—or T. David Gordon? Actually, the agreed thesis of *TLNF* might be that whatever we say about Sinai, John Murray was wrong to recast covenant theology in a monocovenantal direction (16–17).

In the next place, I cannot help but feel that we need to clarify the major point of contention, and perhaps the *raison d'être* for this book. In this intra-Reformed debate the distinction between the covenant of works and covenant of grace is not really in question.³ The present debate, rather, concerns whether this bicovenantal structure is enhanced by the view that Sinai functioned at the typological level as a means for inheritance by works in antithesis to grace. Hence, the argument made by some is that Sinai is in some sense a republication of the covenant of works. This precise view has caused some suspicion—perhaps even judicial action in church courts—over the language of republication. If anything, this particular view of republication might be worth considering in more detail, since there would be a definite thesis to consider.

One should note that a simple appeal to WCF 19.1–2 does not establish all forms of republication. There is a significant difference between formal and material republication. The law first given to Adam was certainly “revived” or “republished”

³ I recognize that some of the authors might feel uncomfortable with what they perceive to be “monocovenantal” tendencies in thinkers like Murray. For my own part, I fail to see how Murray can be described as a monocovenantalist. While he rejects the terminology of the covenant of works, he nevertheless affirms the substance of the doctrine. See “Adamic Administration,” where he argues: “The condition was obedience” (http://www.the-highway.com/adamic-admin_Murray.html). That he “flattens” out the covenant of grace does not make him a monocovenantalist, though it may make him orthodox. See also chap. 8 in Murray’s *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), titled “Law and Grace” (57ff.).

at Sinai (and even in the new covenant), but most Reformed divines did not make the moral law coextensive with the covenant of works.⁴ Critics of republication normally have in view the so-called Klinean version, and not the more typical view that states the moral law was republished on tables of stone. In other words, one may hold to a version of republication and still raise concerns about certain versions of republication, particularly those versions that include the language of merit and works in opposition to grace.

Related to the concerns above, *TLNF* fails to address what version of the covenant of works Sinai replicates. Such a question is not without reason since from the late sixteenth century many Reformed theologians differed on the precise nature of the covenant of works. One only has to compare the British theologians on this issue, particularly the views of Francis Roberts, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Patrick Gillespie, and John Ball, to prove that there existed several perspectives on the covenant of works. Did Adam possess the Holy Spirit as most Reformed theologians maintained? Was Adam’s faith natural or supernatural? What about Adam’s potential reward? Was it heaven or life in Eden? What about Meredith Kline’s own unique contributions to this doctrine (e.g., the role of merit)? Did God assist Adam in his obedience, as Burgess argued? It seems to me that the question over the precise nature of the covenant of works needs to be addressed in some detail before one can understand and formulate the so-called republication idea for the simple reason that it makes all the difference in the world if one understands the covenant of works to be based on strict justice apart from grace.

Following from the above, should we automatically assume that republication places, at the typological level, works and grace in antithesis? I am not saying all the authors do this, but I do want to make it clear that most Reformed theologians have not viewed the covenant of works as devoid of grace. Patrick Gillespie even referred to Eden

⁴ WCF 19.5–6 clarifies this point.

as a covenant of grace, albeit with qualifications, and Francis Roberts dichotomized between a covenant of works and a covenant of faith because he wanted to maintain that God's grace was operative in both covenants.⁵ The issue, as I see it, is not whether Sinai contains similarities with Eden. Instead, the debate concerns whether Israel's failure as a nation to maintain a necessary level of obedience under the Mosaic economy was the reason for their exile.⁶ If this is true, we may wonder what sort of existential tension this might have created in the life of believers from Moses to Christ! In connection with this, the Westminster divine Stephen Marshall acknowledges that there was indeed a "rehearsal" of the covenant of works at Sinai. However, he makes an important point about how the Mosaic covenant relates to the new covenant: "neither did the Lord promise them [Israel] entrance into, or continuance in that Land, but upon the same conditions upon which hee promiseth eternall [sic] life, as true Faith in the Gospel, with the love and feare of God, and obedience of his Commandments."⁷ Their failure to enter the land was because of unbelief and the subsequent idolatry and disobedience that resulted from their unbelief.⁸

Regarding the "historical" analyses in the book, I do not have the space here to register my concerns in any detail. However, the chapter by Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy," warrants a number of observations. Ferry provides us with a well-researched chapter. He clearly has done a lot of work and

5 Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened* (London, 1661), 221; Francis Roberts, *The Mystery and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London, 1657), 26ff. I could give many more quotes on the presence of grace in the covenant of works, but I will hold them back for my forthcoming work on Westminster covenant theology.

6 In addition, the land argument based on works seems to suffer from the problem that Israel was later restored to the land as a sign (type) of restoration in Christ, and yet the covenant of works does not make provision for restoration.

7 *A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants* (London, 1644), 11–12.

8 Second Kings 17:14 reads: "But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God." The Hebrew here for "believe" (*amin*) is also used in Gen. 15:6. See also Heb. 3–4.

there are some good quotes from various seventeenth-century theologians, though at times the names and quotes just roll off each other a little too much without appropriately contextualizing their quotes. My main concern is that Ferry may have been too ambitious. The various taxonomies presented were incomplete. Moreover, Ferry was rather dismissive of past interpretations (78–80). While I agree with some of his criticisms of other writers, he should have exercised more caution in his rhetoric simply because he makes a number of his own interpretive mistakes. These mistakes are nowhere more evident than in the taxonomic chart he provides at the end of his chapter. The problem with such a wide-ranging survey of thinkers on this issue is that individual statements are often stripped from the author's broader way of thinking; the author is then pigeonholed into a category that he himself likely would not have recognized. For example, at best it is an oversimplification to suggest that John Owen holds to a fourfold covenant schema; at worst it is plain wrong. The concept of "testament" and its relation to "covenant" is extremely significant for Owen. Once this is appreciated, it becomes increasingly difficult to label Owen. But this is not discussed. Owen's position defies neat categorizations, and Ferry's chart only serves to obscure the matter. Importantly, even Owen's more radical position on Sinai must be qualified. He argues that the Mosaic covenant is not a revival of the covenant of works strictly (i.e., "formally"). Rather, the moral law is renewed declaratively (i.e., "materially") and not covenantally: "God did never formally and absolutely renew or give again this law as a covenant a second time. Nor was there any need that so he should do, unless it were declaratively only, for so it was renewed at Sinai."⁹ In other words, as noted above, the "republication thesis" does not make Sinai co-extensive with Eden in terms of strict covenantal principles.

What is interesting about Owen is that he openly acknowledges that most Reformed divines

9 *The Works of John Owen*, 23 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Edition), 5:244.

(e.g., Calvin, Martyr, Bucanus) did not view Sinai as “another covenant, but only a different administration of [the covenant of grace]. But this was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ, that it hath the appearance and name of another covenant. The Lutherans on the other side, insist on two arguments to prove, that not a twofold administration of the same covenant, but that two covenants substantially distinct, are intended in this discourse of the apostle.”¹⁰ Owen sides with the Lutherans on this issue: “Wherefore, we must grant *two distinct covenants*, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant, to be intended.”¹¹

The exegetical sections were for the most part well done and particularly useful polemical tools in the continuing justification debates. I want that to be clear because my concerns and questions in this review may overshadow my appreciation for a lot of the exegetical work, and I do not wish for that to happen. However, in connection with my major critique of the book, these chapters fail to establish the thesis—whatever that may exactly be—of the book. Byron G. Curtis’s article provides a helpful exegetical and theological analysis of Hosea 6:7. However, I am not persuaded that his argument establishes the thesis that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a covenant of works. All Hosea 6:7 teaches is that Israel, like Adam, transgressed God’s covenant. It tells us nothing of the precise nature of the covenants themselves. If we were to apply Curtis’s logic to Paul’s writings, we would have to conclude that the new covenant was a covenant of works as well. Paul appeals to Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve in Paradise as paradigmatic for the temptation of the church in the present age (2 Cor. 11:3). All these texts prove is that there is some kind of parallel between the two situations, but it does not necessarily establish that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works. The logical distinction between sufficient

¹⁰ *Works*, 22:71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 76. I would point the reader to the quote by Anthony Burgess at the beginning of this review for further confirmation of the Lutheran-Reformed divide on this issue.

and necessary condition is ignored here.

Guy Waters’s chapter on Romans 10:5 and the covenant of works also contributes to the value of the book. But even he seems to distance himself from the more radical position(s) of Kline and Gordon by aligning himself with Anthony Burgess (211, fn. 2), who clearly viewed Sinai as an administration of the covenant of grace and not different in kind. As noted above, this is what makes the book as a whole rather difficult to interpret in terms of its stated purpose. Nevertheless, Waters’s chapter (and Horton’s) provides useful arguments in the context of the ongoing justification debate.

T. David Gordon’s chapter is in one respect the most satisfying of all the chapters for the simple reason that, agree or disagree with him, you are left in no doubt as to what precisely he is arguing. His argument focuses on five differences between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant. He concludes that these two covenants are “different in kind” (251) and notes that he does not blame the first-generation Israelites for resisting Moses’ efforts to engage them in the (characteristically legal) Sinaitic covenant (251). In fact, Gordon calls their decision, though rebellious, “judicious and well considered” (251). Gordon then turns his attention to John Murray and provides some reasons for why Murray misunderstood the matter so badly. Indeed, Gordon is grateful that Murray, to his knowledge, never wrote on Galatians. Why? Because Murray could make no sense of the letter and Gordon likes to think that Murray was “entirely flummoxed by Paul’s reasoning” (253) and so decided not to write on Galatians. The truth is that Murray’s lectures on Galatians can be found on the Internet in audio and written form; and, judging by his understanding of the letter, he does not appear to be as flummoxed as Gordon would like to think he is.¹² Nevertheless, Gordon’s chapter was certainly the most interesting of all the chapters, and he is to be commended for being entirely candid about his views.

I return to a few general queries, the first of

¹² <http://sites.google.com/site/themosaiccovenant/john-murray>.

which concerns the so-called form of republication that seems to be offered by some of the authors. The WCF clearly speaks of the prelapsarian covenant of works as demanding “perfect and personal obedience” (7.2; 19.1; WLC 20; WSC 12). Does it not follow that any covenant that does not require both “perfect and personal obedience” is not a covenant of works, even at the typological level? But, in two places (137, 301) we are informed that the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant was “imperfect/sincere obedience.” The WCF shows that the only covenant in which God accepts imperfect obedience is the covenant of grace (WCF 16.6). To say, then, that the Mosaic covenant is in some sense a covenant of works can be especially misleading to the average reader in light of the aforementioned concern.

The book attempts to be self-consciously confessional, which can be seen in the opening fictional story. In connection with this, I wish the book addressed which senses of republication are confessional and which are not. The sense one gets from *TLNF* is that almost all senses of republication are confessional, even the more radical view of Gordon, which has corollaries with the Salmurian theologian John Cameron. I do note, however, that on page 11, they speak of some unorthodox views of republication, but just which views are unorthodox seems to be left to the reader to figure out. Would one have to embrace classical dispensationalism to finally move from the pale of Reformed orthodoxy on this matter?

Finally, considering the general trajectory of this book, *TLNF* lacks a chapter that could shed some important light on this discussion, namely, the influence of George Mendenhall on Meredith Kline—and perhaps Kline’s obvious influence on many of the authors—with regard to ancient Near-Eastern (ANE) suzerain treaties. In short, Kline, following Mendenhall’s research, argued that there are essentially two types of covenants: law covenants and promise covenants. In this schema, Sinai, particularly Deuteronomy, represents a “law covenant” on account of its striking parallels with ANE suzerain treaty formats. This covenant is almost always conditional, often involving curses

upon those who fail to fulfill the terms of the covenant. Juxtaposed to this type of covenant is the Abrahamic covenant, which is an unconditional promise covenant that is modeled on a royal grant. Michael Horton, for example, follows this line of demarcation in several of his own works on the covenant.¹³ However, ANE scholars are raising many objections to Mendenhall’s thesis. Recently Dr. Noel Weeks, an expert in ANE culture, has shown that both Mendenhall’s and Kline’s work is not without a number of serious problems, especially in the area of methodology.¹⁴ If the authors, particularly the editors, of *TLNF* wish to continue this discussion regarding the place and function of Sinai in redemptive history, they will need to reckon with the arguments of scholars like Weeks who, in my opinion, subject Mendenhall’s and Kline’s methodology to devastating critique.

In conclusion let me summarize what I think are the main points in this discussion. To say that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a covenant of works may not be all that helpful in the final analysis if we are not more specific about what this means. I think the thesis needs to be defined more narrowly, perhaps by asking the following questions:

1. Is the Mosaic covenant distinct from the covenant of grace? Or, is it an administration of the covenant of grace? With the Lutherans, John Owen viewed it as distinct; the vast majority of the Reformed orthodox did not. The authors in *TLNF* do not seem to agree on this point. But it is an important matter that needs to be settled.

13 See *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 35ff.

14 *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). See also Noel Weeks, “Mari, Nuzi and the Patriarchs,” *Abr-Nahrain* 16 (1975–76): 73–82. Important to note for those who have not read Weeks’s work is his unflinching commitment to the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture from a classical Reformed perspective. Moreover, I sometimes wonder whether those who adopt Kline’s view of suzerain treaties, and their influence on how we understand biblical covenants, have actually read any recent scholarly literature that dissents from Kline’s findings.

2. If Sinai is “in some sense” a republication of the covenant of works at the typological level, then we need to define what is meant by the “covenant of works.” Is not Meredith Kline’s view of Eden a lot different from, say, Francis Roberts’s understanding of Adam’s prelapsarian state? Thus, these two writers might agree with each other that Sinai is “in some sense” a covenant of works, but in the end they could still have very different views of the Mosaic covenant and its function.

3. Is the works-principle at Sinai, at the typological level, totally devoid of assisting grace? Or did it (as Estelle and Kline have argued) function in such a way as to provide the “meritorious grounds for Israel’s continuance in the land?” (136).

4. In relation to Kline’s dependence upon Mendenhall, and Horton’s dependence upon them both, can we divide biblical covenants up into two categories of law covenants (e.g., Sinai) and promise covenants (e.g., Abrahamic)? How reliable is Mendenhall’s methodology?

5. Does the WCF tolerate Kline’s view of a works-principle? D. Patrick Ramsey’s work on this was never really engaged by the authors who referenced him but simply dismissed his argument (11, 43).¹⁵ Or, what views of Sinai are confessional and what views are not?

I hope that this review helps us to better understand and address this intra-Reformed debate. To argue that the giving of the law at Sinai has similarities with the covenant of works is not, to my mind, controversial in Reformed circles. To argue that a meritorious works-principle operated at the typological level in the Mosaic covenant—because Sinai is viewed as a law covenant—is, however, a serious point of contention. The Lutherans and some of our Reformed brethren may be right

¹⁵ See D. Patrick Ramsey, “In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 394ff.

about Moses, but *TLNF* has perhaps raised more questions than it answers. That is not necessarily a bad thing, of course. Therefore, I hope that future discussions on this topic will be enhanced because of this work; and perhaps, on a lesser level, my own review will provide the authors of *TLNF* with some further food for thought. ☺

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Reconciling the Two Covenants in the Old Testament

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by Brian J. Lee

The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant, edited by Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009, 358 pages, \$16.99, paper.

Covenant theology is one of the key distinctives of Reformed theology, and you’d be hard-pressed to find a Reformed believer who didn’t consider themselves in some sense to be “covenantal” in their approach to Scripture. The problem is, what that means today isn’t entirely clear. “Covenantal” is a term that can be so elastic as to mean practically anything, with the result that it means nothing.

The Law Is Not of Faith is an important book because it identifies a particular understanding

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=200&issue_id=54.

of works and grace in the Mosaic economy to be constitutive of Reformed covenant theology. This book's authors bring many different perspectives to this task, but they all share the conviction that at Sinai the Lord in some sense reestablished the merit-based probation of the Garden of Eden, as a grand and conclusive demonstration of sinful humanity's plight under the curse of the law. All this, while simultaneously holding forth in shadowy form the gracious Abrahamic promise of the coming Messiah who would deliver from the curse of the law. Furthermore, they all believe that this view of works and grace in the Mosaic economy is crucial for a right understanding of the work of Christ and the gospel, and is the mainstream historic view of those who have subscribed to the Reformed confessions.

If you think you are covenantal but aren't sure whether you agree with that last paragraph, or don't know if you've ever even heard such a thing before, you should buy this book and read it. One of the hallmarks of covenant thought in the Reformed tradition is diversity, so I am not naive enough to insist that every office-bearer that subscribes to the Reformed confessions must also subscribe to this book, or its view of the covenants. But the fact that many ministers and elders are unaware of such a mainstream view in our tradition is unacceptable.

If you are not convinced, I hope in the following pages to give you further reason to take and read. In this review essay, I attempt to present in some detail the strongest essays in this collection, while also identifying some of the challenges inherent in a project of this nature. The eleven essays in this volume are divided into historical (3), biblical (6), and theological studies (2), and the editors encourage the reader to tackle the material in the order of its presentation. These distinctions are helpful, and the breadth of expertise reflected by our authors is a real strength of this volume. While I agree with the editors' presentation of the material (it makes particular sense for newcomers to the topic), for the purposes of this review I will invert the order of reading, beginning with the last essay, and moving to the first.

The Contrast between Sinai and Zion

Michael Horton's essay, "Obedience Is Better Than Sacrifice," is one of the best in the volume, though not self-evidently on topic. However, once you understand how it relates to this topic, you probably are a long way along the road to grasping the significance and rationale for the republication thesis. And that rationale is to faithfully express the contrast between Sinai and Zion in the eyes of the New Testament, without undermining the fundamental continuity and coherence of redemptive history.

Horton identifies a crucial aspect of that contrast in his contribution—the "obedience" and "sacrifice" of his title, which can also be expressed as the contrast between the freedom of Zion opposed to the bondage and merit of Sinai. What is valuable about his approach is that he demonstrates the explanatory force and value of covenant theology in a way that moves outward from the person and work of Christ. This reflects the historical development of covenant theology itself, which was not an abstract exercise but a concrete attempt to explain the work of Christ.

This essay also shows that the contrast that covenant theology seeks to articulate is much broader than the Pauline contrast between law and gospel, or works and faith. Of course, there is nothing wrong with developing a theology from a Pauline foundation; his writings are central to—and constitutive of—the New Testament canon. But building exclusively on a Pauline law/gospel foundation for covenant theology lends credence to the view that its proponents are suffering from a Lutheran hangover. It also makes covenant theology particularly susceptible to the reappraisal of Paul's thought that we are currently experiencing.

Horton's obedience/sacrifice contrast draws upon Paul's Sinai/Zion contrast, but it really moves from the thought of the psalmist (Ps. 40) to the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 10). And this demonstrates a recurring theme of this volume: the republication thesis is an attempt to articulate a series of contrasts that exist within the Old Testament canon itself. It is a common misinterpreta-

tion of covenant theology that it relates primarily to the relation between the Old Testament and the New, or the old covenant and the new, or between the Jew and the Christian. But it is far more fundamentally an attempt to reckon with the contrast between Abraham and Moses, and their respective covenantal administrations.

Understood in this way, Paul's law/gospel schema is not an imposition on Old Testament data; it is rather a fundamental wrestling with the single greatest challenge to the interpretation of the Old Testament presented by the gospel of the risen Christ. Paul is the first in a long line of federal theologians wrestling with the Old Testament data.

Finally, Horton's essay reflects the eschatological aspect of the republication thesis. The eschatology of the New Testament places the believer in Christ on the far side of the probation, in the Sabbath rest, something that neither the first Adam nor Israel ever attained. The republication of the covenant of works is a typological reestablishment of the probation; it is a dramatic restaging of the tragedy of the Garden. It could just as well be called the "re-probationing." In the context of God's saving message, it makes absolutely clear that salvation will be no mere parole for good behavior.

David VanDrunen in the other theological essay in this book seeks to demonstrate how the natural law undergirds both the Adamic and Mosaic covenants. The use of the term "natural law" remains off-putting to many, despite the efforts of VanDrunen and others to demonstrate its place in our tradition. This is unfortunate. VanDrunen's thesis boils down to a simple fact, agreeable to many: the testimony of our conscience, the law written on man's heart in creation (Rom. 2:15), testifies to the basic principle that God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience. This is the works principle in a nutshell: do this (obedience) and you will live (reward), and implicitly, don't do this (disobedience) and you will die (punishment). The claim that the works principle was republished in the Mosaic administration suggests that Israel served as a microcosm of the whole world,

illustrating the basic predicament faced by sinners under the demands of a perfect law. That such proclamation of the law could at the same time have a gracious effect—driving sinners to Christ—strikes this reader as unobjectionable.

Interestingly, I think the instinctual opposition of many contemporary Calvinists to natural law bolster's VanDrunen's case. I gather that opponents suspect that categories of natural law put the gracious, spiritual character of the Christian faith at risk, and suggest a purely natural knowledge that points the way toward man's ascent to God under his own power. But the Reformed tradition locates natural law precisely at those places where the ascent to God is shut off, where human efforts at self-salvation are shown to be futile. Indeed, Eden and Sinai are the two moments in redemptive history where the terms of natural law are explicitly published, resulting in a written sentence against us. In covenant theology, therefore, natural law is explicitly distinguished from the gospel and from salvation, in a way that the Catholic tradition fails to do.

Two Covenants or One

Rightly or wrongly, many people will judge the success of *The Law Is Not of Faith* by the biblical essays. They are, on the whole, quite good, and taken together they make a strong case for the republication thesis. They are, however, challenging, and most of them will be far more easily understood by the seminary graduate than the layman.

Evenly balanced between Old Testament and New, they cover most of the key territory. I would argue that Jeremiah 31 and/or Hebrews 7–10 should have been included to explicitly address the biblical data suggesting in some sense the abrogation of the Mosaic administration due to its weakness and impotence. Republication suggests discontinuity, both from what came before (Abraham) and what comes after (Christ).

T. David Gordon's essay on the contrast of Abraham and Sinai in Galatians 3 is the best essay in the volume. It is not coincidentally also the most accessible, being the one biblical chapter that

could profitably be read by most laymen. To be fair to the other contributors, Gordon also has the easiest task in the book, that of describing how and why Paul distinguishes between the two covenants he finds in the Old Testament.

Gordon prosecutes this case flawlessly, with spare, elegant writing, and a clear argument. First, he introduces the five differences between Abraham and Sinai presented in Galatians 3. Another reason this essay is clear is because he identifies his opposition early on as John Murray, and engages him in direct argument. This is polemics at its best, affirming and denying clear propositions to bring about greater clarity and understanding with great force and charity. He articulates the Pauline counterargument in Galatians against Murray's claim that "the Mosaic covenant in respect of the condition of obedience is not in a different category from the Abrahamic." Gordon writes in lawyerly style,

"Promise" does not differ from "law"? Is not promise, by definition, unconditional? "Blessing" is not different from "cursing"? "Those of faith" are not different from "those of works of the law"? A covenant that justifies is not different from a covenant that does not? (253)

Pressing the polemic, Gordon continues,

I raise these questions gratefully, rhetorically, and instructively ... grateful that John Murray, to my knowledge, never wrote so much as a paragraph about the Galatian letter. He could have made no sense of the letter, and anything he might have written about it would therefore have been obfuscatory in the highest degree.

Horton's essay demonstrates that Paul's argument is not the only one for republication; that the broad thrust of biblical data supports this view. Gordon's essay shows that Paul's argument for republication is still the best. As Gordon notes, "If Paul says 'these are *two* covenants,' (Gal. 4:24), how can there be only one?"² Gordon uses Murray

2 This line is similar to one Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) used against monocovenantal brethren. Cocceius notes how

as an illustration of how it can be difficult for interpreters and preachers to make sense of Paul's frank talk on the covenants. Because of this, interpreters often assimilate Paul's arguments before fully understanding them and allowing them to speak with full force.

Bryan D. Estelle's essay is also one of the most important essays in the collection. This chapter—and its 157 footnotes—is more challenging to read than Gordon's, but well worth the effort. Estelle manages to capture precisely how the two opposing principles of works and grace coexist in the Mosaic economy. This is a crucial aspect of Meredith Kline's legacy that unfortunately was never as clearly conveyed in his writings as it was in the classroom. In each class, Kline would demonstrate through a close reading of the text how both works and grace were woven together in the Mosaic economy, while yet remaining clearly distinct. The monocovenantal error is to fail to allow the two principles to stand alone and distinct, instead reconciling and conflating them at every turn.

As Estelle puts it (quoting Preston Sprinkle), "Habakkuk 2:4 and Leviticus 18:5 are 'two mutually exclusive *soteriological* statements.'" Note, again, the recurring theme of this volume: the republication thesis is about explaining a covenantal contrast that exists *within* the pages of the Old Testament.

The strength of Estelle's exegesis (and Kline's before him) is in finding the law/gospel distinction in the Old Testament text on its own terms, the same law/gospel distinction that Paul will describe in his epistles. The experience of reading them allows you to "see" it in your own reading of the Old Testament (speaking anachronistically) before

some of his Reformed brethren err when they say that "the two Testaments are one Testament... I ask, what should we say to the Socinians, who urge the difference between the two Testaments? Should we persuade them that two equals one?" (*Moreh Nebochim*, §§107–8). Like Gordon, Cocceius felt that it was impossible to deny that there were two testaments in the light of Galatians 4:24 and Hebrews 8:13, but he also felt that a monocovenantal view forfeited all hope of convincing the erring (in Cocceius's case, Socinians; in Murray's, dispensationalists). It is much better to accurately portray the clear distinction maintained by Scripture, and articulate its rationale.

reading Paul's description of it.

Richard P. Belcher's chapter serves a similar purpose, and connects nicely with Horton's contribution in its description of covenantal themes in the Torah and the righteous king in the Psalter. This is important, because the language of righteousness in the Psalter often serves as a source of confusion on the matter of law and gospel, seeming to hold forth the personal piety and righteousness of the worshiper as the key to his standing before the Lord. But Belcher shows that the themes of Torah and kingship combine in such a way that the king is held forth as the federal head and champion of the people. Thus, Christ the King is the subject and speaker of the Psalter, and we understand and take his words of worship on our lips through our federal union with him.

The remaining three biblical studies, by Byron Curtis on Hosea 6:7, Guy Waters on Romans 10:5, and Steve Baugh on Galatians 5, provide important contributions to the volume's overall argument. Yet their scope is narrower, and they are quite technical in their handling of matters of detail. On the whole, they are less accessible and less compelling to read than the essays above. Curtis makes a good case for the traditional reading of Hosea 6:7, "they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant," and explains how the comparison of Adam and Israel as breakers of a similar covenant would have made sense to Hosea's audience. Waters, like Horton, makes it clear that properly understanding the legal nature of the Mosaic covenant is crucial to Paul's argument in Romans, and therefore crucial to the gospel of justification by faith. Baugh provides a detailed reading of Paul's teaching on the law, and in so doing addresses the "so-called New Perspective" interpreters of Paul.

The Historical Case

The three historical essays in this volume are all solid works of scholarship that contribute to the fundamental thesis of the book, but in my opinion they are not as powerful and satisfying as the Gordon or Horton chapters. This is in part by design; no one essay is intended to be a comprehensive

argument for the republication thesis, so none delivers a comprehensive conclusion. Instead, each essay is illustrative, contributing a piece of the puzzle to build an overall picture of the Reformed tradition on the question. In this sense, *The Law Is Not of Faith* doesn't lead with its strongest case when it puts the historical material first, though it might make the most pedagogical sense. Readers who aren't committed to this project may not be drawn in, and may give up before getting to the biblical material if they slavishly follow the prescribed order of presentation.

J. V. Fesko's presentation of the views of Calvin and Witsius is reflective of the illustrative nature of these essays, and reflects a broader pattern in historical scholarship on covenant theology. The body of data is so large that scholars are often forced to illustrate trajectories by selecting exemplars. This is a perfectly reasonable method, and as exemplars go, Calvin and Witsius are well chosen. Calvin's significance as founder of the Reformed tradition is beyond question, and Witsius stands at the back end of the period of Reformed orthodoxy and the high-water mark of federal theology. As an added bonus, Witsius was also translated into English early on and circulated in the North American colonies, and thus was both influential on the broader tradition and is easily available to readers today.

Fesko shows that both Calvin and Witsius exhibit the Reformed drive to articulate the presence of both legal and evangelical elements in the Mosaic economy. There is in this a great deal of fundamental agreement over a span of more than a century. However, Witsius does exhibit a greater theological and terminological refinement, borne of generations of ironing out difficulties, and a greater tendency to deploy typology in the explication of the Old Testament.

Yet the presentation of one example, and then another, with a closing comparison does not produce a compelling narrative. The result is primarily descriptive—importantly so—but lacking in an explanation of how or why these two data points are connected in this way.

Brenton Ferry also takes up Reformation views

in his taxonomy of Reformed views, though his scope is widened down to the present day. Like Fesko, Ferry's task is primarily descriptive, looking at how Reformed thinkers have answered three questions: How does the Mosaic covenant relate to the new covenant? How does the Mosaic covenant relate to the covenant of works? And finally, how does the Mosaic covenant relate to the covenant of grace? In the case of each question, Ferry presents the range of answers that have been offered by the Reformed, and the various distinctions that have been deployed in terms of describing contrasts and continuities. The result is another static and necessarily repetitive treatment of the material.

This treatment of the material demonstrates the diversity of positions in the tradition, as well as showing how common trajectories have manifested themselves through five centuries of thought. It presents a lot of data, which is a good starting point to understanding how this question has been addressed, but it doesn't take an active role in organizing it. Unfortunately, the organizing principle that is applied—the framing up of the questions that form the spine of the taxonomy—introduces biases which aren't necessarily inherent in the sources. Ferry assumes that the relevant terms of comparison are the Mosaic covenant, works covenant, new covenant, and covenant of grace. These are indeed important terms of comparison, but note how they are unmoored from the central biblical question of the Abrahamic vs. Mosaic covenants, as identified by other contributors.³

Darryl Hart's essay on Old Princeton is more adventurous, if still at the end of the day making a mostly indirect contribution to the thesis of this volume. Hart's essay concludes that the best way to make sense of Princeton's twin veins of Scottish

³ Or, to take an example I happen to be familiar with, they completely fail to capture distinctions that someone like Cocceius draws between the testaments and covenants of God, which are crucial for his covenantal scheme. This is not a fault of Ferry's work; it would be impossible to grasp the nuance of so many authors on the point. But that is precisely the limiting factor of this kind of analysis. See Brian J. Lee, *Johannes Cocceius and the Exegetical Roots of Federal Theology: Reformation Developments in the Interpretation of Hebrews 7–10* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 123–38.

Common Sense Realism and Orthodox Reformed Federalism is by recognizing that the natural law operated as a common term underlying the Princetonian understanding of the covenant of works and the covenant of Moses. In this sense, Hart's essay provides further historical support for VanDrunen's contention that natural law is at home in the Reformed tradition, and is closely related to the covenant of works in the creation and Mosaic economies.

But Hart's essay ranges well beyond this conclusion, and is frankly more interesting than I make it seem. It stands alone as a contribution to the literature on Old Princeton, and I commend it to readers interested in that subject. Importantly, Hart's broader narrative situates Princeton in the context of the New England theology and the heirs of Jonathan Edwards, showing how Edwards sowed the seeds of federal theology's demise. This is an area that could definitely be explored further, in terms of exploring whether or not the spirit of Edwards is alive and well in contemporary opponents of federal theology.

These three historical essays add data points for the reader who is considering the plausibility and prevalence of the republication thesis in the Reformed tradition, but they fail to connect them to the rest of the volume in a compelling fashion. This is not a failure of the historians, but a measure of the difficulty of the task.

What is lacking here on the historical front is a more comprehensive argument for how and why federal theology—and by extension, the republication thesis—developed in a distinctive way among the Reformed. Many attempts at such an explanation have been made, by the likes of David Weir, J. Wayne Baker, Steven Strehle, and Peter Lillback, but these efforts have been extremely limited at best and too often tendentious.⁴

⁴ David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980); Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Steven Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism, and the Covenant: A Study of the*

I know it is an exceedingly difficult task, from my own experience trying to place the covenantal thought and exegesis of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) in the context of Reformation exegetical trajectories. The best studies on the development of thought in this era tend to be small bore, focusing on a single author or work (or a few chapters in a work, when the skills of the scholar are particularly lacking). This kind of work is necessary, but the time is long overdue for a more comprehensive effort to craft a narrative of federal origins that tells a real story without running roughshod over the great diversity in the tradition.

My own belief is that exegesis is extremely important to this historical development, and in a sense the best chapters in this volume reflect accurately the kind of exegetical trajectories that we see in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵ To borrow a phrase from Hart's essay, there are in the Scriptures "notions about law and grace that apart from covenant theology look antithetical" (75). The Reformed doctrine of the covenants—including the republication thesis, which is central to it—is the result of a centuries-long search for the redemptive-historical structures in the text that tie it all together.

Conclusion

As a longtime student of Reformed federal theology, I still struggle when people ask me to recommend a single book describing the topic. This book goes a long way toward accomplishing that goal, particularly for readers who already possess some familiarity with this material. One of its strengths is the great breadth of the contributors, and their mastery of their respective fields. In this breadth, the volume manifests what has always been true about the Reformed doctrine of the covenant: there has always been a diversity of opinions striving to express a central cluster of ideas.

Reformed Doctrine of the Covenant (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988); Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁵ See Lee, *Johannes Cocceius and the Exegetical Roots of Federal Theology*, 23–97.

This strength is also a weakness. One reason "The Book" on covenant theology doesn't yet exist is because very few single authors today possess the historical, biblical, and theological tools and training to tackle all of these crucial aspects of its development and significance today. A collection of essays is not a monograph, and the lack of a central voice is a necessary weakness of this volume. I can imagine a similar volume written by an imaginary author, possessing all of the historical, exegetical, and theological skills of our contributors. It would have the clarity and rhetorical force of Gordon, the creativity and redemptive focus of Horton, and the exegetical richness of Estelle. And the disparate pieces of the puzzle would be assembled to present a unified picture of works and grace in the Mosaic economy.

But that book doesn't exist yet. This one provides an excellent foundation in the interim, and makes a compelling case. I encourage both proponents and opponents of covenant theology to read it and wrestle with its claims. ☺

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Paul on His Own Terms? A Review of N. T. Wright on Justification

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by T. David Gordon

Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision, by N. T. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009, 279 pages, \$25.00.

Over fifteen years ago, I favorably reviewed Wright's *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), and expressed a desire that he would continue to publish more.² Little did I know at the time how abundantly that desire would be satisfied. Many books later, another has appeared. This book is primarily about justification; but there are other theological and exegetical matters in the book, so my review (after introductory comments) will be in two parts: general statements of a theological and exegetical nature, and specific comments about justification. Readers only interested in justification, and not interested in how Wright's other positions inform his views on justification, may skip to the second section.

Introductory Matters

The Form/Structure of the Book

Many consider this book to be a reply to John Piper's *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007). In a sense, this is true, because Piper's work is referred to in the first sentence of the book, and there is a brief portion of the book (64–71) in which Wright indicates five exceptions he takes

to Piper. But Wright has chosen not to structure the book as a point-by-point rebuttal, but rather as what he calls an “outflanking exercise” (9, 31), in which he attempts to express himself again on his own terms, in hopes that his own view will be judged compelling on its own merits. One may reply to one's critics however one wishes. But some of John Piper's allies will wish that the book had not sidestepped some of the particulars of Piper's reasoning, but addressed them more explicitly and in greater detail.

The book falls into two parts, “Introduction” and “Exegesis.” In the first part, there are four chapters, one about the importance of the matter, another about “rules of engagement,” a third about first-century Judaism, and a fourth about justification. In the second part, there are major chapters on Galatians and Romans, an intervening chapter on Philippians, Corinthians, and Ephesians (yes, Wright considers Ephesians and Colossians to be “thoroughly and completely Pauline” [p. 43]), and a final, concluding chapter.

General (Favorable)

There are a number of points Wright makes that are true and helpful, for which I am grateful; I will only mention briefly those I judge to be most important.

1. Wright's commitment to *sola scriptura* refers not only to *results* of exegesis, but also to the *method* of exegesis: a submission to the narrative *form* in which Scripture comes to us, a submission to the actual rhetoric or argumentation of a given Pauline epistle (49, 247), and even a submission to Ephesians and Colossians as part of the Pauline canon (43, 141–176).

2. Wright correctly seeks to understand the “underlying narrative” of Paul's gospel (34–35, 59, 82, 250). Wright appropriately works from a biblical-theological perspective, always looking for the underlying narrative behind Paul's thought.³

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=204&issue_id=55.

² Review of N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* in *Westminster Theological Journal* 56.1 (1994): 197–201.

³ Such an approach is commendable, but not new. Biblical theologies were written by John Owen (1661), Jonathan Edwards (“A History of the Work of Redemption,” 1773), Stuart Robinson (*Discourses of Redemption*, 1866), and, especially in the late

3. For Wright, Romans 2, 4, and 9–11 are essential to (not parenthetical to) Romans as a whole. Romans 1–11 is a unit, that flows out of Paul’s repeated interest in what it means that the gospel comes “to the Jew first, also to the Greek” (1:16). Therefore, those chapters that address the relation of Jew and Gentile in the gospel moment are far from parenthetical in Romans; they are, in some senses, its central purpose. Wright’s thoughts on Romans are rich with insight on this point, and they dovetail nicely with his similar comments about the centrality of Jew/Gentile issues in Galatians.⁴

4. Paul’s theology is eschatological. Helpfully, Wright recognizes the eschatological nature of Paul’s proclamation: that in Paul, aspects of the end-time have irrupted into the center of time.⁵

5. Faith, works, and the Spirit. Throughout, Wright states his desire to recognize a greater role for the Holy Spirit in Paul’s thought (e.g., 10, 11). This is all well and good, but he often implies that the “tradition” has omitted this. Wright appears to be unfamiliar with the Westminster Standards, where the Spirit has a very prominent role, especially in those chapters that address the *ordo salutis*, such as chapters 13 and 14.

6. Wright recognizes the importance of the Jew/Gentile situation for Paul’s “problem” with the Law, and also recognizes the importance of the visible people of God on earth: that soteriology and ecclesiology are intertwined in some way. But this is also old.⁶

nineteenth and early twentieth century, Geerhardus Vos (*Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 1948) (not to mention Meredith G. Kline). Cf. especially John V. Fesko, “On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church, Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 443–77.

4 I argued for this in “The Problem at Galatia,” *Interpretation* 41 (January 1987): 32–43.

5 This is surely right, and surely helpful, though again, not at all new. It reflects the emphases consistently encountered in the writings of Geerhardus Vos and Herman N. Ridderbos.

6 Stuart Robinson wrote a book just before the American War between the States entitled *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel, and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858).

General (Less Favorable)

1. Finally, and helpfully, Wright defines what he means by “the covenant”:

Here we have it: *God’s single plan, through Abraham and his family, to bless the whole world.* This is what I have meant by the word *covenant* when I have used it as shorthand in writing about Paul.... The “covenant,” in my shorthand, is not something other than God’s determination to deal with evil once and for all and so put the whole creation (and human-kind with it) right at last. (67, 95, emphasis his)

This clarification regarding Wright’s “shorthand” is much appreciated. In my judgment, Wright’s “covenant” then is virtually identical with what the Reformed tradition has ordinarily called “the covenant of grace” (WCF 7.3), and is neither worse nor better than the common convention (except that, by employing a different convention, he misled some of us until this recent clarification was made).

I would still argue that such a definition of “covenant” uses a biblical term unbiblically, something Wright warns against on pages 81–82 of this volume. Biblically, a בְּרִית (*berith*) or a διαθήκη (*diathēkē*) is always a historical treaty of some sort, enacted in space and time with particular parties; it is not an eternal purpose or decree. Both Paul (Gal. 3:17) and Stephen (Acts 7:6, 30) could cite the number of years that passed between the Abrahamic and the Sinai covenants, so for them, a “covenant” is not an eternal or prehistorical plan; it is an actual, ratified-in-space-and-time treaty.

2. Related, Wright somewhat more clearly grounds the Abrahamic covenant in its own underlying narrative, that of the spread of human sin narrated in Genesis 3–11.⁷ Referring to Romans 5:12–21, Wright says, “The force of the Adam-Christ contrast grows directly out of the long argument concerning Abraham, since God’s purpose in calling Abraham, as we have seen, was to deal with the problem created through Adam”

7 And Wright acknowledges that there are numerous biblical “covenants,” in the plural (99, 133, 216–17, et al.).

(226). However, Wright still appears to be uncomfortable with discussing the work of Christ in Adamic terms (note he refers to the “Adam-Christ contrast,” not the “Adam-Christ typology,” despite Paul’s use of τύπος [*typos*] in Romans 5:14), a discomfort that was not apparent in 1992 when he wrote *The Climax of the Covenant*.⁸ For Wright, Christ is the “representative Israelite,” but not necessarily (and not explicitly) the representative human. It remains unclear to me whether or in what manner Wright understands Adam to be a type of Christ; we can surely hope that his forthcoming volume on Paul will relieve the unclearness.⁹

3. πίστις Χριστοῦ (*pistis christou*), in Galatians 2:16, as “the faithfulness of Christ.”

Wright depends here on the fuller argument of Richard B. Hays,¹⁰ and I concede that their viewpoint seems to be the scholarly consensus today. Space does not permit a thorough examination of that viewpoint here,¹¹ but the view faces three considerable difficulties. First, it requires the admittedly ambiguous genitival expression to be the only place where Paul says anything at all about Christ’s faithfulness. That is, while Paul unambiguously has many statements about *our* faith *in* Christ, he nowhere unambiguously says anything about the faithfulness *of* Christ, unless in these ambiguous expressions. Second, the view depends heavily on the argument that if πίστις Χριστοῦ (*pistis christou*) means “faith in Christ” in Galatians 2:16, Paul’s statement there is redundant, because the purpose clause also speaks about

being justified by faith in Christ. But redundancy, especially redundancy for emphasis, is a perfectly common semantic reality,¹² and one which Paul employs precisely when discussing faith, such as at Romans 1:16–17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (*panti tō pisteuonti παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι*), to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith (*ek pisteōs eis pistin ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*), as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith (*ek pisteōs ἐκ πίστεως*).” Third, one can easily concur in the various arguments Hays makes about the narrative substructure of Galatians while reaching an entirely different conclusion. Hays argues that Christ is presented in Galatians as the “hero,” to use the language of narrative analysis. Hays then argues that this means that πίστις Χριστοῦ (*pistis christou*) must *also* be descriptive of some virtuous character or work of Christ, an entirely plausible theory. But another—equally plausible—theory exists. It is entirely plausible that the rhetorical reason for presenting Christ to the Galatians as a narrative hero is so that the Galatians will put their *faith* in him. That is, Hays may be entirely right that Paul presents Christ in heroic terms, but perhaps Paul does this so that his audience will put *their* faith *in* that redemptive hero. I can see no *prima facie* reason why Hays’s conclusion is more plausible than this.

4. Regarding his references to the Christian confessional tradition, regrettably Wright is nearly disastrous here and elsewhere. His comments in this area are unclear, unsubstantiated, erroneous, and therefore misleading. The unclearness appears in such expressions as “many Christians” (10), “some Christians” (11), and “conservative churches” (44). Here as elsewhere he refers to the “tradition,” and occasionally the “great tradition, from Augustine onward” (102, cf. also 24, 98, 213). This failure to identify in the confessional literature what specific error is being refuted, coupled with an unwillingness to substantiate the claims

8 Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, esp. chapter 2, “Adam, Israel, and the Messiah.”

9 In Herman Ridderbos’s study of Paul, the second chapter was entitled “Fundamental Structures.” In these, Ridderbos outlined eight such structures, structures that deeply informed all that Paul said. Four of these eight were directly related to Adamic Christology. Bishop Wright is not at all required to concur with Ridderbos, but it is odd that he does not recognize and refute his claim, if he disagrees with it.

10 *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), itself a reworking of his dissertation, originally published in the Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series in 1983.

11 I address the matter somewhat more fully in the forthcoming Festschrift for David F. Wells.

12 Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 154.

by such citations is regrettable if not inexcusable. It is fine for Wright to do exegesis, and simply to overlook the tradition of confessional literature if he so chooses. But if he refers to it, it seems to me that he must do so with some attempt to substantiate his claims. As it actually turns out, he could not substantiate his claims, because his claims are mistaken.¹³ My next point provides two examples:

5. Reducing soteriology to justification:

That is the trouble with the great tradition, from Augustine onward: not that it has not said many true and useful things, but that by using the word “justification” *as though it described the entire process from grace to glory* it has given conscientious Pauline interpreters many sleepless nights trying to work out how what he actually says about justification can be made to cover this whole range without collapsing into nonsense or heresy or both. (102, emphasis his)

What confessional tradition has Wright read? The Westminster Confession, for instance, not only distinguishes various aspects of this “*process from grace to glory*,” but has entirely separate chapters on effectual calling (10), justification (11), adoption (12), sanctification (13), saving faith (14), repentance unto life (15), good works (16), and perseverance of the saints (17). That is, “justification” in the Westminster Standards is, at a minimum, one of *eight* parts of that process. The Westminster Standards are part of the “great tradition, from Augustine,” and they simply have not done what Wright claims, but just the opposite. For them, justification is no more part of the *ordo salutis* than seven other specified aspects thereof.

6. Focusing more on individual salvation than on corporate salvation. Wright again and again states that Paul has been misunderstood by those who ask of his letters, What does this say about

¹³ This is the substance of Carl Trueman’s critique. Cf. “A Man More Sinned Against Than Sinning? The Portrait of Martin Luther in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship: Some Casual Observations of a Mere Historian” (unpublished paper presented at Tyndale Fellowship in Cambridge in 2000), <http://www.crcchico.com/covenant/trueman.html>.

“me and my salvation?” (10, 13, 15, 76). Wright refers to this as the “geo-centric” reading of Scriptures, and consistently challenges it. But the Protestant confessional tradition can hardly be accused of such individualism. Note, e.g., WCF 8.1:

It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man . . . : unto whom he did from all eternity give *a people*, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

7. Bishop Wright still seems bashful about substitutionary atonement. At the conclusion of his lengthy discussion of Romans 4, he refers to its concluding words, “who was handed over for our transgressions and was raised for our justification,” and rightly observes that here “the echoes of Isaiah 53:5, 12 should be unmistakable” (223), leading us to think that Wright is very close to affirming substitutionary atonement here. Yet as he moves into chapter 5, he is hesitant to affirm substitution at the critical 5:12–21, instead speaking only negatively about perceived misunderstandings, and affirming only a likeness between Jesus and Israel, rather than between the two Adams:

We note in particular that the “obedience” of Christ is not designed to amass a treasury of merit which can then be “reckoned” to the believer, as in some Reformed schemes of thought,¹⁴ but is rather a way of saying what Paul says more fully in Philippians 2:8, that the Messiah was obedient all the way to death, even the death on the cross. Jesus Christ has been “obedient” to the saving plan which was marked out for Israel. He has been the faithful Israelite through whom God’s single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world is now fulfilled. (228)

¹⁴ The word “treasury” or the expression “treasury of merit” does not appear either in Bishop Wright’s Thirty-Nine Articles or in my Westminster Standards, so again, I don’t know which “Reformed schemes of thought” he is referring to.

What “saving plan” could Israel have achieved, even if she had obeyed her covenant duties? Within the terms of the Sinai covenant administration, would an obedient Israel have achieved anything other than temporal prosperity for herself in Canaan? In this context, why is “obedient” related to Israel, and not to Adam? And why is “obedient” or “obedience” in quotation marks? Note Wright:

The purpose of the Messiah ... was to offer to God the “obedience” which Israel should have offered but did not... Israel had let the side down, had let God down, had not offered the “obedience” which would have allowed the worldwide covenant plan to proceed. (105)

First, the “covenant plan” succeeded anyway, without her obedience, but that is beside the point. Would her obedience have atoned for human sin? Would she, as a nation, have been raised from the dead, guaranteeing the resurrection of others? Had she been entirely obedient, how would such obedience have overturned Adamic sin and death? What is *not* said here is almost astonishing. Why does Wright appear to resist saying what is so obvious in a passage like this: that the Messiah offered the obedience “which *Adam* should have offered but did not”? While he rightly concedes that there is human sin in Genesis 3–11 as the “backdrop” to Genesis 12, Wright seems almost steadfast in his refusal to relate “Abraham’s seed” to the woman’s “seed” in Genesis 3. Why could he not have said—indeed, why *did* he not say, this:

Jesus Christ has been “obedient” to the saving plan which was disclosed to Eve even in the midst of the curse, when God pledged to put enmity between her seed and the serpent’s seed, and even solemnly warned that in their future warfare her seed would be “bruised” in his victory over the seed of the serpent. Christ’s obedient death on the cross in Romans 5:12–21 is the “bruising” of Genesis 3, yet his resurrection is the crushing of the serpent’s head.

Wright does indeed affirm that the Messiah “repre-

sents his people, now appropriately standing in for them, taking upon himself the death which they deserved, so that they might not suffer it themselves” (105). But in the next sentence he says, “This is most clearly expressed, to my mind, in two passages,” and he cites Romans 8:3 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 (which he earlier denied to be germane to God’s people in general, but only to the apostles),¹⁵ and in a footnote refers to Galatians 3:13. But why not Romans 5:12–21? If one is looking for a Pauline text that “clearly” expresses representation or substitution, Romans 5 would surely be it.

8. Wright takes σπέρμα (*sperma*) in Galatians 3:16 to mean “family.” While this would suit his purposes (to speak, ecumenically, of one happy family), it misses the argument of Paul (who sides with the LXX translation for using the dative singular rather than the dative plural, and then says, “who is Christ”). Paul argues that God’s plan to rescue the world through Abraham’s “seed” is *not* through his “seeds” collectively considered, but through the one *particular* seed, Christ.¹⁶

15 N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 104–5.

16 Lexically, the much more common Greek word for “family” or “clan” in the LXX is πατριά (*patria*). While comparatively rare in the NT, it appears 172 times in the LXX, so it is a well-known word, and is ordinarily translated “clan” or “family.” (In the NT it is used only 3 times—Luke 2:4, Acts 3:25, and Eph. 3:15.) Similarly, one could employ φυλή (*phylē*) if one desired; since this term is common in the LXX (410 times; it is less common in the NT, appearing 31 times, twice in Paul, at Rom. 11:1 and Phil. 3:5). Note that in the very germane LXX of Gen. 28:14, *both* terms appear, σπέρμα (*sperma*) for Abraham’s “descendant/seed,” and φυλή (*phylē*) for the “families of the earth”: “And in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐν τῷ σπερματῷ σου (*kai eneulogēthēsontai en soi pasai ai phulai tēs gēs kai en tō spermatō sou*).” Similarly, in the earlier pledge to Abraham in chapter 12, God had pledged that: “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (*eneulogēthēsontai en soi pasai ai phulai tēs gēs*).” Thus, Paul had ground to realize that at least the LXX translators of Moses made an effort to distinguish σπέρμα (*sperma*) from φυλή (*phylē*), whereas Wright’s translation makes them equivalent. Paul painstakingly (some even argue artificially, since the Hebrew זֶרַע [*zera*] is a collective noun) makes the point that God would bless the world *not* through Abraham’s corporate/collective descendants or family, but through his single seed: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’

9. The Bible on its own terms: this is certainly an admirable goal, but two points need to be made. First, there is utterly nothing new about this. When Calvin spoke of “natural sense” interpretation, he was insisting on what later came to be called “grammatico-historical exegesis,” an attempt to understand biblical texts within their cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. While all attempt to do this, one must be naive to think he achieves it. To understand N. T. Wright, or the New Perspectives on Paul in general, one must understand the post-Holocaust exigencies that drive it. As Peter Stuhlmacher (approvingly) said: “We must also keep in mind the apparent goal of these authors to make a new beginning in Pauline interpretation, so as to free Jewish-Christian dialogue from improper accusations against the Jewish conversation partners.”¹⁷ Indeed, as Wright himself has said, “It follows at once that justification is the original *ecumenical* doctrine.”¹⁸ Since faith in Christ distinguishes Christians from Jews, and since *sola fidei* distinguishes Catholics from Protestants, the New Perspectives on Paul, and Wright as a participant therein, betray an unmistakable agenda to interpret Paul in such a manner as to reduce the prominence of these doctrines. Yet is one really hearing Paul in his own terms if one describes justification as an “ecumenical doctrine,” fourteen centuries before the Western church divided between Catholic and Protestant, ten centuries before the Great Schism separated the Eastern church from the Western church, and even a half century before Christianity was separated from Judaism by the synagogue ban of A.D. 94? The church of Paul’s day had not yet experienced any formal divisions, so how can we be “hearing Paul on his own terms” by calling justification an “ecumenical doctrine”?

referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

17 Peter Stuhlmacher, Donald A. Hagner, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective: With an Essay by Donald A. Hagner* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 34.

18 “New Perspectives on Paul” (10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, 25–28 August 2003), 12, emphasis his.

Justification

Since the book is primarily about justification, a few more detailed comments are in order here.

1. Romans 2:13. Wright insists that Romans 2:13b is a statement about reality: “the doers of the law shall be justified.”¹⁹ This view, however, faces two substantial (in my opinion, insurmountable) exegetical difficulties. First, it requires us to understand Paul here as saying the opposite of what he says in the very next chapter of Romans: “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight” (Rom. 3:20). Second, it requires us to divorce 2:13b from 2:13a: “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” Paul’s reasoning here is “not A but B.” Such reasoning only makes sense if the two sides of the contrast are logically similar. Here are two examples:

I am not ordering a turkey sandwich, but (am ordering) a ham sandwich.

I am not flying to Denver, but (am flying) to Dallas.

What would not make sense is this: “I am not ordering a turkey sandwich, but am flying to Dallas.” Therefore, either both 2:13a and 2:13b are referring to actual reality, the actual reality that will occur at the judgment; or, alternatively, both 2:13a and 2:13b are referring to hypothetical reality, the hypothetical question of the condition on which the Law justifies (if any). The latter interpretation makes perfect sense, especially contextually. Paul simply reminds here that the judgment of God, about which he has been speaking, will come upon the Jews no less than the Gentiles (“For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law,” 2:12), because, after all, the Law requires doing, not merely hearing. The Jews at Sinai were different from the Gentiles only by *hearing* the Law; not by *doing*, and are therefore no more immune from God’s

19 An insistence shared by many of the so-called Auburn theologians.

judgment than Gentiles, even by the Law's own standard. But the alternative view would be catastrophic for Wright: "The hearers of Law (the Jews) are not justified." If this were a statement about reality, we would surely shut down all synagogues and require Christian churches to remove the Torah from their *lectio continuo* also. If "those who hear the law are not justified," then the last thing anyone would want to do is hear the Law. And, in our post-Holocaust setting, I am confident this is the last thing Bishop Wright would want to suggest that Paul was saying. But the bishop cannot have it both ways. 2:13a cannot be hypothetical and 2:13b actual; either both are hypothetical or both are actual. Otherwise, we have the turkey sandwich/flying to Dallas problem (and the straightforward contradiction with Romans 3:20).

2. Oddly, Wright appears to think he may have been the first to have attempted to affirm both justification by faith and judgment by works. Indeed, he says that the idea of judgment by works would be "anathema" to many:

The idea that Paul would insist on such a judgment at which the criterion will be, in some sense, "works," "deeds" or even "works of the law," has naturally been anathema to those who have taught that his sole word about judgment and justification is that, since justification is by faith, there simply cannot be a final "judgment according to works." (184)

But Westminster affirmed both that justification is by faith and that judgment is according to works. All of chapter 11 of WCF addresses justification by faith, and then WCF 33.1 says:

God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, ... all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their *thoughts, words, and deeds*; and to receive *according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil*.

What is new is not the doctrine of judgment by

works, but Wright's conflation of justification by faith into judgment by works ("his sole word about *judgment and justification*"), so that, effectively, we get justification/judgment by faith/works. It was not self-evident to the Westminster divines that "judgment by works" necessitated believing in "justification by works." For them, one might very well be judged and condemned on the basis of the works one had done, while also being acquitted by the works of another, in whom one's faith is placed.

3. Justification and the "law court." I have criticized Wright's view of "righteousness of God" elsewhere²⁰ because his idea that "righteousness" means God's covenant faithfulness does not, in my opinion, do justice to the deeply forensic nature of the δικ-*language* in the Bible. Happily, in this volume, he frequently refers to the "law court" as an essential semantic domain for the "righteousness" and "justification" language in Paul (12, 68, 90, 100, 134, 183, 251, et al.). Regrettably, he still believes that "righteousness" also means God's fidelity to the covenant; and worse, he thinks this is somehow obvious:

And unless the scholars of any time had lost their moorings completely, drifting away from the secure harbor of ancient Jewish thought ... nobody would have supposed that "God's righteousness" was anything other than his faithfulness to the covenant. (178)

But the Psalms frequently declare "God's righteousness" to be his judicial uprightness whereby he will judge the world rightly one day:

Psalm 9:8 And he judges κρινεῖ (*krinei*) the world with righteousness ἐν δικαιοσύνη (*en dikaiosunē*); he judges κρινεῖ (*krinei*) the peoples with uprightness.

Psalm 50:6 The heavens declare his righteousness τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ (*ten dikaiosunen*)

20 "Observations on N. T. Wright's Biblical Theology with Special Consideration of 'Righteousness of God,'" in *By Faith Alone*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 61–73.

autōu), for God himself is judge κριτής (*kritēs*)!

Psalm 58:1 Do you indeed decree what is right δικαιοσύνην (*dikaiousunēn*), yōu gods? Do you judge κρίνετε (*krinete*) the children of man uprightly?

Psalm 72:1–2 Give the king your justice τὸ κρίμα σου (to *krima sou*), O God, and your righteousness τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου (*tēn dikaiosunēn sou*) to the royal son! May he judge your people with righteousness ἐν δικαιοσύνη (*en dikaiosunē*), and your poor with justice κρίνει (*krinei*)!²¹

Each of these texts, and more like them, reside in “the secure harbor of ancient Jewish thought.” Scholars did not and had not “lost their moorings,” then, when they interpreted “God’s righteousness” as something other than “covenant faithfulness.” They were well moored in the ancient Jewish thought when they thought it was his judicial righteousness, by which he held his creation accountable to him. Those moored there might have thought just the opposite of Wright, that “nobody would have supposed” that “God’s righteousness” was anything *other* than his judicial uprightness.

4. Wright reiterates here his view that “justification” in some sense means to be the covenant people of God (12, 116, 121, 122, 134). The later Protestant confessions employed the doctrine of “adoption” to discuss being part of “God’s family” (WCF 12.1). Wright wants to affirm “family” language, but not by employing “adoption” language. Much more fatal to his view is his common suggestion that to be justified means to be part of the covenant community. Israel was plainly God’s covenant community under the Sinai covenant. Yet this did not prevent her from being judged to be *unrighteous*, nor did it prevent her from being severely judged, at times capitally, whether by snakes, Assyrians, or Babylonians. Israel plainly enough was *not* justified, but *was* the visible covenant people. Not a single Gentile died when the

fiery serpents were the agents of God’s judgment in Numbers 21; every individual who perished under God’s judgment there was a member of the covenant community. Indeed, *only* they who were members of that community were subject to such acts of temporal judgment.²² The “worthless men” who were parties to the Phinehas covenant were hardly justified; David, the violent “man of blood” was surely party to the covenant God made with him, yet was not permitted to build God’s house. Wright’s virtual equation of justification and membership in a covenant community is a severe liability in his thought, here and elsewhere.

What I did not notice when I first reviewed *The Climax of the Covenant*, but have come to notice since then, is that what distinguishes Wright’s supporters from his detractors is how they fill in his blanks. Wright somewhat frequently makes statements that could be understood in more than one way, by not expressing explicitly the inferences to be drawn from what he says. His supporters assume the best, and “fill in” these blanks in an orthodox manner, whereas his detractors “fill in” these blanks differently.

An example here is Wright’s frequent statements about the law court background to the “righteousness/justification” language in Paul, statements that please me greatly, because they are not present in all of his works. However, often these very statements actually refer to “the law court metaphor,” not the law court (e.g. 12, 68, 251). Now, what does he mean by “the law court *metaphor*”? Is this a throwaway term, from which we should derive no conclusion? Or, does he mean by this to suggest that we only figuratively/metaphorically appear before God as judge; does he mean to deny that humans actually appear before God as their judge one day? Note the ambiguities in this kind of language:

It is the utterly appropriate metaphor through which Paul can express and develop the biblical understanding that God, the Cre-

²¹ Cf. also Pss. 96:12–13; 97:9.

²² The nations around Israel were only judged when/because they attacked Israel; otherwise, Yahweh left them alone.

ator, must “judge” the world in the sense of putting it right at the last—and that God has brought this judgment into the middle of history, precisely in the covenant-fulfilling work of Jesus Christ, dealing with sin through his death, launching the new world in his resurrection, and sending his Spirit to enable human beings, through repentance and faith, to become little walking and breathing advance parts of that eventual new creation. (251)


Everything here depends upon what “judge” means (and Wright puts it in quotation marks, as though “judge” itself were figurative for “putting it right at last,” an equally inscrutable term), and what “utterly appropriate metaphor” means, etc. His supporters assume that he means nothing heterodox by such statements; his detractors express concern about them. I am neither a supporter nor a detractor; my published material on Wright has been both favorable (my review of *Climax of the Covenant*) and unfavorable (my thoughts about his understanding of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (*dikaioṣunē theou*) in *What Saint Paul Really Said*).²³ But I think the distance between his supporters and his detractors is due not to what he *says* but to what he does *not* say, and how different parties fill in those blanks.

Perhaps such misunderstanding is the price paid for those who begin with the assumption that the traditional categories are all wrong. Once such an assumption is made, one is compelled, effectively, to invent new nomenclature with new definitions, definitions that have not been worked out carefully over time. In such a circumstance it is inevitable that misunderstanding will take place—not only between author and reader, but between one reader and another reader. As I mentioned earlier, as an example, it appears in this volume that Wright defines “the covenant” in a manner that is similar (identical?) to the traditional expression “the covenant of grace.” But if he means the same thing, why use a different (albeit

similar) term? Does the choice of a different term imply a difference in substance or not? Readers do not (and ordinarily cannot) know. Several times in this volume, Wright indicates that he is frequently misunderstood, and he wonders, candidly, whether this is because he is unclear or whether his detractors are unsympathetic. I suspect the answer is both. His detractors fill in his blanks unfavorably; his supporters fill them in favorably; but he is responsible for the blanks. When he employs terms as no one has employed them before, and yet without indicating necessarily whether this is intended or not, substantial misunderstanding will take place.

N. T. Wright, like the rest of us, is a work in progress. For example, he resisted understanding the δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioṣynē*) language as forensic in *What Saint Paul Really Said*, and yet affirms the law court background here. I have tended, therefore, to give him the benefit of the doubt before, assuming that he couldn’t say or clarify every point in every essay or book. I take the same approach here, but he will not get the same free pass in his next book, the major book on Paul that he mentions several times here. Especially, in that volume, he will be expected to deal with Romans 5:12–21 in some constructive manner, and/or to argue for why he rejects as foundational the Adamic Christology affirmed by such Pauline interpreters as Herman N. Ridderbos. Similarly, he will be expected either to omit negative references to “the tradition,” or, as Carl Trueman has suggested, to substantiate those claims with actual citations from the confessional tradition. He will be expected in that volume to reconcile his understanding of Romans 2:13 to Romans 3:20, or, failing that, to completely redo his understanding of judgment/justification by works. If he can do these things (and several others), I will be the first to say so, but I doubt he will be able to accomplish it. His own agenda, his post-English Civil Wars and post-Holocaust ecumenical setting, drives his thought so profoundly that he has difficulty hearing Paul on his own terms, despite his effort to do so. Paul’s church was not yet driven by what has separated the church in subsequent centuries; and to hear

23 T. David Gordon, “Climax of the Covenant,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56.1 (1994): 197–201.

him on his own terms we must not construe him as though our circumstance were his. 

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Facing the Idol Factory

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by A. Craig Troxel

Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters, by Tim Keller. New York: Dutton, 2009, xxiv + 210 pages, \$19.95.

Tim Keller, the Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Manhattan, is *the* rising star among conservative Presbyterian ministers. His achievements are much deserved, especially given his spiritual gifts, his fine theological training at Gordon-Conwell and Westminster seminaries, his immersion into the treasury of Puritan wisdom, and his ability to communicate with skill and clarity. The success and acclaim showered upon his recent books, *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, testify amply to his growing reputation.

One naturally expects a spectrum of responses to Pastor Keller's growing popularity. However, two polar views have come to expression that actually help to segue into the main theme of Pastor Keller's new book, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*. The first reaction has been evident in the well-intended but astonishing praise

that I can only assume embarrasses Pastor Keller. (I am thinking of the comparisons to C. S. Lewis.) Tim Keller is a fine writer and an *extremely* gifted communicator. But the suggestion that he bears likeness to Lewis actually does a disservice to Pastor Keller. Such touting will only cause people to hear him in the way that he undoubtedly least wants to be heard—as a celebrity, rather than as a pastor who wants to speak to his flock and readership, and in such a way that he might decrease and Christ increase. In short, perhaps some have idolized Pastor Keller.

The other reaction to Pastor Keller's recent fame has a different quality, namely that of jealousy—which of course is an idolatrous desire. Some may disagree with Pastor Keller at some points in philosophy of ministry. But it is interesting how many critiques of larger churches come from pastors of smaller churches. (I pastor a smaller church.) But some comments may be rooted in sheer envy. There was a time when I thought I would never have such thoughts towards a fellow minister. As I grow in my self-understanding, I have learned differently. And I am still learning. Maybe you do not struggle with such motives. But then again, maybe you do. That's what *Counterfeit Gods* is all about.

Tim Keller is right to debunk our false conception that an idol is a small figurine in your living room to which you pray and burn incense. Poet John Milton recognized that idols are truly mobile, as he states in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*:

Of Baälím and Ashtaroth—those male,
These feminine. For spirits, when they please,
Can either sex assume, or both; so oft
And uncompounded is their essence pure,
Not tied or manacled with joint or limb,
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they
choose,
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
Can execute their airy purposes,
And works of love or enmity fulfil.

No, an idol is “anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=205&issue_id=55.

imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give” (xvii). Or as a “counterfeit god” it is “anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living” (xviii). Following the work of Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, Keller exposes a common misconception that an idol can only be something to which we ascribe divine attributes and refer to as our “god.” In reality, an idol is whatever demands our full devotion or ultimate commitment and to which we grant ultimate value. Just because you do not address something as your deity, it doesn’t mean that it may not function as your god. Just like the idols of old, these contemporary idols are “bloodthirsty and hard to appease” (xiii). Akin to their pagan predecessors, modern idolaters are still willing to sacrifice their children, marriage, health, purity, job, and personal safety in order to satisfy their “god.”

Biblically speaking, an idol is what we wrongly *love* (so as to commit spiritual adultery), or what we wrongly *trust* (and so make sacrifices to satisfy them), or what we *obey* (so as to be wrongly enslaved and controlled). Anything, even the most noble of pursuits, can end up functioning as an idol: “family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving ‘face’ and social standing . . . a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry” (xviii). As such a list suggests, idols can be personal, cultural, and intellectual. But in the end, it is our hearts that “fashion these desires into idols” (3).

The counterfeit gods that Keller particularly highlights are love (sex), money, success, and power. Throughout the main section of the book, Keller mines the biblical accounts of the patriarchs (especially Abraham, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah), Zacchaeus, Nebuchadnezzar, Jonah, and Naaman in order to fortify his case. In the final chapters Keller concludes by focusing more upon diagnosing the origin of idols. For instance, in chapter 6,

Keller uses the Jonah narrative to tackle the “hidden idols” that lurk in our hearts and lives. Keller concludes each chapter by encouraging us to consider how Christ either fulfills or answers each of the needs or dilemmas that these idols represent. Anyone who loves the gospel will appreciate Keller’s emphasis upon Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord at the conclusion of each chapter. His transitions into these sections on the gospel are not always as smooth as I would have expected, but I think that this is explained by the evangelist in Keller anxiously pressing towards the true hope of the gospel in order to show unbelieving readers the remedy to their spiritual poverty.

I was delighted to see that our author had been gleaning in the fields of others with whom some of us may be previously acquainted—more specifically, Os Guinness, Dick Keyes, Rick Lints, and Greg Beale. Let me highlight just one particular insight that yields considerable pastoral mileage. Dick Keyes has discussed the twin ideas of “nearby idols” and “faraway idols” in his chapter on idols (“The Idol Factory”) in *No God But God*, edited by Os Guinness and John Seel.² Keyes contends that, since an idol seeks to mimic the true God, it seeks to replicate both God’s transcendence and his immanence. Thus, the various idols in our lives represent a higher, wider, and greater conceptual ideal that we serve (what Keyes calls “far” idols), and they simultaneously represent a more personal desire that we can control and manipulate (what Keyes calls “near” idols). Keller makes use of this idea by discussing the relationship between “deep idols” and “surface idols” (his terms for Keyes’s “far” and “near” idols). For example, money can be a “surface idol,” that serves a variety of “deep idols”—power/control, self-indulgence, approval, worldliness, miserliness, etc. The problem with money may not be a straightforward struggle with avarice or materialism. It may be something else. Similarly, anyone who has dealt with a friend who is struggling with an eating disorder has discovered that it really is not about the food. Food is only the


2 Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 29–48.

presenting issue (or “surface/near” idol). Whereas deeper and more profound insecurities (“far/deep” idols) explain where the difficulties arise and where the true spiritual work must take place.

I think Pastor Keller has accomplished his goal very nicely and helps us a great deal with his little book. As I read, I found myself writing various pastoral “prescriptions” based upon the diagnoses I was now better equipped to make. In my mind, this is an important test of a book that travels in the region of sanctification, particularly as it addresses our need to put to death our idolatries and fan into increasing life the fruit of the Spirit. This book also provoked meditation upon my own personal struggles with false loves and counterfeit loyalties. But of course, space limitations do not permit me to expand this point.

Although I take my purpose as a reviewer as more to exposit than analyze, I do have one observation, which I consider to be neither top tier nor trivial. Occasionally, readers will quarrel with the author about what he has garnered from the biblical text. “You are reading this into the text,” you will say to yourself in a few places. I did scratch my head a time or two as I read Pastor Keller’s interpretations. For example, I am not convinced that if God had not intervened by asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, then Abraham would have ended up loving his son more than anything else in the world (13). Nor was I persuaded that Jacob’s life was empty and all the longings of his heart for meaning were fixed on Rachel, so that his behavior was that of an addict, seeking “apocalyptic sex” and the affirmation of a beautiful wife (27, 33, 40). At these few points I thought the narrative was being slightly stretched. As far as I can see, none of his findings are implausible, and certainly none pose any theological harm.

But a word of caution; having just preached through the Genesis narrative with a somewhat fine-toothed comb, I have frequently been astounded at the subtleties penned by Moses and inspired by the Spirit, which underline the point of the text. These clues offer us much if we will simply pay attention. Much of what Pastor Keller observes in the text may not be apparent to a casual reader, yet

when the passage is studied with greater care his points will gain more credibility—even if they fail to convince. On the other hand, there are several helpful reflections, which the reader will deeply appreciate. One of these is how Keller explains the role of the servant girl in the household of leprous Naaman (89–90). I will not spoil your delight in reading it for yourself. And you should. This book offers helpful insights for shepherds in the church, and it will furnish them with deeper ways to think upon the needs of those whom they so earnestly serve and pray for in secret. I would not hesitate to recommend this book to church members. They will find it accessible and profitable as they seek to examine themselves in ever-increasing repentance and faith, so that they will love the true and living God with all their hearts. 

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To Change the World, Reconsidered

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August–September 2010¹

by David VanDrunen

To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World, by James Davison Hunter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, x + 358 pages, \$27.95.

This work adds to the burgeoning collection of books to be placed in the category marked “Chris-

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=214&issue_id=57.

tianity and culture.” Unlike most of them which come and go, however, this book is likely to stimulate a good deal of discussion, and its arguments may be debated for some time to come. James Davison Hunter offers both a descriptive account of how Christians are faring in the contemporary American context and a constructive proposal for how Christians ought to conduct themselves in the world. Though I judge his constructive case to be less successful than his descriptive case, the whole book is worth reading, and its arguments are most worthy of reflection.

The book consists of three lengthy essays, each of which makes a discrete case, though they are integrally related to one another. The first two essays largely constitute Hunter’s construal of the contemporary American landscape. He begins essay 1 with the acknowledgement that Christians have long desired to change the world for the better. He asks the important question, How does the world actually change? According to Hunter, much of American Christianity has assumed that the world changes as the hearts and minds of ordinary people change. Thus Christian leaders have focused upon educating believers with a proper worldview and inspiring them to live their faith boldly and consistently in their cultural activities. Hunter claims that this view of cultural change is simply wrong. He provides an alternative understanding of what culture is and how it changes, arguing that “cultural change at its most profound level occurs through dense networks of elites operating in common purpose within institutions at the high-prestige centers of cultural production” (274). Culture is very resistant to change, and when it changes it usually does so slowly, with resistance, and from the center out to the periphery. Hunter recognizes that Christians in America have had certain success and developed strong institutions, but only at the lower and peripheral ends of cultural production. Christians have failed to be culturally influential not because they have been lax in promoting the right worldview, but because they have been absent from the elite centers of influence.

Essay 2 continues Hunter’s description of the current American scene. According to Hunter,

changing the world implies power, and a great many American Christians think of power in terms of political conquest and domination. Thus, they have politicized most areas of life, equated changing culture with winning political battles, and suffused their political activities with anger and resentment for wrongs they believe they have suffered. They have thereby undermined the gospel they purport to promote. Hunter identifies three prominent positions in contemporary American Christianity: the Christian Right, the Christian Left, and the neo-Anabaptists. Significant differences in political agenda divide the first two groups. The Christian Right seeks the right-ordering of society against the threat of secularization while the Christian Left seeks equality and community against the threat of social forces that harm the disadvantaged. Yet Hunter identifies vast similarities that unite them. Both are motivated by mythical ideals, use Scripture selectively to promote their agenda, are driven by resentment about perceived injustices, engage in highly partisan political activity (the Christian Right for the Republican Party and the Christian Left for the Democratic Party), and yet are used by these respective political parties for their own ends. Hunter offers a somewhat different analysis of the neo-Anabaptists, whose most prominent representative is Stanley Hauerwas. The neo-Anabaptists idealize the authentic Christianity of the early church, promote pacifism as fundamental for the Christian life, and emphasize the church as an alternative *polis*. Though the neo-Anabaptists do not seek political domination as do the Christian Right and Left, Hunter concludes that, ironically, their language and frame of reference are highly political (as in “the politics of Jesus”). Hunter concludes this essay with a call to Christians to rethink their cultural engagement in less politically charged ways. Though the exercise of power is at some level inevitable, he calls attention to the different sort of power that Jesus exhibited and calls upon Christians today to follow suit.

In my judgment these first two essays are quite successful and compelling, and are timely for the Reformed community to consider. The inculca-

tion of a Christian worldview, often conjoined with high expectations for the transformation of society if enough believers will pursue it earnestly, has formed a crucial part of Christian piety in many sectors of the American Reformed community in recent generations, especially among its liberal-arts colleges. Whether or not cultural transformation ought to be our goal, it is salutary to hear an alternative and learned account of how cultures change and how Christians have actually effected such change at certain points in history. Given how much effort the Christian community invests in various educational and political endeavors, Hunter's study helpfully encourages us to ask why and for what goals we are expending our resources in this way. Hunter's analysis of power and of how three prominent strands of American Christianity envision power is also incisive. The vast majority of members of the OPC would likely either identify with the Christian Right or at least sympathize with their positions on most political issues, and for understandable reasons. Hunter's comparison of the Christian Right with the Christian Left should provoke sober reflection among us about both the centrality of politics and the methods with which "Christian" political action is often carried out. Hunter is also to be commended for identifying the neo-Anabaptists as a distinct and important segment of the contemporary Christian scene in America. Though crucially mistaken at key points, these neo-Anabaptists offer insightful (and much-needed) critique of both conservative and liberal Christianity and helpfully highlight the distinctiveness and centrality of the church. We ignore their voice to our own spiritual loss.

Though Hunter continues some of his perceptive description of American Christianity in essay 3, this final section of the book primarily takes up his constructive task. Hunter proposes a model of "faithful presence" as an alternative to the prevailing paradigms among contemporary Christians. His proposal is attractive and, in my judgment, clearly superior to what is offered in the typical smorgasbord of American Christianity. Yet I believe it suffers from a few theological weaknesses—or, perhaps more accurately, from some

underdeveloped theological foundations that are nevertheless significant for his project as a whole. It may be that such a conclusion is inevitable when a professional theologian (like myself) reads a professional sociologist (like Hunter) doing theology. Davison would undoubtedly be far unhappier with any attempt of mine to do sociology than I am with his theological work, but his third essay does provide a good opportunity to consider some crucial and enduring matters.

Before offering my evaluative comments, I briefly describe the case that Hunter prosecutes in essay 3. He identifies key challenges facing Christians today: difference and dissolution. Difference refers to the pluralism characterizing contemporary society, which requires us to interact with those who are different from ourselves. Dissolution refers to the deconstruction of fundamental assumptions about reality in today's society. In response to such challenges, the Christian Right's paradigm is "defensive against," the Christian Left's is "relevance to," and the neo-Anabaptist's is "purity from." (Interestingly, Hunter mentions the OPC and the "truly Reformed" among the PCA, with their "two-kingdoms" view, as having an odd affinity to the neo-Anabaptists at this point. Though Hunter's passing comments suggest something of a caricature of the two-kingdoms idea, I find it intriguing to see a non-OP writer associate the OPC with a two-kingdoms perspective and thus distinguish the OPC from the mind-set of the Christian Right. Insofar as the OPC has traditionally prioritized the church's biblical fidelity over its cultural relevance, I believe Hunter makes a sound observation.) For Hunter, each paradigm identifies legitimate problems but cannot fully cope with the challenges of difference and dissolution. He calls for a new paradigm which both affirms the God-given legitimacy of culture-making and stands anti-theologically opposed to the sin that pervades society.

Hunter refers to this paradigm as "faithful presence within." God himself has acted in time and place, climactically in the Incarnation. God demonstrates his faithful presence in pursuing us, identifying with us, offering us life, and doing all of this through sacrificial love. We in turn are to

be faithfully present toward him and to each other in our worshiping communities, our daily tasks, and our spheres of influence. Faithful presence should result in a new kind of selfless leadership and should spawn relationships and institutions that are covenantal in character. Such relationships and institutions would seek the well-being of all as the shalom of the new creation bursts forth from them (though Christians should not seek to “redeem” culture, “build” the kingdom, or aspire to a “Christian culture”). Hunter concludes by asking whether his proposal will serve to “change the world.” Since the world cannot be controlled and managed, and especially since God and his worship should be our primary goals, he thinks that this is the wrong question. He does suggest, however, that through the practice of faithful presence Christians might possibly help to make the world a little better.

Hunter does not undergird his case with much biblical exegesis or even work explicitly from any particular confessional tradition. It may have been easier to engage in a critical assessment of essay 3 if he had. Nevertheless, Hunter’s theological instincts and proposals are, in a great many respects, on target and offer a very helpful corrective to most other options. His advocacy of both *affirmation* and *antithesis* in the Christian’s stance toward the world, for example, should resonate with Reformed readers who confess both common grace and total depravity. Such a perspective allows Hunter to speak of genuine commonality among Christians and non-Christians in the world, even while denying neutrality in any area of life. It allows him to see Christians’ activities providing a foretaste of the coming kingdom even while such activities themselves do not redeem the world or build the kingdom. It also allows him to affirm that our cultural tasks can have “spiritual significance” without having “ultimate significance.” This perspective also helps to explain why, toward the end of the book, he turns to Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29 to find a biblical model for his view. His basic idea of loving service to others, without seeking political domination in any usual sense of the term, captures the perspective of the

New Testament, despite the relative paucity of biblical references.

Yet the book ends with some disappointments, perhaps largely because most of the book is so good and raises high expectations. In order to capture a sense of my disappointment, I will make a few comments that revolve around two key theological doctrines, eschatology and ecclesiology.

In my judgment, one key issue with which any theology of Christianity and culture must wrestle revolves around the new creation and what relation it bears to the activities and institutions of this world. Is the new creation in some sense realized in the Christian’s cultural activity? Do Christians in some way build the kingdom of Christ in their political, economic, and artistic endeavors? Will our cultural artifacts be preserved into the age to come and adorn the New Jerusalem? The question is not whether we should undertake the activities of human culture and not whether we should do them in faithful obedience to Christ (few would think of denying such things), but whether we should seek the *redemption* of cultural activities and institutions or seek instead to honor God’s *providential preservation* of the cultural life of this present world. Should we seek to conform political and economic life (for example) to the pattern of life of the age to come or should we treat politics and economics as activities that God ordained for the temporary and provisional purposes of this present age?

Ecclesiology is a crucial corollary to such a question. Beyond issues of what it might mean to be a Christian dentist or to play Christian basketball is the crucial issue of what relation the church ought to have to the world’s cultural activities and institutions. By “church” I mean what is sometimes referred to as the institutional or visible church: the fellowship of professing believers and their children who gather for worship on the Lord’s Day and are governed by ordained officers. Among the important questions here that a theology of Christianity and culture needs to address are whether the church bears any *unique* relationship to the new creation (in comparison to other institutions, like the state or a business corporation) and

whether the church's identity and ministry are to be determined by Christ alone speaking in the Scriptures alone or also by the goal of being relevant and influential in the broader culture.

Hunter's book does not provide a clear answer to the eschatology question posed above. Hunter takes an explicit stand against notions of redeeming the culture and building the kingdom through cultural activity, which he sees as impinging on divine sovereignty and carrying connotations of a Constantinian takeover of society (see 233). Yet he also wishes Christians' cultural work to proclaim the shalom of the age to come and thus to embody the values of the coming kingdom (234). Elsewhere he speaks of "a lived-vision of the shalom of God within every place and every sphere where Christians are present" (248). Does he mean by this simply that Christians themselves, as united to Christ and citizens of heaven, are to manifest the new life of the kingdom in all they do? Or does he mean that cultural institutions themselves, when inhabited by faithfully present Christians, may come to enjoy a shalom-like state of existence? If the latter, it becomes difficult to see how such institutions are not in fact being redeemed or how the kingdom is not being realized in them.

Whether or not Hunter clearly wishes to affirm the latter, some things he writes indicate that this is the direction in which his thought tends. Here questions of ecclesiology become relevant. For example, Hunter calls for the church to be subversive "of all frameworks of social life that are incompatible with the shalom for which we were made," though it should be subversive in a constructive rather than a nihilistic way. The church should "offer an alternative vision and direction" for prevailing cultural institutions and seek "to retrieve the good to which modern institutions and ideas implicitly or explicitly aspire" (235–36). I assume we would agree that the church experiences Christ's redemptive work and was instituted by Christ to manifest and embody the life of the new creation here and now. How then can the church offer a vision and direction for other cultural institutions which are not being redeemed? Christians certainly have an interest in seeing cultural

institutions pursue "the good" for which they exist, but can the church provide a model for them?

The good of the state, for example, is the pursuit of justice enforced by the sword; but the church, with its uniquely merciful and restorative discipline, cannot provide a vision for that. The good of economic institutions is the production and distribution of wealth through labor and exchange; but the church, with its distinctive practices of sharing that result in Christians' giving "beyond their means" (2 Cor. 8:3), provides no direction for that. Political, economic, and many other kinds of institutions have God-ordained goods. To me it seems important to recognize, however, that their goods are the goods of this world, not those of the shalom of the new creation embodied in the church.

I close with a few more comments about Hunter's view of the church. Hunter makes many salutary comments about the continuing importance of the institutional church and its primary task of worshipping God. As much as this is to be appreciated, it also seems important to note for readers in the OPC, and other confessionally Reformed churches, that Hunter's vision is very ecumenical. This comes out most explicitly at the end (e.g., 281), but it is evident in hindsight that this perspective guides the book throughout. Hunter apparently believes that his model of faithful presence should work for Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox alike. He acknowledges that some differences among Christians are inevitable, yet sees confessional differences and the historic schisms that generated them (such as the Reformation) as mattering less "in a context of exile." Matters of formation and public engagement depend upon the core beliefs that all Christians share rather than upon "particularities on the periphery." While I would not disagree that Reformed believers are more likely to find common ground with Roman Catholics on issues of public ethics than on, say, soteriology, I fear that Hunter underestimates the importance that a broader theological system at least *should* have for directing one's approach to Christianity and culture. Distinctive Reformed doctrines of the covenants, of Christ's kingship and kingdom, and of

the church are matters that Hunter would presumably place on the periphery of Christian belief, yet I would argue they have been and should continue to be crucially determinative for how Reformed believers view and conduct themselves within the larger culture.

Hunter's constructive account is ultimately a bit thin theologically. Yet I recommend this book highly and hope to see its masterful analysis of so many issues help Reformed theologians to develop a thicker theology of Christianity and culture. 📖

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The Unaccommodated Reformation

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by David C. Noe

Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings, by James R. Payton, Jr. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010, xxi + 272 pages, \$23.00, paper.

James Payton's monograph, *Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings*, seeks to be both provocative and ground-breaking in its analysis of where the Reformation stands now. In the estimation of this reviewer, however, the work is vitiated by several problems. Published by IVP Academic, the book is divided into twelve chapters, beginning with "The Medieval Call for

Reform" and concluding with "The Reformation as Triumph and Tragedy." Despite odd quirks of style (e.g., numerous repetitions of the word "spawn" in various forms), Payton is a capable author who has done his homework. Payton's intended audience is "readers from Christian backgrounds who recognize their roots in and look positively on the Reformation of the sixteenth century" (13). His goal in addressing this group is straightforward: "I have found that too much of what the contemporary evangelical and broader Protestant world thinks it knows about the Reformation is mistaken" (20). Payton seeks to correct that.

He begins in chapter 1 by explaining medieval movements toward ecclesiastical reform as part of a broader problem, including such background issues as the Black Death, anticlericalism, and conciliarism. In providing a concise summary of conditions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Payton is helpful. Throughout, he is fond of highlighting the supposedly shared feeling among laity and clergy alike of the need for reform. "Western Christendom forlornly kept calling for *reformatio in capite et membris*—'reform in head and members'" (51). That there was anything like a consensus for such a movement, Payton fails to prove, though he does try to connect different crises and minority voices into a widespread desire for change.

Payton makes a more significant contribution in the second chapter, "The Renaissance," when he explains how a misreading of Jacob Burckhardt has led to the view that the Renaissance and Reformation movements were antithetical. Instead, Payton demonstrates that the Renaissance was not monolithic, that there were significant differences between what happened in Italy and the northern European variety which reached its apex in Erasmus.² He aptly summarizes: "[Protestant leaders] did not renounce [the Renaissance],

2 Sometimes Payton overargues his case, as when on page 62 he claims that Renaissance figures were "not philosophers but pedagogues." The line between philosophy and other disciplines was not bright and fixed, and men like Valla and Mirandola certainly believed they were philosophers.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=219&issue_id=58.

because they did not accept the contrast which too many conservative Christians still accept... To the Reformation, the Renaissance was friend, not foe" (71).

In chapter 3, "Carried Along by Misunderstandings," Payton helpfully explains the ways in which Luther was misinterpreted by some of his contemporaries, notably the participants in the Peasants' Revolt. This confusion presaged, Payton claims, the later rift between Lutherans and Reformed, which he details in chapter 4, "Conflict among the Reformers." In this chapter, Payton counters whatever tendency there may be to view the Reformation as a carefully devised strategy, led by men in full agreement, of fixing the Roman church. An indication, however, that Payton has in mind a very broad Protestant audience is given on page 109, when he writes: "To begin to appreciate [the conflict among the Reformers] it is necessary to step back from the view common among conservative Christians in the early twenty-first century that the Eucharist is nothing more than a memorial in which pious recipients humbly recall the death of the Son of God in their place long ago as they receive the elements." While it may be true that this is a common view, I suspect that it is not held by those who look to the Reformers for inspiration. When one writes to correct the perceived misunderstandings of others, there is a tendency to make generalizations of this sort. The tendency is exaggerated by the fact that Payton nowhere identifies whose misunderstandings need correction.

Chapters 5 and 6, "What the Reformers Meant by Sola Fide" and "What the Reformers Meant by Sola Scriptura," are the meatiest portions of the fare Payton offers. He writes, for example, on page 117, that "some of what is proclaimed under the banner of 'justification by faith alone' today is far from the teaching of the sixteenth-century Reformers; indeed it explicitly contradicts what they insisted on." Payton's point is simple: Luther, Calvin, and company taught justification by means of faith alone, but always accompanied by good works as its fruit. "No Protestant Reformer ever allowed that a justifying faith could be solitary—no, not

one" (127).³ Perhaps this reviewer is too far out of step with contemporary evangelicalism, but what Payton addresses does not strike me as a common misunderstanding. Payton explains in subsequent paragraphs that he has in mind revivalist experiences, "camp meetings," "walking the aisle," "coming to the altar," and similar phenomena. But throughout this section (127–131), perhaps from a sense of charity, he does not cite by name any advocates of easy-believism who claim inspiration from the likes of Melancthon and Bucer. He is right of course that the Reformers did not teach a faith devoid of works. But that those who practice such look to the Reformers for guidance is unknown in my experience.

In chapter 6, Payton takes up the cudgels against those who adopt what he calls a "simplistic 'Scripture good, tradition bad' notion [that] has become so common that it has even tainted a recent version of Scripture, translated for and widely used in the larger evangelical church community."⁴ For sure the caveman phrase he parodies is simplistic, but it is unclear precisely against whom he is arguing. On page 138, for example, Payton says that "*Sola scriptura* did not invite a free-for-all approach to Scripture in which any and all had the right to assert its authority to substantiate whatever insights they claimed to have attained from it." "Any and all"? "Whatever insights"? Who, besides S. Trawman, makes such claims? Payton also scolds "contemporary Protestant churches" (158) that offer too little in the way of church history, and he takes aim, *nominibus deletis*, at those who talk of "seed faith," "green prosperity prayer cloths," and the "health and wealth gospel" (159). Conservative Christian churches who practice such things are

³ Sometimes he needs to make more measured statements. He claims, for example, on page 117 that "the articulation of this teaching [*sola fide*] was the fruit of the agonizing struggle of Martin Luther and his study of Scripture, a struggle which the others did not endure" (emphasis added). In fact, others like Calvin were simply less self-disclosing. To conclude that they did not struggle is an argument from silence. Calvin writes in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms that he underwent a *subita conversione* to *docilitas*.

⁴ By this he means the NIV, as the footnote citing his 1993 article on the topic indicates.

presumably not claiming to follow the Reformation at all, much less getting it wrong.

Chapter 7, “How the Anabaptists Fit In,” is unremarkable, but chapter 8, *Reformation in Rome*, is a different animal. Here Payton makes what I take to be insufficiently supported and sometimes novel claims. His basic argument seems to be that the Papacy was on a trajectory of reform prior to—and independent of—what Protestants were urging. This is in keeping with Payton’s aforementioned, oft-repeated phrase *reformatio in capite et membris*. The notion that the powers in Rome had their own agenda of reform, which just happened not to track with Calvin’s and Luther’s, is a difficult case to make.⁵ Impetus “from below” (Rahner’s phrase) came from Jimenez, Loyola, and others, as Payton explains, but his case is put too strongly when he speaks of a “reformed papacy” (181). Focusing on the Council of Trent and the work of Paul IV, Payton concludes that “with great determination, [Paul’s successors] directed the Roman Catholic Church toward genuine renewal and reform. Under their guidance, the Council of Trent proclaimed the marching orders of a reinvigorated Roman Catholicism” (187). Payton is really making two different claims here. That Roman Catholicism was reinvigorated is true enough, and one could argue that this is a kind of reform (more accurately, perhaps, retrenchment). Whether this constitutes spiritual, “genuine renewal,” analogous to the reforming activities of Protestants, is quite another matter. Payton strongly suggests that it does.⁶

My second quarrel with Payton is the thesis he advances in chapter 9, “Changing Directions.” Here he addresses a persistent question of the

5 Karl Rahner, no zealous Protestant, gives a more nuanced view. Cf. *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 266. Payton also suggests that Jesuit success was largely unconnected from Counter-Reformation impulses. “Protestantism played no appreciable role in [Loyola’s] understanding of what the Jesuits should be and do, at least not until the last years of his life” (182). This perspective, while shared by several twentieth-century Roman Catholic apologists, is at the very least controversial.

6 Payton’s ecumenical impulse has its limits: in reading through the Council of Trent he found himself “consigned to eternal perdition 268 times” (footnote, 189).

twentieth century: did so-called Reformed scholastics depart from Calvin as they consolidated the Reformer’s insights? It becomes devilishly difficult, given the many qualifications Payton makes of his own comments, to determine precisely what he thinks. On the one hand, he states that the scholastic “shift” is such a “serious change in direction that it amounted to a change in teaching” (195). Near the end of the chapter, however, he says, surprisingly, “None of what is presented in this chapter should be taken to imply that the Protestant scholastics taught error” (209). No? Why then does Payton labor so strenuously to prove they taught something different? In his analogy, the Reformers “watched the frogs” while the Protestant scholastics “dissected the frogs and probably came to quicker conclusions about what could be said about the frogs; the frogs never jumped again, though” (206).

Payton’s thesis needs challenging elsewhere in this chapter as well. For starters, he quotes William J. Bouwsma uncritically in footnote 10 (197), whose “Sixteenth-Century Portrait” Richard Muller has, to my mind, completely discredited in *The Unaccommodated Calvin*.⁷ Moreover, he quotes Bouwsma to the effect that Calvin “despised what passed for systematic theology in his own time.” This is coupled with an equally disturbing comment on page 201 that Calvin “did not try to be a systematic theologian.” Again, Muller has ably demonstrated the absurd anachronism of imposing twentieth-century concepts and terminology on sixteenth-century thinkers. If a “systematic theologian” is one who seeks to understand the whole counsel of God revealed in Scripture and present it in an organized manner, then Calvin saw himself as just that.⁸ Payton says that Calvin “had

7 Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 79–98. Cf. chapter 5, “Beyond the Abyss and the Labyrinth: *An Ordo recte docendi*.” Though Payton has read Muller and expresses his admiration and respect, in my estimation he ought perhaps to have read chapter 3 of that same work (“Scholasticism in Calvin: A Question of Relation and Disjunction,” 39–61) or read it more carefully.

8 John Calvin, “Letter to the Reader,” where he writes, “I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have

no use for scholastic theology [but] nonetheless worked closely with Beza over the next handful of years.” At his death, Calvin “left the academy in Beza’s hands,” and, cue the creepy violins, “Beza became one of the first Reformed scholastics” (199)!

Payton is also inconsistent in how he handles the Reformers’ perspectives on Aristotle. On the one hand, he shows Luther’s early hostility toward Aristotle (196) and the scurrilous language Luther used against him (197). He then shows Calvin’s antagonism to “scholasticism.” In Calvin’s case, however, Payton does not prove that the Reformer objected to Aristotle’s own ideas, and too neatly equates scholasticism with Aristotle. For Calvin the two are separable. Indeed, when Calvin disparages “sophists” he usually intends his Sorbonne contemporaries, not avid Aristotelians like Aquinas. Melancthon also, Payton says, was originally hostile toward Aristotle but eventually adopted the “logic of Aristotle.” This phrase underscores Payton’s difficulty. Was there someone else’s system of syllogisms and enthymemes for Melancthon to adopt? If theology is to be presented systematically, the logic behind it will necessarily resemble insights from Aristotle. If one dislikes systematic theology, Aristotle is an easy scapegoat.

Problems continue in Payton’s discussion of the Lutheran scholastic Johann Gerhard (b. 1582). Gerhard uses Aristotle’s fourfold etiology from the *Physics* to explain justification. Payton observes: “In strictly Aristotelian terms, this is all true, but it is a stretch to view this as an exposition of Christian truth. Rather, it is describing how to ratiocinate” (204). By contrast, Payton says, Calvin’s account in the *Institutes* is presented in a “moving, winsome fashion” (204). A careful reader of the *Institutes*, however, would immediately note that Gerhard’s inspiration might well be Calvin himself! For in *Institutes* 3.14.17 Calvin gives his

arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents.” *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.

own exposition of justification using Aristotle’s same etiology. Though Gerhard calls Mary the material cause and Calvin rightly says “surely the material cause is Christ” (784), Calvin himself would be “guilty” of Reformed scholasticism according to Payton’s criterion. It seems to me this is a serious problem for the relationship between Calvin and his successors that Payton presents. Equally troublesome is the false dichotomy Payton draws between “communication between persons” and the “veracity of what is said,” when he is discussing what he believes are divergent views of Scripture held by the Reformers and their successors (207–8).

The final three chapters, 10–12, cover much of the same territory in different ways, and could have been combined and shortened. In Chapter 10, “Was the Reformation a Success?” Payton reaches the conclusion that Luther, in his later years, would have given a “resounding ‘No!’” to the chapter’s question because his movement had splintered and been used for political ends (215). Melancthon likewise, according to Payton, “as he went to his grave could not have viewed the Reformation as a success” (217). Bucer also, after being forced from Strasbourg, supposedly thought it was a failure (219). Although it is the nature of books like this to be provocative, Payton’s confidence is difficult to share. Luther may well have concluded that, all things considered, the rediscovery of Romans 5:1 was well worth the trouble. There he stood, he could do no other.⁹

The Jesuits, as Payton sees it, fare much better:

[They] have the best claim to being successful. What they accomplished needs to be better known. The difference it made for Western Christianity and subsequently should be recognized. (223)

Indeed the Jesuits were changing the Roman church and influencing the Papacy. They achieved many of their goals (reclaiming all of Europe excepted). And they made a “difference.”

⁹ Payton does not venture an opinion regarding Calvin’s answer.

Whether this constitutes reform and belongs in a chapter that asks the question “Was the Reformation a Success?” is an entirely different matter. The Jesuits did not participate in the Reformation as it is understood even by contemporary Roman Catholics. Payton finds the Reformed scholastics a handy target in this chapter (227) and concludes by connecting the “possibility of dismissing historic Christianity” with Reformed teaching on *sola scriptura* (233). Though his claim is one of correlation, the implication is causation.

Chapter 11, “Is the Reformation a Norm?” rehearses portions of 10. Here Payton seems to be dealing with a question no one is asking. The motto *semper ecclesia Reformanda est* assumes knowledge of and appreciation for historic Christianity. The church is to be reformed according to the apostolic pattern of the New Testament. It is in this sense that we hold Reformation zeal and ideals as normative. Payton seems to be answering the question of whether we believe the success of the Reformers and what they did and experienced in their lifetimes are normative (cf. especially 240–41). Do today’s conservatives want to reform the church to resemble that of Calvin’s day: persecuted, poor, filled with refugees?

Chapter 12, again, is much like 10 and 11, though here Payton becomes more pointed in his criticism of Protestants and more favorable toward Roman Catholicism. For example, in the chapter’s first footnote (249) Payton writes:

By the mid sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church had engaged in a stinging self-criticism leading to internal renewal and had generated a new strength with which it would go on the offensive against its Protestant and radical detractors. The see of St. Peter sought to reassert itself again as the body intended by Christ when he promised, “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

Does Payton believe that Christ intended the Papacy? If so, then we Protestants are certainly “Getting the Reformation Wrong.” It is difficult to read such comments and maintain confidence

in Payton’s equanimity as a judge of the historical consequences of the Reformation. His criticisms of the descendants of the Reformation, despite the many qualifications he makes, border on a wholesale repudiation of the movement. One example will suffice before I conclude. On page 250, Payton credits the Reformers with “[setting] forth the gospel again with boldness and vigor,” before adding that “in the hands of its descendants, the Reformation has proved also to be a tragedy for the Christian gospel.” What would Payton prefer?

In sum, the book is longer than necessary and occasionally gets significant things wrong. Payton’s poor handling of the question of Reformed scholasticism and his strange choices with regard to Roman Catholicism stand out. His call for minimizing denominational differences arising from trivia is also welcome, but misleading when these trivia are presented as inevitable consequences of the Reformation as a whole. Those interested in these matters are better served reading Muller’s *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, Calvin himself (*ad fontes!*), or even a pesky scholastic like Turretin. 📖

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Intelligent Dissent

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by Bryan D. Estelle

Uncommon Dissent: Intellectuals Who Find Darwinism Unconvincing, edited by William A. Dembski. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004, xxvii + 366 pages, \$28.00, paper.

Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design, by Stephen C. Meyer. New York: Harper Collins, 2009, viii + 611 pages, \$28.99.

Most people know about the intelligent design (ID) movement through the media stories about the trial that occurred in 2005 in Dover, Pennsylvania. A judge ruled that teaching ID theories in public schools would transgress the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution, since ID theory is not really science but religion. The judge presiding over the case essentially accused the ID advocates of sneaking religion into the classroom. Sometimes advocates of ID are labeled as creationists and lumped together with young earth creationists. This is ironic since ID advocates often depend on uniformitarian reasoning, something which young earth creationists often loathe. These two books, however, are a good way for church officers to learn about the intelligent design movement firsthand. The first book is a collection of essays by the leading proponents of the movement. The second book is an extended argument for design based upon DNA.

The articles in *Uncommon Dissent* are divided into four major parts. In part one, the first three chapters fall under the category of “A Crisis of Confidence.” These essays argue that the explanatory power of Darwinism has become impoverished. In part two, the next four chapters fall under the heading of “Darwinism’s Cultural

Inroads.” These chapters demonstrate the various ways in which Darwinism has influenced culture and the significant hold such claims have exercised in different areas of modern society. Part three, “Leaving the Darwinian Fold,” contains three autobiographical essays that describe why the authors departed from their previously held positions, which were more favorable to Darwinism. Part four, “Auditing the Books,” is the final section and has four chapters arguing why Darwinism is a failed intellectual project.

Robert Koons begins the essays with an article entitled, “The Check Is in the Mail: Why Darwinism Fails to Inspire Confidence.” Koons argues that Darwinists must carry the burden of proof for their overconfident posture regarding strongly held tenets. The second chapter is by Phillip E. Johnson, “Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism.” What is especially interesting about reading this chapter is hearing imaginatively how the various arguments on various sides would fare in a court of law, since Johnson, a Berkeley law professor, brings his legal precision to bear on the issues at stake. Marcel-Paul Schützenberger, a member of the French Academy of Sciences, writes the next chapter, “The Miracles of Darwinism: 1966 Interview with La Recherche.” This essay is helpful for understanding the most important points of leading Darwinists Gould and Dawkins. Schützenberger claims that the explanatory value of Darwinism is impoverished, and he is not timid about getting into the ring with the major pundits.

The fourth chapter is by Nancy R. Percy, “Darwin Meets the Berenstain Bears: Evolution as a Total Worldview.” Percy’s indebtedness to the late Francis Schaeffer and her approach to one aspect of apologetics are evident in the essay: one’s view of origins is the big picture that draws everything together, always. Helpfully, she argues that distinctions should be made between folk science and true science. In the fifth chapter, “Teaching the Flaws in Neo-Darwinism,” Edward Sisson, a lawyer, exposes fallacious arguments and rhetorical strategies which so often pepper the debates among Darwinists, ID advocates, and creationists. Interestingly, this sleuthhound lawyer read

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=223&issue_id=59.

the original manuscripts and papers involved in the famous Scopes Trial and came up with some very interesting conclusions using his “back to the sources” method. Chapter 6, “Accept No Imitations: The Rivalry of Naturalism and Natural Law,” is a very interesting discussion by J. Budziszewski of a subject that keeps raising its head in this debate about origins. Chapter 7, “Refereed Journals: Do They Insure Quality or Enforce Orthodoxy?” is a fascinating but critical description of the peer review process that occurs in scientific journals, especially since World War II. I have no doubt that some of what Tipler describes in scientific journals is true; however, having been part of the peer review process at numerous levels in ancient Near Eastern studies, I do think that his analysis comes off a little bit cynical. Even so, he has a suggestion for a two-tier system of peer review for the academy that is very intriguing.

The next chapter is by Michael J. Behe, the author of *Darwin's Black Box*.² Behe argues that design is not strictly a religious idea; rather, the conclusion of design for biological origins is completely empirical. Even so, he maintains that you cannot separate faith and science. Chapter 9, “An Anti-Darwinian Intellectual Journey: Biological Order as an Inherent Property of Matter,” is by Michael John Denton. This is an autobiographical essay. Going from medical school to Israel to Kings College, London, profoundly influenced his intellectual development. Denton argues that natural law is responsible for biological adaptations and perhaps “God is more clever than the humans can imagine!” Chapter 10, “Why I Am Not a Darwinist,” by James Barham, argues that natural selection, the chief tool of the Darwinists is a rather blunt one. He should know, since he used to be fully committed to the paradigm. The eleventh chapter, “Why Evolution Fails the Test of Science,” is by Cornelius G. Hunter, a research scientist who spends part of his time working at the University of California, San Diego. He suggests that the evidence for evolution falls into three distinct

2 Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

categories: small scale adaptability, the fossil record evidence, and comparative anatomy. All three areas register weak evidence in favor of Darwinism. In the twelfth chapter, “Darwinian Evolutionary Theory and the Life Sciences in the Twenty-First Century,” Roland F. Hirsch is especially interested in describing what genome sequences tell us about evolution. He notes the influence of Malthus on Darwin, something that Marilynne Robinson has taken great pains to expose as well.

Chapter 13, “Cheating the Millennium: The Mounting Explanatory Debts of Scientific Naturalism,” is by Christopher Michael Langan, an independent researcher. This is actually one of the densest and most challenging essays in the book. The last chapter is by David Berlinski, “The Deniable Darwin.” Berlinski has taught mathematics and philosophy at numerous American universities. He is a hard-hitting debater, and it is interesting to see how Darwinists and ID advocates debate, based on the letters written to Berlinski and his responses.

I have one initial comment on some of these articles: the essays are uneven. This is almost inevitable in a project like this; however, some of the essays were markedly weak in comparison to others. For example, Percy's essay was so general at times in its criticism that one wonders what details and nuance are being missed. Shoot with a shotgun instead of a rifle, and you not only miss your target, but you might not take down your prey. However, this book is an excellent introduction to the ID movement. Many of the most significant scholars writing for the movement are represented here. In fact, a constant refrain in the book is the appeal to read fuller arguments of the authors in the books or monographs of which these essays are essentially a précis.

The second book under review, *Signature in the Cell*, by Stephen C. Meyer, is a very different book than the former one. It is written in a very accessible style so that a layman, and one who is not a trained scientist, can understand it. This book is autobiographical in nature. It describes Meyer's journey as a young scientist. First, he was an exploration geophysicist working for large multinational

oil companies, and then he moved to Cambridge to take up studies in the history and philosophy of science. Next, he spent about a decade teaching undergraduates at Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington; and finally, he became one of the leaders of the ID movement and settled in Seattle as part of an ID think tank. He has arguably become one of the most public figures in the ID movement. What became his passion throughout this journey is the intersection between science and the origin of life. Meyer uses his own pilgrimage as a philosopher of science, and his increasing convictions about design holding significance for origin-of-life theories.

Meyer's book has the strength of being clearly written. Exceptionally lucid illustrations and helpful analogies are given throughout, making difficult scientific concepts abundantly clear to the untrained scientist. It is evident that Meyer's tenure as a college professor, hammering out explanations at a simple level, has served him well in writing a very clearly argued tome. Even so, I found Meyer's book too wordy and repetitive. It reminded me of a German classmate of mine in graduate school whose first draft of her dissertation exceeded 800 pages. She was instructed by our professor to go and cut it in half and not come back until she had condensed it. Even so, Meyer's book is clearly organized, and I think he and the editors at Harper are to be commended for their organizational structure.

Meyer's tone throughout the book is well mannered and reasonable in contrast to the vitriolic criticism that has been levied against the ID movement at times, especially from those committed to scientific materialism. The last chapter (chapter 20) in the book is one of the best. In it, Meyer states his religious sympathies forthrightly while still maintaining that the argument of his book is purely scientific: the "specified information in the cell establishes the existence and past action of intelligent activity in the origin of life" (343). Of course, he makes careful distinctions earlier in the book on the difference between the methods of historical scientists and experimental scientists.

One thing is clear from reading the ID advo-

cates: their positions vary. Therefore, we should exercise caution in our estimations of their work. Just as I think we should talk about New Perspectives when we are referring to this influential movement in Pauline studies and not one monolithic New Perspective, so we should also be careful to distinguish among various positions notable among those committed in one degree or another to ID. Needless to say, philosophical naturalism is deeply engrained in people within our culture. The literature of the ID advocates can help officers in the church to notice some of the ways in which materialism has so thoroughly influenced people with whom we come into contact. ❧

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Two Kingdoms: A New or Old Idea?

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by Darryl G. Hart

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought, by David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, 476 pages, \$35.00, paper.

For some contemporary conservative Presbyterians, two-kingdom theology is a threat that allegedly breaks with Reformed teaching about the proper relationship between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Two-kingdom teaching (hereafter

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=224&issue_id=59.

2K) maintains that the church and the state have different jurisdictions (spiritual vs. temporal) and execute their responsibilities through different means (Scripture vs. the sword). The problem with this view, for some, is that it apparently denies that Christ is lord over all realms of life, admits a secular sphere that is distinct from the sacred, and removes biblical norms from public life. At a time when abortion and gay marriage alarm many American Christians and threaten the maintenance of a good society, 2K appears at best to be a waste of time, and at worst a capitulation to the forces of selfishness and lawlessness.

Surprising to some may be the reality that 2K is part of the teaching of American Presbyterian communions like the OPC. J. Gresham Machen appealed to the doctrinal equivalent of 2K—the spirituality of the church—against the Social Gospel impulses and policies of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., especially to defend his own objection to the church’s annual motions in support of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act (i.e. Prohibition). And, until the OPC’s report on abortion in 1970, the OPC consistently refused to take stands on political matters. In fact, one of the reasons the OPC would not join Carl McIntire’s American Council of Christian Churches owed to fears of politicizing the church and so confusing the responsibilities of church and state. This understanding of the church and its duties in relationship to those of the state are consistent with the 1788 American revisions of the Westminster Confession. Most Presbyterian denominations in the United States—including the mainline PCUSA, and also the sideline OPC and PCA—use the American version of the Westminster Confession, which rejects the original construction of the magistrate’s power to suppress heresy and blasphemy in the civil realm, to call synods and preside over them, and to insure that church assemblies conform to the mind of God.

Despite the presence of 2K in American Presbyterian and OPC history, it is a foreign idea to many. For this reason, David VanDrunen’s new book, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, is

a welcome contribution to contemporary debates and discussions. It is a work of historical theology that traces the development of natural law and 2K in Western Christianity. (After an initial chapter on the ancient and medieval church, the book proceeds to exponents of Reformed theology, from John Calvin to Cornelius Van Til.) VanDrunen is explicit that this book is not a form of advocacy. His plan is to offer another book which will be a biblical and theological defense of natural law and 2K. But before undertaking that ambitious project, he decided to survey the way that a variety of Reformed worthies either employed, modified, or rejected this constellation of doctrines. For this reason, readers who hope to find grist for their polemical mills against 2K may be disappointed. VanDrunen not only limits his scope to historical description, but also points out tensions and inconsistencies among those who held to natural law and 2K. Some may wish that the author were more critical than he is, but the book does not ignore problems.

Aside from showing historically how extensive the use of natural law and 2K is within the Reformed tradition, VanDrunen also clarifies why these two ideas are bound up with each other, so that 2K without natural law lacks coherence and vice versa. An example from Calvin’s own thought might be useful. On the one hand, the French Reformer held that human beings were utterly depraved and could do nothing to save themselves. On the other hand, he highly esteemed the contributions to science, politics, ethics, and art from pagan writers and artists. The only way to reconcile such seemingly contradictory notions is through the amalgam of natural law and 2K. VanDrunen explains:

One of the reasons that Calvin could affirm both a doctrine of the bondage of the will to sin and a positive use of natural law on the part of those under this bondage is that he viewed such issues under the rubric of the two kingdoms. For Calvin, any action performed apart from the saving grace of Christ, arising out of the judgment of reason alone, is sinful

and displeasing in God's sight. No such action can earn any merit before God. This conviction, however, pertained to matters of salvation and thus to the spiritual kingdom of Christ. The same action, having no value for one's standing in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, may be of great value from the perspective of the civil kingdom. The ancient lawgivers of whom Calvin wrote accomplished astonishingly great things for life in the civil kingdom, though their achievements were worthless for attaining life in the kingdom of Christ. Calvin, therefore, could attribute both a wholly negative role and a remarkably positive role to natural law not because of internal inconsistency, but because the former was true for the kingdom of Christ and the latter for the civil kingdom. (113–14)

As already mentioned, VanDrunen does not hesitate to highlight tensions and inconsistencies in the application of natural law and 2K. One instance comes in a section on the Reformers' handling of the civil magistrate's duty to enforce both tables of the Decalogue, a teaching that found repeated iteration in the creeds of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed churches. So, for instance, when teaching on the magistrate's duties to promote the true religion, Althusius, Rutherford, and Turretin couched their arguments in the categories of 2K. According to VanDrunen, these theologians distinguished between "caring for religious affairs *civilly* or spiritually, *externally* or internally, with respect to the *body* or the soul" (199). Like most Christian teachers, Reformed theologians granted magistrates care over religious affairs in "a civil, external, bodily way, never in a spiritual, internal, or soulish way" (199). These theologians avoided saying "that the spiritual kingdom of Christ had nothing to do with external, bodily things" because they also "talked at length about the church's government, its ministry of the word, and its administration of the sacraments" (206). In other words, the distinction between the civil and the spiritual kingdoms along the lines of man's body and soul fails to do justice to the


external aspects of the spiritual kingdom of the church—namely, her marks which are visibly evident in word, sacrament, and discipline.

But if VanDrunen is willing to concede tensions within the development of Reformed 2K, he also hints at the teaching's dogmatic underpinnings (though, again, this book is simply a warm-up for a full-blown theological and biblical account of 2K). One consequential doctrine for 2K was Reformed Christology and the distinction between Christ's rule as creator and his reign as mediator. VanDrunen explains that after the Fall and even after the Incarnation, for instance, "Christ does not exist and operate in the world solely through his human nature in his capacity as redeemer" (75–76). In contrast to the Lutheran view of Christ's ubiquity (i.e., after the Incarnation, Christ's humanity is present everywhere), "Calvin teaches that Christ's divine nature is present *etiam extra carnem* ('even outside the flesh')" (75–76). This allows Calvin and subsequent Reformed theologians to affirm that Christ rules one kingdom in a redemptive manner and the other kingdom in a nonredemptive way. This distinction between "the two mediatorships of the Son of God, over creation and redemption respectively," became the basis for distinguishing Reformed 2K from both Roman Catholic and Lutheran versions (75–76).

This point is important for the last third of the book, in which VanDrunen, having covered Reformed developments from Calvin to New England Puritans and American Presbyterians, turns to modern Reformed writers who have balked at 2K theology, particularly the Dutch Reformed tradition from Abraham Kuyper to Herman Dooyeweerd and Cornelius Van Til. Indeed, one reason this book is generating significant debate owes to the low regard that many conservative Presbyterians have for natural law and 2K, thanks to Van Til's critiques of natural law (at least in a Thomistic form) and the more general Dutch Calvinist rejection of dualism. Although VanDrunen still detects traces of natural law and 2K among Dutch Calvinist thinkers, he also observes a failure to distinguish between the spiritual and temporal kingdoms. The reason has much to do

with an aversion to dualism and consequently to the distinction between Christ's rule as creator and as redeemer. Though less true for Kuyper, whose doctrine of common grace depended on a distinction between creation and redemption, his followers relied less and less on this distinction and some rejected it. As VanDrunen concludes in his chapter on Herman Dooyeweerd, the Dutch philosopher's successors "reject, modify, or simply pass over traditional Reformed articulation of ideas such as the two mediatorships of the Son of God and the covenant of works and, in so doing, come to ground the cultural task in both the creating and redeeming work of God" (384). This leads to "an eschatological burdening of cultural work," in which activity in the common realms of human existence become specifically Christian, "pursued through a comprehensive Christian world-and-life view and with the goal of bringing the kingdom of God to eschatological fulfillment" (384). Indeed, because the older Reformed theologians had distinguished Christ's rule over creation from that over redemption, they were able to avoid the danger of immanentizing the eschaton.

The greatest value of VanDrunen's book is its unearthing of a tradition of 2K that had been lost, thanks largely to the influence of Dutch Calvinism in North America. In fact, from the perspective of Reformed history, VanDrunen's most impressive contribution is to show that an older Reformed 2K tradition, used by Puritans and Old School Presbyterians, declined as Dutch neo-Calvinism rose and replaced it. At the same time, the book offers guidance on Christian involvement in politics and culture from a 2K perspective. In so doing, VanDrunen recognizes the difficulty of sorting out the competing claims that confront believers who live between the times—that is, between the theocratic arrangements of Israel and the ultimate theocracy of the New Heavens and New Earth. To be sure, to Reformed Protestants used to hearing that dualism or a division of personal loyalties is a concession to modern secular society, the distinctions that VanDrunen traces and explains will sound strange and perhaps wrong. But for Presbyterians who seek a better country because Christ's kingdom awaits a

fuller and ultimate establishment upon his return, 2K may provide the comfort and resources needed to negotiate an existence that is in but not of this world. 

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Psalm 119 for Life

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by Stephen J. Tracey

Psalm 119 for Life: Living Today in the Light of the Word, by Hywel R. Jones. Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2009, 156 pages (including brief notes), paper.

Psalm 119 is known as the Great Psalm. Perhaps preachers more often think of it as the Monster Psalm. It is like a great leviathan writhing on the pulpit and the fisher-of-men is not quite sure what to do with it.

This little book is the fruit of Professor Hywel Jones's preaching through the Great Psalm in chapel addresses delivered at Westminster Seminary California. Anyone who has tried that particular exercise—preaching consecutively through Psalm 119—will understand there are few resources to help the preacher. Outside the standard commentaries on Psalms, the staple diet is Calvin, Manton, Spurgeon, and Bridges. Jones gives us a little commentary that serves as a modest contribution to our understanding of the Great Psalm. When I say "modest," I mean that as a virtue.

The purpose of the book is to pay attention "to the content and purpose of Psalm 119 in relation

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=230&issue_id=60.

to Christians and the church” (10). Unlike older works which approach the psalm in a verse-by-verse mode, Jones works through the twenty-two sections with brief expository notes on each section. This is surely the right approach. The key to understanding, and thereby spiritually digesting, Psalm 119 is to realize that it is made up of sections. It is most profitably digested one section at a time. One verse at a time is too little, rather like a pinch of salt on the main dish. To concentrate all our thought on one verse leads to the feeling that the song is repetitive—harping on the same theme, the law, the law, the law. The whole psalm is too much, likely to lead to mental overload. Each section is just right, designed for our spiritual well-being. How each section relates to the others, however, remains an elusive point.

In the conclusion of his introduction, Jones states that this psalm “anticipates true Christianity in every way and every Christian should give it his, or her serious and regular attention” (21). He argues that the central theme of the psalm is “that the Word of God provides all things [necessary] to life and godliness” (21). With all of its words for law, it is understandable that this psalm is understood as referring to the Word of God. Jones’s subtitle is “Living Today, in the Light of the Word.” This is the emphasis given by others too. For example, David Noel Freedman speaks of the “Exaltation of Torah,” Christopher Ash speaks of “Bible Delight,” and Christopher Wright speaks of “Life through God’s Word.”

There is nothing wrong with this application. We should love the Bible more than we do. However, the reflections of C. S. Lewis on this psalm point us further. He says, “The Order of the Divine mind, embodied in the Divine Law, is beautiful.” The psalm, in Lewis’s view, expresses the reactions of a man “ravished by moral beauty.”² The psalm is more than a contemplation and exaltation of God’s Word. It is a contemplation and exaltation of God. It is good to be ravished by the moral beauty of God’s Word, but it is better to be ravished by the

2 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 59–60.

moral beauty of God. Jones, along with the other commentators mentioned above, pushes us to see more of the glory of God. He puts it well when he says, “God’s word should never become a substitute for him” (73).

The other great struggle preachers have with Psalm 119 is, not simply how to preach it, but how to preach Christ from it. That, in turn, is part of the larger struggle to preach Christ from the Old Testament. Jones approaches this in several ways. Most obviously he looks for messianic types. He speaks of the psalmist as “a type of the Messiah and an example to all who follow in his steps, whether apostles or not” (84). A little further on, Jones says the psalmist “is determined not to fall like Adam, and in that he is a conscious type of the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s King over the church and the world” (85). I have some questions on the statement, “determined not to fall like Adam.” It seems to be an overstated application, but it illustrates Jones’s endeavor to preach Christ. At other times Jones traces the flow of redemption. Most of the time, however, the application is by way of analogy. Speaking of “enemies, teachers, and the aged” in verses 98–100, Jones says, “The Lord Jesus was surrounded by such people too” (103). Well, yes, he was.

I found this commentary helpful. I also found it frustrating. Please don’t misunderstand me. This commentary is a warm and refreshing devotional work. The frustration is not the fault of Dr. Jones. He makes a valiant effort to do what few preachers would do—preach through Psalm 119 and seek to preach Christ from Psalm 119. This work is an appetizer, but only that, because there is clearly so much more to this psalm. Jones whets the appetite.

Here and there we are given tantalizing glimpses that underneath our English translation there is a poem of great beauty and power in the original language. The “content and purpose” of the psalm are clearly wrapped up in the form and shape of the poem in the original language. While Jones competently addresses some of the original language, there is little attention given to the technical structure of the psalm. One work that does give such attention is that by David Noel Freedman. He points out that “there is a direct cor-

respondence between the structure and content of Psalm 119.”³ Jones makes reference to Freedman’s work in his notes (151, n. 4).

Admittedly, on first reading, Freedman seems over the top, as though this were too mechanical an analysis. On rereading Freedman, one feels that a seam has just been found that may help with mining the “content and purpose” of Psalm 119. Freedman’s structural analysis suggests that there are rhythms of structure (including matters such as the acrostic form, arranged in eight verses, with eight words for law; the masculine, feminine, singular, and plural use of the nouns, etc.) that are both deliberately arranged and, more importantly, deliberately broken. It is the points at which they are deliberately broken that are fascinating. What we need is a work that takes Freedman’s research and incorporates it into a commentary.

The stark contrast between the perfect and the imperfect is what lies at the heart of this psalm. Perhaps that is nowhere more obvious than in the final verse. It seems to be such an anticlimax: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments” (Ps. 119:176). It is like ending the great poem with a self-imposed “F” for “fail.” It is like saying, “I wanted to love you and love your law, but I failed.” From within that failure a cry rises, “Seek your servant.” Jones comments,

He is convinced that the Lord has a shepherd’s heart towards his people and that he will not leave them in distress, seeing that he has given them the promise of a Messiah, a shepherd-kin.... And that is the best possible way to end an Old Testament poem—with an expectation of the coming of the Messiah.” (150)

Preach the Great Psalm. Preach Christ, the Word incarnate. ☩

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³ David Noel Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 93.

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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.
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