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A Journal
for
Church
Officers

Gosport Church, Star Island, Rye, New Hampshire / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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A Journal for Church Officers

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Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

Dedicated to Grace Mullen

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✦ From the Editor

This is the ninth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* as we enter the twenty-fourth year of publication.

I have dedicated this annual edition to one of the choicest servants of the church I have ever known, Grace Mullen. Paul tells us that death is our last enemy—the last to be conquered by our Savior. By God’s grace in Christ, the sting has been removed. So it is always with a curious mixture of joy and sorrow that we remember a departed saint. So it is with Grace Mullen. Danny Olinger has written a touching memorial to this great servant-saint, based on his close personal relationship with her as a worker and friend.

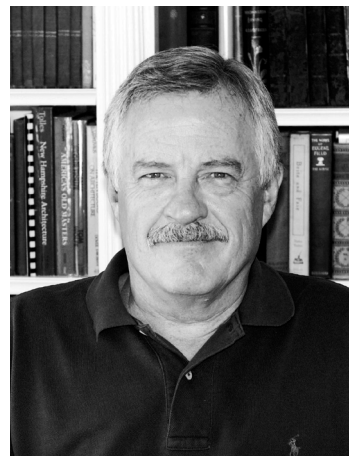
She held no special office, shunned the limelight, and gave herself, as Danny says, to service in the shadows. Her form of doorkeeping in the household of God was as an archivist. But much more than that, she loved the history of the church, laboring tirelessly to help preserve our little corner of that history, because she loved the church and the Lord of the church above all. She treated everyone with whom she worked with the utmost respect and deep kindness. She was an example to us all. We shall miss her.

The cover photo is of Gosport Church on Star Island among the Isles of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire in the town of Rye. It was originally constructed from the timbers from the wreck of a Spanish ship in 1685. It was rebuilt in 1720 and burned by islanders in 1790. The fieldstone building pictured was built in 1800. It is a reminder of the many changes and trials the church goes through in its history—in this case for the worse, as the gospel is not preached there anymore. Yet there are more Reformed churches in New Hampshire today than there were just twenty-five years ago. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

It is my prayer that the pages of *Ordained Servant* will be used by our Lord to encourage, instruct, and motivate ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons to serve tirelessly to build the church throughout our world, however slim our resources, by trusting in the grace, power, and wisdom of the Lord of the harvest, who has promised to be with his church to the end of the age.

This year I have been able to print everything published online. Becoming stricter about article length has paid off. 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, Alan Strange, and subcommittee members Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, Paul MacDonald, and Wallace King 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 Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Tribute

Grace Mullen: A Life in the Shadows

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2014¹

by **Danny E. Olinger**

The Lord puts certain people in your life who make a difference, who demonstrate by the grace of God what the Christian life is. To many of us in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and to many others beyond, Grace Mullen was one of those individuals. I have rarely met anyone who was more Christ-centered. I have never met anyone who had more integrity and commitment to the church.

Born on March 7, 1943, Grace grew up in North Wildwood, New Jersey, the younger daughter of Hopwood and Rebecca Brandiff Mullen. Although her grandfather, I.T. Mullen, was a founding member and ruling elder at Covenant OPC, Vineland, New Jersey, her dad, Hopwood, did not have much interest in the church. Her mother, Rebecca, did, and she made sure that Grace, and her sister, Becky, were involved in the life of Calvary OPC, Wildwood. For the first twenty-eight years of her life, Grace had only two pastors at Calvary Church, Leslie Dunn and John Davies, but what great pastors they were. Both were absolutely committed to Jesus Christ and to the cause of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Still, the town of Wildwood, with its isolated geographical position at the southern tip of the state of New Jersey, was not really on the map for

Orthodox Presbyterians. That changed dramatically when Mr. Dunn persuaded the Presbytery of New Jersey to purchase a lot on the Wildwood boardwalk in 1945 with the goal of building a chapel. Soon after, the Boardwalk Chapel was up and running, and Orthodox Presbyterians were flocking to Wildwood during the summer. Added to this was the fact that OPC missionary families on furlough during the mid-to-late 1940s and 1950s were often staying in Wildwood for extended periods of time. The convergence of these factors led Grace to believe in her youth that the Lord had made Wildwood and South Jersey the center of life in the OPC. She may well have been right.

She grew particularly fond of the Richard Gaffin family when the Gaffins found themselves living in Wildwood for three years from 1948 to 1951. Pauline Gaffin's vibrant faith and zeal for missions made a great impression on young Grace. She would become one of Grace's spiritual mentors, and Grace would support the work of Reformed foreign missionaries her entire life.

Grace remained supportive of the Boardwalk Chapel and was very thankful that she had been blessed to participate in its ministry from the beginning. Even after she had moved away from Wildwood as an adult, she returned every summer to the Mullen family home and visited the staff and volunteers whenever she could.

At the start of the decade of the 1950s, Grace providentially found herself at the ground floor of another new ministry that would positively impact her life. Seeking a camp where they could gather OPC young people for instruction, Pastors Lewis Grotenhuis, Glenn Coie, and Robert Atwell created the French Creek Bible Conference. During the summer time, if Grace wasn't at the Boardwalk Chapel, you would find her there. She not only loved the fellowship, but also being outdoors. It might have been her favorite place in the world, and Grace gave herself entirely to everything involved with the Conference. Over the years, she was a camper, a counselor, a director of activities, a lifeguard, and a helper in the kitchen where her mother, Rebecca, served as the main cook for decades. In the late 1970s, she recruited Dick and

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=452&issue_id=100.

Jean Gaffin to join with her as a cooks' trio to assist her mother and Mary Laubach, which they did together for fifteen years. When she no longer was able to spend multiple weeks at French Creek, the Board of Trustees appointed her as its Executive Secretary.

Seemingly, the only thing that Grace didn't do at French Creek over the years was preach! But, it was the gospel preaching and teaching of the covenant youth that was so important to her. Whenever I had the opportunity to speak at French Creek, she would want the full report on the text I had chosen to preach on, what I emphasized about Christ, and how it was received by the campers and staff.

You also couldn't talk to Grace long about the subject of French Creek before she would mention Mr. Grotenhuis. He was her model of what a pastor in his daily walk should be—godly, humble, and hardworking with a boundless love for Christ and his church. Together, Mr. and Mrs. Grotenhuis were Grace's role models for showing hospitality to friends and strangers alike. Grace would speak of the Grotenhuis children, whom she had grown up with at French Creek, with such love and familiarity that you would have thought that they were family—which, of course, they were in Christ. The bonds of fellowship were tightened as Ralph and Joan Grotenhuis English labored for many years as OPC missionaries to Korea and Suriname. And John Grotenhuis, one of Grace's dearest friends, cofounded the Middle East Reformed Fellowship in 1970.

After Grace's graduation from Wildwood High School in 1961, she attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Although there was not an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation at that time in Michigan, much less in Grand Rapids, there was regular fellowship for OPC students at the home of Winifred Holkeboer, whose late husband, Oscar, had been a longtime OPC pastor in Wisconsin and Iowa. Among the OPC students with Grace at Calvin College were Nancy Adair, Thomas Armour, Margaret Atwell, David Clowney, Philip Coray, Calvin Cummings, Mary Jo DeWaard, George Elder, Suzanne Galbraith,

and Beth Graham.

Following her graduation from Calvin College in 1965 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Grace accepted a job as a teacher at the Charlotte Christian School in Charlotte, North Carolina. After a year there, she taught English for two years at the Philadelphia-Montgomery Christian Academy while living with Dick and Jean Gaffin and their young family. She then accepted a teaching position at the San Jose Christian School.

After spending a year at San Jose and then helping Pastor George Hall and his family in Middletown, Pennsylvania, when Mrs. Hall was ill, she went back to school and received a Masters in English Education at the University of Pennsylvania in 1971. Also at this time, she began working at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. In 1972 she decided to teach once again, albeit this time not in the United States, but at the Ardan School in Shiraz, Iran. She returned to work for the Presbyterian Historical Society in 1973, and labored there for two years until Arthur Kuschke hired her to serve in the Montgomery Library at Westminster Seminary.

At Westminster she found a home and her globe-trotting ended. She greeted people at the front desk with the warmest smile and then worked endlessly to help them find whatever they needed. When asked a question about who wrote this or that book or where to find a particular article, Grace almost always knew the answer. When Grace didn't know the answer, she knew exactly where to look and what rabbit trails to follow. On both her desk at work, and on tables at her home, you would find stacks of papers and books where Grace was tracking down leads long after the inquirer had given up hope of finding anything.

Grace also influenced many students who worked in the library over the years, including Alan Strange, whom Grace helped in his pilgrimage to the OPC. Alan later interned at Grace's home church, Faith OPC, Pole Tavern, New Jersey, and married a daughter of that congregation, Kathryn Bacon, which only deepened the bonds of fellowship.

It was during her first years at Westminster

that Grace also developed a deep friendship with Cornelius Van Til as he was finishing up his teaching career there. She agreed with Dr. Van Til that the only Christ that the church had was the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. She also shared with Dr. Van Til a mutual appreciation of the OPC, J. Gresham Machen, and Geerhardus Vos. When Dr. Van Til was still able to fill pulpits in his eighties, Grace often drove him to the church where he would be preaching. When Dr. Van Til officially retired, he gave Grace his marked-up copy of Calvin's *Institutes*, inscribed to her his Bible used for personal devotions, and many of his and Vos's books.

Her esteem for Dr. Van Til was evident in her asking her lifelong friend Richard Gaffin, Jr. to read the same Scriptures at her funeral service that he had read in April of 1987 for Dr. Van Til's funeral. In sharing Grace's request to those gathered at her funeral service, Dick vocalized what we all thought. He said, "Dr. Van Til had no more favorite daughter in the faith than Grace Mullen, and she stood so resolutely with Dr. Van Til in his maintenance and defense of the gospel." After reading the passages, Dick then paused and said, "And to these Scriptures I would like to add one more. Grace would not be pleased, but I am going to do it anyway. First Timothy 6:6, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.'" He continued,

I know for so many of you here today, especially those of us who have known Grace over the years and have worked with her, you will certainly identify when I say that I have never known anyone who more exemplified, more modeled, godly contentment than Grace Mullen. And now, she experiences that contentment, the greater gain of that contentment with her Savior, in a way that none of us today, here, can truly comprehend. But we know for sure, because the apostle Paul tells us, that it is better by far.

Grace's love of OPC history was put to good use in the early 1980s, when she began assisting OPC historian Charles Dennison in developing the OPC archives. When Charlie became histori-

an in 1981, previous historian Clair Davis handed him a shoe box that contained the OPC archives. Together, Charlie and Grace started gathering material from first-generation members of the church, and Grace began to organize and oversee the collection. Soon it was apparent that a place larger than Grace's home was needed to hold the material. Charlie talked to then Montgomery Library director John Muether about the possibility of keeping the collection in the basement of the Montgomery Library, and John and Westminster Seminary graciously agreed.

After Charlie died in 1999, Grace was thankful that John was appointed as historian. John, in turn, was thankful for her great service as archivist in preserving the OPC's history. In seeking to recognize Grace's work, Darryl Hart and John Muether dedicated their 2006 book, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism*, to her. They wrote:

In her work at the Presbyterian Historical Society, the archives of Westminster Theological Seminary and of the OPC, Grace Mullen has a wise understanding of the vicissitudes and riches of American Presbyterian history. And as a lifelong Orthodox Presbyterian, her historical awareness is tethered to a deep devotion nurtured by the Reformed faith. Both of us had the privilege of working with Grace when we served respectively as directors of Westminster's Montgomery Memorial Library—when, in fact, most of the direction came from our relying on Grace's own wise counsel as a librarian and archivist. As an acknowledgement of the debt we owe to her, and as a tribute to her insufficiently appreciated efforts to preserve Presbyterian history, we dedicate this book to Grace.

By the time that I accepted the call to serve as General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education at the end of 2003, Grace was one of my closest friends. Over the years, our friendship had deepened through my work on the Committee for the Historian and our shared interests. I would ship her cassette tape recordings of the sermons of

Charlie Dennison, and she would send me copies of all the hard-to-find Vos, Machen, and Gaffin materials that I had requested.

One of the first things that I did after telling Grace the news of my appointment was to ask her if she could recommend a real estate agent. She immediately gave me the phone number of Ray Parnell, a fellow worker and friend of hers from Westminster Seminary. A few weeks later, Ray, my wife, Diane, and I were looking for homes without success when we pulled up at the last one on the list in the Glenside area. I was getting out of the car when I heard Grace calling my name from across the street. As I ran to greet her, Diane turned to Ray and said, “He’s going to want this one.” It was the house we purchased.

For the next decade, I would walk across the street, go through her backyard, and knock on her back door. She would greet me with the same excited “Danny” every time, and we would start talking all things OPC and the Reformed faith. I learned so much from her in those talks, and not just from her great knowledge of practically everyone who had ever ministered in the OPC. There was a dignified manner to everything that Grace said. She might not have agreed with someone’s theological positions or actions, but she treated that person as if he or she were joined to Christ until the person proved otherwise. I have tried to carry that posture from Grace in my service to others.

I also had the opportunity, living so close to Grace, to participate in the Vos Group meetings that were held monthly in her home. Grace and Chad Bond had asked Lane Tipton in 1998 to lead a Vos study group, which Lane graciously did for the next fifteen years. Those nights were among Grace’s favorites as Lane would explain Vos’s writings, exegete Scripture texts, and answer questions from those gathered. Afterwards, everyone would fellowship together. Some of Grace’s dearest friends, Robert and Eleanor Meeker, Bob and Linda Jones, Charles and Alayne Martell, and Philip Tachin were regular attenders.

The last decade of her life, Grace was often undergoing radiation treatments, chemotherapy,

and surgery for a rare and aggressive form of cancer. When I would visit Grace when she was hospitalized in the Fox Chase Cancer Center, almost always there were OPC members or someone from Westminster Seminary already visiting with her. When friends would ask Grace how they could pray for her, she would not ask them to pray that the pain would lessen, but that she would remain faithful.

It was during this period that the Committee for the Historian was able to relocate the OPC archives to the OPC administrative building in Willow Grove. Grace was excited about helping us move into the new space, and we spent hours together arranging the collection. After everything was in its place, the Committee took the official action on March 23, 2010, of naming the archival room “The Grace Mullen Archives Room.” This was our small token of appreciation for her labor over the years. No one could have done a better job, and yet she was never paid and never wanted to be paid. For her, it was a labor of love.

The Committee assigned me the task to let Grace know that we were honoring her in this way. When I told her, she immediately said that we shouldn’t. I told her that we were so thankful for everything that she had done that we wanted to recognize her in this way. Then appealing to her Dutch side, I showed her the plaque and told her that we had already paid for it. The plaque read, “Dedicated to the Glory of God and named in honor of Miss Grace Mullen whose tireless efforts were instrumental in the establishment of the archives of the church and the preservation of its heritage.” Tearfully, she said “Okay.”

On February 5, 2014, an ice storm hit greater Philadelphia, knocking out electrical power in the Glenside area. In her weakened condition from the cancer, Grace could not stay at her house without power. Douglas and Betty Watson, longtime friends of Grace’s from French Creek, lovingly took Grace into their home for the next six weeks. With Betty’s cooking, Grace gained some strength, although it was clear that the cancer was taking its toll. When it was announced at Calvary OPC, Glenside that Grace was feeling well enough to

receive visitors at the Watsons for a hymn-sing, over thirty people packed into the Watson's living room to sing God's praise from the *Trinity Hymnal* with Grace seated in the middle. She could not have been happier.

A few months later, when Grace entered the last stage of her life at the Fort Washington Estates extended care unit, two dear friends and fellow residents in the residential wing, Beverly Mariani and Charlotte Kuschke, attended to her. Bev, who was probably Grace's closest friend, did a little bit of everything. She would eat her meals with Grace, help her with her doctor's appointments, handle her personal affairs, read Scripture with her, and pray with her.

Charlotte would walk over during breakfast time and, while Grace ate breakfast, she would help Grace, whose eyesight by this time was failing, read her mail and many get-well cards. Whatever Charlotte and Bev couldn't do in helping Grace during this time, Patricia Clawson and James Dolezal did. So many times in the last months of Grace's life, I would find James reading Scripture to Grace at her bedside or Pat returning to Grace's room after having run an errand for her friend.

At the Eighty-first (2014) General Assembly on June 9, the commissioners expressed their love and appreciation for Grace as they unanimously adopted the following resolution:

The 81st GA of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church hereby resolves to communicate the following to Miss Grace Mullen: The 81st General Assembly takes this opportunity to greet you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to assure you of our love and prayers. We thank God for your life and the many ways your gentle, quiet, and faithful service has enriched the life of our denomination. Your service in the Montgomery Library at Westminster Seminary had led to the establishment of a denominational archives, in a facility named, to the glory of God, in your honor. Your loving, cheerful, and loyal friendship and service have prompted many in the OPC to

esteem you highly in Christian love.

In light of your declining health, we pray that you will find comfort in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who gives eternal hope to the living and eternal life to the dying.

Grace's pastor at Faith OPC, Pole Tavern, Richard Ellis, was able to read that resolution to Grace when he returned from the Assembly. Dick's trips to see her, despite the long distance, always gave her great encouragement. Although Grace lived in Glenside on the northern tip of Philadelphia, she always made clear to everyone that her home church was Faith Church and that she loved the members there. They were as important to her as any of the prominent theologians at Westminster who she helped on a daily basis. For years, Grace would leave after her work ended on Friday at the seminary and drive to Newfield, New Jersey, to take care of her mother, Rebecca. Together, they would worship at Faith Church on the Lord's Day.

Grace loved South Jersey and knew every part of it. Although she grew up along the coast in Wildwood loving the ocean and the lighthouse, just minutes from her home, she considered the oft-unmentioned southern and western part of South Jersey a treasure. The Maurice River and the Cohansey River to the Delaware Bay and all the little towns along the way were of intense interest to her.

Almost of equal importance to Grace was her love of England, to which she traveled many times, often alone. She would explore the many towns with their cottages and gardens and was not shy about knocking on the door of a house to seek lodging for the night.

When I returned from the Assembly in mid-June, Grace quizzed me in her typical fashion about everything that had happened. But we also started to talk about what she wanted done at her funeral service. She said that she wanted it held at Faith Church with Lane Tipton and me preaching. The instructions that she gave us were clear. She wanted us to preach Christ, to focus on him and not on her in our sermons.

On July 15, Virginia Dennison, Charlie Dennison's wife, and I stopped by to see Grace. She was so happy to see Ginger, even exclaiming that she could think of nothing better. I had also just spent the Lord's Day teaching Sunday school and preaching at French Creek and Grace wanted to hear the full account. We talked nonstop for an hour, and then we read Scripture and prayed. As we left, I wondered if this was the last time that I would see Grace living. Ginger and Grace were more direct. They hugged each other as Ginger said, "I'll see you next in heaven."

A few days later on July 20, Grace's condition worsened, and Lane and I determined to see Grace immediately after the evening worship service at Calvary Church in Glenside. We entered her room, where Bev was already by her side. Lane began to read from Romans 8. Grace died and passed into glory as he read that glorious passage that speaks of the relationship between Christ and his own:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31–39) ©

Danny E. Olinger is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

✦ Servant Thoughts

Editorials

Democracy and the Denigration of Office

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2014¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Americans are not given to use the word *democracy* pejoratively. Hence, the title of this essay will be disturbing to some. In common usage the word loosely describes a system of government in which the rights of citizens are protected and their voices are given a fair representation in public affairs. Careful students of history, however, will be quick to make certain cautionary distinctions in order to remind us that majoritarian democracy, such as that found in Periclean Athens, and constitutional republicanism, which we often loosely refer to as “democracy” today, are quite different in many important respects.

Our present American system is, in fact, a corruption of the government of our Founding Fathers. While most may naively think of the popular franchise as the essence of the democratic ideal, we do well to remember that the essence of this form was a system of carefully defined, limited,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=398&issue_id=91;
http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=403&issue_id=92. This essay is adapted from chap. 13 in Mark R. Brown, ed., *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers* (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993), 235–55.

and distributed federal powers designed to keep civil order and foster individual and corporate responsibility at the state and local levels. Furthermore, it assumed the internal constraints of true Christianity, which are now rapidly disappearing in the Western world.²

It is not, however, the purpose of this essay to reflect on democracy as a political system in its relationship to church government. It is democracy as a popular ideal, as a major strand in the fabric of the American mind, as that ideal impinging on the idea of church office, that is the subject of this essay. President Woodrow Wilson encapsulated this American ideal, in giving the rationale for our entrance into World War I, with his slogan: “The world must be made safe for democracy.” This theme has been reiterated in President George H. W. Bush’s preachments about a “new world order.”

The popular imagination, increasingly disconnected as it is from its Christian and Reformation past, tends to read “democracy” as a cultural catchword which conjures up narcissistic notions such as: “I have rights; my opinion is as important as anyone’s; I am equal to others in every way; I have a right to education, peace, prosperity, healthcare, and recreation; I may believe and say what I like; and I may do what I like as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone.”

It is not my intention to denigrate the democracy embodied in the founding documents and institutions of our nation or to dismiss all present popular ideas about democracy. It must not be overlooked, however, that in its contemporary popular conception, the egalitarian instinct is destructive to the very institutions that have made our country great. But most importantly, the biblical idea of office has been denigrated in church and state by this idol of egalitarianism. As evangelical Anglican John Stott pointed out many decades ago: “There is much uncertainty in the modern Church about the nature and functions of the pro-

² Claes G. Ryn, *The New Jacobinism, Can Democracy Survive?* (Washington: National Humanities Institute, 1991), esp. 19ff. Here is an excellent primer on the points made in my first two paragraphs.

fessional Christian ministry.”³ It is my contention that this uncertainty has in large part been fostered by a growing egalitarian mentality. Egalitarianism tends to equalize God with man and then man with man, and as a result, office of every kind is destroyed. Authority in all of its God-given forms is radically undermined. When it comes to the government of the church, we tamper with its God-given order at our own peril. Thus, I have chosen generally to use the word *egalitarian* to denote the negative, destructive aspect of the democratic mind-set that I am concerned to expose.

My intention is to make a case for a view of church office which has been clearly articulated by Presbyterian and Reformed churches since the Reformation. The “three-office” idea (minister, elder, and deacon), though substantially embodied in the standards of most American Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, has fallen on hard times in recent history. This is due in large part to the egalitarian ideal which pervades the American mind and its contemporary institutions. In order to correct this problem as it is manifested in the church, we need to appreciate the cultural forces which have undermined the proper biblical idea of church office. An example that reveals this mind-set can be observed in the way in which ministers are often sought. The process is referred to as “candidating.” In many churches the resemblance of this process to contemporary political candidating is striking and tragic. The prevailing “two-office” view (elder and deacon; for some Presbyterians this means there are two functions of elders—teaching and ruling) is a concession to the egalitarian agenda, even if there is no intention to compromise biblical principle. In fact, it is where this compromise is unintended that it must be reckoned with especially. The traditional three-office idea, on the other hand, properly understood and practiced, will help to overcome all of the deleterious tendencies of the democratic spirit,

3 Geoffrey Thomas, “The Pastoral Ministry,” in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952–1984: Essays in Honor of Edmund P. Clowney*, ed. Harvey M. Conn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 74.

while promoting the full range of pastoral ministry envisioned in the New Testament.

No doubt both two- and three-office proponents will find a large measure of agreement in assessing the threat which egalitarianism poses to the biblical view of office. Those who claim the two-office view among Presbyterians are usually functionally three-office.⁴ They will also agree, in the main, on the function of church office. But beyond this it needs to be appreciated that the two-office view, especially in its pure form, is, wittingly or unwittingly, egalitarian in its conception and effect, and, therefore, tends to undermine the ministry of the church in our day.

The Historical Roots of Egalitarianism

We must recognize at the outset that the fundamental spiritual and moral principle of egalitarianism is not equality but autonomy. Put another way, the primary motivation of this democratic spirit is found in its assertion of equality or identification with God.

Thus, egalitarianism has its roots not in the Enlightenment, but in Eden. Adam’s assertion of autonomy in God’s world is the ultimate cause of the democratic mentality in its contemporary expression. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century is the proximate historical source, which gave egalitarianism its present form.

The word *office* comes from the Latin *officium*, a work or service performed. Biblically, office is a position of specific duty assigned to a person by the Lord through his church. Each believer has a calling to general office. The minister is called to be a servant of the Lord as his spokesman, a minister of his Word. The apostle Paul needed to remind Timothy of his office. “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership” (1 Tim. 4:13–14). The teaching office is God’s gift to the church. It is also com-

4 Larry E. Wilson, “How Many Offices Are There? Practical Concerns,” *Ordained Servant* 1 (April 1992): 38.

manded. Sietsma asserts: “The essence of office depends on the divine mandate.”⁵

Man, created as *imago dei*, was given the office of a servant of God. Under God, Adam was called to be a prophet, a priest, and a king—a vicegerent over God’s creation. God’s mandate was for his servant to cultivate all of the rich and varied potential of his creation to the eternal glory of God. In challenging God’s sovereign authority to define man’s meaning and role in history, Adam forsook his office. He became the first egalitarian by declaring his equality with God in defining his own meaning and role in history. The modern manifestation of this problem should not surprise us. It is at the heart of the thinking and motivation of fallen man in whatever form it may be historically expressed.

At the beginning of America’s history, this spirit was clearly present. It must not be forgotten that our nation was born in the twilight of the “Age of Reason.” As a true child of the Enlightenment, Thomas Paine confidently declared “my own mind is my own church.” Paine’s *The Age of Reason* was a virulent attack on the integrity and authority of Scripture. Several of the Founding Fathers held similar deistic ideas, however more subtly they may have stated them. Autonomy was on the march.

As sociologist Robert Bellah points out in his brilliant analysis of individualism, there are “three central strands of our culture—biblical, republican, and modern individualist.”⁶ According to Bellah, the American quest for “success, freedom, and justice” comes to expression in each of these three strands throughout her history.⁷ Benjamin Franklin was the quintessential individualist of the founding era. He was the heroic poor boy made good, who pulled himself up by his own bootstraps and lived by the utilitarian interpretation of Christianity captured in his famous statement, “God helps those who help themselves.” The moral maxims

of *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, such as, “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,” were rooted not in God and his Word, but in personal utility.⁸ As with Thomas Jefferson, whose *Jefferson Bible* was an attempt to reduce Scripture to its purely ethical teachings, morality was loosed from its Christian moorings. Man was the measure, as well as the master, of reality and history. God and his Word became the servant of man.

Given this ascendant utilitarianism, it was not difficult for equality before the law, guaranteed by our constitution, subtly to become an equality of individual success. Enlightenment men like Franklin and Paine became exemplars of the American dream. Every man can succeed, given the opportunity and the will. With this shift toward a more anthropocentric view of life, the biblical idea of office began to disappear. Man lives for his own glory. He is no one’s servant. He is a law unto himself.⁹ The Enlightenment idea that governmental authority is derived from the people was a secular distortion of the covenantal idea, in which the people of God were called to respond to the sovereign initiative of their Lord. When authority is delegated by God, both government and people have mutual responsibilities. But God’s law is king, not the king or the people’s law. As authority shifted to the people, the will of the majority became king, and God was simply invoked to bless the popular will (or the will of politicians, as we are reminded at every inauguration).

Though often billed as a reaction to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century Romanticism was really its offspring, or at least its younger sibling. Men like Walt Whitman and Washington Irving despised the materialism of the Enlightenment-inspired Industrial Revolution. Autonomy, however, was as much at the heart of the romantic movement as it was of Enlightenment rationalism. Whitman’s “Song of Myself” says it all in the first line: “I celebrate myself.”¹⁰ The roman-

5 K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, trans. Henry Vander Goot (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1985), 24.

6 Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 28.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 32.

9 Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, 40.

10 Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 34.

tic poet and the rationalist philosopher-statesman were singing different parts to the same tune. The transcendentalist essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed this theme when he asserted: “Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string.”¹¹

Romantic man thought himself able to plum deeper than the Newtonian geometric-mathematical portrait of reality. The mysterious, emotional, and irrational element of man’s nature needed to be appreciated. The logic of the scientist-philosopher was to be replaced by the genius of the artist. The precincts of calculation were to be transcended. Form was to be superseded by life. The authentic individual had to pursue Percy Shelley’s “desire of the moth for the star.”¹² With man’s reason having been set up as the final arbiter of reality and meaning, the romantic focused on the inner feelings, longings, and aspirations of the individual. In the nineteenth century, reason set out on a new voyage amidst the mysteries of life.¹³

It should not surprise us to see rationalistic science and romantic individualism appear together as brothers in the twentieth century. Squabble though they did, they were still kin. The internal combustion engine and the electronic impulse, consummate products of reason, were harnessed to serve the individual in an unprecedented way. Timothy Leary, a leading proponent of the expansion of the individual consciousness via psychedelic drugs in the 1960s, applauded the new technology, called “virtual reality” (VR), commenting, “I hope it’s totally subversive and unacceptable to anyone in power. I am flat out enthusiastic that it is for the liberation and empowerment of the individual.”¹⁴

This reminds us of President Bill Clinton’s recent assertion that the purpose of government is

“empowerment” of its citizenry. As new technologies propelled by egalitarianism reshape our institutions, the individual is rapidly replacing the authority of God, his Word, his church, and the idea of office. As spontaneity and informality express people’s devotion to the idol of egalitarianism,¹⁵ individual authority and expression assert themselves with increasing boldness in the church. Many think that in the absence of such self-assertion the church as an institution lacks authenticity and is “morally hypocritical.”¹⁶ Thus, the sadly prevailing sentiment is “There’s nothing in it for me.” Increasingly, the conviction that the church exists to “meet my needs” is held by ministers and congregants alike as they use the church as a vehicle for their own success.

The Effects of Egalitarianism on Church Office

The immediate precursor of the American War of Independence was the Great Awakening. Despite the spiritual good it generated, it has proven to be a major influence in kindling the egalitarian impulse. Revivalists within the Presbyterian Church of that period were mostly a “force battering at the ecclesiastical structure.”¹⁷ John Thompson, an Old Side Presbyterian minister, opposed itinerancy by positing the federalist idea that ruling elders fairly represented the people.¹⁸ But this view stood against a tide of unrestrained leveling.

One of the plainest popular manifestations of egalitarianism is anticlericalism together with its offspring, anti-intellectualism. Ever since the Reformation, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has been misinterpreted by the radical wing of that movement, the Anabaptist (referring

11 Ibid., 63.

12 Crane Brinton, “Romanticism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7:207.

13 Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1650–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 283–301.

14 Glenn Emery, “Virtual Reality’s Radical Vision,” *Insight on the News* (May 6, 1991), 25.

15 Cf. Charles Dennison, “Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in Worship Services,” *Minutes of the Fifty-eighth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1991), 290.

16 Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 64.

17 Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), xxx.

18 Ibid., 113–14.

to their rejection of infant baptism). During the Great Awakening, revivalist Herman Husband, glorying in his lack of learning, confirmed the anti-revivalists' worst suspicions by boasting, "My Capacity is not below them of the first and greatest Magnitude."¹⁹ Some, according to anti-revivalists, even claimed to be "abler divines than either *Luther* or *Calvin*."²⁰ In claiming the right to question and judge all, the extreme revivalists denied the idea of special office altogether. A genuine experience of God's grace was, for them, the only prerequisite for preaching. James Davenport's "repentance" during the Awakening consisted of burning his books and his clerical garb. He encouraged the laity to assume ministerial authority.²¹

In a well-intended effort to assert the priesthood of all believers and genuine religious experience over against the rationalistic elitism of some of the New England clergy, revivalists, in many cases unwittingly, undermined the authority and integrity of biblical office, especially the teaching office. The tendency to find the source of spiritual authority in the individual, rather than in God-ordained office, was present in American Reformed churches from the earliest times. Men like Jonathan Edwards, along with his Calvinistic contemporaries and forefathers, carefully rejected the egalitarian impulse in the Great Awakening, without denying the authentic work of God's Spirit in that movement. Charles Dennison, late historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, summed it up cogently:

The new tone sounding from the Presbyterians harmonized well with the spirit in the new nation in which the democratic ideal blended with the rising evangelical movement. The evangelicals traced themselves straight back to the charismatic aspects of New Testament worship (Ilion T. Jones, *A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship* [1954], 150). Their perspective had been promoted in part by the

19 Ibid., 646.

20 Ibid., 150.

21 Ibid., 260.

Great Awakening and more conspicuously by the triumphs of Methodism.... With most, there was a deliberate attempt to keep ministers and layman on the same plane (Jones, 155).²²

In the nineteenth century, this tendency simply spread. No one exemplified it in Presbyterianism better than Charles Grandison Finney. He was a member of the New School party from his conversion in 1821 until 1836, when he became a Congregationalist. "Finney and his colleagues had drunk deeply of the new ideals of democracy and sought to devise new means to reach men like themselves."²³ Finney's "new measures" focused on the individual decision of seekers. Others gave more attention to the emotions.²⁴ New School author Albert Barnes, in opposing the doctrinal strictness of the Old School, had great zeal for "freedom of the spirit."²⁵ But the net result was the same: the individual was king.

Old School Presbyterian Thomas Smyth saw the dangers of the "democratic form" in congregational churches:

Experience, however, proved, as it still proved in Congregational churches, the inexpediency of such a course, its impotency and inefficiency on the one hand, and on the other hand its tendency to produce parties, schisms and disturbances, and even tumults and open ruptures in the church.²⁶

The egalitarian spirit, however, did not find Presbyterianism to be the happiest of hunting grounds, due to the latter's strong and clear view of the importance of special office. Through the office of ruling elder, the laity already played a

22 Dennison, "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons," 290.

23 Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America* (Richmond: John Knox, 1967), 47.

24 Ibid., 59.

25 Ibid., 62.

26 Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1908), 4:18–19.

prominent role in the government of the church. Furthermore, the priesthood of all believers was taken seriously and insured each member a vital part in the worship and edification of the church without giving quarter to egalitarianism.

Presently, however, the power of the democratic ideal in the American mind threatens to overwhelm all institutions which dare to stand in its way. In the church, a distorted version of the priesthood of all believers has been reinforced by interpreting Ephesians 4:12 to refer to ministers of the Word equipping church members for ministry. T. David Gordon presents a convincing exegetical argument against this prevailing interpretation:

To sustain such a translation, three things must be proven: (1) that the three purpose clauses, so obviously parallel in their grammatical structure, have different implied subjects (thereby disrupting the parallel); (2) that *katartismos* is properly translated “equip” here; and (3) that *ergodiakonia*s refers not to acts of service, in the general sense, but to the overall “Christian ministry.”

If any one of these three is not proven, the entire argument unravels, for the “lay ministry” translation of this passage requires all three conclusions.²⁷

Gordon concludes,

Further, insofar as these “gifted ones” are appointed for the edification of the body, it is detrimental to the health of the body to diminish or otherwise alter the role of the gifted ones. That is, it is a sin against all three components of Paul’s metaphor, not merely against one, to diminish the role of the gift. It diminishes the thanks that are properly due the Giver for his gracious provision. It diminishes the range and degree of edification that the body might otherwise experience. And it diminishes the honor that ought to be given to those we are

27 T. David Gordon, “Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/1 (March 1994): 70.

commanded to honor doubly.²⁸

In his recent impassioned and witty plea for America to return to the behavior and ideals of its WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) heritage, Richard Brookhiser unintentionally made a very important point about egalitarianism. In commenting on the power of WASP America to assimilate a wide variety of nationalities and viewpoints, Brookhiser noted:

It is one of the pleasant surprises of the Irish experience that Catholicism adapted so well. The reason is plain. The Catholic Church in America became Americanized—that is, WASPized. The Catholic Church arrived as the one true faith, outside which there was no salvation, and it became a denomination. It was still the one true faith, of course, but then so were all the others.²⁹

Here is the power, not of the WASP, who is living off borrowed capital and about to declare bankruptcy anyway, but of egalitarianism aimed at religion. All religions are created equal. It is not a big step from that assertion to declare that because all church members are created equal, the idea of office is rubbish—or, worse, that, because it stands in the way of equality and self-fulfillment, it must be abolished altogether.

Where office formally exists in church and state, it is often used more for personal aggrandizement than for service to God or man. The celebrity has replaced the servant as a major mentor in our culture. Every man has the potential to be a star. If that fails, watching TV will provide vicarious stardom. In the church, this translates into the mistaken notion that participation in worship requires a spotlight on the individual. So special music and “sharing times” proliferate. Why should the preacher own center stage? Thus, church office often degenerates into a stage for the display of one’s gifts, rather than a means of ministering

28 Ibid., 78.

29 Richard Brookhiser, *The Way of the WASP* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 23.

God's grace to God's people. When it comes to opinions and ideas, many people feel that their thoughts have not been "heard" until they have been heeded. As Christopher Lasch rightly concludes, the value of self-restraint has been replaced by that of self-indulgence.³⁰ This is egalitarianism come into its own. Whether one worships in church or in the woods, the individual prevails.

While the view that diminishes the distinction between the pastor and the ruling elder, known as the two-office view, may not be the lineal descendent of egalitarian thinking, it is significant that it was first explicitly articulated in American Presbyterianism in the romantic nineteenth century. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that this view is predominant in our egalitarian present.

If egalitarianism is in the business of leveling distinctions, particularly where authority and office are involved, the two-office view falls prey to this instinct by obliterating the distinction between ruler and pastor. Its tendency is to bring down, not to elevate. At its worst, the preacher is thought merely to be paid to do full-time what the elder does for free. Thus, whatever distinction remains, it is not qualitative and official, but quantitative and practical. But then, ironically, this equalizing instinct brings down in order to elevate itself. In true *Animal Farm* fashion, "Some are more equal than others." Pure egalitarianism always opens the door to pure dictatorship.

The defenders of the three-office view in the nineteenth century were quick to pick up on this irony in the two-office view. Princeton theologian Charles Hodge pointed out that as a consequence of the two-office view, "we are therefore shut up by this new doctrine to abolish the office of ruling elder; we are required to make them all preachers."³¹ The very people the two-office theory purports to help are deprived of the putative pastoral connection. Hodge continues:

30 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), 177.

31 Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 269.

This doctrine is, therefore, completely revolutionary. It deprives the people of all substantive power. The legislative, judicial, and executive power according to our system, is in Church courts, and if these courts are to be composed entirely of clergymen, and are close, self-perpetuating bodies, then we have, or we should have, as complete a clerical domination as the world has ever seen.³²

As former Westminster Theological Seminary President Edmund Clowney asserts, to limit rule to those with teaching gifts creates a distance between church officers and the church, and it denies the use of men who are gifted to rule.³³ So, while the three-office idea is often billed as clericalism or elitism, it turns out actually to be just the opposite.

A further irony lies in the fact that where the two-office view prevails, the plurality of elders in a congregation tends to diminish the importance and, therefore, the quality of the teaching office. This was not lost on one of Hodge's mentors, Samuel Miller, whose classic work *The Ruling Elder* set the agenda for the nineteenth-century debate on the eldership. He lamented that the effect of the two-office view

would be to reduce the preparation and acquirements for the ministry; to make choice of plain, illiterate men for this office; men of small intellectual and theological furniture; dependent on secular employments for subsistence; and, therefore, needing little or no support from the churches which they serve.³⁴

The two-office idea, then, in its purest form, ends up denigrating both the teaching and the ruling offices. The biblical system requires both as separate offices in order to preserve the full range of ministry mandated in the Scriptures. In fact,

32 Ibid., 129.

33 Edmund P. Clowney, "A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government" (unpublished paper, 1972), 17.

34 Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831), 187.

most two-office proponents in Presbyterian churches do hold to a distinction between teaching and ruling elders, as species of one genus. This is often popularly referred to as the “two-and-a-half-office” view. But does this not really represent a transition from the three- to the two-office view? As Iain Murray noted of James Henley Thornwell and Robert Lewis Dabney in the nineteenth century, “When in writing on the call to the ministry they make plain that they are *not* discussing ruling elders—a position hardly consistent with their case” (i.e., for the two-office view).³⁵ The logic of the two-office position is bound ultimately to do away with any distinction between the pastor and the ruling elder.³⁶

The Restoration of Church Office

No doctrine can be properly restored to the church’s mind without careful definition. The three-office view is no exception. Distinctions made in the nineteenth-century debate are helpful in focusing the definition. In fact, it was the lack of proper distinctions that characterized the two-office theory for Hodge. The point at issue, he maintained, is

the nature of the office of the ruling elder. Is he a clergyman, a bishop? or is he a layman? Does he hold the same office with the minister or a different one? According to the new theory, the offices are identified.... This new theory makes all elders, bishops, pastors, teachers, and rulers.... It therefore destroys all official distinctions between them. It reduces the two to one order, class, or office.³⁷

The focus of the question, from an exegetical

perspective, is clearly stated by Iain Murray:

The question which arises is how this Presbyterian distinction between ‘ministers’ and ‘elders’ is to be justified from the New Testament. Upon what grounds should such a title as ‘pastor’ be restricted to one if the word in the New Testament is descriptive of all elders?³⁸

If *presbyter* is used uniformly in the New Testament to refer to a single office, then the distinction between the ruling elder and the pastor cannot be maintained. But, as Clowney cautioned:

In 1 Timothy 5:17, those who engage in rule are distinguished from those who also labor in the word and doctrine. Again, the fact that both groups can be called *πρεσβύτεροι* by no means demonstrates that their office is identical.³⁹

Hodge made a crucial exegetical point in recounting the essence of a debate he had with Thornwell:

This is the dilemma in which, as we understood, Dr. Thornwell endeavoured to place Dr. Hodge, when he asked him, on the floor of the Assembly, whether he admitted that the elder was a presbyter. Dr. Hodge rejoined by asking Dr. Thornwell whether he admitted that the apostles were deacons. He answered, No. But, says Dr. Hodge, Paul says he was a *διάκονος*. O, says Dr. Thornwell, that was in the general sense of the word. Precisely so. If the answer is good in the one case, it is good in the other. If the apostles being deacons in the wide sense of the word, does not prove that they were officially deacons, then that elders were presbyters in the one sense, does not prove them to be presbyters in the other sense. We hold, with Calvin, that the official presbyters of the New Testament were bishops; for, as he says, “[F]or to all who carry out the ministry

35 Iain Murray, “Ruling Elders—A Sketch of a Controversy,” *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, no. 235 (April 1983): 9.

36 Instructive in this regard is the transition made by G. I. Williamson from a two-office to three-office view. See G. I. Williamson, “A Look at the Biblical Offices,” *Ordained Servant* 1 (April 1992): 30–37; “The Two- and Three-Office Issue Reconsidered,” *Ordained Servant* 12 (January 2003): 5–6. See also Mark R. Brown, “Why I Came to a Three-Office View,” *Ordained Servant* 4 (January 1995): 17–19.

37 Hodge, *Church Polity*, 128.

38 Iain Murray, “Ruling Elders—A Sketch of a Controversy,” 1.

39 Clowney, “A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government,” 15.

of the Word it (Scripture) accords the title of 'bishops.]" But of the ruling elders, he adds, "[Governors (I Cor. 12:28) were, I believe, elders chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure or morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops.]" *Institutio, &c.* IV. 3. 8.⁴⁰

Some defenders of the three-office view, such as Southern Presbyterian minister and theologian Thomas Smyth, held that ruling elders were never referred to in the New Testament "under the term presbyter or elder, which always refers to the teacher or bishop solely."⁴¹ Like John Calvin, he found his warrant for the office of governor or ruling elder in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8. He understood passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and 5:17, Titus 1, and Acts 20 as referring only to ministers of the word. On the other end of the exegetical spectrum of three-office defenders, Samuel Miller understood the above passages to refer to both offices together. Miller, nonetheless, clearly held the three-office view.⁴² In fact, Hodge declared himself to be in complete agreement with Miller as to the nature of the ruling office, only differing with him in the method of establishing its biblical warrant.⁴³ Exegetical uniformity is not required in order to base the view clearly on Scripture.

Hodge summed up the three-office position robustly:

This is the old, healthful, conservative doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. Ministers of the word are clergymen, having special training, vocation, and ordination; ruling elders are laymen, chosen from the people as their representatives, having, by divine warrant, equal authority in all Church courts with the

ministers.⁴⁴

Much study of this question needs to be carried out by Presbyterians. The integrity of the offices of both ruling elder and minister is at stake. And while we need to take seriously the warning of Thomas Smyth that our devotion does not "terminate on the outward form, order, ministry or ordinances of any church,"⁴⁵ we must not forget that the proper biblical form of office will best serve the Lord who ordained it. This is true of both offices.

The 1941 edition of the *Form of Government* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church began the chapter "Of Ministers": "The office of the minister is the first in the church, both for dignity and usefulness." But this phrase was deleted from the chapter describing the office of minister in the 1978 revision, as an accommodation to the two-office view. The chapter title was also changed from "Of Ministers" to "Ministers or Teaching Elders." Interestingly, the sentence remains in the chapter on "Ordaining and Installing Ministers" (23.8, 14). However, its omission in the description of the ministerial office is unfortunate because ultimately the centrality of preaching is at stake. Calvin said it well: "God often commended the dignity of the ministry by all possible marks of approval in order that it might be held among us in highest honor and esteem, even as the most excellent of all things."⁴⁶ It is not the privilege of persons, but the dignity of God's Word, which is being upheld. Egalitarianism, lacking any real conception of office, tends to see all official distinctions as tools of oppression. A biblical servant, however, will see such a distinction as a tool of ministry and himself as an instrument of God's grace.

The three-office doctrine also preserves the ruling function of the eldership. As both Hodge and Clowney pointed out, the two-office view creates a gap between the clergy and the people.

40 Hodge, *Church Polity*, 130. (Battles's English translation in the Library of Christian Classics is substituted for Hodge's quotation of Calvin in Latin.)

41 Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1908), 4:26.

42 Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 28.

43 Hodge, *Church Polity*, 129.

44 *Ibid.*, 130.

45 Smyth, *Works*, 4:26.

46 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.8, 1055.

As every faithful minister knows, the oversight of the flock is impossible to maintain alone. The three-office position allows ruling elders to focus on the application of what the minister teaches from God's Word. The three-office position, rightly understood, alone preserves the true dignity and effectiveness of the ruling office.

Only a careful distinction of offices will ultimately preserve the proper functions of each. Historically, the two-office scheme leads to the disappearance of the ruling elder and the atrophy of lay leadership. In some circles, the teaching function has been demeaned, but this seems to be the case more where the "no-office" idea prevails, as in Brethrenism. When everyone is a minister, no one is. The egalitarian impulse, by its very nature, erodes the idea of office to the great harm of the church.

The benefits of the three-office view are manifold. First, the parity of rule protects the church from tyranny. The minister does not rule alone. There is a balance of power—a system of checks and balances. As Miller noted, the ruling elder has "an equal voice. The vote of the most humble and retiring Ruling Elder, is of the same avail as that of his minister."⁴⁷ Dutch pastor K. Sietsma observed, "It must be remembered that office is the only justification and the proper limitation of any human exercise of power and authority."⁴⁸ The three-office view brings this idea into its own. Egalitarianism allows power to fall into the hands of the domineering and gives voice ultimately to the loudest mouth.

Second, the three-office doctrine provides leadership. The minister, as a scribe of the Word, is a leader among the rulers. He is normally the moderator of the session, a first among equals. A ship cannot sail without a captain. As Welsh pastor Geoffrey Thomas pointed out:

Where plural elders are in existence, the principle of single leadership is necessary. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find leadership

exercised by a committee with one man acting as a kind of chairman, although that is the consequence of the concept of parity among plural elders in many cases today.⁴⁹

In preventing ministers from lording it over the elders, the two-office view tends to leave a vacuum of leadership. Smyth declared, "Ministers are like the head from which proceeds the stimulus, guidance, and direction, which are essential to the vitality, the activity, the dignity, and the harmony of the system."⁵⁰ Egalitarianism engenders lordship, not leadership.

Third, the three-office view allows the minister to focus on the ministry of the Word, unhindered by the multitude of concerns that only the group of elders can attend to with him. How many of the pulpits of our land suffer because of the inordinate demands made on a minister's time? Jethro's advice to Moses is as pertinent today as it was over three millennia ago: "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone" (Exod. 18:17–18). The apostles put this principle into practice in the calling out of deacons in Acts 6. Egalitarianism leads not only to tyranny but to burnout.

Fourth, this view allows for the proper and effective implementation of discipline, which the minister could not appropriately or practically provide on his own. Egalitarianism leads to moral chaos.

Finally, the three-office idea provides for the needs of all of the people. Miller beautifully depicted this full-orbed ministry:

In every department of official duty, the Pastor of this denomination has associated with him, a body of pious, wise, and disinterested counselors, taken from among the people; acquainted with their views; participating in their feelings; able to give sound advice as to the wisdom and practicability of plans which

47 Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 197.

48 Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, 15.

49 Thomas, "The Pastoral Ministry," 78–79.

50 Smyth, *Works*, 4:28.

require general co-operation for carrying them into effect; and able also, after having aided in the formation of such plans, to return to their constituents, and so to advocate and recommend them, as to secure general concurrence in their favor.⁵¹

There are several things which need to be done to promote a more biblical view of office in our churches. First, congregants need to be instructed about the nature and dangers of egalitarianism. Most people are unaware of the democratic assumptions that are part of the fabric of the worldview in which they have been nurtured as Americans. To the extent that these assumptions are unbiblical, church officers, especially ministers, must foster the transformation of people's minds, so that they will not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1–2).

Second, pastors and elders need to encourage each other to fulfill the ministries to which God has called them. This means that each must be aware of the biblical requirements, duties, and limits of the offices of pastor and ruler. In particular, each must understand what is specifically expected of them in the local congregation. The strengths and weaknesses of each officer should be openly discussed in the privacy of the session. Special strengths and gifts should be appreciated and cultivated so that the wide variety of needs in a given congregation will be met.

Third, a good working relationship should be cultivated among elders and ministers. This means developing biblical communication and conflict-resolution skills. The session must see itself as a team. This means that the individualist instinct must be suppressed in ministers and elders. Matters under discussion must be kept confidential. When decisions are made, the dissenter should keep his disagreement to himself unless it involves moral or doctrinal absolutes. Then the proper means of discipline should be judiciously used to deal with sin and heresy.

One of the greatest temptations presented

51 Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 311–12.

by the democratic mentality is the idea that the ruling elder is a sounding board for congregational discontent or an agent for special interests. Smyth was aware of this danger already in the nineteenth century, when he warned elders:

Remember, however, that while you are the representatives of the people, you represent not their WISHES and OPINIONS, but their DUTIES and OBLIGATIONS, THEIR RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES, as these are laid down in those heavenly laws to which you and they are both alike subject, and which no power on earth can either alter, modify, abridge, or enlarge.

Because pride enhances this temptation he added, “Seek not popularity at the expense of fidelity.”⁵²

The idea, rightly emphasized by Hodge and others, that ruling elders are “representatives of the people” can easily be misused in order to pit the minister against the people, as if the pastor did not sympathize with their concerns. Frustrated preachers must not treat their elder as Absaloms. Annual sessional retreats, together with a wise and regular system of visitation by elders and minister, will do much to prevent such abuse.

The session must present a united front. This means that a wedge should never be allowed to be driven between a pastor and the elders. The pastor must be teachable and humble, never demanding his agenda. But it also means that the ruling elders must protect the pastor from the power of destructive criticism. Criticism itself is healthy, but the devil, the original egalitarian, is a master at inspiring unjust criticism and using just criticism divisively to ruin churches and drive good men from the ministry. The wise elder will try to answer the criticisms and concerns of members on the spot or bring the matter directly to the pastor (with the critic, if necessary). It is crucial that elders support the pastor, especially when they disagree with him. Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster have an

52 Smyth, *Works*, 4:31.

excellent section on this subject.⁵³ This would be a superb book for sessions to work through together. Finally, ministers and elders will serve the Lord and promote the godly government of his church best by being servants of God and his people. The three-office view, by itself, will not restore true ministry to the church. Only if those who fill the offices have the mind of their Master, the mind of a servant (Phil. 2:5–11), will egalitarianism be kept at bay and the kingdom of God built. The individualist will use the office for his own personal fulfillment and thus denigrate the office. The servant will seek the glory of his Lord. ©

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53 Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Elder's Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Christian Library, 1979), 160–62. Cf. Lawrence Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), 17–18.

The Nature, Limits, and Place of Exceptions and Scruples in Subscription to Our Doctrinal Standards

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

State of the Question (*statis questionis*)

The second ordination question in the *Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Form of Government [FG]13.9) asks: “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church [Orthodox Presbyterian], as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?” To what extent does the system of doctrine bind the ordinand to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms? Do we subscribe to the *ipsissima verba* of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms? Or do we subscribe to the “system of doctrine” only? Is there a difference between a “scruple” and an “exception”? If so, what is it? How do we determine which scruples and/or exceptions, if any, are acceptable? These are the germane questions every ministerial candidate should be asking as he approaches ordination to an office in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

An Overview of the History of Subscription in the Presbyterian Church

The question before us is one that has been debated hotly throughout the history of Presbyterianism in America. The subject of subscription was not, however, new in America. Protestant

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=415&issue_id=94. This article was originally written for the Committee on Candidates and Credentials of the Presbytery of New York and New England in 1999 and revised in 2008. It has been modified.

subscription to creeds can be traced as far back as Calvin's Geneva (1536).² Subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles by English Presbyterians can be found as early as 1571.³ From this period through to the beginning of the eighteenth century in the English context, according to pastor David Hall: "Obviously subscription meant submission to the stated doctrine and a whole-hearted embracing of the *credenda*, without equivocation or mental reservation."⁴ The Scottish context reveals a clear-cut statement on subscription in the vow of subscription used at the 1693 General Assembly: "I do sincerely own and declare the above Confession of Faith, . . . to be the Confession of my faith, and that I own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine, which I will constantly adhere to."⁵ Confessional historian Ian Hamilton notes the shift from the earlier Scottish subscription, in which the minister "owned . . . the whole doctrine contained," to an adoption of the "general sense" of the Confession, which led to doctrinal decline by the eighteenth century.⁶ There is clear evidence that the Scottish as well as the English contexts of subscription during the time of American Presbyterian debate that led to the 1729 Adopting Act favored a very strict view of subscription.⁷

The American adoption of the Confession and Catechisms in 1729, however, is fraught with ambiguities, which have led Presbyterian scholars to widely differing interpretations of the intent and consequences of that act. Church historian James Payton maintains that the outcome of that action was a *via media* on the matter of subscription, which laid the foundation for the subsequent differences between Old and New Schools. He also argues that the unique precision of the Westminster

Standards made it difficult to require the same unqualified subscription which the church had demanded of previous creeds such as the Three Forms of Unity.⁸ The ambiguity of the Adopting Act was also noted in the nineteenth century by strict subscriptionists Charles Hodge and A. A. Hodge.⁹ Thus the 1729 Adopting Act represents a compromise between opponents of subscription, like Jonathan Dickinson, and "strict" subscriptionists, like John Thompson and George Gillespie, within the Synod of Philadelphia.¹⁰ Those who held a mediating position in the presbytery were represented by Thomas Craighead.¹¹ Others, like Charles Hodge, who believe that a "strict" view was intended by the adopters, point to the 1736 interpretation stating the "jot and tittle" intentions of the original act. Even so, Hodge understood the Act to be a "compromise . . . to avoid schism."¹²

The cause of the ambiguity is that two separate actions were taken on September 19, 1729. In the morning, the text of the act was passed. This bound ministers to "declare their agreement in, and approbation of, the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and . . . [to] also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith." Ministers or candidates who had "scruples" must "declare them to the Presbytery or Synod" and

2 David W. Hall, "On the Hermeneutics of Subscription," in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. David W. Hall (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 2.

3 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

4 *Ibid.*, 5.

5 *Ibid.*, 10.

6 *Ibid.*, 11. Cf. the full and strict vow taken by licentiates on p. 12.

7 *Ibid.*, 13–14.

8 James Payton Jr., "Background and Significance of the Adopting Act of 1729," in *Pressing toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 131, 134, 135. Cf. Luder G. Whitlock Jr., "The Context of the Adopting Act," in Hall, *Confessional Subscription*, 99. For the entire text of the Adopting Act, see Appendix A.

9 Luder G. Whitlock Jr., "The Context of the Adopting Act," in Hall, *Confessional Subscription*, 99–100.

10 *Ibid.*, 97ff.

11 *Ibid.*, 98–99.

12 Charles Hodge, "The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," extracted from volume 1, pp. 145–66, 170–72, 185–86 of Hodge's two-volume work of the same name (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851) in Hall, *Confessional Subscription*, 109.

these bodies would “judge” whether or not these scruples were “only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government . . . not necessary points of doctrine.” In the afternoon session, certain scruples were considered, having to do with the articles regarding the civil magistrate (chapters 20 and 23). The form of subscription, in the second vow of ordination, adopted as constitutional law by the Synod of 1788, though it does not directly quote the Adopting Act of 1729, embodies its intention.¹³ This 1788 vow is precisely the vow used by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church today (FG 13.9, see above). It should be carefully noted that the general statement of the morning action was “preliminary” to the actual Adopting Act passed in the afternoon session. The latter alone bore Synodical authority.¹⁴

Charles Hodge argued that the strict view of subscription was the intention of the adopters, while admitting “that the language of the act leaves the intention of its authors a matter of doubt.”¹⁵ Hodge doubts the integrity of those who would interpret the language of the Adopting Act to committing them to “only so much of the Confession as is essential to the gospel.”¹⁶ He insists that “all the essential and necessary articles of the said Confession” refers to the whole fabric of the document. To abstract those articles essential to the gospel from the confession obviates the need of a confession.¹⁷ The “whole concatenated statement of doctrines,” while not requiring agreement with every “proposition” or “expression” used in stating a particular doctrine in the Confession, is what ministers subscribe to.

Hodge goes on to observe that the matter of scruples is more ambiguous, but nonetheless was intended to set forth a strict view of subscription.

13 Payton, “Background and Significance of the Adopting Act of 1729,” 138.

14 George W. Knight III, “Subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms,” in Hall, *Confessional Subscription*, 121.

15 Charles Hodge, “The Constitutional History,” 107.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 108.

The system of “doctrine, worship, and government” cannot be separated from all of its constituent elements of what is Presbyterian. Hodge accounts for the dissatisfaction of many and the subsequent latitudinarian interpretations of the Act by the fact that the text of what was passed in the afternoon session, which contained the explanation of scruples as only referring to “some clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters” was not printed and distributed with the Act itself.¹⁸ The Synod of 1730 thus had to explain that the “declaration” of the afternoon session was interpretive of the meaning of the Adopting Act passed in the morning session.

Since confusion and dissatisfaction continued in the church, the Synod of 1736 declared that “the Synod have adopted and still do adhere to the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory, without the least variation or alteration.” It reiterated that the only scruples admitted were “some clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters.”¹⁹ This was passed without objection (*nemine contradicente*). Payton’s reference to this act as “abortive” is mysterious in light of this unanimity. He seems to disregard the relationship of the two parts of the act in order to make the case that the Adopting Act was intended to be a looser departure from the British and Continental tradition of strict subscription.²⁰ Several presbyteries at this time passed their own versions of subscription, including the very strict Presbytery of New Castle, which referred to the Confession and Catechisms, “taking them in the true, genuine, and obvious sense of the words.”²¹

As noted above, the specific wording of the second vow, which we presently use, was adopted by the Synod of 1788. The words “adopt” and “receive” were used in the 1729 Adopting Act and clarified by the Synod of 1730: “to receive and adopt the Confession and Catechisms . . . in

18 Ibid., 110.

19 Ibid., 111–12.

20 Payton “Background and Significance of the Adopting Act of 1729,” 137ff.

21 Hodge, “The Constitutional History,” 114.

the same Manner and as fully as the Members of Synod did.” Theologian George Knight makes a convincing historical argument to prove that the phrase “system of doctrine” refers to *each* and *every* article and doctrine of the Confession.²² In affirming it, the candidate is subscribing to the entire body of teaching in the confession as a summary of what Scripture teaches. That is, we are not saying that we believe the articles of the confession “in as much as” they teach what is scriptural, but rather we believe that all that they teach *is* scriptural. If we do not believe this, then we cannot in good conscience take the vow, i.e., “sincerely.”²³

Closer now to our own immediate context was the attempt by conservatives in the early part of twentieth century to preserve the essence of historic Christianity by asserting the minimal necessity of affirming the “five fundamentals.” As Knight points out, this had the unintended effect of reducing the “essential and necessary articles” of the Adopting Act to just five, even though the 1910 action of the General Assembly referred to the “five fundamentals” as “certain essential and necessary Articles of Faith.”

When the Assembly of 1927 gave to the individual presbytery the right to determine which articles or doctrines the presbytery would consider as part of the system of doctrine of the confessional standards, the Assembly abandoned the past history of American Presbyterianism.²⁴

In reviewing this history, one thing is clear: the idea of the “system of doctrine” has been used by those holding doctrines seriously deviating from our Confession and Catechisms. The danger is in viewing the “system” as a kind of supra-confessional body of truth which transcends the text of the confession itself. This view obviates the whole

22 Knight, “Subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms,” 127ff.

23 *Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Form of Government [FG]13.9).

24 Knight, “Subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms,” 140ff.

idea of having a confession in the first place. This becomes especially problematic in the modern context of neoorthodox and deconstructionist hermeneutics. As a carefully worded summary of the perspicuous and essential teachings of Scripture, a creed must be affirmed in its entirety as a system or not at all. A cogent warning appears in the 1834 “Act and Testimony” framed by Southern Presbyterian pastor Robert J. Breckenridge as a protest of the Old School against the “loose” view of subscription held by the New School: “2. We testify against the unchristian subterfuge to which some have recourse, when they avow a general adherence to our standards *as a system*, while they deny doctrines essential to the system, or hold doctrines at complete variance with the system.”²⁵

On the other hand, in seeking to preserve the full subscriptionist view, we must not require more than our strictest forefathers have. The kind of doctrinal errors that the Old School opposed in the view of subscription to which they objected in the 1834 “Act and Testimony” were Socinian, “Arminian and Pelagian heresies,”²⁶ matters of central importance to the system. Not every word, phrase, or even teaching must be either adhered to or even understood in order to hold to this orthodox view of subscription to our confessional Standards.

In 1993, an overture from the Presbytery of Northern California in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was presented to the Sixtieth General Assembly that proposed changes in the second ordination vow.²⁷ The Assembly sent it back because it lacked the required “grounds,” and it has never reappeared.²⁸ It defines “system of doctrine” as “the whole body of truth which the Holy Scriptures teach. The Confession of Faith and Catechisms are to be received by the licentiate and officer

25 Morton H. Smith, *Subscription to the Westminster Standards in the Presbyterian Church in America* (privately printed, 1992?), 51.

26 Ibid. Cf. the sixteen “Specifications of error in the Memorial,” 52–54.

27 *Minutes of the Sixtieth General Assembly*, 81–83.

28 John R. Muether, “Confidence in Our Brethren: Creedal Subscription in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” in Hall, *Confessional Subscription*, 307.

as a most satisfactory exposition of this truth in an integral and indivisible whole. By receiving and adopting the standards, he thereby affirms and agrees with nothing less than the complete set of assertions contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms.” This is similar to, but not exactly, what Charles Hodge maintained was the original intention of the Adopting Act of 1729. Hodge emphasized the integrity of the system, not the “complete set of assertions.”

At this point, I will summarize Charles Hodge’s treatment of this issue in *Church Polity*, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith” (317–35; this was formerly an article in the *Princeton Review* 1858, 669). Hodge distinguishes among three views of what the subscription vow commits a minister to when he declares that the Confession and Catechisms contain “the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” He subscribes to: 1) the substance of doctrine; 2) every proposition; 3) the system of doctrine. A fourth distinction may be drawn from number 3.²⁹ By the “system of doctrine” Hodge understood *essential* doctrines, not every doctrine. The overture noted above would seem to indicate a fourth view: 4) every doctrine.

Hodge explores the implications of the criteria for vows and oaths—the historical meaning of the words and the *animus imponentis* (“the intention of the party imposing the oath”).³⁰ He concludes: “The Confession must be adopted in the sense of the Church, into the service of which the minister, in virtue of that adoption, is received.” Thus the intention of the church in its adoption of the confession, along with the history of its deliberations on exceptions must be taken into account.

Thus, Hodge concludes regarding view 1: “From the beginning, therefore, the mind of our Church has been that the ‘system of doctrine’ in its integrity, not the substance of those doctrines, was the term of ministerial communion.... the phrase ‘substance of doctrine’ has no definite assignable

meaning.”³¹ On the other end of the spectrum, view 2 “is contrary to the *animus imponentis*, or the mind of the Church.”³² The “words ‘system of doctrine,’ have a definite meaning, and serve to define and limit the extent to which the Confession is adopted.”³³ To require the adoption of every proposition or teaching is to invite hypocrisy and foster disunity. “We are not sure that we personally know a dozen ministers besides ourselves, who could stand the test.”³⁴ “Whenever a man is induced either to do what he does not approve, or to profess what he does not believe, his conscience is defiled. ... It [the requirement of adopting every proposition] fosters a spirit of evasion and subterfuge.”³⁵

Hodge’s own position, view 3, varies from position 4 in that he does not believe that the “system of doctrine” requires subscription to every single doctrine taught in the confession. Hodge takes his cue from the original Adopting Act of 1729, which refers to the “essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine” and defines “scruples” as “only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government.”³⁶ Thus the “system” excludes articles not part of the “whole system in its integrity.”³⁷ Hodge is careful to distance himself from the view that *essential* refers only to the “doctrines of the gospel.”³⁸ *Essential* refers, rather, to the entire “system of doctrines common to the Reformed Churches.”³⁹ This includes all teachings on doctrine, worship, and government, which are *essential* to that system. There are three categories of such teachings: 1) those common to all Christians, expressed in the early councils of the ancient church; 2) those common to all Protes-

29 I owe this distinction to T. David Gordon.

30 Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 319.

31 *Ibid.*, 324.

32 *Ibid.*, 327.

33 *Ibid.*, 326.

34 *Ibid.*, 331.

35 *Ibid.*, 332.

36 *Ibid.*, 321.

37 *Ibid.*, 323.

38 *Ibid.*, 329.

39 *Ibid.*, 326.

tants, as distinct from Romanism; 3) those peculiar to Reformed Churches, as distinct from Lutheran and Arminian.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Hodge gives examples of doctrines not essential to the system, which are consistent with the kind of exceptions noted by the adopting assembly. These are doctrines “relating to civil magistrates, the power of the state, conditions of Church membership, marriage, divorce, and other matters lying outside of the ‘system of doctrine’ in its theological sense.”⁴¹ As important as the Confession’s teaching on these doctrines is, Hodge maintains, the Church has been wise not to make them conditions of ministerial communion.

Definition of Terms

Loose or “system subscription”⁴²—affirms the essential doctrines of the “system of theology.” Not every doctrine taught in the Confession is included in this view.

Strict or “full subscription”⁴³—affirms every doctrine in the Confession and Catechisms; not every word or phrase, but every doctrine.

Scruple—literally L. *scrupulus*, small sharp stone, especially in a shoe, causing uneasiness; therefore, doubt based on conscientious reasons (qualms). The Assembly which produced the Adopting Act of 1729 defined “scruples” and how they should be dealt with:

In case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall, at the time of his making the said declaration, declare his sentiments to the said Presbytery or Synod; who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be *only about articles not essential*

*and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government.*⁴⁴

While it can be demonstrated that the original intention regarding scruples was limited to certain teachings about the civil magistrate in his relationship to the church in chapters 20 and 23, it is also clear that from the beginning scruples have been understood to refer to a wider range of exceptions, due to the ambiguity of the original definition of scruples.⁴⁵ Debate over the extent to which exceptions are acceptable has continued ever since.

George Knight calls our attention, however, to the definition of scruple, in light of the afternoon declaration (which is the Adopting Act), which defined the scruples to which that Synod took exception, as well as the official clarifications of 1730 and 1736. “Essential and necessary articles and doctrines,” according to Knight, includes *every* article and doctrine in the Confession. Scruples were defined as “extra-essential and non-necessary points.” The only scruples allowed in 1729 were “some clauses in the twentieth and twenty-third chapters.” These nonessentials as well as “expressions” or modes of articulating articles or doctrines were the only categories of scruples accepted by the Synod as permissible in subscription.⁴⁶ Furthermore, this definition limited the matters on which Presbyteries and Synods could judge. According to Knight, they are not at liberty to decide which doctrines and articles are essential, since they are *all* essential as part of the system.

Hodge differed on this point in allowing other doctrines to be considered nonessential and unnecessary to the system. Whereas Knight would appear to consider “extra-essential and non-necessary points” to be limited to modes of expression of the doctrines of the Confession, Hodge took the example of clauses in chapters 20 and 23 concerning the civil magistrate as precedents for doctrinal exceptions not essential to the system as articulated in the other Reformed confessions. Clearly the

40 Ibid., 333.

41 Ibid., 334.

42 Smith, *Subscription to the Westminster Standards*, 3–4.

43 Ibid., 2–3.

44 Ibid., 11, from *Minutes of Synod*, 104. Emphasis added.

45 Ibid., 16.

46 Knight, “Subscription to the Westminster Confession,” 126.

clauses regarding the civil magistrate, to which many in the adopting assembly took exception, were more than mere modes of expression, but rather concerned specific doctrines about the role of the civil magistrate which the American church could not affirm. Westminster Theological Seminary professor John Murray took exception to the confessional doctrine of divorce and remarriage on the matter of remarriage in the case of abandonment.

Exception—As far as I can ascertain, “exception” is synonymous with “scruple.”⁴⁷ Although in our Presbytery “exception” has been used as if it were more serious than a “scruple,”⁴⁸ there is no support for this distinction in the history of our churches. One deviation from this is found in the above-mentioned overture to the Sixtieth General Assembly.⁴⁹ The overture defined an “exception” as

a dissent from, an objection to, or a mental reservation about *any assertion* contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and is to be distinguished from an inconsequential objection to a proposition or from a quibble or from a reservation about terminology. However, such a distinction is to be made only by the judicatory, never by the individual. No officer or licentiate shall presume to have the right of making self-evaluation regarding this distinction.

47 Smith, *Subscription to the Westminster Standards*. Smith simply uses the terms “scruple” and “exception” interchangeably throughout his paper.

48 Email from the Rev. William Shishko (Sept. 1998): “An ‘exception,’ as I would understand it, is something you believe is either wrong or stated wrongly in the confession, i.e., it is something you disagree with. (Personally, I don’t believe a man should be able to teach his exception, e.g., I believe that proponents of the framework hypothesis need to declare an exception to the confession . . . and should not be able to teach that view). A ‘scruple’ is something that you have a conscience problem with, e.g., you have a scruple against being bound to teach a six day creation if—in fact—it is determined that is the actual meaning of the confession. Yes, you’re probably right about that [that there is no distinction between “scruple” and “exception” in the history of this discussion]. More to the point is the question of whether a man is permitted to TEACH what he holds as scruple/exception.”

49 *Minutes of the Sixtieth General Assembly*, 82. Emphasis added.

An exception to the confessional standards may be granted by a judicatory, for the sake of conscience, only if 1) it affects a peripheral and minor assertion in the standards, not a central and fundamental one, 2) it does not vacate the central teaching of any chapter in the Confession or overturn a complete answer to any question in the Catechisms, and 3) it does not undermine the system of truth in the Confession and Catechisms as a whole.

Here the distinction is made among scruples in which an “exception” is a nonessential assertion, whereas “inconsequential objection” or “quibble” is an “expression” with which one disagrees. However confusing the terminology may be, the substance of a historical understanding of the intentions of the Adopting Act of 1729 is present in the overture. These are three: 1) no exceptions or scruples may be admitted if they undermine the complete set of assertions contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, 2) there are two categories of exceptions or scruples: peripheral or minor assertions, and quibbles over terminology, 3) only the Presbytery may decide what is or is not a proper or admissible exception or scruple.

In light of the confusion over the terms “scruple” and “exception,” I will use “exception/scruple.”

A Case in Point: Creation in Six Days

WCF 4.1 states: “It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.”

The phrase “in the space of six days” has raised the question of subscription in our presbytery. In subscribing to this paragraph of the Confession we must first ask: “What is required by the words of this paragraph?” The affirmation that the triune God, as the sole Creator, has freely created all things, visible and invisible, out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), by a series of eight divine commands

(*fiats*),⁵⁰ to display his own glory; the events of Genesis 1 and 2 were historical, in which Adam and Eve were uniquely created in God's image, at a specific point in time in a particular place (space-time history);⁵¹ all was created good, and under the lordship of the Trinity.

The precise duration of the "six days" has never been agreed upon by orthodox Christians. It would seem unwise to focus on what is unclear, when so much else is at stake, and *is* clear. It would also seem unwise for anyone to be dogmatic, therefore, about precisely what that duration is, whether from Westminster Seminary in California professor Meredith G. Kline's "framework" perspective, from the "day-age theory," or from a literal twenty-four hour day or "ordinary day" perspective, provided the ordinand or minister can affirm what is summarized above. As far as I can determine, all of those who have been ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, who have held to the "framework hypothesis" or the "day-age theory," have affirmed the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 and the special creation of Adam and Eve.

That no measure of such solar day existed until day four was observed by Augustine. Our own J. Gresham Machen observed:

The Book of Genesis seems to divide the work of creation into six successive steps or stages. It is certainly not necessary to think that the six days spoken of in the first chapter of the Bible are intended to be six days of twenty-four hours each. We may think of them rather as very long periods of time. But do they not at least mark six distinct acts or stages of creation, rather than merely six periods in which God molded by works of providence an already created world?⁵²

Machen goes on to assert: "The real question

at issue here is the question whether at the origin of the race of mankind there was or was not a supernatural act of God."⁵³ Remember that these quotations come from what was originally a series of radio lectures in which Machen sought to communicate clearly the most salient points of Reformed teaching to a popular audience. Someone might respond that Machen was not confronted by the onslaught of evolutionary unbelief which we face. I think that it can be shown historically that Machen was quite well aware of both evolutionary views and the threat that they posed to the church, as the larger context of the above quotes demonstrates.

In assessing the relative importance of the phrase "in the space of six days," note that in all of the creeds of Christendom, including all those of the magisterial Reformation up until the Irish Articles of Religion in 1615, there is no mention of the *six days* or the duration of creation.⁵⁴ The emphasis is on the fact that the triune God created all things out of nothing. The Irish Articles appear to have been the precursor of the language "in the space of six days" in our Confession. In appreciating the relative weight of the doctrines of the Confession, as opposed to every proposition by which those doctrines are expressed, John Murray observed: "It seems to the present writer that to demand acceptance of every proposition in so extensive a series of documents [as the Westminster Confession and Catechisms] would be incompatible with the avowal made in answer to the first question to the formula of subscription and comes dangerously close to the error of placing human documents on a par with holy Scripture."⁵⁵

Strict or full subscriptionists have always allowed minor exceptions, which are, as Samuel Miller explained, "of little or no importance, and

53 Ibid., 117.

54 This includes the French Confession of Faith (1559) the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Belgic Confession (1561), the First Scotch Confession (1560), and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1563, 1571).

55 Murray in Smith, *Subscription to the Westminster Standards*, 80.

50 Joseph Pipa has suggested the following language in affirming creation *ex nihilo*: "eight fiat acts of ontological origination."

51 Joseph Pipa has suggested that macroevolution be repudiated both within each of the days and in the creation of man.

52 J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (1937; repr., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 115.

interfered with no article of faith.”⁵⁶ Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary professor Morton Smith, another strict subscriptionist, opines, “The ordinand, who takes exception to a particular teaching of the Confession or Catechisms, may be ordained by the Presbytery, if it feels that the exception does not impinge upon the basic system of doctrine contained in the Standards. If one is not able thus to subject himself to the brethren, he should seek some other communion, where he has greater liberty.”⁵⁷ The various understandings of the duration of the days of creation have never been understood to impinge on the essential doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. One may fully affirm the statement that God “created all things of nothing, in the space of six days, and all very good” without committing oneself to a particular interpretation of the length of those days. That there was a definite beginning and ending to God’s creative acts, and that those acts were by divine command (*fiat*) and not by providential development, as Machen points out, is required by the statement. That each day was of a particular length is not.

While I believe that the intention of those who adhere to the twenty-four-hour day, or “ordinary day,” view (among whom I count myself) is to preserve the integrity of the doctrine of creation, I think it unwise to make this interpretation of the duration of the six days a confessional requirement. It is not in the best interests of the preservation of orthodoxy to speak dogmatically where the meaning of Scripture is not crystal clear. Nor do we need to explain everything in order to affirm the essential doctrines of our Confession, e.g., the Trinity.

On the other hand, I believe that if we affirm the duration of the “six days” to be open to a variety of legitimate Reformed interpretations, we should insist that those views may be presented but not taught as the final word on this subject in the church. Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary president Joseph Pipa, who cogently

defends the “ordinary day” view of Genesis 1 and 2, and who has significant exegetical concerns with the framework view, has suggested the framework view be allowed as an exception, as long as those who take the exception can affirm that in Genesis 1 and 2 there are eight fiat acts of ontological origination, and deny macroevolution within the days and in the creation of Adam and Eve. The writer of Hebrews (11:3) gives a terse summary of our faith at this point: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

Conclusions

The original “preliminary” act, along with the Adopting Act of 1729, in light of its subsequent elucidation in 1730 and 1736, intends a full subscription to the entire system of doctrine articulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

While misunderstandings and later perversions of this intention may have led to a loose or “substance” view of subscription, the “system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures” refers to the whole body of articles and doctrines in its integrity as a system, expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Candidates and ministers must affirm that all the articles of the system taught in the Confession are essential and necessary.

Exceptions/scruples are only admissible if they concern nonessential doctrines, “propositions,” phrases, or words. “Nonessential” refers to articles, “propositions,” phrases, or words which do not alter our understanding of the articles and doctrines essential to the system expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

Presbyteries have authority to decide the admissibility of exceptions/scruples only within the limits of nonessential articles, “propositions,” phrases, or words in accordance with the historical decisions of the courts of the church.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Subscription to the Westminster Standards*, 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

Appendix A - The Adopting Act of 1729

Approved at the morning session, September 19, 1729

Although the Synod do not claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences, but do profess our just dissatisfaction with, and abhorrence of such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the Church, being willing to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances, all such as have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven, yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure and uncorrupt among us, and so handed down to our posterity; and do therefore agree that all ministers of this Synod, or that hereafter shall be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in, and approbation of, the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith. And we do also agree, that all the Presbyteries within our bounds shall always take care not to admit any candidate of the ministry into the exercise of the sacred function but what declares his agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms, or by a verbal declaration of their assent thereto, as such minister or candidate shall think best. And in case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential

and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of communion with them. And the Synod do solemnly agree, that none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious terms of those who differ from us in these extra-essential and not necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness, and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such sentiments.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ Payton, "Background and Significance of the Adopting Act of 1729," 136–37.

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John Knox and the Reformation of Worship

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

In the midst of the so-called “worship wars,” many Reformed churches seem to have forgotten their roots. The magisterial Reformers believed that the reformation of worship was the most essential aspect of reforming the church. Without it they understood that Reformed doctrine would never take root in peoples’ lives.

John Knox, for 500 years since his birth, has been maligned, along with his Reformation colleagues depicted in the statue in Geneva (John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and William Farel). At his funeral, Scottish regent James Douglas, fourth Earl of Morton, said, “Here lies one who never feared any flesh.”² Reformation historian Roland Bainton called him “the most implacable of all the Reformers.”³ He is justly famous for standing up to Mary Queen of Scots in his effort to establish the Church of Scotland on Reformation principles. He was the most powerful preacher of his age and wrote many, very effective, practical tracts and treatises. What is not fully appreciated is his reformation of worship. Those who do appreciate this aspect of his ministry tend to emphasize his development of the “regulative principle” of worship and his consequent critique of Roman Catholic worship, especially the Mass. However, what he helped put in its place is often overlooked.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=438&issue_id=98. This article is adapted from a Reformation Day lecture given at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church, October 29, 2004.

2 W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Scribner’s, 1974), 283. Quoting from D. Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, vol. 3, ed. T. Thompson (Edinburgh: Wodrow Soc., 1842), 242.

3 Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1952), 180.

I. A BRIEF SKETCH OF KNOX'S LIFE

Early Years [1513-15?-1545]

Sixteenth-century Scotland was “almost beyond the limits of the human race,” according to the Earl of Moray in 1564.⁴ It was very rural in character—the largest city, Edinburgh, had a population of only 15,000. Spiritually, it was full of Roman Catholic superstition, and half the wealth was in the hands of the clergy. It was also a pawn of European politics, but by the 1520s, trade brought the German Reformation to Scotland.

John Knox was born between 1513 and 1515 in Gifford, near Haddington in East Lothian, fifteen miles east of Edinburgh. His was a hard rural life—his father probably was killed in battle at Knox’s birth. But young John was talented, and thus headed for the priesthood. He attended grammar school at Haddington and went on to Saint Andrews University, where Professor John Major exposed him to a critique of clerical excesses. The seeds of the Reformation were being planted in young Knox as the thinking of Erasmus and Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples came to Saint Andrews via students from the University of Paris. Knox also came under the influence of the powerful preaching of Alexander Seton, a former Black Friar. During this time, Patrick Hamilton, who was martyred in 1528, brought Lutheranism from Wittenberg to Scotland.

Knox probably was ordained in 1536 as priest, likely functioning as a minor church lawyer. Sometime about 1543–45, when Knox was about thirty years old, through his study of Jerome and Augustine, and his hearing of Scripture preached by the prior at Greyfriar’s Monastery in Inverness, Knox was converted to Reformed Christianity. John 17, in particular, taught him the importance of dependence on Christ alone for salvation.

4 Iain Tait, “The Exiled Reformers of Sixteenth-Century Geneva,” printed lectures given at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, TN, September 17–21, 1973, page 1 of Lecture I. Much of this brief history is based on these largely unpaginated lectures.

Early Public Ministry: Wishart and St. Andrews [1546–1549]

Knox became a disciple of the fiery Reformed preacher George Wishart, while serving as a tutor to the sons of a Scottish nobleman, who denounced popery and the Mass. He served as Wishart’s bodyguard, wielding a two-handed sword, during a five-week preaching tour in Lothian. When they encountered danger in Haddington, Knox was about to defend Wishart, who said, “Gang back to your bairns Maister Knox.”⁵ Nine hours later, Wishart was arrested and brought to Cardinal Beaton (known to be a drunkard and a womanizer) at St. Andrews. The next day Wishart was strangled and burned while uttering a gracious prayer: “I beseech thee, Father of heaven, forgive them that have, from ignorance or an evil mind, forged lies of me: I forgive them with all my heart. I beseech Christ to forgive them that have ignorantly condemned me.”⁶ This event had a profound effect on Knox.

On May 29, 1546, the castle at St. Andrews was seized by Protestants, who killed Cardinal Beaton. On April 10, 1547, Knox arrived at the castle with group of students from the University for asylum. He taught them letters, humanities, Latin and Greek, and lectured on the gospel of John. The people pleaded with Knox to preach since their pastor, John Rough, was unlearned. Knox responded, “I won’t run where God has not called me.”⁷ Rough asked Knox to preach in the presence of the congregation during Sunday worship. Knox fled to his room and wept for fear of martyrdom and the awesome responsibility of preaching. But under duress, he agreed.⁸

His first sermon, on Daniel 7:24–25, was

5 Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 29–30.

6 Ibid., 30. Cf. John Fox, *The Second Volume of the Ecclesiastical History: Containing the Acts and Monuments of Martyrs: with a General Discourse of the Later Persecutions Horrible Troubles and Tumults Stirred up by Romish Prelates in the Church: with Diverse Other Things Incident to This Realm of Scotland and England* (London: The Company of Stationers, 1684), 526.

7 Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 47.

8 Elizabeth Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Reformation Society, 1960), 30–31.

preached in the presence of the faculty of St. Andrews, including some of his former teachers, such as John Major.⁹ He proved justification by faith and called the pope the anti-Christ. He preached with power, causing some to comment, “He strikes at the root.”¹⁰ Knox also administered the first Lord’s Supper served in Scotland since the Middle Ages. It was simply observed, and all partook of both elements.¹¹

In June 1547, the castle was seized by twenty-one French galleys. Knox was condemned as a heretic and sentenced to nineteen months at the oars with some of the worst French criminals. When asked to kiss a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, Knox tossed it overboard with his usual gusto, saying, “She is light enough. Let her swim.”¹² This intense suffering strengthened his spiritual convictions. During this ordeal, he learned to pray the Psalms. Seeing the steeples on the Scottish shore, he longed to return and preach the gospel. Never again did the terrors of life intimidate or treasures of this world allure him.

Ministry in England under Edward VI [1549–1554]

Early in 1549, Knox was freed in France, probably in a prisoner exchange, and returned to the safe haven of England under Edward VI’s benevolent reign.¹³ Knox was licensed to preach under this godly king, who supported the Reformation (son of Henry VIII). His congregation was a garrison of 600 men at Berwick-on-Tweed, a border town in the northeast of England. Many were converted. While there he wrote a moving treatise on prayer published in 1553.¹⁴

During this time, Mrs. Elizabeth Bowes, a noble woman from the area, came to hear Knox

preach. She was deeply depressed and looking for consolation. She found it in the gospel and in turn became like a mother to Knox. Soon thereafter, he married her daughter Marjorie.¹⁵

Knox’s unequivocal preaching against the Mass earned him a summons to account for his position before the Council of the North in Newcastle in April 1550. He ably demonstrated before the bishop of Durham that the Mass is idolatrous. His preaching in the area around Newcastle raised quite a stir.¹⁶

In 1551, Knox was appointed Chaplain in Ordinary to King Edward VI. His first sermon at court attacked the practice, advocated in the second edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1552), of compulsory kneeling before receiving the Lord’s Supper. Presses were stopped to insert a caution that “kneeling” was not worshipping the elements. Knox’s preaching drew large crowds. He observed that godly and ailing Edward was surrounded by Ahithophels. Court life sickened him. Knox refused the bishopric of Rochester in Kent.¹⁷

On July 6, 1553, King Edward died, and Mary Tudor took the throne. Knox warned the church of being shipwrecked on the rocks of Roman Catholic idolatry. He fled north under pursuit and was smuggled to France on a boat from Newcastle.

The Marian Exile [1554–1559]

Having arrived safely in Dieppe, Knox wrestled with the question: “Am I a coward?” Matthew 10:23 was a comfort, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.” Eventually arriving as an exile in Geneva, Knox declared it to be “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was since the days of the apostles.”¹⁸ Soon after Knox arrived, Calvin sent him to Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich to receive counsel on the “divine right of kings” and the right to redress grievances. Meanwhile,

9 Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 48.

10 Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox*, 32.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 36.

13 D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 261.

14 Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox*, 44–45.

15 Ibid., 46–47; Tait, “The Exiled Reformers,” Lecture III, 8.

16 Tait, “The Exiled Reformers,” Lecture III, 8.

17 Ibid., 9.

18 Thomas M’Crie, *The Life of John Knox* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1845), 129.

French Mary of Guise seized the Scottish throne.

After a brief return to Geneva, Knox received a call to become the pastor to the English exiles in Frankfort in 1555. He arrived only to encounter worship wars instigated by Richard Cox, dean of Westminster, who demanded uniformity according to the Book of Common Prayer. Knox, on the other hand, was willing to compromise between the Book of Common Prayer and the Genevan Service Book. Sadly, the Frankfort congregation was divided, and Knox was forced to resign. He returned to Geneva in November 1555, where he found a new congregation of English exiles. There Knox gave himself to study and helped translate the Geneva Bible, especially the marginal notes.¹⁹ Several months later, part of the Frankfort congregation, along with William Whittingham, came to Knox in Geneva.

In late 1555, Mrs. Bowes and Knox's wife Marjorie pleaded with Knox to come and rescue them from the tyranny of the reign of Bloody Mary. Upon his secret return, Knox found a new hunger for the gospel in Edinburgh and Scotland overall, where Reformed Christians were sheltered by the Protestant nobility under the leadership of the Duke of Argyle. Knox returned to Geneva with Mrs. Bowes and Marjorie.²⁰

The English exiles in Geneva asked Knox to be their pastor (along with Christopher Goodman). During his ministry (1556–1558), Knox grew as a minister and Reformer. He developed his own order of worship, Reformed Church Order, known as the "Geneva Book."²¹

Then in 1558 he received a letter from four Scottish noblemen requesting his return. Three months later, he resigned and set out alone for Scotland. He was stopped at Dieppe after hearing news of persecution and the return of northern England to Rome. Knox preached to the Huguenots in La Rochelle and then returned to Geneva dejected, and gave up on the possibility of the

19 Whitley, *The Plain Mr. Knox*, 85.

20 Tait, "The Exiled Reformers," Lecture III, 12.

21 Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*, 275.

Reformation of Scotland.

Back in Geneva, he wrote *The First Blast of the Trumpet against that Monstrous Regiment of Women* against Bloody Mary (Tudor) for her burning of martyrs in England. At this time, Mary of Guise ruled Scotland from France, with her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, crowned at age sixteen. Knox overstated his case and offended Queen Elizabeth. Christopher Goodman wrote a treatise *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Observed*. Both were published in Geneva and embarrassed Calvin and Theodore Beza.²²

Ministry in Scotland: Scottish Reformation [1559–1572]

Finally, in November 1558, Mary Tudor died. Knox left Geneva, as honorary burgess, in the spring of 1559. Traveling via Dieppe, Knox arrived at the port of Leith in Edinburgh on May 2, 1559. "John Knox is come!" rang throughout Scotland. He arrived in the midst of a meeting of bishops and priests on the subject of the reform of the church.²³ The Queen Regent decreed a meeting of the pastors at Stirling on May 10. Protestants and their army went along. She then called it off. Knox preached for forty days under threat of being shot. Meanwhile, fourteen priests were converted at St. Andrews. The Queen then attacked and killed a number of the Protestants from Leith, forcing the Protestants to retreat to Stirling. There Knox preached on Psalm 80, "Take a stand for God's eternal truth," stirring up his followers to stand against the Queen Regent. Eventually English troops were sent, and the French forces withdrew.

Then the Scottish Parliament convened, rejecting the authority of the pope and declaring the Mass illegal. The National Covenant, Confession, and Book of Discipline were approved with astonishing speed. From then on, Knox preached regularly at St. Giles Church in Edinburgh.

From 1561 to 1572, the Counter-Reformation in Europe took aim at Scotland, hoping it to be the

22 Tait, "The Exiled Reformers," Lecture III, 15–16.

23 *Ibid.*, 16.

easiest to overturn. In 1561, Mary Queen of Scots (Mary Guise's daughter) returned from France and held a Mass in her royal chapel. She was a subtle, sly, beautiful, and deceptive flatterer. But Knox was not afraid to denounce her. She summoned him, and a famous debate ensued. Mary insisted, "You must obey the prince, therefore, his religion." Knox retorted, "Religion gets its authority from God, not the prince." Mary responded, "May subjects resist the prince?" Knox answered, "Yes, when princes 'exceed their bounds.'" Mary stood amazed for fifteen minutes, and then responded, "Then princes should obey you and the people?" Knox insisted, "No, both prince and his subjects must obey God. May you be blessed like Deborah." She wept once, not out of hurt or sorrow, but out of petulant stubbornness. Knox was not rude and uncouth as he is often depicted. He was plain, and to the point, but always courteous.

Mary was unfaithful to her second husband and plotted his murder. She abdicated her throne and was beheaded for treason by Elizabeth in July of 1567. The Earl of Moray ruled, known as "the good regent," until he was assassinated. Then James VI began his reign.

Meanwhile, Knox was shot at in his house in Edinburgh. The bullet hit a chandelier. Thus, Knox was urged to retire to St. Andrews. His wife, Marjorie, had died in 1564. He remarried. Knox was deeply affected by the St. Bartholomew Massacre in France in 1572. He died November 24, 1572. He put up his sword and went to be with his Lord.²⁴ Truly he was the "trumpeter of God."²⁵

II. KNOX'S REFORMATION OF WORSHIP

"The Scottish Reformation was preeminently a struggle over worship."²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 17–21.

²⁵ Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 284.

²⁶ Kevin Reed, "Knox and the Reformation of Worship in the Scottish Reformation," in *Worship in the Presence of God*, ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), 332.

What Knox Learned in Scotland and Geneva

In 1549 at Berwick-on-Tweed, Knox wrote a treatise, "Declaration of the Christian Belief in the Lord's Supper." It was published in 1550. His first sermon as chaplain to King Edward VI, as we have seen, attacked the practice, advocated in the second edition of the Book of Common Prayer, of compulsory kneeling before receiving the Lord's Supper. During the worship conflict in Frankfurt, in which Dean Richard Cox advocated submission to this practice, a revised version of Calvin's *Forme des Prières* (Form of Prayers), with William Wittingham's help (along with Anthony Gilby, John Foxe, and Thomas Cole), became the Form of Prayers or Genevan Service Book for the English Genevan congregation that was published in early 1556.

Knox learned from Calvin to think through the form of worship so as not to add elements which were the inventions of men, such as required kneeling at the Lord's Supper. He also used Valerian Poullain's *Liturgia Sacra* (Poullain was Calvin's successor in Strasbourg). He translated one of the confessions of sin and composed his own Eucharistic prayer.²⁷

What Knox Learned in Geneva and Scotland

The Genevan Service Book or Book of Geneva became the Service Book of the Church of Scotland. Here is the Sunday Morning Service or liturgy from the Genevan Service Book of 1556. This is considered the first Puritan prayer book:

A Confession of sins
A Prayer for pardon
A metrical Psalm
A Prayer for illumination
The Scripture Lection and Sermon
The Long Prayer and the Lord's Prayer
The Apostles' Creed (*said by the minister*)

²⁷ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Guides to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 139–40.

alone)

A metrical Psalm

A Blessing (*either 1 Corinthians or Numbers*)

The Lord's Supper

A Psalm in metre while the elements were prepared

The Words of Institution

The Exhortation

Sursum corda

The Consecration

The Fraction and Delivery

The Communion while Scripture is read

The Post-Communion Prayer

Psalm 103

Gloria in excelsis

The Blessing²⁸

The Foundation of the Regulative Principle

The Regulative Principle was forged in Frankfurt with roots in Geneva. The preface to the Form of Prayer, known as the Book of Geneva, gives the first known statement of the Regulative Principle. The author was William Whittingham, who brought this principle back to England. This became a hallmark of English Puritanism.

Because there is no way more ready or sure to come to him, than by framing ourselves altogether to his blessed will, revealed unto us in his Word . . . a form and order of a reformed church, limited within the compass of God's Word.²⁹

In his first sermon at St. Andrews, in answer to the subprior's questions about adding ceremonies, Knox said: "Now, if ye will prove that your ceremonies proceed from faith, and do please God, ye must prove God in expressed words has commanded them."³⁰ It should be remembered

28 Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Glasgow: Dacre, 1948; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 31 (modern edition).

29 Iain H. Murray, ed., *The Reformation of the Church: A Collection of Reformed and Puritan Documents on Church Issues* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 75.

30 Reed, "Knox and the Reformation of Worship," 296.

that the Regulative Principle was limited to church government and worship. The New Testament was the standard, though principles were gleaned from the Old Testament.

The Forms of Worship: Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition

Historian Horton Davies observed that the Genevan liturgy was "biblical, didactic, and congregational."³¹ One of the great discoveries of the Reformation was that Reformed public worship gives practical form to Reformed doctrine, and thus practical form to the Christian life. In turn, every aspect of worship is informed by the Word of God. Each element must be warranted by the Word. Even the exact order of worship must have biblical logic, although the particular order is not expressly warranted, and thus was understood to be somewhat flexible. Calvin counseled compromise where liturgical elements do not affect the substance of faith, and encouraged pastoral patience in seeking reform.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REFORMATION OF OUR WORSHIP

We Should Glean from Our Liturgical Roots

After becoming Reformed in doctrine, I was amazed to discover the richness of the theology and practice of Reformed worship—something that did not seem important to those who originally convinced me of the Reformed faith. This is still a largely untapped source in the life of our churches. *Ad fonts*, "to the fountains or sources," was a cry of the Reformation.

Perhaps the dominance of technology, novelty, and the forms of popular culture have inhibited the use of our liturgical past in forming our present orders of worship. When we minimize the importance of forms of all kinds we are missing the inextricable relationship between form and substance. Forms are never merely a matter of style, as conventional wisdom would have us think. For

31 Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, 119.

example, the formal attire at most weddings is an expression of the importance of the occasion. The particular ways that we do things are the expression of the things themselves.

Also, what we do not do is as important as what we do. So, when Knox objected to kneeling at the Lord's Table, he was objecting to adding an element not expressly required in the New Testament. So the absence of corporate confession of sin, assurance of pardon, and confession of faith using the historic creeds says something about our priorities as officers in charge of worship.

We Should Not Ignore or Shun Liturgical Forms of Worship

It would be useful to ask if the Westminster Directory's, and thus our own (OPC), lack of liturgical forms is necessarily a good thing. Was the Puritan position something of a reaction to the Anglican imposition of a prayer book? Or was there practice removed from the official governing documents of the church for good reason?

The magisterial Reformers, as well as the Presbyterian Puritans, like Calvin, Knox, and Wittingham, did not oppose liturgical forms or written prayers *per se*, but only their imposition on ministers and churches. The Westminster Assembly used both prescribed and extemporaneous prayers. The Independents (Congregationalists) were the ones who promoted extemporaneous prayers exclusively.

In Scotland, especially in the South and West, there was considerable anti-liturgical sentiment. As church historian James Hastings Nichols observes:

As we turn to the [Westminster] Directory for Worship, the first striking fact about the document is that it is not a liturgy or service book at all, after the fashion of Calvin, Cranmer, or Knox.³²

Would we do well to consider "suggested forms of worship" as our Reformed forefathers did?

³² James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 99.

We do so for funerals, weddings, and the sacraments. Calvin, Thomas Cranmer, and Knox each used service books with liturgies.

We must assess how the electronic media environment is affecting our understanding of and practice of worship and fostering formless worship.

Our entire attitude toward worship is shaped by our culture, which idolizes the visual image over against the written and spoken word, the novel against the traditional, the entertaining against the serious, the popular against the classical, the immediate against the eternal, the informal against the formal.

Since every medium is an inherent part of the message it communicates, the elements of worship should not be "supplemented" with the chief purveyors of modern culture—electronic media. They subtly bring their own messages into worship, often eclipsing the gospel; muting the reverence and awe that should be the atmosphere and attitude of worship; and truncating the full range of biblical truth, in particular the place of lament and grief.³³

We Should Consider the Reading and Preaching of Scripture as the Supreme Act of Worship

Preaching is often wrongly distinguished from worship, as if preaching is something different from worship, and that worship consists of praise and prayer. But if we are to regain a proper understanding of preaching as the supreme act of worship, then we should consider three ingredients that are essential to preaching, and thus should always be in the forefront of our thinking and practice.³⁴

First, preaching must be spiritually powerful. Near the end of Knox's life, in a condition so weakened that he could barely climb into the pulpit of Saint Andrews, one observer commented that

before he was done with his sermon he was so

³³ See Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), especially ch. 8.

³⁴ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 1:7.

active and vigorous that he was like to ding the pulpit in blads [pieces], and fly out of it... he maid me sa to grew [quake] and tremble, that I could not hald pen to wryt.”³⁵

Second, preaching must be seen as the center of true worship. As covenantal communication, preaching is always two-way. The hearer is always to be a worshipper. If preaching is the supreme act of worship, then should this not be reflected in the order of worship? The liturgies of the Reformation placed the ministry of the Word at the center, rather than the end, of the liturgy, with an approach to the Lord, declaring the gospel, at the beginning, and a response to the Word, including a confession of faith, a pastoral prayer, and the Lord’s Supper, at the end.

Third, preaching must be understood as God speaking. John Calvin’s own view of the centrality of preaching is reflected in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, which were framed under his influence:

The first part of the office of the pastor, says the Ordinances, is “to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and in private.”... Calvin will very frequently use the most definite language to assert that the preaching of the gospel is the Word of God. It is as if the congregation “heard the very words pronounced by God himself.” A man “preaches so that God may speak to us by the mouth of a man.”³⁶

Despite having a naturally reserved personality, he exercised rare freedom in the pulpit. “His manner of delivery was lively, passionate, intimate, direct, and clear.”³⁷ For Calvin, the sermon itself was an act of worship as it engaged the congregation in the reality of redemption.³⁸

As we reflect on the life and ministry of John Knox, on the occasion of the five hundredth an-

niversary of his birth, especially his reformation of worship, may the Lord give us grace and wisdom to continue that noble reforming effort. ©

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35 Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 270.

36 T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Tring/Batavia, IL/Sydney: Lion, 1987), 106.

37 *Ibid.*, 110.

38 *Ibid.*, 114.

✦ Servant Worship

The *Sursum Corda*

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by Jeffrey B. Wilson

I. The *Sursum Corda* Is Catholic

One Sunday after worship, in which communion was served, fellow worshipers were talking in the hallway. A member of the church approached me and said, “That language we use in worship during communion, I remember saying it when I was a boy in the Catholic Church.” I searched his face for any signs of distress or alarm. Neither was evident. Rather, he was excited about noticing this liturgical language in a new way. I told him it is called the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts), and we chatted about it and the recollections of his youth. As a pastor in a Presbyterian Church, I have learned that finding similarities in Presbyterian worship with Roman Catholic worship is a warning flag for some people. When we attend worship, it can be unsettling to look for one thing but find another. We look for what we have known and what is familiar to us. This is especially true when we attend the worship of churches within the same liturgical and theological tradition, or in the same denomination. Even members of church traditions without fixed forms of worship (Presbyterian churches are guided by principles of worship) often expect some semblance of uniformity, particularly if they have strong convictions

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=439&issue_id=98;
http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=447&issue_id=99;
http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=453&issue_id=100.

about worship. There is the current trend in many churches to mix it up a bit, to try to be offbeat, to capitalize on the disturbance it causes. More non-Christians will hear the gospel and be attracted to a current and relevant church—so the argument goes. But most of those who come to the church I serve want a form of worship rooted in the Word of God and well placed within historic Christian worship. Since our church is Presbyterian, there are certain assumptions people have for our worship, and when there is something that does not fit those assumptions, like the *sursum corda*, it can be unsettling, to say the least.

Since *sursum corda* is a Latin phrase, many Protestants immediately suspect that it is Roman Catholic. The Catholic Tridentine Mass uses Latin, and the post-Vatican II Mass still retains many Latin words. Presbyterian churches, however, have largely abided by the principle of the Protestant Reformation to use vernacular language in worship so everyone can participate in the service and do so intelligently. Presbyterians have removed all foreign language phrases from their worship, and conservative Presbyterian churches like our own have maintained this practice. Of course, the *sursum corda* can be translated into the language of the people and used intelligently by all. Besides being the first words of the Latin phrase, *sursum corda* is also the technical name for the litany between the pastor and the congregation which prefaces the Eucharistic prayer. It has been used for centuries by many different kinds of churches in their worship. The response is as follows:

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.
Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.
Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord
our God.
Congregation: It is right to give Him thanks
and praise.

This response then leads immediately into the prayer of thanksgiving. It is not unusual to have Latin and Greek names of elements of worship in Presbyterian churches. To wit, we have names like the *Gloria Patri*, the *Doxology*, and many of the tunes we use for our hymns have non-English

names, such as *Mit freuden Zart* (the tune for *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*) and *Laudate Dominum* (the tune for *Sing Praise to the Lord!*). Along these lines, the words *sursum corda* can be used in reference to a part of worship without using that phrase in worship.

Latin nomenclature is one thing, usage is another. There is still the abiding concern that the *sursum corda* is Roman Catholic because it is used in the Mass. It is the purpose of this essay to survey briefly the principal liturgies of Eastern and Western Christianity, including early Reformed liturgies, to see how broadly the *sursum corda* has been used in worship. For this survey, two easily accessible resources have been used. The first is *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* by Ronald C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming.² The other is *Liturgies of the Western Church* compiled by Bard Thompson.³ These collections are of great help for understanding the place of the *sursum corda* in Christian worship.

Although it had a Jewish background, Christian worship did come into its own. Jasper and Cuming suggest that the early church felt a need to distance its worship from actual Jewish prayers. However, the style, structure, and concepts of Jewish prayers continued to exert an influence on Christian worship.⁴ This is true for the *sursum corda*, as will be explained below. As far as scholars can discern, there were no fixed, written prayers for the communion service in the first two hundred years of Christianity. Jasper and Cuming conclude that the early church was more regional, and the communion prayers were at the discretion of the local bishops, although there was the expectation that certain elements from the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper would be included, such as the words of institution, the prayer of

thanksgiving, and the *anamnesis* (remembering).⁵ By the end of the fourth century, the standardization of communion liturgies and prayers of thanksgiving is well attested.⁶

Scholars have grouped the various early communion liturgies into five or six families.⁷ For the purposes of this essay, five families of liturgies will be reviewed for their use of the *sursum corda*: the East Syrian, the West Syrian, the Alexandrian, the Roman and North African, and the Gallican and Mozarabic. These different groups of liturgies have their own characteristics even though, over the course of time, they influenced each other.

The East Syrian family of communion liturgies is one of the oldest. These intrinsically related forms of worship originated in the eastern region of the Roman Empire. In this area was the city of Edessa, one of the earliest centers of Christianity.⁸ Jasper and Cuming call attention to the strong presence of Semitic style and expressions in this family, with some of the liturgies composed in the Semitic dialect of Syriac.⁹ One notable form of worship within this genus is the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, originating in Edessa. On the whole, it shows the sources of an ancient form of worship, although changes were made over the years.¹⁰ The *sursum corda* from the sixth-century version of the

5 Ibid., 20–33. These pages refer to the *Didache* and Justin Martyr as two of the earliest examples of writings listing elements that should be included in the communion service without providing specific prayers of thanksgiving for the communion meal. Even Hippolytus, who provides a complete eucharistic prayer for communion, allows for the bishop to use his own words or a fixed form.

6 Ibid., 13. For further reading, see Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 115–16. Senn believes Diocletian's organization of the regions of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century, and Constantine's Edict of Milan, indirectly contributed to the standardization of Christian liturgy.

7 Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (repr. 1960, Continuum: London, 2001), 156. Dix identifies six, primary, standardized communion liturgies; Frank Senn discusses five, *Christian Liturgy*, 115ff.; Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, throughout their work, indicate the complexity of the influence of one liturgical region on another.

8 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 39.

9 Ibid., 39.

10 Ibid., 39.

2 Ronald C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

3 Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

4 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 7.

Liturgy of Addai and Mari is below:

Celebrant: Up with your minds.

Congregation: They are with you, O God.¹¹

In spite of the strong Semitic character of the *sursum corda* in the service of Addai and Mari, it bears a Greek influence as well, with the use of “minds” instead of “hearts.”

Antioch was the ancient center of the West Syrian family of rites of worship. The worship that arose in this region had a widespread influence on many liturgies in other areas, such as the Alexandrian and East Syrian. Furthermore, the West Syrian churches experienced the great Christological debates focused on Arius and Monophysitism. Not only did these controversies divide the churches, they affected their worship.¹² The West Syrian family includes the liturgies of St. James in Jerusalem and the Third Anaphora of St. Peter (also called the Sharar). The style of this family of liturgy also lies behind the rite of John Chrysostom, which became the principal form of the Byzantine liturgy. One interesting feature that shows up in the West Syrian liturgies is a Hellenistic, as well as Semitic, influence on the *sursum corda*. The *sursum corda* for the liturgy of St. James begins with the response:

Celebrant: Let us lift up our mind and our hearts.

Congregation: We have them with the Lord.¹³

In Hellenistic thinking, the *νοῦς* (*nous*, mind) was considered the center of one’s being in contrast to the Jewish metaphor of the heart.¹⁴ The Third Anaphora of St. Peter offers this version of the *sursum corda*:

Celebrant: Let our minds ever be lifted up to heaven, and all our hearts in purity.

Congregation: To you, Lord, God of Abraham,

Isaac, and Israel, O king
glorious and holy for ever.

In the fourth century, John Chrysostom produced his liturgy relying on those of the Apostolic Constitutions, St. Basil, St. James, and the Eucharistic prayer of the Twelve Apostles.¹⁵ Below is Chrysostom’s version of the *sursum corda*:

Celebrant: Let us lift up our hearts.

Congregation: We have them with the Lord.

Chrysostom’s *sursum corda* deletes the Greek *νοῦς* (*nous*, mind) and keeps the Semitic metaphor (heart), making the response simpler.

Similar characteristics are found in another ancient group of liturgies, the Alexandrian. Scholars have tentatively concluded that the sources for this group of liturgies are as ancient as those for the East Syrian forms of worship.¹⁶ One of the distinct characteristics of the Alexandrian family is its inclusion of the intercessions after the preface in the Eucharistic prayer.¹⁷ The liturgies of St. Mark and the Egyptian St. Basil stand out in the Alexandrian family. The liturgy of St. Mark includes the *sursum corda* before the prayer of thanksgiving, but it leaves out the verb “lift.” Instead it has the following phraseology:

Celebrant: Up with your hearts.

Congregation: We have them with the Lord.¹⁸

The Egyptian version of the liturgy of St. Basil is so named because it may have come from the Cappadocian Church Father Basil, who lived in Egypt for a time. It definitely bears the characteristics of the Alexandrian family, but it also has the structure of the West Syrian family of liturgies. We are reminded again of the influence of one liturgical family upon another. The liturgy of St. Basil has the *sursum corda* in the usual location at the beginning of the prayer of thanksgiving and in the following form:

11 Ibid., 42.

12 Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 119.

13 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 90.

14 Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 122–23.

15 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 129.

16 Ibid., 67.

17 Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 134.

18 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 59.

Celebrant: Let us lift up our hearts.
Congregation: We have them with the Lord.

It is agreed universally that the Egyptian St. Basil liturgy is a primary source for the Byzantine liturgy of St. Basil, and Cuming argues that it also helped shape the liturgy of St. James in Jerusalem, even more so than the West Syrian.¹⁹

Since North Africa was one of the most Roman of Rome's provinces, it is easy to understand its close relationship to the Roman family of liturgy. The liturgy in the African churches was essentially an independent variant of the Roman liturgy.²⁰ It is in this family that we find the earliest known liturgical document containing the *sursum corda*, Hippolytus's prayer, which was written around the year 215. The text is below:

Celebrant: Up with your hearts.
Congregation: We have (them) with the Lord.²¹

The Roman Mass developed separately from Hippolytus. Aside from the introductory dialogue and the concluding doxology, there is nothing else in it from Hippolytus's liturgy.²² The Roman Canon seems to have evolved from a number of independent prayers, with many additions coming later. The *sursum corda* was most likely part of the earliest form of the Roman service and presumably came from Hippolytus's liturgy.²³ Later, when the Mass was officially organized by the papal court in the seventh century, the *sursum corda* was revised with the more complete line, "Lift up your hearts."²⁴

Although Rome became the dominant church in the West, there were other liturgical traditions in Europe. Two of them are the Gallican and Mozarabic liturgies. By the sixth century, they were

well established in the areas of modern France and Spain. These were non-Roman, Latin rites that had been influenced by some of the liturgies of the Eastern Churches.²⁵ Yet they had their own form and phrases and so are classified as a distinct family. The Gallican order of worship includes the *sursum corda*, as does the Mozarabic liturgy. The latter developed in Spain, probably with influences from Constantinople. This rite uses the following sequence for the *sursum corda*:

Celebrant: Up with your hearts.
Congregation: Let us lift them to the Lord.²⁶

Both the Gallican and the Mozarabic liturgies place the *sursum corda* immediately before the Eucharistic prayer.

This brings us to the use of the *sursum corda* in the Protestant Reformation. One of the principal aims of Protestant leaders like Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, John Knox, and Thomas Cranmer was to reform Christian worship. As they saw it, such worship had become encrusted with practices and theology not derived from Scripture. Therefore, they began to restore the worship of the church according to the Word of God. Significant changes were made relative to the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. Although some elements were excised and thrown to the side, the *sursum corda* was not one of these (at least for the initial Lutheran and Reformed liturgies). At the same time, the *sursum corda* did undergo a change in how it was used. Luther, in his *Formula Missae* of 1523, retained the *sursum corda* in its traditional place as the preface to the Eucharistic prayer with this wording:

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.
Congregation: Let us lift them to the Lord.²⁷

However, in his German Mass of 1526, he removed the *sursum corda* from its place as the preface to the prayer of thanksgiving and moved it

19 G. J. Cuming, "Egyptian Elements in the Jerusalem Liturgy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25:1 (1974): 117–24.

20 Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 137.

21 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 32–34.

22 Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 140.

23 *Ibid.*, 159.

24 *Ibid.*, 168–70.

25 *Ibid.*, 147.

26 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 152.

27 *Ibid.*, 189, 192–93.

to the opening of his prayer of intercession at the beginning of the communion service. In doing so, he truncated it and made it an exhortation, thus eliminating the response of the people. Luther's new use of the *sursum corda* was, "Lift up your hearts to God to pray with me the Lord's Prayer."²⁸ This relocation of the *sursum corda* was significant, but Luther continued to use it as an expression of prayerful trust to God.

The Reformed liturgies of Bucer, Calvin, and Knox also retained the first line of the *sursum corda*. Bucer's Strasbourg liturgy used it in one of his prayers in his suggested forms for the communion liturgy. This prayer combined the prayer of intercession and Eucharistic prayer, but instead of making it an exhortation to prayer, like Luther, Bucer put it at the end of the prayer as the goal of being set free from sin by Jesus Christ. Thus, Bucer's line is, "To the end that, by all means, we as thine obedient children may ever lift our hearts and souls unto thee in true childlike trust."²⁹ Calvin also used the first line of the *sursum corda*, but, unlike Luther and Bucer, he used it in his exhortation to the congregation, focused on the words of institution in the communion service. After commenting on Jesus's institution of the meal, the Genevan order says, "Therefore, lift up your hearts on high, seeking the heavenly things in heaven, where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father; and do not fix your eyes on the visible signs which are corrupted through usage."³⁰ For Calvin, the *sursum corda* provided the proper orientation for the celebration of the sacrament. Calvin's influence can be seen in John Knox's *The Forme of Prayers*, published in 1556. Knox follows Calvin in using the *sursum corda* to orient the congregation's faith from the earthly elements to Christ himself, whose body is seated at the right hand of God. *The Forme of Prayers* says, "Lift up our minds by faith above all things worldly and sensible, and thereby to enter into heaven, that we may find, and receive

28 Ibid., 196.

29 Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 173.

30 Ibid., 223.

Christ."³¹ Interestingly, Knox places the *sursum corda* at the end of his exhortation, just before his prayer of thanksgiving. Along the same lines, in 1586, some of the English Puritans produced the Middleburg Liturgy, which was similar to Knox's *The Forme of Prayers*, making use of the *sursum corda* in the same way.³²

Our brisk overview of the use of the *sursum corda* in the liturgies of the church suffices to show that it has found a place in most Christian liturgical traditions, including the Reformed. The various liturgies certainly have played their part in shaping the variations of the *sursum corda*. Most obviously, the word used to refer to the center of the person, whether it be "mind" or "heart," changed depending on Semitic or Greek influence. During the Reformation, concern for how the church understood its worship also created variety in how the *sursum corda* was used. However, even when there was conscientious reform in the church, the *sursum corda* was retained. Only later, with the rise of new movements in the Protestant churches (namely Puritan, Nonconformist, and revivalistic) would the *sursum corda* begin to disappear from the church's liturgy. Today some of the descendants of early Protestant worship have a renewed interest in the historical worship of the church and the place of the *sursum corda* in liturgy. One example of this can be found in the suggested form for the communion exhortation in the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.³³ As churches give due consideration to their liturgy, hopefully they will recognize the catholic use of the *sursum corda* and not dismiss it out of hand.

II. The *Sursum Corda* and Biblically Shaped Worship

Interest in historic Christian liturgies is

31 Ibid., 303.

32 Ibid., 337.

33 *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 153.

increasing among some Christians and in certain churches.³⁴ One example of this is the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts) which is showing up, more and more, in the worship of various Protestant churches. After a long period of being overlooked, or being intentionally ignored, the *sursum corda* is being rediscovered and included in worship where it once had been absent. Its location in today's liturgy, however, is not always the same as it was in the historic liturgies. One church I attended a couple of years ago included the *sursum corda* as a song set off by itself in the liturgy. The service ended without the Lord's Supper to which, in the past, the *sursum corda* was attached as the preface to the Eucharistic prayer. Perhaps there is renewed interest in the *sursum corda* because it is one of those elements of Christian worship that have an ancient and clear spiritual ring to it—"Lift up your hearts; we lift them to the Lord." However, to use something simply because it sounds more spiritual is not a satisfactory reason to include it in the worship of the church. The Reformed tradition has insisted that there must be a biblical warrant for what we do in worship. Therefore, the question arises: is the use of the *sursum corda* in worship according to Scripture, particularly in its historic location as the preface to the prayer of thanksgiving in the communion service.

Early Christian prayer grew out of the soil of Jewish prayer. Much work has been done on the Jewish background of the prayers in the church.³⁵ Within the vocabulary for worship and prayer in the Old Testament is the *נשא ידים* (*nasa yadim* lift up hands) phrase, as in the line "I will lift up

my hands" to the Lord (Ps. 28:2).³⁶ When Israel gathered in the temple, they prayed to God with their arms raised in the air. Psalm 134 is a direct call to the people "in the house of the Lord" to "lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord." For the Jewish people, prayer incorporated the body with their hands outstretched to the God of Israel. Praying with hands raised up to God may seem like a strange position for prayer until we remember we have our own prayerful postures. When we pray, we typically bow our head, close our eyes, and fold our hands. Bodily posture expresses something about our prayer. The bowing of the head communicates humility and deference before God. The closing of the eyes is a way of focusing our attention on our heavenly Father. Similarly, the practice of lifting up the hands to God in the Old Testament communicated something about the act of prayer. For some Christians today, this prayer posture of hands lifted up to God has been identified with a sense of closeness to God. It is understood as an expression of the desire to reach out to God and make contact with him in an intensely personal and spiritual connection, like a child reaching out her hand for her father to grasp it. What this amounts to is a psychological-emotional reinterpretation of Israel's practice of lifting up its hands to God. For Israel the lifting up of the hands in prayer was a profound, fully personal way of expressing their prayers as a plea or appeal to God. This God, Israel knew, is the God who created the heavens and the earth, who rules over the nations, who is infinitely sublime and beyond us, yet who entered into a covenant with the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and formed them into a holy nation. To this God, Israel brought its prayers. At Mount Sinai, God had declared to the people through Moses: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:8). Everyone in Israel could participate in this offering of prayers to God. Therefore, the Psalms extend the summons to "lift up hands" to all of Israel: "Lift up your hands" (Ps. 134). There is evidence

34 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/September/9.24.html>; Robert Webber and Lester Ruth, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* (New York: Morehouse, 2012); website of the Reformed Liturgical Institute, <http://www.liturgicalinstitute.wordpress.com/churches>.

35 See Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship, Guides to the Reformed Tradition*, ed. John H. Leith and John W. Kuykendall (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 87–96; R. T. Beckwith, "The Jewish Background to Christian Worship," *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 39–51; Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 53–108.

36 See also Psalms 63:4; 134:2 and Lamentations 2:19.

that churches mentioned in the New Testament continued the practice of lifting up their hands to God. In 1 Timothy, Paul instructs the men in the church to pray, “lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Tim. 2:8). Instead of fighting with each other—which uses the hands in a threatening posture—the Christians were to raise their hands to God in thanksgiving, and petition him for what they needed. Since the first Christians were mostly Jewish, it was natural for them to associate prayer with lifting up of the hands to God.

From Scripture, then, we learn that the **נשא** (*nasa* lift up) language is often used for prayer, and the phrase “lift up your hands” is an expression of prayer. The *sursum corda* uses this language for prayer that is found in the Psalms. Accordingly, in the historic liturgies of the church, the *sursum corda* begins the prayer of thanksgiving during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. “Lift up your hearts” from the *sursum corda* accords well with the “lift up” phrase used in the Psalms for prayer and is entirely appropriate for the introduction to the Eucharistic prayer.

Another **נשא** (*nasa* lift up) phrase for prayer in the Psalms is **אלֵיךְ יְהוָה נַפְשִׁי אֲשָׁא** (*‘eleyka Yahweh napshi ‘esa* to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul). The word **נפש** (*nepesh* soul), in the Hebrew way of thinking, refers to the essential life of the person and the very core of his or her being.³⁷ In Greek thinking the *λογος* (*logos* mind) was the essence of the person and that is why in some cases, in the early Christian Eastern liturgies (which tend to rely on the Greek language), the *sursum corda* is “lift up the mind” instead of “lift up the heart.” Interestingly, the popular American way of referring to the inner, authentic part of a person is more in keeping with the Hebrew metaphor of the heart than the Greek metaphor of the mind, such as when people say, “I mean it from the bottom of my heart.”

To lift up the hands is one thing. To lift up

37 Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, based on the lexicon of William Gesenius as translated by Edward Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 659–60.

the soul is something more. Three psalms contain a form of the phrase **נפש נשא** (*nepesh nasa* lift up soul), Psalms 25, 86, and 143. Let us consider Psalm 86 first. This psalm has been classified as an individual lament, which is evident in the first line, “Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me.”³⁸ Old Testament scholar James Mays presents an insightful analysis of the psalm.³⁹ He comments that one unusual feature of Psalm 86 is that many of its lines are found in other psalms. For example, the statement **אלֵיךְ אֲדֹנָי נַפְשִׁי אֲשָׁא** (*‘eleka ‘adonay napshi ‘esa* to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul) in verse 4 is taken from Psalm 25. Frequent borrowing notwithstanding, Psalm 86 has been arranged so that it has its own agenda, which focuses on the one who prays the psalm and his relationship to God. The psalm identifies that relationship as a servant-Lord relationship, such as in verses 3–4: “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.”

As one who is completely dependent upon God, the psalmist makes his prayer. Concerning the Lord-servant imagery, used with the “lift up my soul” phrase, Mays offers this keen observation, “Prayer not only seeks deliverance from trouble but as well helps in the formation of the self.”⁴⁰ We call upon God and are thankful to him when the self, the core of our being, knows it is dependent on him. Mays comments that Psalm 86 goes so far as to pray that God would integrate the self so that the whole heart is undivided and is united in giving thanks. Note verses 11–12:

Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
unite my heart to fear your name.

I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my
whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.

38 Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary, Psalms 51–100*, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 377.

39 James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 278–79.

40 *Ibid.*, 280.

Mays vividly explains this integration of the self using the **אֵלֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי נַפְשִׁי אֲשָׁא** (*'eleka adonay napeshi 'esa* to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul) imagery: “The metaphor portrays prayer as an act in which individuals hold their conscious identity, their life, in hands stretched out to God as a way of saying that their life depends completely and only on the help of God.”⁴¹

The *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts) carries this imagery and meaning into worship. The congregation lifts up its thanksgiving to God before the communion meal in total dependence upon God, giving thanks specifically for their redemption in Jesus Christ and the new life he gives to them. With the profound language of Scripture, the people pray with their whole being to their heavenly Father because the fractured reality of their life, broken by sin, is healed and united by the abundant life of Jesus Christ.

These same three psalms (Psalms 25, 86, 143) join trust with the **אֵלֶיךָ נַפְשִׁי אֲשָׁא** (*'eleka napeshi 'esa* to you I lift up my soul). Psalm 25 is arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet in the form of an acrostic. Much of the psalm is comprised of petitions and the opening verse sets it off as a prayer, “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.” There is also instruction in this psalm. It can be argued that the purpose of the psalm is to give instruction on prayer, yet the effect of the opening metaphor is to characterize the entire psalm as a lifting up of the soul to God.⁴² The psalm teaches while it prays. The result is a prayer that works back on those who pray it. Throughout the psalm—beginning, middle, and end—there is the assertion of trust, “O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame” (v. 2), and “for you I wait” (vv. 5, 21). The reason for this trust is God’s **חֶסֶד** (*khesed* steadfast love) and **רַחֲמִים** (*rahamim* mercy), which is invoked in the middle of the psalm, “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (v. 6, see also vv. 7, 10). With Psalm 25 trust is included with the prayer, “To you, O

Lord, I lift up my soul.”

The same can be found in Psalms 86 and 143. A series of petitions are made at the beginning of Psalm 86, and here too there is a confidence in God because “you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,” (v. 15). The other psalm, Psalm 143, petitions God to listen in his faithfulness and not in judgment. Asking for a quick answer to his prayer, the psalmist prays, “Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love” (v. 8). All three of these psalms bring their petitions to God in trust because of God’s character of faithfulness, mercy, and steadfast love.

Besides the Psalms, the **נָשָׂא** (*nasa* lift up) phrase is found in the book of Lamentations. The reference in Lamentations needs some comment since it is often cited in worship bulletins as the biblical text for the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts). The text found in Lamentations 3:41 is **נָשָׂא לְבַבְנוּ אֶל-כַּפַּיִם אֶל-אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם** (*nisa lebenu 'el-kappayim 'el-'el bashamayim* let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in the heavens). Here we find the two **נָשָׂא** (*nasa* lift up) phrases in the Psalms drawn together (let us lift up our hearts and hands) with some elaboration. The Hebrew word for “hands” in the Lamentations text is more specific than the word for “hands” used in the psalms reviewed above. The word in Lamentations means the hollow of the hand.⁴³ The plural “our hearts” has replaced “my soul,” and the object of the lifted hands and hearts is “God in the heavens.” The “heart” in Hebrew refers to the inner, the middle, the central part of the person and can also refer to the mind, the inclinations, the person himself, and the seat of the passions and emotions.⁴⁴ Given this range of meaning, there is considerable overlap between the connotations of “heart” and “soul” in Hebrew. With these changes to the psalmic **נָשָׂא** (*nasa* lift up) phrase, the Lamentations text appears to be a more direct Scripture reference for the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts). This may

41 Ibid., 124. Mays says this in his comments on Psalm 25.

42 Ibid., 125.

43 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 496.

44 Ibid., 523.

explain why Lamentations 3:41 is the text some churches list beside the *sursum corda* in their order of worship.

The extraction of words and phrases from the Bible for use in worship has occurred since the beginning of Christian worship, and a liturgical use of Scripture does not always have regard for the biblical context of the phrase being used. However, to answer questions about the biblical warrant for the use of language in worship, such as “lift up your heart,” the context of that phrase in Scripture needs to be considered.

Lamentations is a writing filled with intense pain and outrage. One commentator describes it this way: “The poems emerge from a deep wound, a whirlpool of pain, toward which the images, metaphors, and voices of the poetry can only point.”⁴⁵ The tragedy of the Babylonian invasion of Judah is the proximate cause for the pain and outrage in Lamentations, and yet this book knows that the more ultimate cause is the anger of the Lord because of the sin of his people. The deep agony can be heard in each of the five poems that comprise the book, for example: “Look, O Lord, for I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me; because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death” (Lam. 1:20).

Chapter three is the third poem in Lamentations and it calls for a communal response of repentance. The people have sinned against the Lord, and together they must confess their sin. This is where the line **אל־כַּפִּים אֶל־אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם** *nisa lebabenu ‘el-kappayim ‘el-el bashamayim* (let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven), verse 41, appears. The stanza containing verses 40–42, begins, “Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!” And it ends with an accusation against God, “We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven.” In between is the line, “Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven.” For a moment, the anger is turned to God, but then the

45 Kathleen M. O’Connor, “The Book of Lamentations,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1013.

poem moves on and becomes hopeful, imploring God with tears for vengeance against Judah’s enemies. In Lamentations, the “lift up your hearts and hands” phrase is in the context of repentance and indignation.

This does not fit well with the liturgical use of the *sursum corda* in its traditional location as the preface to the Eucharistic prayer during communion. The theme of the Eucharistic prayer is joy and gratitude for the mighty acts of God’s redemption in Jesus Christ. It calls upon the Lord, with thankfulness and confident trust, to send his Spirit “so the eating of this bread and drinking of this wine may be a communion in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The setting of the “let us lift up our hearts and hands” in Lamentations is not thanksgiving. However, far from invalidating the *sursum corda* for use in worship, Lamentations indicates that the biblical language “lift up your hearts” may fit into other places in Christian worship, like the prayer of confession of sin. Still, the more common use of the “lift up” language in Scripture is found in psalms where it is in the context of prayer with confident trust and expectant dependence upon God.

This study shows that the language of the *sursum corda* does have biblical warrant in Psalms and Lamentations. Even though it cannot be argued that the biblical warrant for the *sursum corda* accords only with the Eucharistic prayer in the communion service, the language in Psalms, **אֲשָׂא אֶלַיךְ נַפְשִׁי** (*‘eleyka napshi ‘esa* to you I lift up my soul), is well suited for the preface to the Eucharistic prayer before communion. Yet, it is not merely a matter of quoting these words from Scripture in order to make the church’s liturgy “more biblical.” The use of biblical language has much more to do with shaping the imagery of worship. A church’s liturgy can have the basic elements of worship directed by Scripture and still be superficial and poorly constructed. Worship according to the Bible is also about imagery. In writing to ministers about leading in worship, church historian Hughes Oliphant Old makes this point well:

Prayer does have its own language, its own

vocabulary, and its own imagery. This language is not simply a matter of style. Prayer, particularly Christian prayer, uses biblical language.... The Bible contains a vast number of paradigms for prayer and a thesaurus of words to handle the unique experience of prayer.⁴⁶

The imagery of the language of Scripture draws the church into the reality of worshipping the God who is our creator and redeemer. Without such imagery worship loses that vibrancy and vividness of our encounter with the Holy and Almighty One. It is a matter of perspective—what we are doing in worship. Churches today would do well to incorporate the *sursum corda* with its biblical imagery into their worship. The Christian communities that came before us learned much about using biblical language and imagery in worship, and we have much we can learn from them. This is certainly true of the “lift up my soul” language from Psalms. As they saw it, this language is ideal for expressing our thanksgiving and communion with God. Those who led the Reformed churches during the Reformation, particularly John Calvin and Peter Vermigli, also appreciated the imagery of the *sursum corda*, and they recognized its deep and rich theological dimensions.

III. The *Sursum Corda* Promotes Corporate Worship

In 1572 various ecclesiastical movements, agitating for change in the Church of England, began to align with the publication of a tract called *An Admonition to Parliament*. This publication fired a shot at the established church and, in doing so, marked off those who wanted wholesale revision within the official worship and government of the Church of England from those who essentially embraced the status quo. The agitators were a disparate collection of Barrowist, Brownist, and Anabaptist separatists, Independents, Puritans (who were willing to honor the civil magistrate so long

as their worship was unimpeded), and Presbyterians. One of the Presbyterian leaders was Thomas Cartwright. Four months after the first tract was published, Cartwright sent another in which he challenged the use of specific prayers prescribed by the *Book of Common Prayer*. In this manifesto, he opposed the church regulating what every local congregation was to do and say in worship. Among other concerns, Cartwright argued for a freedom of worship. In this pamphlet he provocatively asks, “Againe, where learned they to multiplie up many prayers of one effect, so many times Glorye be to the Father, so manye times the Lorde be with you, so many times let us pray. Whence learned they all those needelesse repetitions?”⁴⁷ He considered these phrases of worship residue from the Catholic Church and he denounced such prayer as contrary to the words of Christ, “You when you pray use not vaine repetitions as the heathen doe, says he.” Although Cartwright does not mention it by name, his polemic presumably would include the *sursum corda* (lift up your hearts). In the historic liturgies of the church the *sursum corda* is the preface to the prayer of thanksgiving used during the celebration of communion. The complete dialogue is as follows:

Minister: The Lord be with you.
Congregation: And also with you.
Minister: Lift up your hearts.
Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.
Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
Congregation: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

After the *sursum corda*, the minister offers thanksgiving to God focused on the acts of Jesus Christ for our redemption: his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Spirit. Because the centerpiece of this preface to the Eucharistic prayer is the summons to

⁴⁶ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer, a Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 7.

⁴⁷ W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, eds., *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1907, digital scan reprint from the University of Toronto library), 114.

“lift up your hearts,” it is called the *sursum corda*, and in the historic liturgies it is said every time communion is served and the prayer of thanksgiving is prayed. Those in the Puritan movement argued for extemporaneous, nonrepetitive prayer because they believed a free form of worship was inspired by the Spirit.⁴⁸ Over time the effect of the popular dissention from the established church was to erase responses and dialogues from the worship of many Protestant churches, including Presbyterian ones. This essay argues that the *sursum corda* should be included in our liturgies because it contributes to a richer theology of the Lord’s Supper and promotes the active participation of the congregation in corporate worship.

John Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli did not believe the *sursum corda* was vain nor empty. Since they were enmeshed in the controversy with the Roman Catholic Church, the Mass was their immediate context for instruction and debate about worship. The *sursum corda* was a rubric in the Catholic liturgy. Yet both Calvin and Vermigli knew that it had been used by the early Church Fathers and was not exclusively Roman Catholic. Calvin observes, in his comments about rightly apprehending Christ in the Lord’s Supper, “And for the same reason it was established of old that before consecration the people should be told in a loud voice to lift up their hearts.”⁴⁹ Vermigli thought the *sursum corda* and the prayer of thanksgiving were worth keeping, partly because the Fathers (like John Chrysostom and Saint Augustine) taught the necessity of the *sursum corda*.⁵⁰

One of the inherent problems with the Mass, according to Calvin, was that it focused the congregation’s faith on the elements of the sacrament, the bread and the wine, rather than on the ascended Jesus Christ whose humanity was locally present in heaven. More to the point, Calvin said the

reality upon which the sacraments rest is Christ himself. The reality and the elements are not the same thing. By confusing the elements with Christ’s body, the Catholic Mass wrongly directed the church’s faith to the sacramental elements. As Calvin saw it, this error led to superstition and idolatry. Arguing that a proper distinction must be made in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Calvin decisively uses the language of the *sursum corda* in his writings. In his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper* Calvin says, “Moreover, the practice always observed in the ancient church was that, before celebrating the Supper, the people were solemnly exhorted to lift their hearts on high, to show that we must not stop at the visible sign, to adore Jesus Christ rightly.”⁵¹ For Calvin, faith is set properly upon Jesus Christ. In his treatment of the sacraments, he refers to Augustine, who warned against “not lifting our minds beyond the visible sign, to transfer to it the credit for those benefits which are conferred upon us by Christ alone.”⁵² Vermigli echoed this point saying, “Wherefore in the church it is not by chance that rule obtains, before we come to the mystery, of calling out *sursum corda*, that is as if to say, ‘Let your souls cling not to these things that are seen, but to those which are promised.’”⁵³ Not limited to the communion meal, this faith set upon Christ pertains to the entire Christian life. Writing on “The Life of the Christian Man,” in his *Institutes*, Calvin gives this instruction: “Ever since Christ himself, who is our Head, ascended into heaven, it behooves us, having laid aside love of earthly things, wholeheartedly to aspire heavenward.”⁵⁴ The entire Christian life is lived in faith properly set upon the ascended Jesus Christ. This heavenly aspiration of the life of the Christian is centered in worship at the Lord’s Supper, with the words of the *sursum corda*, “lift

48 Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1948), 56.

49 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed., John T. McNeill, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 1412.

50 Joseph McClelland and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Visible Words of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 205 and 232.

51 John Calvin, “Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord and only Savior Jesus Christ,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, LCC, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 159.

52 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.17, 1292.

53 Quoted in McLelland and Torrance, *The Visible Words of God*, 136.

54 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.6.3, 687. For further reading on this, see Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

up your hearts.” These words in the liturgy state the directionality for the Christian’s faith and the life. It encapsulates the nature of Christian faith as directed from creaturely things to Christ.

The richness of the *sursum corda* is found in the directionality of the faith of the church to Christ; but there is also the directionality of Christ to the church. Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, comes to be present with the church. Calvin’s teaching on the Spirit as the bond between the Christian and Christ is well known. The Spirit, who is sent by Christ at Pentecost, unites the church with the ascended Lord. In the Lord’s Supper the Spirit’s bond makes Christ present with his church. In his discussion of the benefits of receiving the Lord’s Supper, Calvin insists on the presence of Christ: “We say Christ descends to us both by the outward symbol and by his Spirit, that he truly may quicken our souls by the substance of his flesh and of his blood.”⁵⁵ On this point Vermigli used the *sursum corda* to explain Christ’s participation with the church. The faith of the Christian is lifted up to Christ, which Vermigli explains further:

For there [at the Lord’s Supper] you must not think either of the bread or of the wine—your mind and sense must cleave only to the things represented unto you. Therefore it is said “Lift up your hearts,” when you lift up your mind from the signs to the invisible things offered you.⁵⁶

For Vermigli there is a real reception of Christ offered to the Christian: “I judge the real and substantial body of Christ to be only in the heavens, yet the faithful truly receive, spiritually

and through faith, the communication of His true body and His true blood, which was delivered to the cross for our sake.”⁵⁷ The Church’s faith is not lifted up to a static Christ, but to the One who promises to give himself to his people for food.⁵⁸ Calvin agrees in his treatise on the Lord’s Supper:

On the one hand we must, to shut out all carnal fancies, raise our hearts on high to heaven, not thinking that our Lord Jesus Christ is so abased as to be enclosed under any corruptible elements. On the other hand, not to diminish the efficacy of this sacred mystery, we must hold that it is accomplished by the secret and miraculous virtue of God, and that the Spirit of God is the bond of participation, for which reason it is called spiritual.⁵⁹

The *sursum corda*, then, is the church’s prayerful declaration that its faith is lifted up to the Lord—the same Lord Jesus Christ who comes to be present with the church by his Spirit.

Calvin and Vermigli had no reservations about the value of the *sursum corda* for the church’s celebration of the sacrament of communion. For them, it was not an empty liturgical phrase. However, there is some ambiguity in the way they used it, which leads to the question, is the directionality of the *sursum corda* individual or corporate? These two reformers do not address this question and their use of the *sursum corda* leaves the door open either way. Each individual Christian could take the words “lift up your hearts” as a call to set his or her own faith on Christ, by himself or herself. In a society where individualism is ubiquitous, this becomes the default way of hearing the *sursum corda*.

57 McLelland and Torrance, *The Visible Words of God*, 174.

58 See John 6:51–58.

59 Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord and only Savior Jesus Christ*, 166. Elsewhere, in his sermon on II Samuel 6:1–7, Calvin says, “Thus, we must note that when God declares himself to us, we must not cling to any earthly thing, but must elevate our sense above the world, and lift ourselves up by faith to his eternal glory. In sum, God comes down to us so that then we might go up to him. That is why the sacraments are compared to the steps of a ladder.” See John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, Chapters 1–13, trans. Douglas Kelly (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 234.

55 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.24, 1390.

56 McLelland and Torrance, *The Visible Words of God*, 175. For one analysis of Calvin and Vermigli’s understanding of the relationship between Christ’s body and the sacrament, see George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 40. Hunsinger explains that Vermigli preferred the word “transelementation” for the mystery of the transforming union of Christ with the sacrament, like a rod of iron thrust into a fire. “Just as the iron did not cease to be iron, or the fire fire, so did the bread not cease to be bread, or Christ’s flesh his flesh.” *Ibid.*

To put it another way, with an individualistic conception of the *sursum corda*, each Christian's faith lifted up to the Lord is a singular line, like an arrow flying to its mark. The problem with this way of understanding the *sursum corda* is that it isolates the individual Christian within the church by encouraging each person to focus on himself or herself, obscuring the corporate nature of the church, its worship, and its sacraments.

Church historian Julie Canlis has called attention to the ambiguity of Calvin's doctrine of the *sursum corda*. She argues that this doctrine can remain nothing "more than a 'cognitive plus' or 'mere psychological process.'"⁶⁰ Calvin placed the *sursum corda* in his exhortation at the beginning of the communion liturgy. Consequently, it no longer functioned as a liturgical dialogue with the congregation. Taken this way, the *sursum corda* can become an invitation to a personal communion with Christ, and the bond of the Spirit becomes merely a personal bond. So, each individual Christian participates in Christ, one to one. Canlis compares Calvin's doctrine with Irenaeus's theology of recapitulation, which teaches that God's redemption in Christ extends beyond the individual to a collective humanity and to the creation. Calvin was no stranger to Irenaeus and drew upon this church father in his theology. On union with Christ, Calvin can be understood in broader terms than just the individual.⁶¹ Yet if a theology of corporate union with Christ does not find liturgical expression in worship, then participants in worship can continue easily in their individualistic thinking, even with Calvin's use of the *sursum corda*. This is what makes Calvin's use of the *sursum corda* ambiguous.

What we do and say in worship goes a long way toward shaping the church's faith and theology. Far better than dropping the *sursum corda* from worship, or turning it into a monologue, is

60 Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*, 168.

61 Calvin brings out the corporate nature of the church in his doctrine of the unity of the church. He can say we are engrafted into the unity of the church and for believers "no hope of future inheritance remains to us unless we have been united with all other members under Christ, our Head." For our engrafting into the unity of the church see Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.3, 1014.

using it in dialogue with the congregation, and using it every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated. But is such liturgical repetition to be avoided, as Cartwright suggested in his manifesto? Of course, mindless, insincere repetition should be avoided in worship. Worship should engage our hearts and our minds. Jesus did warn against vainly repeating ritualistic words themselves, as if that alone were pleasing to God.⁶² In the writings of the prophets, God declares that obedience and justice should accompany the worship of his people.⁶³ Rattling off the same prayer without being engaged in the prayer makes for empty praying. However, removing a prayer or a liturgical response from worship will not prevent mindlessness and insincerity in worship. People can be disengaged from the liturgy—their thoughts drifting away to work or pleasure—even with an order of worship that is new and different every week. There needs to be a distinction made between the behavior of vain repetition and the content of the liturgy of worship. If the content of a prayer is faithful to Scripture and is in a form conducive for worship, then it is not vapid and fruitless in and of itself. In the case of vain repetition, with a prayer that is biblical, the problem is with the one praying it, not the form of the prayer.

There is another way. Instead of excising biblically rich liturgy, like the *sursum corda*, from the worship of the church, it can be incorporated into the prayers and responses of the people in order to become the language of the congregation. In so doing, the content of the liturgy becomes "our" prayer and "our" language of worship. This can be done with the *sursum corda*. In the church I serve, we use the *sursum corda* every week. It resonates within me every time I say it. It sharpens my focus for the Lord's Supper. My heart is lifted up to the Lord by means of the bond of the Spirit, and so the Lord himself is present with me and he offers himself to me for the food of eternal life. I think of this every time I say the *sursum corda*, and I am not

62 See Matthew 6:7.

63 See Isaiah 1:12–17.

the only one: the members of the church I serve also think about this when they say the liturgy because they have been taught what it means and because they have taken it to heart. The words of the *sursum corda* have become their words. With the *sursum corda* our prayer is filled with fruitful theological content when we come to the Lord's Table.

Beyond giving content to the people's prayers, the *sursum corda* also serves to unite the congregation in worship. By saying it together, the ambivalence of Calvin's use of the *sursum corda* is cleared away. When the minister says, "Lift up your hearts," and when the congregation together responds with one voice, "We lift them up to the Lord," an individualistic interpretation of our relationship to God gives way to an interpretation more reflective of the unity of the church. Saying the same thing together helps combat individualism. Along with all of Christ's people, we are lifted up to Christ—one body, one family. Together we partake of his one body and blood shed for us. Together we are justified and forgiven of our sins—each one of us, yes, but also all of us together. Our Lord gives himself to us in love. He did not do this for each one of us alone. We share in his salvation together in Christ. The *sursum corda*, used responsively in worship, helps tip the balance of the church's worship from being a collection of individuals, who dwell on their one-to-one relationship with God, to the people of Christ joined together and lifted up to the Lord in the unity of the Spirit.

In the interest of both enriching our liturgy and promoting corporate worship, let us return the *sursum corda* to its place as a dialogue at the beginning of the prayer of thanksgiving in the service of communion. Many churches have already done this, including some in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The OPC's Directory for Worship has retained the first line of the *sursum corda*, "lift up your hearts," in its suggested form of the exhortation given by the minister before the Lord's Supper. This placement is according to Calvin's use, and it serves its purpose to teach the congregation the proper focus of our faith as we partake of the

sacrament. However, it can have the undesirable effect of sidelining the congregation and making the people passive in the liturgy. By pulling the *sursum corda* out of the communion exhortation and returning it to its place as a dialogue with the congregation, the church's service of communion becomes a corporate act and increases the participation of the people in worship. ☺

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Servant Word

How to Pray at Prayer Meetings: Some Practical Suggestions

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by Ryan McGraw

Prayer meetings are vital to the church. However, they can be difficult to manage. Most who have led prayer meetings have experienced various difficulties in doing so. When Christians gather together in families or in small groups to pray, ordinarily they go to prayer directly. Yet, when the church gathers for corporate prayer, the scene often changes. Instead of focusing primarily on prayer, most of the time often is used in taking requests or conducting Bible studies. The purpose of prayer meetings should be primarily to promote the Father's glory, through spreading the kingdom of his Son, by doing his will through the Spirit's power. The following directions point out some common pitfalls to avoid in corporate prayer meetings. Most of these directions respect our relations to fellow believers and how best to utilize our time of corporate prayer and to unite our hearts in it. These are practical suggestions without the force of "thus saith the Lord." They include numerous scriptural allusions, but no direct references. The goal is to improve our prayer meetings as effective means of advancing the gospel and of edifying the saints by drawing upon the general principles of Scripture,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=440&issue_id=98.

experience, and sanctified common sense.

1. Limit the Petitions Largely to the First Three Petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

The primary purpose of prayer meetings should be to spread the glory of God through the gospel. The coming of the kingdom and the doing of his will are the two primary ways that God does this. Pray for the Father to glorify himself through spreading the gospel of his Son. Pray that the Spirit would spread the kingdom through blessing the preaching of the Word, especially on the Lord's Day. This does not mean that we should avoid praying for the needs of the church. It means that we should pray for the needs of the church with the goal of spreading God's glory through honoring his name, furthering his kingdom, and doing his will.

2. Pray for Other Things in Light of the First Three Petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

For example, pray for the sick so that they might know Christ better through their illnesses or come to know him in light of them. Pray that they would get well, but recognize that this is a secondary end of praying for them. This is true especially in corporate prayer, where those present are less abreast of the private details of the lives of friends for whom we pray. Do not give too much detail about those for whom we pray, either by way of requests or in your prayers. The Lord will always bless our prayers for the growth of the saints in the midst of affliction. He will use some of our prayers for the conversion of the lost in their affliction, as well. This principle should give focus to your private prayers as well as for your public prayers. In other words, do not simply pray but ask yourself why you are praying and how your prayer glorifies God.

3. Pray Scripture.

Praying using scriptural language and content is the best way to be assured simultaneously that God will answer our prayers and that we will gain the consent of others in the prayer meeting. Fewer

people will disagree with the Scriptures themselves in corporate prayer than will disagree with our opinions about family, politics, news, etc. If people attending the prayer meetings do not consent to the Scriptures, then such people face deeper problems. Praying Scripture is the best means of honoring God and edifying our brethren. This does not mean parroting Scripture citations back to God, but thoughtfully using and applying scriptural language and ideas. This will improve your private prayers as well.

4. Come to Pray.

Do not spend too much time on prayer requests. We are gathered to pray at prayer meetings, not to be updated on the latest news. Use prayer chains or smaller groups to share small details and minor requests. Do not give minute-by-minute updates on the state of the sick. Do not enumerate the names of every lost family member and neighbor. The Lord knows our needs. Corporate prayer should prioritize corporate needs and requests. Use the Psalms as a model. The prayers contained in the Psalms transcend time and rarely include specific names or circumstances. When they do, these are usually relegated to the titles of the Psalms. We should not need lengthy requests for corporate prayer. Use other means and occasions for these purposes. This is true regarding Bible studies, as well. A short Bible study can help prepare people to participate in a prayer meeting. Long Bible studies crowd out prayer. Remember that the purpose of the meeting is prayer, not Bible study. Corporate prayer makes Bible study and preaching effective through the power of the Holy Spirit. People need to know that prayer is the main event and that it is vital even if there is no study attached. Anything that detracts from spending most of the time in corporate prayer, whether requests or studies, distorts the nature of the prayer meeting, transforming it into something else.

5. Do Not Be Too Specific in Corporate Prayer.

Everyone in a prayer meeting winces inwardly

when someone prays in vivid detail about the latest fight in his or her household—everyone, apparently, except the people who pray such inappropriate prayers. Respect the private details of people's lives in prayer meetings. Those who are present do not need to know most details. We sometimes act superstitiously by assuming that we need a list of names to pray for that includes every individual who concerns us. This is important in private prayer, but can be distracting in public prayer. The Lord knows their names, and he can hear corporate prayer for lost people and other needs, whether we know their names or not. This does not mean that we should never pray for people by name, but we must be sparing and do so only when it adds to the substance of the prayer meeting and promotes the efficacy of the prayers. Turning prayer into a commentary on the latest events, whether personal or in the public news, transforms prayer meetings into gossip sessions. This happens more frequently than most people realize. Giving personal details on people's lives when it is not necessary borders on gossip. Corporate prayer for the kingdom of God should be less specific than private prayers. The general rule should be that the more private your prayers are the more specific they become. The point of corporate prayer is to pray, as much as possible, for corporate concerns.

6. Pray in a Way that Allows Most of Those Present to Say "Amen."

The Bible expects us to say "amen" in corporate prayer. This is the briefest and perhaps the most ancient confession of faith in Scripture. In our "amen," we testify our desire and assurance to be heard. We cannot say "amen" unless we both understand and agree with what is prayed. This goes both ways. You should pray in such a way that you expect others to say "amen" to your prayers. Those who pray in corporate prayer meetings are speaking for every Christian present at the meeting during that prayer. In this relation, it is helpful to avoid using "I" in a prayer meeting. If you cannot preface your petition or praise with "we," then the petition probably is inappropriate for the context.

Avoid polemical issues in corporate prayer as much as possible. If you are a Presbyterian who is praying in a Baptist prayer meeting, then do not pray for the Lord's blessing on household baptisms as a divine ordinance. Polemics are utterly inappropriate in corporate prayer. They are repulsive in this context, even where they are equally necessary in other settings. When we practice household baptisms in a Presbyterian church, then we should pray for the ordinance, whether or not everyone present agrees with it. However, praying for the spread of the kingdom and the glory of God, through Christ, by the Spirit is something that all Christians can—and should—unite over. We are most ecumenical when we join our hearts in corporate prayer. We should express this both by saying “amen” audibly and praying in a way that enables others to do so with us.

7. Avoid Political References in Your Prayers.

We must pray for rulers and for all who are in authority that they might both come to the knowledge of the truth and allow us to lead quiet and peaceable lives in holiness and reverence. We should pray that they would enact just laws, punish the wicked, and reward the upright. However, Christians have differing political views. Not all of us vote the same way. So corporate prayer is not the time to sort out our differences over which president to vote for or to mention bills and referendums by name. Why should we need to? Does not God know better than we do how to direct our governing authorities? Your ideas of just laws and wars may not be the same as his. You may hold your opinions on these things, but exercise humility, especially in corporate prayer. How many wars have been fought where both sides thought their cause was just? We cannot see things as God sees them. Our perspectives are far too limited. We often think that we can pray more accurately on national and international matters than is actually the case. If everyone in the prayer meeting got what they asked for in relation to politics, then this would likely lead the nation into catastrophic

disorder. Leave the specifics to your closet. Pray corporately in a way that is truly corporate. Even if your position is right, corporate prayer is the wrong context in which to press it. Corporate prayer assumes agreement among those who pray; it is neither the place nor the time to procure agreement.

8. Avoid Vain Repetition.

It is useful to regard the prayer meeting as one long prayer, with several parts, offered through many voices, and with unified hearts. Christ's command to avoid vain repetition in prayer applies with equal force to prayer meetings. It is common in prayer meetings for several people to parrot the same petitions offered by others already. When others pray at prayer meetings, remember that it is your prayer, too. If you would not repeat the same thing in your private prayers, then neither should you repeat what others have prayed in corporate prayer. There are at least two exceptions to this rule. Repeat a petition when you have something new to add that someone else did not include. However, consider this advice in light of the directions above about not being too specific in public prayer unless it is necessary. We can also repeat a petition when it is a peculiar burden on the hearts of those who are present. For example, everyone in the prayer meeting should share a burden for the revival of the church. Neither God nor man is wearied when such concerns dominate the hearts of all who pray. Concern for the spiritual vitality of the church and the spread of the gospel is virtually a litmus test for a good prayer meeting. All of the people in the meeting could, and perhaps should, pray for revival. However, even here, use a variety of heartfelt and genuine expressions combined with texts of Scripture rather than simply repeating the same request *ad nauseam*. For five or six people to offer the same petition in virtually the same words is as not pleasing to God as it is to us when people speak to us this way in conversation. This rule does not exclude those who come to God with a child-like heart and express their prayers through stumbling and broken expressions. Contrary to the self-image of such people, such prayers ascend like

incense to heaven and are music in the ears of the saints who pray with them.

9. Keep Your Prayers Brief.

It is better for more people to pray a few petitions each than for a few people to try to pray for all of them, or to pray for some of them with too much detail. If you pray for someone who has cancer, for example, then pray for their spiritual and physical welfare. Those in the prayer meeting do not need to know the results of their current blood tests, etc. This will not affect in the least either the content or the efficacy of the prayer for them. Do not pray more than once unless there is some necessity for it. If the prayer meeting is particularly large, then the leadership may need to designate individuals to pray on behalf of the group. If the group is small, then the widest participation possible is desirable. In either case, petitions should be brief and to the point.

10. Do Not Be a Slave to the Clock.

If the prayers fizzle out early, then the prayer meeting should end early. If the Spirit blesses corporate prayer extraordinarily and people are pleading for the spread of the gospel with vigor, then do not close until people have finished. Remember, however, that extraordinary blessings in a prayer meeting must be extraordinary. Otherwise, this term is meaningless, if not self-contradictory. Time will be less of an issue in prayer meetings if almost the entire time is devoted to prayer rather than to prayer requests or Bible study.

11. Do Not Turn Your Prayers into Sermons.

In public prayer, you are speaking to God in the presence of men, not to men on behalf of God. This is one of the worst and the most common errors in prayer. If someone prays something like, “Lord, we know that you have told us to keep ourselves from temptation and that there are some people here who walk into tempting situations, and that they know they should stop, but they do not, even though I have tried to confront them repeatedly,” then they are preaching rather than

praying. This kind of prayer comes across as very similar to the prayer of the Pharisee, who “prayed to himself” and thanked God that he was not like other men. Your goal in prayer is to express the hearts of men with your voice and not to change the opinions and practices of men through your exhortation. If there are issues that must be resolved between church members, or areas where there are disagreements in doctrine or practice, then address these by way of private admonition. Some faults are liable to church discipline, while you simply must bear with others. You are not informing God or your neighbor in your prayers. You must pray in a way that others can understand and agree with you. Others often view those who preach in their prayers as disingenuous, insincere, and self-aggrandizing. You will not do good to the souls of others or your own if you turn your prayers into veiled exhortations and expositions of Scripture.

12. Encourage All Types of People to Pray.

Prayer meetings are one of the best opportunities to teach children how to be an active part of the congregation. It is important to bring our children to prayer meetings and to teach them how to pray brief prayers. The prayers of children are one of the greatest encouragements to the congregation, and they among the best means to give the children ownership in the task of spreading the gospel. The rules that limit and shape our prayers should never discourage the weakest and least informed among us from praying. As with all other things, we learn as we do. Though this is not the place to settle the controversy, it would appear that the women participated in the prayer meeting in Acts 1.

13. Remember in Your Prayers to Praise the Triune God.

This is how the Westminster Shorter Catechism appropriately closes. If our prayer meeting is more consumed with petitions than with praises, then we have lost sight of the biblical model for prayer. We should praise the triune God for who

he is and for what he has done. All of our petitions should promote his glory and reputation among us and in the world. Prayer is many things, but it is an act of worship above all other things. Use the prayer meeting as an occasion to worship and glorify the Lord and to do so together. It is better to praise God with united hearts and voices than to do so alone—look at the Psalms for numerous examples of this! Praising God and seeking his glory in corporate prayer is one of the best ways to advance Christ's kingdom and to edify his people. I have never heard a Christian say that there was too much worship and thanksgiving at a prayer meeting. This is what you will be doing when all the saints and angels are gathered in glory and when you see Christ face-to-face as he is. Praise him in your corporate prayers. ©

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✚ Servant Truth

The Israelites Were Not Exclusive Psalmists (Nor Are We)

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by T. David Gordon

The Reformed tradition has been more hesitant to employ Christian hymns in worship than the Lutheran tradition. Ulrich Zwingli removed all music from worship entirely, so Calvin's effort to restore the singing of praise had to proceed cautiously. Calvin himself was not an exclusive psalmist: his Strasbourg liturgy included musical settings of the Decalogue, the Apostle's Creed, and the *Nunc Dimittis*.² He was, however, a vigorous proponent

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=404&issue_id=92.

2 For a review of the different emphases between the Lutheran and Reformed heritage on the matter, cf. Theodore Brown Hewitt, *Paul Gerhardt as a Hymnwriter and His Influence on English Hymnody* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918); Walter E. Buszin, "Luther on Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January 1946): 80–97; James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster 1968); Charles Garside Jr., "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music, 1536–43," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69, part 4 (1979): 1–36; Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); John Barber, "Luther and Calvin on Music and Worship," *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 8, no. 26 (June 2006). Consider also Hughes Oliphant Old's comment: "Luther was a talented musician, and he liked to sing the gospel as much as preach it. The Reformation produced a great amount of excellent hymnody. Luther left us several superb hymns that we still sing today, but he was not alone; a number of other Reformers did the same. In fact, the Reformation spawned a whole school of hymnodists.... Hymn singing is firmly wedded to the very nature of Protestant worship. We Protestants have as great a love for

of metrical versions of the Psalms, and the Reformed tradition has always been very friendly to such. Exclusive psalmody, however, is now a fairly small minority report of the Reformed tradition; Isaac Watts altered the Reformed tradition substantially on that point. I do not believe in exclusive psalmody; rather, I believe it was an extremely late development in Christianity, and that not even the Old Testament saints were exclusive psalmists. What follows is an abbreviated discussion of the five grounds on which I conclude that even the Israelites were not exclusive psalmists.

The Lexical Issue

"The Psalms" is an unfortunate designation for this body of literature, because there is no secular equivalent in our speech to "psalms." For us, "psalms" are always "the canonical Psalms." Other terms could be used, and/or have been used, that might be more helpful. We could refer to them, as our Hebrew text and Jewish friends do, as "Praises." In the Hebrew Bible, the title to our "Psalms" is תהלים (*tehillim*) "praises." The Psalter also employs the term self-referentially in a number of places:

Ps. 22:3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises (תְּהִלֹּת, *tehillot*) of Israel.

Ps. 40:3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise (תְּהִלָּה, *tehillah*) to our God.

Ps. 51:15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise (תְּהִלַּתְךָ, *tehillateka*)

Ps. 65:1 Praise (תְּהִלָּה, *tehillah*) is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.

Ps. 145:21 My mouth will speak the praise (תְּהִלָּת, *tehillat*) of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

Insofar as Psalms recount and celebrate the

hymn singing as we do for preaching." *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 321.

praise-worthy character and deeds of God, they are properly called “praises.” In a handy little volume by Avrohom Davis, *The Metsudah Tehillim*, which provides the Hebrew and English of the Psalter in parallel columns, Rabbi Davis says this: “Sefer Tehillim is often referred to as the Book of Psalms. A more precise translation of the word תהלים (*tehillim*) is praises, the plural of the word תהלה (*tehillah*). We should therefore refer to this work as the Book of Praises. The book was named because so many of its words express David’s praise of God.”³ Indeed, the noun is formed from the verb הלל (*hill*), which means to praise or extol. So the Psalter itself does not refer to itself by a term that suggests a fixed or determined canonical reality, the way our expression “The Psalms” does. It refers to itself by the ordinary term for “praises.”⁴ I do not suggest that this evidence is conclusive, because the term conceivably could refer to a fixed group of praises. I do suggest, however, that the natural reading of the Hebrew permits a much more open-ended collection of praises than our English expression “The Psalms” does.

Even more significant, lexically, is that some of the psalms refer to themselves as “prayers” (LXX, προσευχή [*proseuchē*], ᾠδή [*ōdē*], or ὕμνος [*hymnos*]):

Ps. 17:1 A Prayer (תפלה, *tehillah*) of David (LXX προσευχή τοῦ Δαυίδ, *proseuchē tou David*)

Ps. 42:8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song (שירה, LXX ᾠδή) is with me, a prayer (תפלה, LXX προσευχή, *proseuchē*) to the God of my life.

Ps. 72:20 The prayers (תפלות, *tephillot*) of David, the son of Jesse, are ended (ἔξέλιπον

3 *The Metsudah Tehillim: A New Linear Tehillim with English Translation and Notes* (Brooklyn: Simcha-Graphic Associates, 1983), iii.

4 This designation of “praises” is imperfect, since nearly seventy-five of the psalms are more technically laments, and only about forty are what we would designate as songs of praise. But since there are seven different genres within the canonical psalter, perhaps “praises” is the most generic term that can be used for them.

οἱ ὕμνοι Δαυίδ τοῦ υἱοῦ, Ἰεσσαί, *exelipon hoi hymnoi David tou Iessai*).

Ps. 85:1 A Prayer of David (προσευχὴ τῷ Δαυίδ, *proseuchē tō David*)

Ps. 89:1 A Prayer of Moses, the man of God (προσευχὴ τοῦ Μωϋσῆ ἀνθρώπου τοῦ θεοῦ, *proseuchē tou Mōysē anthropou tou theou*)

If we referred to these biblical psalms as “prayers,” since so many are addressed to God, would any of us consider being “exclusive pray-ers”? Would anyone seriously consider praying only the prayers found in the canonical Psalter?

Further, the term “psalm” (ψαλμός, *psalmos*), is not restricted in the OT to the collection that we would call the canonical Psalms. Other prayers and praises are referred to by this designation.

1 Sam. 16:18 One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing (ἐιδότα ψαλμόν, *eidota psalmon*, lit., “who knows psalm”), a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him.”

Note that, at this point in David’s career, he is “skillful in playing,” but has not yet written any of what we would later call “the Psalms.” So he did not know (ἐιδότα, *eidota*) “the Psalms”; he knew how to play an accompanying instrument. Indeed, this is how the term is employed in Job, to refer to a musical instrument:

Job 21:12 They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of *the pipe* (φωνῆ ψαλμοῦ, *phōnē psalmou*).

Job 30:31 My lyre is turned to mourning, and *my pipe* (ὁ δὲ ψαλμός μου, *o de psalmos mou*) to the voice of those who weep.⁵

5 Pipes are indeed extremely old. Elena Mannes has an interesting discussion of a vulture bone flute found in Germany that is forty thousand years old: five thousand years older than the famous cave paintings in Chauvet, France. Even more remarkable, when archaeologists recreated one using a condor bone, the flute played the five-tone (pentatonic) Western

Lexically, then, none of the language employed in the OT suggests what our English “The Psalms” does, to wit: a *fixed* collection of prayers or praises. It refers much more openly, to lyrical music that may be accompanied with an instrument.

OT Songs Not in the Psalter

As Douglas O’Donnell has documented, there are a number of prominent songs recorded in the Old Testament that are not in the Psalter.⁶ Two “songs of Moses” are recorded in the Old Testament (Exod. 15 and Deut. 32), plus the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), two of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1–10; 2 Sam. 22), and the song of Habakkuk (Hab. 3). The Old Testament not only contains a record of these non-Psalter songs; it contains approval of those who composed and sang them. Yet the compilers of the five collections that eventually constituted our canonical psalms did not hesitate to omit them. Had those compilers thought that their collections would have been regarded as exclusive, they almost certainly would not have excluded such well-known songs. If a strict view of exclusive psalmody were held, we would be permitted to sing the 150 canonical psalms, but not allowed to sing these six other songs that are recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament canon. The Israelites could have lawfully sung them (and did), but we could not.

Five Collections of Psalms

All students of the Psalms now recognize that what we call the Psalter itself was constructed of five collections of psalms that originally existed independently of one another:

scale perfectly, a scale used in “Amazing Grace” or “The Star-Spangled Banner.” So our preference for that pentatonic (later developed into the heptatonic) scale is not merely the result of enculturation; it is apparently wired into our DNA, and was wired so into our ancestors over forty thousand years ago. Cf. Elena Mannes, *The Power of Music: Pioneering Discoveries in the New Science of Song* (New York: Walker, 2013), and also her PBS Special, “The Music Instinct: Science and Song.”

6 Douglas O’Donnell, *God’s Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs* (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R, 2010).

Psalms 1–41 Davidic Psalms

Psalms 42–72 Solomonian Psalms

Psalms 73–89 Despair over the Davidic Monarchy

Psalms 90–106 Mosaic Psalms

Psalms 107–150 A Coming King⁷

Interestingly, with almost no exceptions, these five different collections of praises did not contain the praises that were in the other four (psalms 14 and 53 appear to be the exception). If any one of the five had intended to be exclusive, we would not have had the other four. Indeed, the second collection suggests that it was/is complete: “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” (Ps. 72:20). But whatever “ended” means here (LXX ἐξέλιπον, *exelipon*, Hebrew כָּלוּ, *clw*), it did not mean that an entire canon of exclusive psalms ended, because over seventy-five more followed it. The only thing that “ended” here was one of five collections of praises; but the ending of that collection did not exclude the other four.

The Psalter Itself Grew

Our present canonical collection of “prayers or praises” developed over time. Not only did five separate collections develop separately, but the canonical psalms were written over hundreds of years. Psalm 90, for instance, is attributed to Moses: “A Prayer of Moses, the man of God” (προσευχὴ τοῦ Μωϋσῆ ἀνθρώπου τοῦ θεοῦ, *pro-seuchē tou Mōysē anthropou tou theou*, Ps. 90:1). Critical scholars may dispute the Mosaic origins of this particular psalm, but the general consensus, even among critical scholars, is that the Psalms, at a minimum, date from the original monarchy to the postexilic era.⁸ As Old Testament scholar William L. Holladay put it, “Scholars who have

7 All students of the Psalms agree with this numbering of the five collections, but the labels are obviously interpretive. I derived these labels from the persuasive argumentation of Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

8 Cf. John D. Telgren, “Dating the Psalms,” n.p., n.d.

worked on the Psalms in the last hundred years or so have detected within them the kind of variations of style and emphasis that suggest that they are the product of many poets and singers over many centuries.”⁹ At various critical moments in Israel’s history, laments, thanksgivings, or praises were composed to commemorate, bewail, or celebrate some new work of God’s judgment or deliverance. And indeed, more than one psalm was composed for most such occasions. A number of psalms, for example, recall Israel’s exodus from Egypt (e.g., 22, 44, 80, 83). During that process of composing psalms, one would have assumed that the process of composing such praises or prayers would continue as long as God continued to judge or deliver. If, therefore, Christians regard the cross as God’s judgment and the resurrection as God’s deliverance, we would surely expect prayers and praises to be composed to commemorate and celebrate (and lament) such.

The Psalter Commands Praising God for All His Works

If one reads the canonical psalms, it is not at all surprising to learn that they were composed over the course of many generations, because so many of the psalms command God’s people to praise and extol him for his works or deeds of judgment and deliverance. In doing so, such passages command God’s visible people to compose such songs in response to all of what he has done. Note in these representative passages the relationship between God’s acting and his people’s singing in response:

Ps. 9:11 *Sing praises* to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his *deeds*!

Ps. 13:6 I will *sing* to the LORD, because he has *dealt bountifully* with me.

Ps. 66: 1 Shout for joy to God, all the earth; 2

sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! 3 Say to God, “How awesome are your *deeds*! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.

Ps. 67:4 Let the nations be glad and *sing* for joy, for you *judge* the peoples with equity and *guide* the nations upon earth.

Ps. 92:4 For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your *work*; at the *works* of your hands I *sing* for joy.

Ps. 95:1 Oh come, let us *sing* to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our *salvation*!

Ps. 96:1 Oh *sing* to the LORD a new *song*; *sing* to the LORD, all the earth! 2 *Sing* to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his *salvation* from day to day.

Ps. 98:1 Oh *sing* to the LORD a new *song*, for he has *done* marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have *worked salvation* for him.

Ps. 105:2 *Sing* to him, *sing praises* to him; tell of all his wondrous *works*!

Ps. 139:14 I *praise* you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully *made*. Wonderful are your *works*; my soul knows it very well.

These passages (and others like them) invite and command those who benefit from God’s works to sing praises to him for such works. Both the non-psalter songs in the Old Testament and the 150 in our collection testify to Israel’s obedience to the divine invitation. Generation after generation composed new songs of praise, lament, or thanksgiving in response to God’s acts of judgment and deliverance. And, as I indicated earlier, they were not content to compose merely one prayer or praise for such acts; many of God’s acts were celebrated by many compositions.

If the arrival of God’s anointed was an occasion for singing in the psalter, how could humanity not compose songs for the advent and birth of God’s Christ (“Come, thou long-expected Jesus”)?

9 Cf. William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 17–18.

If the Israelites sang laments when David's enemies drove him from the city (e.g., Psalm 3), how could Christians refrain from lamenting the Son of David's passion ("O Sacred Head, now wounded")? If Israel sang when the exiled king returned to Jerusalem, how could we not sing when the crucified Redeemer returned to life ("Jesus lives, and so shall I; death, thy sting is gone forever")? If Israel sang songs to celebrate the ascension of David or Solomon to rule, how could it be possible that we would not also compose songs when the Son of David ascended to the right hand of the Father ("Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne")? How could we possibly refuse to sing about such things? God disclosed himself much more supremely and definitively through his incarnate Son than he ever had before in any of his acts of judgment and deliverance in Israel; how could we possibly fail to sing praises for the greater and fuller act of judgment and deliverance in God's own Son?

New Testament Saints Are Not Exclusive Psalmists

The answers to those rhetorical questions are not difficult to find in the New Testament. When Jesus took on human flesh, his conception and birth were greeted by song (Mary's *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46–55 and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* in Luke 2:29–32). If Calvin's interpretation of Acts 2:42 is correct,¹⁰ the earliest meetings of the apostolic churches included singing of praise that was not restricted to the Old Testament psalms. Paul's letters contain both an example of what is likely a Christ-hymn in Philippians 2,¹¹ and Paul's

10 Calvin understood ταῖς προσευχαῖς, *tais proseuchais* of Acts 2:42 to refer to the prayers both spoken and sung. As James Hastings Nichols put it, commenting on Calvin, "The second element in every meeting of the church is the prayers. These are of two types, said Calvin, spoken and sung. We must say something of each. It is significant that *Calvin discusses church music under the heading of prayer.*" Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, 33 (emphasis added).

11 "Philippians 2:2–5 is distinguished by the fact that it is perhaps the most illustrious example of New Testament Christ-hymns. It stands out as an ode sung to Christ in praise of Him and His achievement." Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi*:

instructions about singing in the congregation in texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:26: "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." While it is possible that the "hymn" here is an Old Testament canonical psalm, the context suggests that it, like the "lesson" or "revelation" contained New Testament truth. Similarly, Paul's comment in Colossians 3:16 virtually necessitates such an understanding: "Let the *word of Christ* dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." What the Colossians sang in their psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs were rich with the message/word about Christ. The songs recorded by the apostle John in the book of Revelation are never Old Testament psalms; they are always new compositions, and sometimes expressly Christological, referring to the slain "Lamb" (Rev. 5:9–10, 12–13; 7:10–12; 19:1–8), and one of which expressly juxtaposes the songs of Moses to those of the Lamb: "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!'" (Rev. 15:3).

Indeed, even secular Roman sources of the period were aware of the Christian practice of singing expressly Christological songs. When Pliny the Younger reported to the emperor Trajan about professing Christians, he examined those accused with infidelity to the emperor carefully, found that many of them had never been Christians, and some only for a time, who then renounced their faith. But among those who had been Christians, Pliny's accusation included this: "However, they assured me that the main of their fault, or of their mistake was this: That they were wont, on a stated day, to meet together before it was light, and to *sing a hymn to Christ, as to a god*, alternately; and to oblige themselves by a sacrament [or oath],

Philippians ii.5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 294–95.

not to do anything that was ill.”¹² Pliny received this testimony from their own mouth, and since, in his report, he was exonerating them, he was not attempting to include in his report anything incriminating. So the testimony is almost certainly authentic.

Conclusion

The evidence throughout the history of revelation is the same: Songs of lament, thanksgiving, or praise are the ongoing response to divine acts and perfections. When God acts in judgment or deliverance, his people reply in lament, thanksgiving, or praise, as befits the situation. The Lord is not only great, but “greatly to be praised” (1 Chron. 16:25; Pss. 48:1; 96:4; 145:3). Each of his great attributes and great acts is to be greatly praised. The notion that his greatest acts—the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of his Son—would be greeted mutely is contrary to the entire pattern of act-and-praise disclosed across biblical history, and is indeed contrary to the evidence of the New Testament. Is the composition of hymns a serious matter that should be taken with all due seriousness and skill? Yes, just as this is true of preaching sermons and composing prayers; but we do the two latter in every service of worship, and there is no reason to believe we are exempt from the same careful composition when it comes to Christian hymns. ©

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¹² Trajan was emperor from AD 98 until his death in 117, and most historians date the letter from Pliny at ca. 110. But, of course, the behavior narrated had been committed many years earlier, so the testimony probably refers to merely the second generation of the church. Already, by the second generation, the Christians confessed to singing hymns to Christ “as to a god.” It is possible, but highly unlikely, that the second generation would have introduced a practice unapproved by the apostolic church.

Servant Work

Volunteers and Your Church: Avoiding Legal Pitfalls

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2014¹

by Christopher W. Shishko

“Things aren’t what they used to be.” Times really do change, and what was common practice years ago may no longer be sufficient to address the realities that face a church today. However, given the right guidance, it may be easier than you think to change the way you have done something in the past.

One topic that you probably will deal with, on a regular basis, is the extent to which your church should look into the backgrounds of its members who volunteer or who work for the church.² This is particularly true when church volunteers will be working with children. This article will attempt to provide readers with ideas on how to develop a policy for conducting background checks on church volunteers. It is being published in tandem with an article that provides a practical perspective from a pastor who has recently implemented such a policy in his church.

The reality today is that bad things can happen, and if they do, it is likely someone will be looking to determine whether your church

behaved reasonably under the circumstances. It is no longer uncommon for large organizations, like some churches, to conduct background checks or some form of due diligence regarding people who will be working with children. For a church, there is an obvious tension between protecting the interests of the church from liability and fostering an environment of community within the congregation. However, depending on the state where your church is located, you may be obligated to comply with certain requirements before allowing volunteers to work with children; or your church’s insurance policy may require that you establish certain procedures to be followed by volunteers.

Before you implement a policy regarding background checks, there are two important questions you should know the answer to: 1) Does my state impose any requirements on my church regarding employees and volunteers? and 2) Does my insurance policy have any requirements regarding my employees and volunteers? The answers will help you in determining whether your church is required to implement certain procedures, or whether you are free to adopt a policy based on what you believe will best protect your church in the event that something does go wrong. However, if there are requirements for your insurance policy, you should be careful to comply to avoid having your insurance company attempt to disclaim coverage to the church if something goes wrong. If your state imposes specific requirements, you should come into compliance as soon as possible.

Once you have decided to establish a policy regarding volunteer/employee background checks, and you have determined whether there are any legal requirements or insurance company-imposed requirements, you may also want to consider the following issues:

1. What is your State’s current legal standard of care for a church or other organization that supervises children temporarily? It is likely the church would be held to the same standard as any other organization in terms of owing a reasonable duty of care to children when it provides supervision, even with volunteers. If there is case law where an organization has been found negli-

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=425&issue_id=96.

2 Although this article is intended to be informative, it is not a substitute for legal counsel. Speak to an attorney about your individual church’s situation if you have questions.

gent because they did not do a background check before allowing someone to care for children, then it is likely your church could be found liable if you do not perform background checks and a volunteer were to do something that harms a child. Basically, in the event of a lawsuit, the question will be whether the church behaved reasonably. Reasonable is not an easily defined term and is shaped by cases within your jurisdiction, but generally, doing nothing is not reasonable. Therefore, when drafting a policy, it will be helpful to know what courts in your state consider to be reasonable.

2. Check with your insurance provider to determine what is covered and what is not. They may not be clear about this, but the last thing you want is to find out that your insurance policy does not cover the actions of volunteers. It would be bad enough if the church was sued for something that a volunteer did, but it would be even worse if there were no insurance to cover the expenses associated with the lawsuit. Work closely with your insurance provider and ask them tough questions. (What if one of our nursery volunteers hurts a child intentionally? What if one of them touches a child inappropriately? Would this be covered? Where does it say that in the insurance contract? What about the same questions for our employees/elders/deacons?) Insurance companies are notorious for selling policies and taking money, but they love to deny coverage when something actually happens. (Who knew that a flood is somehow different than rising water, until Hurricane Sandy?) In short, there is nothing wrong with posing uncomfortable questions to your insurance company because you purchase insurance for the remote possibility that something will go wrong; not because you think something bad will actually happen. Based on input from your insurance company, you may want to ask whether they have any recommendations for what should be included in your policy. They may even have a sample policy for you to adapt for your specific purposes.

3. You may consider having parents sign a waiver for the various services provided by the church. The enforceability of a waiver varies from state to state, so it may not be enforceable.

However, at the very least, it could serve as proof that parents knowingly accepted certain risks (i.e., that children who are playing may ultimately be hurt regardless of the level of supervision and that the church cannot/does not guarantee the child's safety). If you are going to use a waiver for certain activities, it is wise to develop a model form with blanks which can be filled in as needed. You may also want to indicate in your policy when a waiver will be required. Just remember, if you say you will do something in your policy, and you do not do it, it may be used as proof that your church behaved negligently by not following its own policies.

4. You may want to establish a policy governing certain church volunteers (such as nursery volunteers or Bible school teachers). As an example, the policy could require volunteers to avoid having only one person alone with children. It is always smart to have a second set of eyes in any situation because you may need to be able to refute any allegations that something inappropriate took place. It is much harder for someone to claim that something bad happened if there was another person around who can refute the claim. Cameras are also an option. They are not very expensive. While some people feel uncomfortable being recorded, it is definitely one method of protecting a church from false claims, and also may be a deterrent to inappropriate behavior. Again, laws differ from state to state and some states do not allow recording without consent of all parties being videotaped. Most places allow private organizations to videotape without consent from anyone, but sometimes recording audio is a problem, so you should check with an attorney about what your rights are before you implement any type of security camera system.

5. One specific area of concern involves trips to the bathroom. For obvious reasons, it is likely a volunteer may escort a child to the bathroom and assist the child. There is not a single best method of handling this situation because your options are limited to leaving the child alone in the bathroom, having the child in the bathroom with the volunteer, insisting that two people go to the bathroom with the child (probably impractical), or video cameras (almost certainly illegal in a bathroom).

Obviously none of the options comes without risk. You may consider having parents inform you whether a child is independently toilet trained and then establish a policy that children should not be accompanied into the bathroom itself if the child is toilet trained. If children are not toilet trained, then the parents could be called to bring their children to the toilet. In some organizations that routinely deal with children, there are aides who assist children in the bathroom. You can see why in this situation it would be a good idea to be able to show that a background check was done on that person before they were allowed to carry out such duties. Although it may be impractical or too costly to perform background checks on all of the volunteers in the church, you may be able to limit your potential liability by establishing guidelines that reduce the likelihood of something going wrong or limiting the number of volunteers who work with children in such a sensitive setting.

6. Finally, lawsuits are extremely difficult for anyone who has to go through one. They are stressful, expensive, and can destroy relationships. Unfortunately, there is always a trade-off in creating an environment that appears to be overly concerned with protecting the organization versus an overly trusting environment that is ultimately found to be negligent. If you face a lawsuit, the lawyer representing the church will be looking for documentation to prove whatever it is that you believe to be true. The best-case scenario is when an organization can say, “We acted reasonably; here are the documents showing that we checked on everyone before we let them work with us; we established policies on what they can and can’t do; we enforced those policies when there were violations; and we did not allow those volunteers to continue working with the church because they failed to follow our policies.” Ultimately, you want to be able to demonstrate that, while the church cannot guarantee a child’s safety (nobody can), you took reasonable steps to protect the child from harm.

In closing, consider what Theodore Roosevelt once said: “In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you

can do is nothing.”³ This advice rings true for almost every circumstance. When dealing with a situation in which your church faces potential liability, doing nothing may prove the worst decision of all. Instead, being proactive by exploring the issue with an eye toward a reasonable solution, based on accurate information, is the best course of action. This can be difficult, and your church members may resist change. However, if you think that saying “but we have always done it this way” will protect you when something goes wrong, you should think again.

Now, more than ever, courts are considering whether your actions were reasonable based on today’s standards, not what was acceptable many years ago. While you may not want to change the way you have done things in the past, and you think that change will upset your congregation, you should consider the alternative of being unprepared for the worst. It will certainly be time well spent in the event something does go wrong. ©

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³ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/theodorero403358.html>.

Improving Upon the Status Quo: Child Safety

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by Jonathan W. Shishko

I believe that pastors and sessions often resort to saying things like “we have always done it this way,” neither because they think the status quo is sufficient nor because they think they are already doing things in the best way possible. The reality is that pastors and sessions are so loaded with pastoral work and church administration that changing the status quo feels like an insurmountable additional work load. Background checks on everybody that works with children? More policies, procedures, and protocols? Asking more of our already strained group of volunteers? Spending more time researching insurance policies, on the phone with insurance agents, and looking into the law of the land? Spending more money on insurance and legal counsel? Oh my. “We have always done things this way,” and “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”

As a church-planting evangelist in New York City, I certainly understand this way of thinking. However, it was the status quo that led to a recent article in the *New York Times* entitled “Vatican Tells of 848 Priests Ousted in Decade.” In this article, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, a Vatican representative, said that 848 priests were dismissed between 2004 and 2013 and that another 2,572 members of the clergy had been disciplined for sexual abuse. Part of their discipline involved “putting children beyond their reach.”²

One can only imagine how much work the Roman Catholic Church had to do to accomplish this feat. And yet, the feat itself is far beyond em-

barrassing. Instead of being proactive, the Catholic Church is now forced to publicize their reactivity. Why? Because, for too long, the Catholic Church went with the status quo, the way they had always done things.

With this horrendous contribution to the ecclesiastical climate, as ordained servants, we must make the protection of Christ’s sheep, and especially the protection of Christ’s children, a top priority. Among all the other things going on, we must be proactive about child safety in the church.

The ethos of Christopher W. Shishko’s article “Volunteers and Your Church: Avoiding Legal Pitfalls” is that proactively doing something is far better than doing nothing. Simply continuing with the status quo can be negligence. Assessing the system in place and working to improve upon it is proactive due diligence. I am writing to contend that many of the ideas in the aforementioned article are not only easy to investigate, but also easy to implement.

At Reformation Presbyterian Church, where I am an evangelist, our proactive due diligence regarding child safety began at an overseeing session meeting. As is our practice, we discussed the church’s financial situation. As one item pertained to the finances, we discussed the amount we were paying for liability insurance. We collectively decided that, due to the church’s current size, we absolutely needed to pay for higher coverage. This led to interaction with our insurance company. This engagement was tremendously informative and helpful on many levels. Our insurance company made one thing very clear: we could continue without running background checks on the volunteers who worked with children, but we would pay a lot more money for a lot less coverage—all while continuing to set ourselves up for the possibility of a terrible lawsuit.

Our course of action became clear. We decided that no matter how difficult it would be, we would run background checks on everyone at the church who would ever work with the children. At the time, this was a daunting task for two reasons. The first reason was the administrative and financial task. How could we afford, run, and maintain

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=426&issue_id=96.

2 Nick Cummings-Bruce, “Vatican Tells of 848 Priests Ousted in Decade,” *New York Times*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/07/world/europe/vatican-tells-of-848-priests-ousted-in-last-decade.html>.

background checks on the twenty-four nursery workers, Sunday school teachers, and other sitters who regularly contributed at Reformation? The second reason was the public side. Volunteers, by definition, give their time and abilities to a certain task. As a church plant, we are not only grateful for this, but we are dependent upon it! How would the congregation (one third of which serve as volunteers in working with the children) receive this new requirement?

Thankfully, the anxiety is always greatest in the planning stage. Soon after committing to make this change, we discovered that there are fantastic services that address this particular issue. We decided to go with protectmyministry.com. The cost is minimal and the service is paperless. All we had to do was make a list of Reformation's active volunteers, and ask those volunteers to fill out a simple consent form. Before distributing the consent forms, we made it the official Reformation policy: before anyone worked with children at Reformation, he or she needed to be a church member who had consented to a background check.

The next step was informing the congregation and distributing the consent forms. As a session, we were nervous about this step. We really didn't know how the congregation would receive the new policy. We held a congregational meeting, and simply summarized our thinking on the subject to the congregation. Fully expecting at least some objection, we were pleasantly surprised by a congregation that was fully on board with the new procedure! The various comments we did receive reflected how thankful they were to see the church proactively, tangibly, and reasonably addressing the issue of child safety. The congregation appreciated that we were proactively performing due diligence.

Since that meeting, things have been relatively easy. Some people were initially hesitant to give the information necessary to run the background check. That objection is easily overcome by reminding people that they do not have to volunteer, but that, if they do, we must run a background check for them, in order to provide the safest possible environment for our children. This explanation overcame all objections. Right now, we have

a robust and wonderful team of twenty-four active volunteers. Their background checks have all been run and are currently on file.

To continue improving upon the status quo, we have not stopped thinking about child safety. In addressing the issue of volunteers and kids needing to use the bathroom, we plan to work with our volunteers to understand that the nursery is really for kids under the age of two. They are usually not potty-trained, which means that taking kids to the bathroom is not a very likely event. We most likely will work to make a policy that potty-trained children are not permitted in the nursery. Some exceptions to this rule may be made; but when they are, and a child needs to use the bathroom, their parents will be retrieved to take their own children to the bathroom.

We have a robust Kidz Club at Reformation (meetup.com/Kidz-Club). Kidz Club events are held monthly, and are focused on kids ages two to twelve. To provide safety at these events, we insist that at least one parent or caretaker attend along with the Kidz Club member. In addition, we host these events in public places (zoos, bowling alleys, museums, etc., instead of in private residences). No one is allowed to come and simply drop their kids off. The parents or caretakers must stay. While this may sound rigid, it is easily communicated in a gracious way. The back of every Kidz Club invitation card reads:

In order to build a safe community, Kidz Club events are never "drop off your kids and leave." They are always "come and stay," so parents, volunteers, and other guests are serving and fellowshiping with one another while the kids are also there, enjoying the time organized for them.

In addition to attorneys and insurance agents, there are other great resources from which to learn. In the future, we intend to glean from other organizations facing similar safety concerns. Teachers, day care professionals, other kid-based ministries, and especially, other churches, can all serve as terrific places to learn what works. Ask around. See what other organizations use. Think

outside the box. Ask questions. Are there computer programs we should use to monitor the kids and the supervisors? Is there a place for audio/visual surveillance? What policies could we easily implement that would immediately reduce risk?

If you don't have time, appoint someone within the congregation to research the issue and counsel the session. Just don't fall into the trap of setting yourself and the church up for disaster, by, contenting yourself with the status quo. Rather remember: "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord" (Ps. 127:3). Let's do what we can to protect that wonderful God-given heritage! ☺

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✦ Servant Training

If You Are a Deacon

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by Nathan Trice

If you are a deacon in Christ's church, you have been called by God to a high office indeed. You serve a vital role in protecting the church's primary calling of the ministry of the Word. You represent to the church our God's deep concern for the poor among his people, and particularly our Savior's own compassion toward the poor in his earthly ministry. And you have an opportunity to lead the church of Christ in adorning her witness to the world with deeds of mercy to accompany words of gospel truth.

This article seeks to refresh the perspectives of deacons regarding the true significance of their office as the Lord of the church has designed it. It is my hope that it will elevate in your mind, if you are a deacon, a sense of the tremendous importance of diaconal ministry in the church, as well as enlarge your insight into the heart of compassion of our Lord, to whom this office and its ministry is so important.

The Origin of Your Office

If you are a deacon, you should understand well the significance of Acts 6 to your office. According to the traditional interpretation of the church, dating back to the days of the church fathers, this is that portion of the biblical account in which Christ institutes the office of deacon

through his apostles.

The background to the institution of the diaconate involved the church leaders' struggle with what we sometimes call "a good problem to have." As evidence of the recent outpouring of the Spirit upon his church, and the resulting overflow of the love for the brethren that was the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples (John 13:35), there had been a remarkable outpouring of material generosity toward the poor within the Christian community. Earlier, in Acts 4:34–35, we are told:

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

No doubt the wise and equitable distribution of these funds for the poor weighed heavily upon the apostolic leadership, especially in light of the remarkable growth of the church in these days, and their primary concern for evangelism and discipleship. This burden of responsibility reached the breaking point in the account of Acts 6:1–7, triggered by a controversy in the church over the distribution of funds for the poor. The Greek-speaking members of the church in Jerusalem were convinced that their widows were being slighted in the distributions, and the indignation that accompanied this conviction threatened the peace of the church. The apostles apparently were convinced that at least part of this problem concerned their having too many items to oversee effectively. In a meeting of the whole church, the apostles say (vv. 2b–4):

It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

The Greek word translated "serve" in verse 2 is the verb form of the word *διάκονος* (*diakonos*), from which we get our word "deacon." It is the

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=409&issue_id=93.

same word that is used elsewhere to describe a minister of the gospel as a “servant of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 4:6). It is also a word that Jesus used to describe his own kind of ministry: “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). However, ever since the apostles in Acts called for men to relieve them of the responsibility of “serving tables” (a reference to money tables, most likely: the mechanism for receiving and distributing funds for the poor), the word “deacon” (servant) has come to have a more specialized reference to a certain officer in the church. The apostle Paul uses it that way in Philippians 1:1:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at
Philippi, with the overseers [or elders] and
deacons [διακόνους, *diakonois*]: Grace to you
and peace from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ.

All members of the church are “servants” in a broader sense, but there are certain “servants” who are elected by the congregation and ordained by the apostles (or elders) to serve with authority.

Because the responsibilities of the new office would entail difficult decisions, interactions with members in delicate situations, and even the resolution of serious conflicts, the right men for this job needed to be “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (v. 3). In that first deacon nomination and election process, seven such men were identified by the congregation, and the first deacon ordination in Christ’s church was held: “These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them” (v. 6). The office of deacon was now in place.

The Reason for Your Office (Broadly)

If you are a deacon, you also need to recognize what is the most basic reason for your office. Acts 6 makes clear that the broadest reason for having deacons is to preserve and protect the church’s primary calling of the ministry of the Word and prayer.

Recall that, before the first deacons were

installed into office, the apostles were carrying the full burden of leadership in the church, including the administration of mercy ministry funds. In Presbyterianism, the calling and office of apostle is viewed as having ceased, and it is now elders along with the minister who have the highest authority in the local church and the final responsibility for all the ministries therein. Thus, the same partnership in ministry that was created in Acts 6 between the apostles and deacons should continue today between elders and deacons. Though all of the affairs of the local church are under the ultimate oversight of the elders (the word “overseer” is interchangeable in the New Testament with “elder”), there are many important concerns of leadership that, in a congregation of any size, inevitably would divert them from what are their two most crucial tasks: ministering the Word both publicly and privately, and interceding in prayer with and for the members of the church. Thus, potentially any leadership concerns that go beyond these two most vital ones may, and often should be, delegated to deacons for their oversight.

For this reason, the scope of diaconal duties is very broad in our churches. This is in keeping with the broader principle of delegation established in Acts 6, in which a specific task was given to the deacons to preserve certain priorities in the apostles (elders today). Thus, not only the church’s funds designated for the relief of the poor, but the funds of the church as a whole may be delegated to the diaconate for oversight. The many decisions that arise regarding property ownership and maintenance, the logistics of facility use, and so on can be referred by the elders to the deacons. Elders may certainly retain direct oversight of these areas if necessary, and they always are subject to the review of elders. However, it will often be wise, where qualified men may be found, for the elders to delegate many of these responsibilities of leadership to deacons. As assistants to the elders, the deacons serve an indispensable role: that of enabling the focus of the elders to remain on the spiritual lives of the saints.

Of course, there are many forms of service in the life of the church that should be shared by

all church members, ordained and not. Deacons are not to be “the servants” of the church in the sense that they personally do everything. They are servant-leaders in the church, who on the one hand have hearts willing to do the most menial of tasks for the sake of the body, yet who also possess the authority to direct and oversee the whole church’s involvement in such tasks. The “deacon as church custodian” stereotype is shown for its folly by the high spiritual qualifications required by Scripture for deacons. With the exception of being “able to teach” (the ministry of the Word), the personal qualities prerequisite for the office of deacon are essentially the same as those required for elders (see 1 Tim. 3:1–13). The reason for this is that the office of deacon is one of leadership and authority in the church. Their service, then, should include enlisting the broader congregation in the fulfillment of tasks fitting for every Christian to be involved with.

The Reason for Your Office (Particularly)

But if you are a deacon, you also need to be aware of what is the more particular reason for your office: one that most exhibits the glory of your office and the goodness of the one who ordained it. Acts 6 also attaches to the office of deacon in a special way the calling of the church to minister to the physical and temporal needs of the poor: what is often called “mercy ministry.”

The giving impulse of the early Christians to meet each other’s material needs grew out of a profound awareness of one of the gospel’s implications: it is an expression of a holistic love on the part of God; it aims at the ultimate well-being of the whole person, body and soul. This is part of the reason that Jesus’s earthly ministry consisted not only in a ministry of teaching, but also a ministry of healing. The latter, in addition to providing attestation of his true identity as the Son of God, was also an expression of his compassion for sinners who were suffering the physical consequences of sin. It also pointed to the ultimate restoration that his kingdom would bring: the end of all human deprivation, spiritual and material, for those who

put their faith in Christ. The king was revealed as one who had compassion and brought relief to sinners, both body and soul. And those who were made conformed to his image by the Spirit had an instinctive urge to meet both kinds of needs in others. As the widows in the church at Jerusalem found, life within the redeemed community was one in which relief from both spiritual and temporal woes could be found.

This mercy ministry itself has a broad application. The form of mercy ministry found in the book of Acts was focused upon widows, those in the congregation who typically would have faced the most pressing needs. But the legitimate objects of such ministry, by extension, would include those within the church who, by reasons of health, disability, old age, or other providential circumstances, find themselves lacking basic necessities of life. Likewise, the needs felt by the widows of the early church were met primarily by means of the monetary gifts of the church. Yet, there are many temporal needs within the Christ’s body that are best or only met by gifts of time and effort. From this we can deduce that the mercy ministry labors of the deacons should go far beyond mere check-writing and fund management. The temporal and material needs of the body are the special concern of their office, and their calling extends to all manner of service on behalf of the needy that addresses those concerns. Whereas one member, through financial hardship, may find himself in need of help purchasing a vehicle, another member, through age or disability, may find herself in need of transportation. Both are the proper concern of the diaconate. Again, one may need help with a mortgage payment; another may need help drafting a family budget: both are the proper concern of the diaconate. And again, the deacon serves the church best when he seeks to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of the whole congregation to minister to the needy in their midst.

Thus, the office of deacon represents a most fitting and essential complement to the office of elder in the church: together they represent the “two hands” of the church’s ministry. Whereas one has its primary expression in a ministry of Word,

the other has its primary expression in a ministry of deed. According to 1 Peter 4:10–11, these are the two broad categories of gifts that the whole church partakes of—speaking gifts and serving gifts:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

It is, thus, fitting that these two kinds of gifts be epitomized in the men that serve in the two offices of elder and deacon. And it becomes clearer why the mercy ministry of the church is a necessary complement to the gospel ministry. Without genuine compassion for the material needs of our brothers and sisters, our assurances of love for them will sound hollow (James 2:15–16). The calling of the deacons is to lead the church in such a way as to ensure that its love is not in word or talk only, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17–18). This is not to displace the ministry of the Word as the primary calling of the church. It is rather to strengthen it and to render it more credible and effective.

The Significance of Your Office

If you are a deacon, therefore, the special calling of your office happens to be a reflection of one of the major biblical themes: our God has a special concern for the poor. This is not something revealed for the first time in New Testament church polity. Rather, the institution of the diaconate is the fulfillment of a long-standing record of God’s heart for the poor.

For example, the call for compassion for the poor is written large in Moses’ instructions to Israel. The Israelites’ own deliverance by Yahweh from poverty in Egypt was to shape their responses to the poor within their own communities. Since they themselves as a people had been redeemed from poverty, they were told by God in Deuteronomy 15:11, “You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.” Just as God had demonstrated a heart for the

poor in singling out Israel among all the greater nations of the world, so his people were to have their own heart for the poor in their midst. And legislation within the Mosaic law included provisions and protections for the poor, the enforcement of which was a precursor to the diaconal ministry of the new covenant community (Exod. 22–23; Lev. 19, 25; Deut. 15, 24). When the apostle Paul committed himself so zealously to an offering for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8–9), he was acting on an ancient impulse within the law itself.

Likewise, warnings are given against taking advantage of the weakness of the poor in the wisdom literature of Israel. The reason? God identifies with the poor in a special way: what is done to the poor he counts as done to him: “Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him” (Prov. 14:31). Likewise, the poor who are abused will find a dreadful defender in God himself: “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the LORD will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them” (Prov. 22:22). God’s people were to recognize that how they treated the poor had a direct correspondence to their own relationship with God: a theme which would be reinforced in the New Testament by our Lord. Jesus made this clear when he said of ministry to the poor among his disciples: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). God’s jealousy for the poor is further underscored in a grim way as it forms a major rationale for his wrath against his people in the days of the prophets. Isaiah’s opening words of rebuke for the guilty nation single out its crimes against the poor: “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (1:16–17).

This is a message brought by many of the prophets of old; God’s anger against his people is stirred by their neglecting the needs of the poor, and their actual abuse of that portion of the covenant community of which God was so mindful.

The repentance and reformation that God calls for is repeatedly expressed in terms of mercy and justice toward the poor:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa. 58: 6–7)

This emphasis on mercy ministry as at the heart of true religion finds its echo in various places in the New Testament, particularly in the well-known words of James, the brother of Jesus: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1: 27). The prophets and the apostles are one in underscoring—for all God’s people—how a heart for the poor is indispensable to a heart after God’s own heart.

Certainly the most spectacular way that the whole of Scripture underscores the significance of the work of deacons is in its casting of the work of the Messiah in “diaconal” terms. What will be the nature of the Messiah’s rule? Isaiah writes:

But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. (11:4)

Who, consequently, will find the coming of the kingdom of the Messiah “good news”? We are told in Isaiah 29:19, “The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.” What will be this Messiah’s sense of mission? Isaiah depicts the coming anointed one as saying: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (61:1). This is a text which Jesus claimed to be fulfilling in his life and ministry (Luke 4:18). All of this emphasis upon the coming of Christ as a ministry to the poor

explains those opening words of our Lord’s most famous sermon: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, compare with Luke 6:20). It also further illuminates the reason Jesus devoted the largest part of his public ministry to the relatively poorer region of Galilee rather than Judea.

Of course, none of this biblical data suggests that God’s favor rests in an unqualified way upon men of material neediness. The blessings of the gospel come to those who have suffered deprivation and oppression in this life *and* who in their need look to the Lord for help. It is those who embrace the gospel by faith who will inherit the kingdom of heaven. But our Lord’s prioritizing of ministry to the poor and his relative pessimism about the prospects of gospel success with the rich (Matt. 19:23–24; Luke 6:24) highlight the important place that ministry to the poor should have in the New Testament church. And it underscores the significance of that office which has a particular concern for this kind of ministry.

The Opportunity of Your Office

Finally, then, if you are a deacon, you should be keenly aware of the opportunity that comes with your office: the opportunity to adorn the gospel that the church offers to the world. It is only through the ministry of the gospel that any sinner can find relief from the eternal consequences of sin, and this must remain the central and primary work of the church. But deacons are in a position to make that message of divine love more winsome and credible to the world by leading the church in deeds of mercy.

This, of course, reflects a certain perspective on the question of whether the diaconal ministry of the church should extend to the world. Should diaconal ministry work only in concert with the ministry of the Word within the congregation (edification), or does it have a place as well complementing the ministry of the Word to the world (evangelism)? It is certainly true that the primary focus of diaconal ministry within the biblical record is on the covenant community. A special

priority is given to providing aid to poor “brothers,” or fellow Hebrews, in the Old Testament legislation (Deut. 15:11–12). The widows whom Paul refers to as being eligible for ongoing diaconal support are obviously members of the church (1 Tim. 5:3–16), as were the widows in Acts 6. And the special offering for the poor that Paul takes among the churches is for the “saints in Jerusalem” (Acts 11: 29; Rom. 15: 26; 2 Cor. 8). All this is to be expected since diaconal ministry is a vital component of the communion of the saints: it is a benefit of the unique bond of love that Christ has formed by his saving union with his church. Serving one another in love (Gal. 5:13), as well as speaking the truth to one another in love (Eph. 4:15), are both vital expressions of the unity of the Spirit. Just as the priority of the ministry of the Word each Lord’s Day is for the assembled people of God, so also the priority of the diaconal funds is for the needs of that covenant community. The church is the primary object of attention for both elders and deacons.

But it is precisely this parallel to the ministry of the Word that points to the propriety, and indeed the vital importance, of a diaconal ministry to the world. If the ministry of the Word is not intended by Christ to be exclusively for the benefit of the church, it would be surprising to find the ministry of deed restricted by Scripture for the sole benefit of the church. Even in the Mosaic law, the resources of the covenant community were to be shared with the sojourner and stranger (Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19–21; 26:11–13). This was because the Israelites themselves knew what it was like to be sojourners, and knew that God had a special concern for sojourners along with the fatherless and widows (Deut. 10:18–19). Likewise, we do not find the apostles limiting the ministry of deed to the church. Rather, we see the apostle Paul exhorting the churches in this way: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

This principle seems to embody perfectly both the scope and priority of all the church’s ministry: it is first for the household of faith, but it is also to

overflow intentionally into the lives of all that we meet as we go into the world. Indeed, is this not the broad trajectory of Jesus’s own ministry? He came with a ministry of Word and deed to the covenant community of Israel, prioritizing a ministry to them (though even then not excluding entirely those outside; see for example Mark 7:24–30). However, by the time of his resurrection proclamation (also known as the Great Commission, Matt. 28:18–20), we find him calling for this ministry to be carried by his disciples to all the nations. And again, what was the template of ministry that he had provided and was now to go to all the world? It was a ministry of Word *and* deed. The ministry of the Word had the clear priority, but Christ’s labors to meet material needs also clearly “adorned” the gospel of the kingdom that he preached. This is how deacons today can see their own opportunity in the church’s outward mission: to adorn the church’s proclamation of the gospel.

Diaconal ministry “adorns the gospel” by providing the tangible evidence of our true motives in preaching the gospel: love for the lost. If verbal expressions of love apart from material assistance can sound hollow to our own brothers and sisters in the church (James 2:15–16), surely this is just as possible—if not more so—in our ministry to the world. The forgiveness of sins and a new life in Christ are what men and women fundamentally need, and all temporal needs are trivial in comparison. Yet a compassionate response to men’s temporal needs can encourage an openness of heart to the gospel’s provision for their deeper needs. Indeed, this seemed to be our Lord’s perspective on ministry as he provided food for both body and soul to the multitudes, all the while aware that many initially would be drawn more to one than the other (John 6:26–27). For this reason, in the OPC we send to the mission field both missionaries and missionary deacons, theological instructors as well as medical doctors. Indeed, in certain circumstances the ministry of the Word is virtually unintelligible apart from a ministry of deed, which is why the OPC also has a mechanism for providing disaster response. The work of diaconal ministry alongside gospel ministry keeps the holistic nature of God’s

love for man in clear view. And the former often opens doors of opportunity for the latter. People are more inclined to listen to those who are undeniably and tangibly loving them.

In sum, there is a kingdom-building component to the work of the diaconate, along with a covenant-nurturing component. Deacons have an opportunity to provide leadership to the church in her mercy ministry to those outside her doors, always with a view to creating avenues of access for the gospel itself. Just as elders should see themselves as having an opportunity unique to their office to lead the church in evangelism and discipleship of the lost, deacons should see themselves with a similar opportunity in ministries of mercy. Not only can they explore and pursue ministries in the community and beyond that wisely and compassionately address material needs in a Christian context, but they can promote involvement in such ministries within the congregation. Ministries of service are, in fact, accessible to many in a typical congregation who would be otherwise intimidated by pure evangelistic work. Often it is in the context of ordinary servanthood, and the human connection that it provides, that ordinary Christians find the courage to give a clear testimony to Christ and the gospel. Deed ministry opens doors for Word ministry in the heart of the giver as well as the receiver. Deacons have a unique opportunity, therefore, to lead the congregation in an outward orientation toward the needs of the lost. And few things are more needful for us as leaders in the Presbyterian tradition today.

You, a Deacon!

So if you are a deacon, you have a calling that is utterly essential to the church's mission to be a Christlike community. Without your service in support of the elders, the primary calling of the church—the ministry of the Word and prayer—is threatened. And without your service alongside the elders, the ministry of the Word, both within and without the church, is left unadorned with the compassion of Christ. If you are a deacon, may a heightened sense of the tremendous importance of

your office lead you to a fuller commitment to the responsibilities and opportunities that it entails. For it is specifically to deacons that the apostle Paul issues this promise of reward: “For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). ©

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On Fasting, Death, and Joy: Reflections on My Upcoming Ordination

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by Hugh Lynn

To me, fasting has always seemed like a mechanical ritual. When church leaders have talked about fasting and stated that it is a sanctioned practice in the Bible, I have always wondered, Should I fast? What is it for? When is it appropriate?

Many people will be quick to point out that Jesus says in Matthew 6:16, “*When* you fast . . .,” not “*if* you fast.” So fasting is permissible. But does that mean I should fast?

There is clearly a fast that is not beneficial to perform. In Isaiah 58:1–5, God declares that the house of Jacob has transgressed in their fast. So maybe I shouldn't fast.

But how do I know? What is fasting for?

I think a clue can be found in Matthew

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=410&issue_id=93.

9:14–17. In verse 14, the disciples of John ask Jesus, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus’s reply is, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?”

Jesus is commenting that fasting is not appropriate all the time. When there is a celebration, when there is joy, this is not the time for fasting. But Jesus goes on to say, “The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” Fasting is a time for mourning.

Jesus gives metaphors for fasting. He says that only shrunk cloth can be used to patch an old garment. Also that new wine is put in new wineskins. The reason is clear. If unshrunk cloth is used on an old garment it will shrink in time and further damage the garment. If new wine is put in old wineskins, the fermentation process will burst the old wineskins, because they have lost their elasticity.

So will fasting destroy a person if they attempt to do it when they should be rejoicing? Fasting is for times of mourning.

When then is an appropriate time for mourning and fasting?

What do the fasts in the Bible look like?

Moses is the first person that I remember fasting in the Bible. After the incident with the golden calves, Exodus 33 and 34 recount the story of God wanting to send the people to the Promised Land without his presence. Moses interceded and asked to see the glory of God. God told Moses that no man can see his glory and live. God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him with his hand. Then God took away his hand and Moses saw God’s back. Then Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights while God gave him the law.

The Bible includes accounts of fasts by David. One of these is found in 2 Samuel 1. David received news of the deaths of King Saul and Jonathan. In verses 11 and 12 it says, “Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son.”

Another one of David’s fasts is recorded in 2 Samuel 12. David’s infidelity with Bathsheba leads to the birth of a child. The Lord sent a deathly sickness to this child. Verse 16 says, “David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.”

In 1 Kings 19, the story of Elijah’s fast is recounted. After killing the prophets of Baal, Jezebel desired to kill Elijah. So he flees, loses heart, and asks God for death. Elijah eats two meals and then goes on a fast for forty days and forty nights as he travels to the mountain of God. When at the mountain of God, God asks what Elijah is doing there. Elijah answers:

I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left and they seek my life, to take it away. (1 Kings 19:14)

Esther called for a fast when she risked her life to go before the king when not summoned (Est. 4:16). And it was not only her life that was at risk. All of the Jews in the Persian Empire were in deathly peril.

In Daniel, there is the story of a gentile king, Darius, who unwittingly made a law that condemned Daniel to death. When the sentence of being cast into a den of lions was executed, Darius fasted all night because of Daniel (Dan. 6:18).

And what about our Lord? Jesus himself fasted, as recorded in Scripture. Matthew 3:13–17 tells the story of Jesus’s baptism. Then, in chapter 4:1–11, Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. Then the tempter came to Jesus and tempted him with life. In verse 3, Jesus was tempted to cling to life by commanding stones to become bread. In verse 6, Jesus was tempted to live by being protected by angels. In verse 9, Jesus was tempted to live life to the fullest by receiving all the kingdoms of the world, if only he would worship the devil. But Paul says in Romans 6:3 that those “who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.”

In my study of fasting in the Bible, one thing stood out to make fasting appropriate—death.

Moses comes close to seeing the face of God, which no man can see and live. David fasts after the death of Saul and Jonathan. He also fasts when his child approaches death. Elijah, when fleeing for his life and even desiring death, fasts. Esther fasts when she faces death. King Darius fasts when Daniel is facing death. And even death is not far away during Jesus’s fast. For his future death must have been in his mind after his baptism.

So, if I am to fast, who died? Who is dying? Who will die?

Well, me.

If I am going to perform the duties of a deacon, then I must die. The list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 is a list that I will not live up to. I will not love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I will not love my neighbor as myself.

For me to do so, I must die. Eventually, my body will die, and by God’s grace and mercy I will love him more than anything, and I will not love others less than I love myself. But until then, I have to die to my idolatries. I have to die to my worship of myself.

So I fast, because I know dying is hard. Dying hurts. Dying brings sorrow. I fast because this task set before me will kill me.

But with Jesus, there is hope. With Jesus, death is a paradox and results in life! With Jesus, death is not the end. When we die, there is Jesus’s life in us! Paul states it beautifully in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

And that is a reason to end the fast and have great, great joy. ☺

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✦ Servant History

What to Think of the New Pope

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by Darryl G. Hart and John R. Muether

Introduction

Papal watching has been a popular spectator sport among American evangelicals for thirty-five years now. In 1978, when the 455-year Italian monopoly was broken by a Polish priest, Karol Józef Wojtyła, John Paul II, who became an instant celebrity, Protestants began to warm in their attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church. The thaw continued when the respected biblical scholar Joseph Ratzinger succeeded John Paul II in a 2005 election that overcame rivals from the liberal wing of the church. Now the word on his successor, the first non-European Pope since the eighth century, is that if you liked John Paul II and Benedict XVI, you are going to love Francis.

What's not to love about this humble priest from Buenos Aires? We are not sure whether to classify him as a liberal or a traditionalist, and his Jesuit background may not serve to clarify matters. But under his leadership, the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires was decidedly evangelical-friendly, easing long-standing tensions especially between Roman Catholics and charismatics. And this pope can preach—in fact, he does preach, and that daily, we are told; sermons, moreover, that are Scripture-saturated and Christ-centered.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=399&issue_id=91.

With Francis, it's not all talk. If his predecessors maintained the trappings of a haughty and inaccessible Roman Catholicism, Francis is signaling a solidarity with the poor in a lifestyle that seems to be a clear break from the past. Shortly after his election last spring, Francis conducted a Maundy Thursday service in a prison, washing the feet of several prisoners, including a Muslim woman's. His antipapal practices, including modest apparel, humble living conditions, and use of public transportation, are rendering him more populist than John Paul II, and he resonates even more strongly with the young. In short, Francis "gets it" in ways that eluded Benedict and even John Paul II.

Indeed *Roman Catholicism* is sounding like an anachronistic phrase. Months before Francis took office, George Weigel suggested that we are witnessing the dawn of a new *evangelical* Catholicism. Weigel could scarcely have imagined a better torch-bearer for his vision for the church. With Francis, we are far removed from the clutches of Rome and have broken into leadership from the new world and the global south. Evangelization and conversion are priorities in this magisterium that promises to heal the deep wounds of the church and the turmoil since Vatican II.

Protestants have been reluctant to take issue with assessments like these. Last November, when Sarah Palin voiced her concern over the liberal sounding rhetoric of Francis, she apologized in short order for rushing to judgment against this "sincere and faithful shepherd" of the church. Instead she blamed a more reliable villain—the media.

But the best-in-evangelical-fawning award goes to Timothy George,² who wrote in *Christianity Today* that, for evangelicals, the new Pope is "our Francis." His "Christ-like rhetoric" is more widely accepted than that of any of his predecessors. Whatever doctrinal or moral continuity he represents is second to his profound pastoral instincts. His "servant leadership" is precisely what has con-

2 Timothy George, "Our Francis, Too," [posted 6/4/2013 8:30 AM] <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/our-francis-too.html>.

nected Francis to our cynical age. “He is breaking the rules in the right places: where they shouldn’t exist.”

Is this truly the dawn of an era of “evangelical Catholicism”? As much as Francis promises to be a pope for the twenty-first century, there are considerations from the past that still haunt the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Here are three that especially confront the new Pope.

Three Considerations

The first concerns Francis’s appropriation of the conciliar impulse that the Second Vatican Council had tapped. Ever since the fifteenth century, popes have been bashful about calling church councils. The reason owes mainly to the papal crisis of the fourteenth century, when the Roman Catholic Church experienced its so-called Western Schism. Between 1378 and 1417, the papacy had at least two rival claimants to the papal office, one located in Rome, the other in Avignon. When cardinals sought to end the crisis by electing a suitable pope, they wound up with five years (1409–1414) when the Roman Catholic hierarchy had three rival popes. To break the stalemate, the Council of Constance sorted through the rival popes and elected the legitimate successor to the See of Rome, Martin V. To do this, the council’s bishops claimed for councils an authority higher than the pope’s. Conciliarism was a prominent theme of late medieval reformers—that is, the idea that a better way to oversee the church was by a body of bishops than by the rule of a monarchical papacy. The Council of Constance also called for a regular convening of bishops—every ten years, much like the Church of England’s Lambeth Conference, which gathers every decade. But Martin V and his successors never reconvened the council of bishops. It fell to Martin Luther, in his appeal to the German nobility, to call for a council to reform the Western church. It also took John Calvin to propose Presbyterianism—a form of church government that would rely on church councils or assemblies.

Of course, Paul III convened a council in

1545—the Council of Trent—to respond to the challenges made by Protestants. Pope Paul was ambivalent, since he wanted to repudiate Luther and other Protestants, but Charles V, the emperor, hoped for reconciliation between Protestants and Rome. The awkward nature of Trent meant that participation by bishops was weak. Only thirty-one were present for the opening session. The council met on and off for almost twenty years and only swelled to 270 bishops by the end. Four popes held office during the Council, and none of them attended. Instead, they orchestrated the proceedings through legates. Some bishops believed the papacy placed restrictions on open discussion. Even though papal supremacy was a major Protestant objection to Rome, Trent delicately avoided discussion of the contested matter of papal or conciliar authority.

From 1563 until 1870, the Roman Catholic Church never witnessed another council. (To put this in some perspective, the national synod of the Dutch Reformed churches did not convene after the Synod of Dort for two centuries: 1618–1818.) But at the First Vatican Council, the chief item of business was to underscore papal authority and supremacy, and the bishops did so by making papal infallibility a matter of church dogma. The specific context was a Europe in which political revolutions, like the one in France in 1789 or calls for democratic reform in 1848, challenged the pope’s temporal and spiritual authority. In reaction, the First Vatican Council highlighted papal supremacy: “We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses ... that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.”

But when John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the mood in the church at large was less about how to resist changes in European society than about how the church needed

to embrace and affirm the contemporary world. Along with this transformation were the Second Vatican Council's explicit calls for a more conciliar arrangement between the Bishop of Rome and the church's bishops. The word used to describe this aspect of church life was "collegial." The Second Vatican Council described the pope and the bishops as being "joined together," and in communion "with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace, and also the councils assembled together, in which more profound issues were settled in common, the opinion of the many having been prudently considered." These were signs of the "collegial character" of the episcopate and of the "hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body." At the same time, the Council was quick to affirm the pope's primacy: "The college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head." The reason was that the "pope's power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact."³ In effect, the Second Vatican Council wanted to involve the bishops and the laity in church life but could not challenge the standard of papal supremacy.

What ensued after the Second Vatican Council was dramatic. Traditionalists complained that everyone did what was right in his own eyes. For that reason, John Paul II and Benedict XVI tried to correct some of the excesses that developed after Vatican II by resurrecting the teaching office of the papacy and by restoring coherence with the liturgy and church discipline. But Pope Francis's initial moves suggest that he is following the conciliar spirit that animated Vatican II by abandoning a model of pope as monarch over the church. Some reporters have commented that unlike Benedict XVI who preferred a "smaller, doctrinally purer church," Francis stresses the Vatican II notion of

3 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

"the church as the people of God." The pope also has signaled an interest in promoting a more conciliar approach to day-to-day affairs. He has formed the so-called Council of Eight, a group of cardinals who will assist in reorganizing of the Vatican bureaucracy and, in Francis's own words, "help me with governance of the universal church."⁴ These tendencies dovetail with Francis's "common man" style and his refusal to use the privileged trappings of the papacy. What this means for the Roman Catholic Church in the long run is impossible to tell, but it does suggest that the spirit of Vatican II is alive and possibly well.

A second consideration for evaluating Francis is his attitude toward the doctrinal and disciplinary ambiguity that Vatican II introduced. Prior to 1960, papal teaching had stressed not only the supremacy of the papal office, but also the danger of departing from Rome's doctrinal formulations. In reaction to the social and political forces that disrupted nineteenth-century Europe, Pius IX issued a "Syllabus of Errors" which condemned all modern developments that threatened the church. Canon 80 summarized the tenor of the syllabus: it condemned the idea that "the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization." This opposition to modern life led later popes to issue sharp condemnations of liberalism in society and the church. Leo XIII, for instance, in 1898 issued an encyclical that judged Americanism to be a heresy—this was the idea that the church needed to adapt to the democratic setting of the United States. Leo's successor, Pius X, followed up in 1907 with an encyclical condemning theological modernism—that is, theological efforts to adapt Christian teaching to evolution, biblical criticism, and modern philosophy.

Vatican II, however, took an almost opposite stance by following John XXIII's call for the church to update its teaching and practice. In politics, this meant that the church embraced what it had previously rejected—freedom of conscience

4 <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-francis-formalizes-cardinal-reform-group-reserves-decision-making>.

and the separation of church and state. It also encouraged Roman Catholics to seek what was common with Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, while calling for ecumenical relationships with Protestants, known to the council as “separated brothers.” And as mentioned earlier, Vatican II explained an ecclesiology that sought to recognize greater collegiality among the bishops and also the gifts of the laity, even asserting that the average believer participated in the prophetic office “by means of a life of faith and charity.” The Council also reformed the liturgy and disciplines that had defined Roman Catholicism since Trent. It was an epoch-making event, one difficult for laity and clergy to comprehend, as Kenneth Woodward, a longtime reporter for *Newsweek*, explained in an account of Vatican II:

There was a time, not so long ago, when Roman Catholics were very different from other Americans. They belonged not to public school districts, but to parishes named after foreign saints, and each morning parochial-school children would preface their Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag with a prayer for Holy Mother the Church. When they went to Mass—never just a “Sunday service”—they prayed silently with rosaries or read along in Latin as if those ancient syllables were the language Jesus himself spoke. Blood-red vigil candles fluttered under statues and, on special occasions, incense floated heavily about the pews. Kneeling at the altar rail, their mouths pinched dry from fasting, the clean of soul were rewarded with the taste of God on their tongues—mysterious, doughy, and difficult to swallow. “Don’t chew the Baby Jesus,” they were warned as children, and few—even in old age—ever did.

The Catholic Church was a family, then, and if there were few brothers in it, there were lots of sisters—women with milk-white faces of ambiguous age, peering out of long veils and stiff wimples that made the feminine contours of their bodies ambiguous too. Alternately sweet and sour, they glided across polished

classroom floors as if on silent rubber wheels, virginal “brides of Christ” who often found a schoolroom of thirty students entrusted to their care. At home, “Sister says” was a sure way to win points in any household argument.

Even so, in both church and home, it was the “fathers” who wielded ultimate authority. First, there was the Holy Father in Rome: aloof, infallible, in touch with God. Then there were the bishops, who condemned movies and sometimes communism; once a year, with a rub from a bishop’s anointing thumb, young men blossomed into priests and Catholic children of twelve became “soldiers of Jesus Christ.” But it was in the confessional box on gloomy Saturday nights that the powers of the paternal hierarchy pressed most closely on the soul. “Bless me Father for I have sinned” the penitent would say, and in that somber intimacy, sins would surface and be forgiven.

There were sins that only Catholics could commit, like eating meat on Friday or missing Sunday Mass. But mostly the priests were there to pardon common failings of the flesh, which the timid liked to list under the general heading of “impure” thoughts, desires, and action. Adolescent boys dreamed of marriage when it would be okay by God and the fathers to “go all the way.” But their parents knew full well that birth control was not included in such freedom. Birth control was against God’s law, all the fathers said, and God’s law—like Holy Mother the Church—could never change.⁵

But everyone could see that Rome had changed. John Paul II and Benedict XVI tried to channel that change back into a coherent order. Yet, for some, the damage had been done. In the light of Francis’s recent off-the-cuff interviews, the less demanding and more tolerant character of Vatican II seems to have returned to the papacy. As one reporter on the Vatican recently put it,

5 <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2013/01/reflections-on-the-revolution-in-rome>.

“Vatican II offered a new way of thinking about doctrine; it presented doctrine as something that always needed to be interpreted and appropriated in a pastoral key.” He sees this same attitude in Francis, who insisted that “the dogmatic and moral teachings of the church are not all equivalent.” Instead, the church’s teaching finds its true pastoral significance within a “missionary style [that] focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things.”⁶ Conservative Presbyterians, who know the history of the controversies over modernism in the Presbyterian Church USA, may notice an uncanny resemblance between Francis and the signers of the Auburn Affirmation. They also distinguished between the essential and nonessential aspects of Christian teaching to avoid being charged with departing from ordination vows. In other words, if Vatican II represented Rome’s backing away from its previous condemnations of liberal theology, and if Francis represents the spirit of Vatican II, he may create a setting where theological innovation (read: liberalism) can blossom.

Questions surrounding the place of modernism in contemporary Roman Catholicism lead naturally to the third consideration relevant to evaluating Francis, namely, the social teaching of the church. In the case of Protestant modernism, the decline of fidelity to orthodox teaching was bound up with efforts to apply Christianity to all of life. In the late nineteenth century, this meant trying to give the churches resources to respond to the social crises arising from industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. The social gospel—an application of the gospel to social and political “sins”—led churches to downplay the historic gospel which for progressives looked too otherworldly and individualistic to be of much good.

In contrast to Protestant modernists, the post-Vatican I papacy held on to Roman Catholic teaching about salvation while also beginning to deliver teachings about the social conditions that had provoked the social gospel. Leo XIII, for instance, the same pontiff who condemned Ameri-

6 <http://nronline.org/news/vatican/francis-wishes-release-vatican-iis-bold-vision-captivity>.

canism as a heresy, also issued *Rerum Novarum* (1891), an encyclical that addressed the tensions between industrial laborers and capitalism. He advocated conditions and compensation that would allow workers to avoid poverty. He also insisted on the importance of Christian moral norms for a proper understanding of the dignity of the laboring classes. Many historians regard Leo’s writing as the beginning of the so-called social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Benedict XVI, the church’s social teaching aims “to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.” He added that the church “has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice ... cannot prevail and prosper.”⁷ Since Leo XIII, virtually all popes have understood their office to have a responsibility to address economic, political, and international well being. Pope Francis has yet to issue any encyclicals that directly fall in the category of social teaching, but many of his off-the-cuff remarks indicate that he is willing to address topics that governments around the world are trying to resolve. In his inaugural homily Francis said, for instance, “I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”⁸

For Christians who want a church that speaks to all of life, Rome’s tradition of social teaching represents a wholesome effort to extend the blessings of Christianity to the entire world, not just its peoples but its structures. But for conservative Presbyterians, who believe that the church can only speak what God’s word reveals, Rome’s extensive comments on society and politics violate the doctrine of the spirituality of the church and

7 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.

8 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato_en.html.

show the dangers of churches speaking to matters beyond what Scripture reveals. J. Gresham Machen, in fact, explained this position by saying that the church could not speak to civil or political matters unless God clearly had revealed such laws and policies in the context of Christ's fulfilling the civil and ceremonial laws of Old Testament Israel. Instead, the church's mission, as exemplified by Christ and the apostles, was to proclaim the good news of eternal life through faith in Christ. This conviction—the idea that the church cannot let worldly affairs compromise her proclamation of otherworldly realities—means that even if many Protestants and Roman Catholics find Francis's identification with the poor a refreshing shift, conservative Presbyterians will be much more critical. For rather than showing the world God's love, Francis may actually be obscuring the real love that God displayed in the sacrifice of his beloved son, if he is not proclaiming that to the spiritually poor and needy no matter what their economic or physical condition.

Conclusion

On the three considerations raised here, Protestant skepticism regarding the magisterium of Pope Francis remains reasonable. These matters will do little to diminish his popularity. His recent papal exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), is being likened to the progressive imagination of Martin Luther King Jr. But saying yes to the gospel is possible only for those who get the gospel right.

The enthusiasm for Francis reveals more about the state of American evangelicalism (not to mention divisions among U.S. Roman Catholics) than the possibilities for his pontificate. His humble lifestyle and preferential option for the poor may trump careful considerations of the doctrine that he preaches, because evangelical enthusiasts content themselves with accounts of his orthopraxy (or Roman Catholics on the left and the right can read their own convictions into his teachings). Thus, when Timothy George confidently asserts that the first Jesuit Pope embraces Martin Luther's

thesis on the importance of lifelong repentance, he is simply engaged in wishful thinking.

Finally, to the three considerations raised above, we add one more: who is next? What happens when the seventy-six-year-old Francis passes from the scene? What will be found attractive in that “breath of fresh air?” If the fortunes of Roman Catholicism rest on the Bishop of Rome, the non-Protestant Western church will continue in its “Babylonian captivity.”

Recommended Reading

Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants

Analyze What Divides and Unites Us, ed. John Armstrong (Moody, 1994). Especially helpful is the chapter by Robert B. Strimple, “Roman Catholicism Today,” analyzing the post-Vatican II situation.

John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (Norton, 2004).

Anne Roche Muggeridge, *The Desolate City: Revolution in the Catholic Church* (Harper & Row, 1986).

John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Belknap Press, 2010).

Russell Shaw, *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America* (Ignatius, 2013).

William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature, ed. John Witte, Jr., and Frank S. Alexander (Columbia University Press, 2007). ©

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Servant Mission

Evangelism and the Local Church

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by **John S. Shaw**

Orthodox Presbyterian congregations, presbyteries, and assemblies regularly sing a hymn that closes with these words:

We long to see your churches full,
That all the chosen race
May, with one voice and heart and soul,
Sing your redeeming grace.²

We love to sing this hymn because the desire reflects the stated plan of God. The Lord seeks true worshippers who “will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). The Lord pursues true worshippers through the ministry of his Word and Spirit. And the Lord sends the church to gather true worshippers by the means of evangelism.

God gives the ministry of evangelism to the church as a primary responsibility. This article considers that responsibility, especially as it applies to local congregations. We will consider evangelism through the local congregation in three parts: first, the agent of evangelism; second, the theology of evangelism; and third, the practice of evangelism.

The Agent of Evangelism

The Lord gives to the church as a whole the

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=420&issue_id=95.

2 *Trinity Hymnal* (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), no. 469, “How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place.”

responsibility of evangelism. Jesus Christ proclaimed this responsibility to the apostles, and the Scriptures record the specifics at both the end of Matthew (28:18–20) and the beginning of Acts (1:8). As the Lord providentially scatters his fledgling church, believers carry the Word wherever the Lord sends them (e.g., Acts 8:4). The growing church of the New Testament displays a commitment to the work of evangelism and outreach, and the Lord blesses the labors by gathering many new converts into the worshipping community. As R. B. Kuiper observes, the evangelistic responsibility of the church is clear and undeniable:

Beyond dispute, the Christian church is the God-appointed agent of evangelism.... Both the church as an organization, operating through its special offices, and the church as an organism of believers, each of which holds a general or universal office, are God-ordained agents of evangelism.³

While God calls all believers as agents of evangelism, he specifically and uniquely calls ministers to this work. Paul tells Timothy the work of the minister includes the responsibility to preach the Word to a sinful people in a rebellious age (2 Tim. 4:1–3). He brings that particular instruction to a conclusion by writing, “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (4:5).

Men called to the ministry of the Word must make evangelistic ministry a priority, for they are set apart by the Lord to carry the Word to the lost. Geerhardus Vos emphasized this responsibility in a sermon preached to the students at Princeton: “Pitiable indeed is the plight of the steward of Christ, who cannot say from a conviction as profound as the roots of his spiritual life itself, that he came into the kingdom for the very purpose of seeking and of saving that which was lost.”⁴ Pastors

3 R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 118.

4 Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 65. This sermon was preached between 1896 and 1913 at Miller Chapel in Princeton Theological

must proclaim the promises and demands of the gospel, calling sinners to repent and believe. In his book concerning the pastoral ministry, magisterial reformer Martin Bucer summarizes “the first task of the pastoral ministry and care of souls [as] that of seeking Christ’s lost sheep and bringing them into the flock and sheep-pen of Christ.”⁵

Yet the minister along with the elders must also lead the congregation in the work of evangelism. According to our Form of Government (FG), the local session “shall concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation” (13.7).⁶ While the FG also gives responsibility to presbyteries and the general assembly for evangelism and witness (14.5 and 15.6), the liberty of the local congregation remains protected. Local congregations play a significant part in the witness of the whole church; therefore, sessions must lead and promote the effective witness of the body they serve.

The early history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shows a denomination committed to vibrant evangelistic ministry. Many of the first church plants began with a minister moving to a new community and starting the hard work of planting evangelistic seeds by both knocking on doors and open-air preaching. Through the labors of these faithful men, the Lord raised up congregations. Yet the ministers did not work alone. They prepared and deployed their congregations to assist in these labors.

With a desire for evangelistic ministry to flourish, the General Assembly in 1942 appointed a Committee on Local Evangelism. The committee worked over a period of ten years and produced a document titled *Biblical Evangelism Today: A Symposium*. It is available on the denomination’s website.⁷ In that document, the committee makes

Seminary.

5 Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 90.

6 *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Form of Government [FG] 13.7).

7 John Murray and Calvin K. Cummings, eds., *Biblical Evangelism Today: A Symposium* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,

an important statement about personal evangelism and the necessity for the whole church to engage in such work:

Personal work is a very important aspect of evangelism. This method of presenting the gospel was widely used by our Lord. In the apostolic church this work was not only done by the ministers but by the laymen as well. This fact sheds light on its phenomenal growth. If the churches of our denomination are going to do an effective work of local evangelism then the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a whole must be roused to the need and instructed in this type of work.⁸

Our love for the last stanza of “How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place” grows from a theological commitment to a ministry of evangelism that engages the whole church at some level. Yet this still leaves two questions to answer. First, what theological commitments undergird the work of evangelism through local congregations? Second, how should we practice evangelism in the local church?

The Theology of Evangelism⁹

A quick study of our denomination’s early history reveals a commitment to labor-intensive, local evangelism. Some ministers made door-to-door evangelistic calling a regular part of their weekly (or even daily) ministry schedule. At first glance, one might consider that work to be a result of practical desperation. Many pastors moved into new communities to a church with few if any members. They needed more people in the church, so they had to knock on doors. Yet, mere pragmatism never serves as a proper motivation for ministry.

These pastors were motivated by something greater than necessity. Their actions grew from biblical commitments. They recognized that the call

1954), <http://www.opc.org/chm/BEToday.html>.

8 *Ibid.*, under chap. 5, para. 1.

9 For a more detailed discussion of the theological foundations for a ministry of evangelism and outreach, read the first three chapters of *Biblical Evangelism Today*.

to the gospel ministry necessarily involved a call to evangelistic ministry (2 Tim. 4:5). As the Committee on Local Evangelism explained, “The Great Head and King of the Church has solemnly commissioned the Church to proclaim the gospel in all the world, to every creature.”¹⁰ They embraced their evangelistic responsibility with joy and vigor. The Lord is seeking worshippers, and these pastors recognized the church to be a mighty instrument in the hand of God to gather these worshippers. So they labored in evangelism.

With this in mind, we should answer an important question. What in particular about our theology presses the responsibility of evangelism? What do we believe about God and his Word that demands evangelistic ministry? Of course, there are many theological truths that relate to the evangelistic responsibility of the church, but let’s consider four.

First, local congregations engage in evangelism out of obedience to the clear commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sends out his church to disciple the nations and to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). Jesus promises a rich harvest for the church, and calls us to pray for (Matt. 9:37–38), to send (Rom. 10:14–15), and to support (1 Cor. 9:8–14) laborers to gather the harvest. The Lord calls pastors to a full ministry that includes the work of evangelism (2 Tim. 4:5). Faithful ministers lead their congregations in the work of evangelism and witness because the Lord commands the church to engage in this labor.

Second, local congregations engage in evangelism because our chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”¹¹ We exist and live for the glory of God. That answer mirrors the words that Jesus speaks in John 4:23. The Lord seeks worshippers—people who are defined and named by their commitment to glorify God. Worshippers are gathered as people hear and believe the Word of God, and people hear the Word as the church sends those

10 Murray and Cummings, eds., *Biblical Evangelism Today*, under Preface, first sentence.

11 Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question and Answer 1.

who speak the gospel (Rom. 10:14–15). Therefore, ministers lead their congregations in the work of evangelism and witness.

Third, local congregations engage in evangelism because of the love of Christ. Paul tells the church in Corinth, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14–15). The love of the crucified and risen Christ compels us to give our lives wholly to him. We are thereby compelled to share the good news. J. Gresham Machen, preaching on this passage to our Second General Assembly, said:

What a wonderful open door God has placed before the church of today. A pagan world, weary and sick, often distrusting its own modern gods. A saving gospel strangely entrusted to us unworthy messengers. A divine Book with unused resources of glory and power. Ah, what a marvelous opportunity, my brethren!¹²

The love of Christ compels, controls, and constrains us to proclaim the saving message of the gospel to a broken world. Once we know the love of Christ, we must not, indeed we cannot, remain silent. Ministers and congregations do the work of evangelism and witness because the love of Christ controls them.

Fourth, local congregations engage in evangelism because of compassion for the lost. God himself models the compassion for the lost that should characterize believers. The Lord reveals his compassion for sinners in the question that closes the book of Jonah.

You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their

12 Ned Bernard Stonehouse, ed., *J. Gresham Machen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 154.

left, and also much cattle? (Jonah 4:10–11)

The Lord pitied that great and wicked city both because he created the dwellers there and also because they were lost—a people who did not know their right hand from their left.

The Son of God, someone greater than Jonah (Matt. 12:41), displayed the same kind of love for the crowds of lost people who followed him through the cities and villages. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Out of his compassion for the crowds, the Lord drew attention to the harvest and the need for laborers. He calls us to imitate his compassion for those who are lost. Ministers and congregations do the work of evangelism out of compassion for the lost, compassion modeled after the love of the Savior.

The Practice of Evangelism

Having looked at the agent of evangelism and the theology of evangelism, we will consider briefly the practice of evangelism. What are some practical steps to carry out a ministry of evangelism and witness in local congregations?

First, we need to train our ministers to do the work of an evangelist and to lead their congregation in a ministry of witness. The minister’s call includes the responsibility to do the work of an evangelist and to promote the evangelistic witness of the congregation (2 Tim. 2:5; FG 13.7). Any ministry of evangelism in the local congregation must begin with the pastor. Yet most Orthodox Presbyterian ministers have received limited training for this work. The typical Reformed seminary provides one or two classes on the ministry of witness. (Of course, any good preaching class will teach a man to proclaim the gospel since biblical preaching is evangelistic by nature.) The typical class on evangelism involves hours of classroom instruction on the theology of evangelism with very little time for practical training concerning the “how” of evangelism. The result: many ministers recognize their responsibility for evangelism but feel ill-equipped to fulfill that responsibility.

As a denomination, we need to train and equip our ministers to do the work of an evangelist. Paul writes to Timothy about the necessity for training and modeling within the ministry. “Entrust [what you have heard from me] to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:2–3).

R. B. Kuiper drew pointed instruction from these verses:

One implication of that behest [2 Tim. 2:2] is that the church must make provision for the training of evangelists, particularly of such as have in mind the devoting of their entire life to the presentation of the gospel to the lost... Far more attention should be paid to the specific preparation of evangelists.¹³

Young pastors benefit greatly from learning the ministry through the example of older men who spend time with them. While most of our ministers learn through internships, they would also benefit from coming alongside experienced ministers with evangelistic gifts. Young ministers in previous decades grew in their ministry of witness through visits with John Fikkert, Don Stanton, George Haney, and others. They learned by watching and serving together. We need to provide such opportunities for our pastors.

Second, ministers must grow in their ability to clearly communicate the whole counsel of God through biblical, Christ-centered preaching. The clear preaching of the Word, Sunday after Sunday, through which people hear the voice of Christ, is the primary means by which people believe (Rom. 10:15–16). As ministers, we labor to proclaim the promises and the obligations communicated in our text, and to proclaim those in a manner that is both clear and compelling. We must preach the gospel so that lost sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd; we must preach the gospel so that the sheep under our care know the Shepherd more deeply. This is not an article on preaching, so I will end with this simple instruction: preach Christ

13 Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism*, 123.

from all the Scriptures.

Third, local sessions should take time to develop a thorough Christian education program that teaches a congregation the whole counsel of God. Our Bible teaching should present a full theology of the Scriptures and the gospel, one that includes training in our confessional standards. Our members should understand the claims of the gospel on their lives, and they should learn and rehearse the gospel again and again. The clearer understanding they have of the whole gospel and the whole Scripture, the better prepared they are to witness and give a reason for their hope.¹⁴

Fourth, we should be deliberate in teaching our children the whole Bible, putting before them the claims of the gospel again and again. At one point in my ministry, the adult son of a Baptist minister was preparing to bring his family into the membership of our congregation and to have his young children baptized. His father asked him, “Are you comfortable joining a church that doesn’t believe in evangelizing their children?” This question could mean many things, and we could offer many answers, but let me simply suggest this response. We should tell our children, repeatedly, the glorious story of the gospel. We should hold before them the glories of the Savior every day. We should rehearse the gospel message after every sermon preached, after every administration of the sacraments, after every reading of the Scripture. Our children should hear the gospel repeatedly because of, not in spite of, what we believe about the covenant promises. We promise to hold the gospel before them when we take vows at their baptism. Our children have been baptized as disciples, and we should teach them to observe everything that the Lord has commanded (Matt. 28:18–20; Deut. 6:4–9) so that they might believe and obey (Ps.

14 Murray and Cummings, eds., *Biblical Evangelism Today*, under “Application to Evangelistic Method” chap. 3, para. 5: “Fourth, the whole Bible must be used in evangelism. The gospel is an absolute and complete answer to every need in the heart of the sinner, but the whole gospel must be employed. A portion of Scripture neglected in the evangelistic message may be the very portion of Scripture which will strike home to certain particular subjects of evangelism.”

78:1–8; cf. v. 7). Local congregations, with parents, must teach the gospel to the children God has entrusted to us. This is a vital part of our ministry of evangelism and discipleship.

Fifth, local congregations should reach out to their neighbors with the gospel. This means that individual believers should be zealous to invite friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members to the regular gatherings of the local church. Our standards teach that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the church.¹⁵ If we believe that, then we should invite others to join us when the church gathers for worship every Sunday. But we should also invite others to join us for Bible study, for fellowship events, or when others from church are visiting in our homes. We should look for opportunities to connect our church family with our neighbors, family, and friends.¹⁶

Pastors and sessions should lead in this regard. Here is one practical suggestion on how to evaluate the unique opportunities for witness within your local community. First, make a list of the talents, gifts, passions, interests, and places of influence among the members of your congregation. Second, make a list of the passions, interests, and gathering places within your local community. Then consider where those circles intersect. These points of intersection provide opportunities to build relationships which open doors of opportunity for witness.

Sixth, local congregations should be active in prayer, and the prayer life of a congregation (in public, family, and private worship) should include a specific focus on evangelistic prayer. The Lord tells us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into a ripe and ready field (Matt. 9:37–38). That means we can pray with expectation, for we know the Lord of the harvest to be a faithful and powerful Savior. That also means we

15 Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2.

16 I considered making a separate point of hospitality, but understand that loving and serving our neighbor includes hospitality, and that hospitality and evangelism often intersect. For a beautiful example, read the story of Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secrets Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2012).

should pray regularly and persistently regarding the harvest. And we should pray specifically, with the names of particular people on our lips. What a tremendous privilege for a congregation to build a list of people about whom to pray that the Lord might save them. As you share the good news of the gospel with family or friends, you know that a whole congregation stands behind you in prayer.

Our congregation in Saint Paul, Minnesota, built such a list, and we prayed every week (in our homes and from the pulpit) for the salvation of specific persons. We prayed for five years that the Lord might save one particular woman, and people in the congregation who had never met this woman prayed for her. Eventually, by the grace of God, we had the wonderful privilege of celebrating her conversion and baptism (and the baptism of her two children) together as a congregation. The relative of another member was converted and baptized in an Orthodox Presbyterian Church across the country, and we again celebrated together, but this time with another congregation who had also prayed for this woman. Evangelistic prayer as believers and as congregations builds a commitment to a ministry of witness that over time pervades the whole congregation. Evangelistic prayer trains our eye on opportunities for witness.

In conclusion, we possess a rich heritage in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—a heritage expressed in our theological commitment to a pure doctrine of salvation found in the Bible, and a heritage expressed in the practice of a ministry of evangelism and witness throughout the whole church. The Lord has blessed this evangelistic ministry, and he will continue to bless such a ministry as the whole church (including local congregations) faithfully takes the good news to the nations. Resting in the faithfulness of the Lord of the harvest, may we humbly and passionately serve God as his witnesses to a broken world. ©

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The Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the City

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by **John S. Shaw**

Christian publishing houses continue to roll out books on church ministry in the city.² There is a growing desire to both learn how to plant churches in large urban centers, and effectively communicate the gospel across languages and cultures. These desires grow from a response to the changing dynamics of our nation and world.

A quick review of demographic trends tells the story of a world becoming increasingly urban with nationalities, languages, and races mixing in new ways. Consider the following statistics and trends:

- The percentage of people living in urban centers across the globe has increased steadily over the past one hundred years: 20% in 1910; slightly less than 40% in 1990; more than 50% in 2010; projected at 60% in 2030 and 70% in 2050;
- Globally, the number of urban dwellers grows on average by sixty million per year;³
- The urban population in the United States grew by 12.1% from 2000 to 2010;⁴

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=431&issue_id=97.

2 Some examples: Jon M. Dennis, *Christ + City: Why the Greatest Need of the City Is the Greatest News of All* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013); Darrin Patrick, *For the City: Proclaiming and Living Out the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Mark Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Stephen T. Um and Justin Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture, and the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

3 “Urban Population Growth,” World Health Organization, accessed July 26, 2013, http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en/.

4 “Growth in Urban Population Outpaces Rest of Nation, Census Bureau Reports,” U.S. Census Bureau press release, March 26, 2012, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-50.html.

- Urban areas made up 80.7% of the population of the United States in 2010, while rural areas made up more than 80% of the geography of the United States;⁵
- The total urban population of the United States in 2010 accounted for more than 250 million people;⁶
- From 2006 to 2011 the number of children (age 0 to 17) in the United States with at least one immigrant parent grew by 1.5 million, from 15.7 to 17.2 million, which includes nearly one fourth of all the children in the United States;⁷
- The non-Hispanic white population in the United States shrunk from 76% of total population in 1995 to 65% of total population in 2009;⁸
- A December 2012 study from the United States Census Bureau (based on the 2010 census) predicted that by 2020, no single ethnic or racial group will constitute a majority of children under 18, and that by 2043, no single ethnic or racial group will constitute a majority of the total population;
- Already, based on the 2010 census data, there is no majority race among new births within the United States;
- The Hispanic population in the United States is predicted to increase from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060—then making up one in three of the total population;
- The Asian population in the United States

5 “America’s Urban Population: Patterns and Characteristics,” Proximity One, accessed July 26, 2014, <http://www.proximityone.com/urbanpopulation.htm>.

6 “U.S. Urban Population Is Up . . . but What Does ‘Urban’ Really Mean?” Nate Berg, Citylab, last modified March 26, 2012, <http://www.citylab.com/housing/2012/03/us-urban-population-what-does-urban-really-mean/1589/>.

7 “Children of Immigrants:2011 State Trends Update,” Devlin Hanson and Margaret Simms, Urban Institute, last modified May 5, 2014, <http://www.urban.org/publications/413113.html>.

8 “U.S. Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation a Half Century from Now, U.S. Census Bureau press release, December 12, 2012, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html>.

is predicted to increase from 15.9 million in 2012 to 34.4 million in 2060—then making up 8.2% of the total population.⁹

The demographic trends tell us something. Obviously, we don’t build our theology or our mission on demographics that reflect cultural movements and shifting human priorities. The Bible provides the only foundation for theology and mission, and that standard never changes despite the movement of the culture. We recognize, as well, that statistics can be, and often are, twisted to support the political and moral inclinations of the powers of the age. But the demographic realities tell us something: that the world is becoming more urban and more ethnically diverse. Those realities provide both challenges and opportunities for the church that we must recognize.

Two Possible Responses

So how should the church, and in particular, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, respond to a population growing increasingly urban and diverse? The literature and practice of the evangelical and Reformed church generally suggests two typical responses, what I will describe as being either against the city or for the city.¹⁰

First, the response that I have described as being “against the city” focuses on the problems of the city (e.g., crimes, drugs, homelessness, overcrowding, poor schools, etc.). Proponents of this viewpoint describe cities as “uncomfortable, congested places filled with crime, grime, and temptation.”¹¹ Christians that begin from such a starting point approach the city in one of two ways. It is either a terrible place from which Christians should flee, or a flawed place that Christians must fix. You see the results of this approach with certain trends in the American church. Congrega-

9 “2012 National Population Projections,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed July 26, 2014, <https://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2012.html>,

10 Obviously, this is an oversimplification of the issue. But gathering the typical evangelical responses into two categories seems the best way forward for a short article.

11 Um and Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter*, 16.

tions leave their building behind in the city to re-plant their congregation in the suburbs. (Have you noticed all the empty church buildings in the city and wondered where those congregations went?) And politically active Christians sometimes talk about poverty, welfare, health care, and immigration in ways that communicate disdain for people made in God's image.

Anyone who has lived in an urban environment has experienced the problems of the city. In my short experience of urban living, I was solicited for drugs in front of the elementary school playground one block from my house; interrupted a drug deal six blocks from my home; lived in a neighborhood with gang shootings, extensive drug raids, and a manhunt that led to the killing of a police officer and the lock down of our neighborhood on an otherwise quiet and leisurely Saturday morning. Of course, you can experience many of these same things living in suburban or rural communities; but the concentration of such events tends to be much higher in urban contexts.

Yet, our family also experienced tremendous benefits living in an urban context. Our children played with the neighborhood children quite happily while being among the only Caucasian children. This experience changed their perspective on race and ethnicity. We hosted a Bible club in our backyard with fifteen Hmong children participating and enjoyed hearing five of them recite the Bible verses for that week in our kitchen. Our children learned about maintaining their public testimony as they confronted difficult interactions with the neighbors (for instance, how to respond when a neighbor asks you to play house with their family idols) and invited neighbors for dinner and family devotions. We also celebrated three professions of faith and five baptisms of internationals (Korean, Japanese, and Chinese) in our urban, Midwestern congregation.

The biblical answer to the problems of the city certainly can't include fleeing the city or looking at the city as a place that simply needs to be fixed. Cities are filled with people made God's image, who need the gospel and the compassion of Jesus Christ. Churches in urban contexts within the

United States have a unique opening for gospel ministry and even the opportunity to minister the gospel in circumstances that we often have relegated to foreign missions.

So what about the second approach—what I have labeled being “for the city”? Maybe that provides the right response to a population growing increasingly urban and diverse. You can trace this particular urban movement within Reformed circles to men like Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz, who have written extensively about how the church should approach urban centers. But the most prolific twenty-first century voice addressing this issue is Tim Keller, a popular author and speaker, and the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. In one of his articles, “A Biblical Theology of the City,” he wrote: “This city [the New Jerusalem] is the Garden of Eden, remade. The City is the fulfillment of the purposes of the Eden of God. We began in a garden but will end in a city; God's purpose for humanity is urban!”¹²

To summarize, being “for the city” in this context means to focus on the blessings and opportunities of the city. Stephen Um and Justin Buzzard describe cities as centers of power, culture, and worship; as magnets for people, amplifiers of voice, and engines of culture and ideas; and thus consider cities to be unique gateways for the ministry of the gospel.¹³

Once again, this particular viewpoint includes much that is true. Due to the nature of urban populations—with large concentrations of people from various backgrounds and ethnicities, and with a greater concentration of professionals, universities, and the arts—cities exercise an immense influence on the direction of culture and ideas. In addition, the large concentration of people in a relatively small geographic footprint provides great opportunities to reach many people with the gospel. Churches within these contexts have

12 Resurgence, a ministry of Mars Hill Church, accessed July 26, 2014, http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/tim_keller_2002_a_biblical_theology_of_the_city.pdf.

13 See Um and Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter*, chapters 1 and 2.

an opportunity to speak the message of the gospel loudly and broadly, with a much greater reach than is generally available in smaller towns and rural communities.

Yet, there is an accompanying danger in the message of those who are “for the city.” They at least suggest, if not boldly state, that God possesses and the Bible expresses a preference for the urban. “God’s purpose for humanity is urban!”¹⁴ Keller proclaims. The unstated implication is that God’s purpose for humanity is not suburban or rural (or small town or whatever other category you might want to include). Such an attitude leaves people in small or rural communities to wonder, what happens to us if Christ and his church prefer the urban? Such an attitude could lead the church to wonder, “Why would we bother planting churches in rural areas or small towns when demographics, and even the Bible itself, tell us to go to the city?”

A Third Response

I would suggest a third response to the city that differs from the two already mentioned. Rather than focus on the city as a place the church should stand for or against, this third response focuses on the people who populate the city. To explain, let me begin with Bible passages that animate books presenting a “for the city” approach.

Um and Buzzard build their argument for a city-centered ministry on a biblical theological walk through the Old and New Testaments. They suggest that their “for the city” approach finds its greatest support in the earthly ministry of Jesus, focusing on Luke 9:51 and 19:41–48. Building from these passages, Um and Buzzard make a bold statement concerning the ministry of Jesus:

Jesus’s ministry is not only set in an urban context, we must remember that in some sense its goal—that by which it is gravitationally pulled—is a city. This is eminently clear in Luke’s Gospel where the bulk of the story is

14 Resurgence, a ministry of Mars Hill Church, accessed July 26, 2014, http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/tim_keller_2002_a_biblical_theology_of_the_city.pdf.

shaped around Jesus’s journey toward Jerusalem. The major turn of the book occurs in 9:51, where we see Jesus “[setting] his face to go to Jerusalem.” The travelogue continues until Jesus enters the temple in 19:45, effectively taking Jesus to the center of the city immediately outside of which he will soon be put to death. Though it will not be a refuge for him, Jesus is determined to get to Jerusalem. To recognize the centrality of the city of Jerusalem for Jesus’s ministry is not to deny or undervalue his ministry in rural or pre-suburban settings, it is simply to acknowledge the shape of his ministry as it is presented in Scripture. As we will see, in Jesus, God’s commitment to the city is at its peak.¹⁵

This whole chapter, “The Bible and the City,” provides opportunities to wrestle with the exegetical implications of the passages they consider, but I will leave that task to a more skilled exegete. It seems to me, though, that Um and Buzzard miss the most basic application of these passages to our practical theology. When you consider the words of Jesus in Luke 19:41–44, he weeps not so much over the city as an institution or structure, but rather over the people who will perish as the Lord judges the city. Consider what he says in verses 43 and 44: “For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side, and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you.” Jesus focuses on the judgment (the visitation mentioned later in verse 44) that the Lord will visit on the people of Jerusalem and their children.¹⁶

Throughout this chapter of Um and Buzzard’s book, and throughout similar books, the authors read their own definition of the city (a metropolis)

15 Um and Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter*, 68–69.

16 This is not to deny that the Lord Jesus weeps over the judgment that will come against the creation, which includes more than simply people. The pattern of Scripture bears out such a concern for all the creation. But the focus of his sorrow rests on the crown of creation, men and women made in the image of God.

into every mention of cities (both particular earthly cities, like Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and also every mention of Zion, the city of God, in places like Hebrews 11 and 12 and Revelation 21). In the process, they often miss the beautiful message of the Lord's love for the people within the walls of earthly cities. More importantly, they miss the particular love that Jesus reserves for the people of Zion, his bride and the apple of his eye, the church.

When Jesus approaches earthly cities, he looks with compassion on lost and perishing sinners "who were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:35–36). Also, "the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob," not because of a particular bias toward the urban, but because he founded that great city as a dwelling place for his beloved and chosen people (Ps. 87:2ff.). That city points us, ultimately, to Christ's church.

We do learn how to approach the city from the example and teaching of Jesus. He calls us not to be against or for the city, but rather to be for people. To approach men and women with the same love that characterized our Savior. To approach lost sinners with compassion because we recognize the terror of God's wrath, and to approach believers with great love because we recognize the price of Christ's sacrifice for them. Jesus's earthly ministry, and in fact the whole scope of biblical theology, calls us to approach men and women with compassion modeled after that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such an approach gives us a method to build churches and gather sheep in every context—whether urban, suburban, rural, or small town. Because Christ loves people and possesses a special love for his chosen people, we plant churches anywhere that we find people. Yet this perspective also gives us good reason to focus attention on large cities and urban centers. The Lord sends his church to gather the sheep, and we find the greatest collection of people (and potential sheep) in large cities.

In addition, this particular perspective provides good reason to focus our attention on places

where a diverse population of people (across languages, races, and cultures) is gathered. The Bible describes the church as a collection of people from the nations, even nations that previously hated each other and hated God and his people. Psalm 87:4 describes Zion as including citizens from every geographic direction and even from those nations who sought to destroy Israel (Assyria, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Egypt). Revelation 7 describes the people of God as including "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (v. 9). The growing diversity of our nation's cities, rather than a threat, presents an opportunity to bring the gospel message to the nations. How wonderful to see the Revelation 7 vision reflected in churches in our own country.

The increasing urban and diverse population of our nation certainly presents challenges. But the Lord provides, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a plan to unite all things in him (Eph. 1:10); and he promises to unite all things especially through the message of the cross of Jesus Christ carried by the church (Eph. 2:11–22; 3:10). The church finds in these demographic trends an opportunity to proclaim Christ to a growing and diverse population, and to offer them the only answer to those things that otherwise divide people. The flow of biblical theology calls us to love people, and therefore the flow of biblical theology calls us to places where people, many in number and diverse in population, gather. In conclusion, let's consider a few ways the Orthodox Presbyterian Church can tangibly love people in the city.

Loving People in the City

First, the church tangibly loves people in the city simply by their kind presence. Most large American cities are littered with empty church buildings or repurposed church buildings. Christians have fled city cores in droves, and the void of gospel influence leaves tangible marks. Urban cores feel the painful results of the fall in a concentrated way, and they need the gospel. When Christians offer their presence, following the

instruction of Paul in Romans 12:9–21—blessing those who persecute you, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep, living in harmony with one another, associating with the lowly, living peaceably with all, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, overcoming evil with good—the Lord blesses those labors of love. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church should be present in cities expressing genuine Christian love for our neighbors.¹⁷

Second, the church tangibly loves people in the city by proclaiming the truth of the Scriptures, without hesitation or compromise. The only answer to sin is the gospel of Jesus Christ. He calls his church to disciple nations as we go by baptizing in the name of the triune God and teaching them to observe everything that Jesus commands (Matt. 28:18–20). For people to believe and call upon God, we need to send those who preach the good news (Rom. 10:14–15). People need truth and they want truth, no matter what secular sources might claim. The Lord gives his church everything necessary for life and godliness. Let's boldly teach the truth.

Third, the church tangibly loves people in the city by establishing congregations committed to the fullness of the Christian ministry laid out in Acts 2:42–47. We see congregations devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (v. 42), congregations committed to helping any who have need (vv. 44–45), congregations committed to regular fellowship, regular worship, and opening their homes (v. 46), congregations characterized by joy and praise (vv. 46–47), congregations known as good neighbors who have favor with all the people (v. 47), and congregations in the city must plan for an active diaconal ministry and a vibrant prayer ministry. The Lord blesses such churches and makes them a

¹⁷ I would argue that the relational ministry to which we are committed—including an emphasis on Christian fellowship, pastoral visitation, and family visitation—is well-suited for urban ministry. People want and need that kind of Christian nurture and committed presence. Our pastors have committed to being with and loving people—the house-to-house ministry that Paul describes in Acts 20:20.

blessing (v. 47b).

Fourth, the church tangibly loves people in the city by emphasizing the teachings of Scripture (the content of the gospel and the commands of God) and deemphasizing other things we consider important (politics, personal choices for school, etc.). While recognizing this point may be controversial, the church should be about the gospel and about the Bible, calling people to faith and obedience to the Word of Christ. In contrast, the church should not be about party politics, homeschooling versus Christian schooling versus public schooling debates, health food, homeopathic medicine, or environmental causes. Christ calls the church to proclaim the whole counsel of God, and we must focus our words on those matters.

Fifth, the church tangibly loves people in the city by being good neighbors and good laborers. Undoubtedly, several good articles could be written on this point alone. Without question, clear, biblical preaching and teaching are essential and powerful (Rom. 10:14–15; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5); yet it is important to recognize that most Christians exercise their Christian witness most directly by how they treat their neighbors and how they serve their employer. Careful attention to these matters has opened many doors for the gospel.

Do the demographic trends so clearly evident in the twenty-first century mean anything for the church? Yes, of course they do. The Lord, in his good providence, has gathered large and diverse populations into urban centers throughout the United States and the world. There are new opportunities to bring the gospel to the nations even in our own backyard. May the Lord give us wisdom to speak clearly and grace to speak kindly the words of life, so that a multitude, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, might worship the one true God. ☉

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✦ Servant World

How Does Scripture Speak to Politics?

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by **Cale Horne**

During periods of intense partisanship, when political sentiments run high, it is easy to lose sight of the freedom the Christian enjoys in views of norms and forms of government, policy, and political engagement. While contemporary evangelicalism relentlessly presses the bounds of what the Bible says about politics, an appreciation that what the Bible *does not* say about politics is equally relevant. In fact, I would suggest that inattentiveness to the silence of Scripture—in the political sphere and elsewhere—harms the peace, purity, and witness of the church in ways we are not normally prepared to admit.

What does the Bible say about political matters? The answer depends on how we choose to interpret the Bible. If we look at the twentieth century alone, the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition was pulled in different directions on this question as theological liberalism, fundamentalism, and eventually broad evangelicalism all competed with historic orthodoxy for the soul of the church. Behind this competition stood very different sets of assumptions about the Bible itself. We might think that the only assumption about the Bible that really matters is whether or not we believe it is true: whether or not we believe it is

the inerrant and infallible Word of God. After all, liberalism rejected this assumption while American fundamentalism and evangelicalism upheld it. Yet, over the past century, liberals, fundamentalists and evangelicals regularly have come to the *same conclusions* on things political, all claiming justification from the Bible, regardless of what they believe the Bible to be.

Several examples will clarify what I mean. Patriotic services. Politically themed messages trumpeting the virtues of the American system. An American flag displayed in one corner of the church auditorium. Sermons on national service and preparedness delivered in times of danger to the country. Perhaps a July Fourth extravaganza paired with an appeal for the spectator to turn to Christ. I could be describing a regular part of today's conservative, broadly evangelical church where—despite whatever differences we may have—the Bible is *believed* and *presented* as God's Word. Or I could be describing the liberal, mainline church of the early twentieth century, where the Bible increasingly was regarded as an inspiring, if not inspired, text.

For the most part, theological liberalism as it entered the church did not look like the liberalism we think of it today. Ordinarily, sermons did not deny the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, or a literal resurrection from a literal death. Rather, sermons encompassed themes of patriotism, civic virtues, the Golden Rule, and the value of individuals and freedom—and these sermons claimed biblical backing.

As it was preached on Sunday morning from the pulpit and was heard in the pew, this new Christianity was all about hope: hope for the future of individuals and societies, with a heaven that bore a striking resemblance to the American dream. Even the horrors of World War I could not undo this optimism in mankind. If the war made Europeans declare that “God was dead,” Americans—who had come to Europe's rescue in the eleventh hour—could by contrast say that we have the cure for what ails the world. Our faith would be in ourselves, and mainline, American Presbyterianism—from the wartime, Presbyterian president

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=421&issue_id=95.

Woodrow Wilson down—would be right at the center of this cultural exuberance.

However counterintuitive it may seem, theological liberalism's prescriptions for American politics in the first half of the twentieth century bear the ideological hallmarks and outward symbolism frequently associated with conservative, evangelical churches today. In effect, assumptions about the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures in their original forms, though essential, do not necessarily lead to different thinking about politics.

The point here is not to decry the dangers of patriotism. Rather, the point is that regardless of whether pastors and church members believe the Scriptures to be true, these kinds of sermons and church experiences do not *require* you to believe the Scriptures to be true. Instead, the Bible can be read and preached just like Aesop's fables—good stories about morality, with a focus on the right behavior of individuals, families, communities, and nations. Christ gave the example of the life well lived, and to emulate it is the road to salvation for individuals as well as cultures and states. Like today's evangelicals, the well-intentioned and civic-minded liberals of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s energetically asked, "What would Jesus do?"

I argue that a set of older assumptions about the Scriptures, rooted in the historic Reformed tradition, offers a more satisfying view of both politics *and* the Bible. For many of you, these assumptions will not be new. I suspect, though, that few of us have considered how these foundational beliefs about the Scriptures can clarify our understanding of the relationship among our faith, the church, and politics.

Two of these foundational beliefs are most relevant. First, the Bible in all its parts is revealing to us God's plan of salvation for his people, and second, this revelation of salvation is *organic* and *unfolding*. If we accept that the Bible in its entirety is an unfolding of the story of redemption, we are unlikely to be sidetracked by moralistic interpretations of biblical texts, or to go looking in the Bible for policy prescriptions that simply are not there. And if we accept that this salvation story is organic and unfolding, we can begin to understand how

biblical texts that might seem to talk about politics actually fit into this long, coherent narrative.

Based on these assumptions, I contend that Scripture says far less about politics than many of us might hope. In fact, I want to argue that the Bible does not say much about politics at all. The Bible is no more a textbook on politics than one on organic chemistry or accounting, and we should resist the temptation to read the Bible in this way. Secondly, what Scripture *does* say about politics is extremely important, and in fact far more important than what we might be tempted to conclude about politics from the Bible if we didn't accept these assumptions about the text's redemptive and unfolding qualities.

Let's think about why, based on the assumption that Scripture does not say much about political things. This statement contradicts much of what is being propagated in Reformed and evangelical circles today. A recent book by a popular evangelical theologians—and one with Calvinistic sympathies—works its way through the gamut of contemporary political issues with commentary on how the Bible speaks to each issue.² The resulting book is actually longer than the Bible itself, and the alleged biblical answers to this wide range of political problems and puzzles invariably align with the platform of the political right in the United States. And as *theological* liberals and conservatives have begun to align with the *political* left and right (which is a story for another day), countless books have been produced by theological liberals, who employ Scripture to argue for the causes of the political left.

Consider models of economic organization as an example of this flawed reasoning. Many political conservatives have looked at the eighth and tenth commandments in Exodus 20 and found a biblical basis for free-market principles. The argument goes like this: The commands "Thou shall not steal" and "Thou shall not covet" presuppose the existence of private property. If there is no

2 Wayne Grudem, *Politics according to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

private property, there is nothing to steal or covet. And the fact that the theft and even coveting of this private property is condemned in the Decalogue should lead us to conclude that private property is God-ordained and good. The protection of private property mandated in the eighth and tenth commandments requires laws and institutions designed to preserve the integrity of property. These laws and institutions are exemplified in the Old Testament in the form of rules of restitution. Today, no longer operating under the theocracy, free-market capitalism accompanied by democracy form the soundest institutional basis for the protection of property.

Christians on the political left have not taken this argument lying down. To justify their ideals for economic and social organization they turn to the model of the early church described in Acts 4:32–35:

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

This, many on the left tell us, is the Bible's model for social and economic organization. Private property is not the economic norm cultivated by followers of Jesus, but a surrender of private property to the collective. The norm upheld is redistribution of wealth: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

Based on our assumptions—that the Bible in all its parts is revealing God's plan of salvation for his people, and that this revelation is organic and unfolding—we must conclude that these uses of Exodus 20 and Acts 4 are wide of the mark. I believe in private property, and think capitalism and democracy are, broadly speaking, good—or at

least the best systems to date. But the idea of private property and institutions designed to protect private property can best be thought of as insights of common grace. They are partial, imperfect, and temporally bound solutions to the problems of social and economic order generated by the Fall.

So, if not bases for biblical models of economic organization, what is going on in Exodus 20 and Acts 4? In the case of Exodus 20, we should remember that the explication of the moral law only becomes necessary in light of the Fall to show us what we ought to do, our inability to do it and need for grace, and as a norm of conduct for those who are the recipients of this grace. In other words, the moral law is given primarily to impress upon God's people the immeasurable distance between themselves and God, as a consequence of the Fall. Regarding the eighth and tenth commandments, "Thou shall not steal" and "Thou shall not covet," the commandments clarify behavior toward one another because we no longer understand our behavior in reference to God. Before the Fall, Adam is given the mandate to *steward* the creation. *There was no private property*; rather, Adam in his innocence understood all things to belong to God. He was commissioned as the caretaker of *God's* property. The eighth and tenth commandments are required because, by the entrance of sin, we no longer regard property entrusted to us as articles of our stewardship that are not our own.

In Acts 4, in the unfolding of God's salvation, we see something of that original consciousness restored in the early church, where believers were giving and taking freely. We witness something of the eighth and tenth commandment fulfilled because, in a way, the Acts church has returned to the Garden—property is again regarded as a thing *entrusted*, not a thing *owned*. But the Acts church (of which we are a part) is also moving *beyond* the life of the Garden. And this is as it should be, because even before the Fall, the Garden was never intended as the end. Faithful stewardship—tending the Garden—was Adam's probationary task. The end was always Adam's possession of God himself, and God's possession of Adam. Adam failed this probationary task of stewardship because he sought

the possession of other things—he coveted and stole. But God’s plan would not be undone, the Second Adam is faithful where the First Adam failed, and in Acts 4 we can almost taste heaven.

Remember the unique place of Acts in the canon: situated at the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new. Strange things are happening. The apostles are still entering the temple and synagogues, miracles are taking place, as well as prophecies and tongues. In Acts, everything is in flux, and we see aspects of the church’s life under the old covenant, in the past, the church’s life in the present and—at times—we catch a glimpse of the future, of the perfected and glorified church. I think that’s what we see—if only a glimpse—in these few verses of Acts 4. (And it is *only* a glimpse, because Ananias and Sapphira bring us back to the present in the verses that follow.)

Acts 4 is not about economic egalitarianism. We do not even know if there were poor people present in the scene it presents. Perhaps it can be inferred from the text, but it is left for us to determine because it is not the main point. Though some think it wooden, I love the language of the old American Standard Version: “and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own.” I assume there were plenty of materially poor believers present, but they would have known that they were not being made rich by this redistribution of goods, but because of the apostles’ witness of the resurrection of Jesus. They were rich because they possessed God himself. The church’s provision for their material needs flowed out of this reality.

These New Testament believers could give and receive so freely because they were beginning to see that this is not the end. In other words, they possess a consciousness that stands in stark contrast to the life of God’s people under the law, where they begin to mistake *the land* as their end—they begin to conflate the possession of Canaan with a Promised Land yet to come.

The Acts church understood the *reason* behind the imperative of the eighth and tenth commandments, “Thou shall not steal or covet”: because “I am the Lord your God who brought

you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” We do not steal or covet because of who God is and what he has done for us: he takes us as his possession and, *strangely*, freely gives himself as our possession. *There is no possession that we want—nothing left to covet—other than God himself.*

That, I believe, is what is going on in Exodus 20 and Acts 4, in contrast to interpretations that use these texts for political ends. To seek to harness God’s Word to promote one political agenda or another—of the left or right—is to miss the point.

Consider with me now what the Bible *does* say about politics. While this list is not exhaustive, I believe the Bible speaks critically about the establishment of government, government’s role, and the Christian’s obligation toward government. I will discuss these briefly.

Reformed thinkers differ in understandings of the origin of government. Some, including many Dutch Reformed thinkers as well as the Scottish Covenanters, associate the establishment of government with life in the Garden, as intrinsic to the common mandate given to Adam and embodied in his kingly role in Eden. Others place the establishment of government after the Fall, usually with that part of the Noahic covenant given in Genesis 9:6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed,” which seems to imply the establishment of a legitimate authority empowered to police, judge, and enforce against capital crimes. Others in the post-Fall camp (a minority position) identify the origins of the state with Babel in Genesis 11, with the scattering of people groups defined by common language. Each of these views has something in common: it is God who establishes government. In other words, government is not intrinsically bad—though the rhetoric of some libertarians (who have become increasingly popular among the young adult demographic in recent years) seems to come close to saying that.

God’s institution of government is closely related to his purpose for it, and our obligation towards it. Christians on the political left emphasize the New Testament description of a government that “rewards good” to argue for an expansive role

for the state, just as Christians on the right emphasize the same text's description of government as the punisher of evil to make their case for small government. What do these isolated quotes, taken from 1 Peter 2:14, really say? Verses 11–17 provide the immediate context:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Peter addresses God's people as a pilgrim people—a people who know that their lives are wrapped up in the narrative of Scripture—who believe this world is not the end. We submit to government and honor the king—good or bad—*because* we are a pilgrim people. The same rationale underlies Jesus's own command to “render unto Caesar.” Peter goes on to explain that submission to earthly authorities is following in the footsteps of Christ: humiliation precedes exaltation. So much for so-called “Christian coalitions,” demanding a seat at the table of political power. Indeed, in an age of color revolutions, it seems timely to note that the response of the New Testament church to official persecution was not political revolt in the style of the Maccabees, but perseverance.

I am deeply concerned that many sincere, Bible-believing Christians today are harming themselves and the witness of the church with unbiblical *attitudes* toward the state—even if the *policies* of the state really do fall far short of the mark. How do we speak about President Barack Obama?

Does our tone honor the king and reflect our pilgrim identity? Can you acknowledge him, in Paul's language from Romans 13, as “a minister of God to you for good”? What if the next president is, for example, a devoted follower and former bishop of a prominent religious cult?³ Can we honor him in faith, believing that God causes princes to rise and fall as part of the unfolding drama of redemption, mysteriously moving us toward the consummation of all things?

A final thought. Nowhere in the Bible is this honor of the king more poignantly displayed than in the apostle Paul's life. When accused by the Jews before the Roman authorities, he appealed to be judged by Caesar. In other words, he took full advantage of his rights as a Roman citizen. Yet if he had not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free in Caesarea, because he had not violated any Roman law. Eventually Paul's appeal would result in his death in Rome.

But Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship—an appeal he made on more than one occasion—was inspired by the Holy Spirit. He was living out the life pattern of Christ for the benefit of the fledgling and persecuted church. His Roman citizenship was not irrelevant to his pilgrimage, but was purposefully used in service to it. For Paul, Rome was never the end.

If you choose to become involved in government or politics, do so wholeheartedly and without reservation. Take common grace and general revelation seriously. Just as the Bible is not a textbook on politics, prudent and just policymaking is not the special reserve of Christians. But your faith does inform your political engagement. Even if you agree with the unbeliever on particular policy issues, you are not agreeing for the same reasons. For you, exercising the benefits and obligations of earthly citizenship is all done in the service of your citizenship that is in heaven. If the Garden was not the end, nor Canaan nor Rome, surely Washing-

3 This address was originally given in the midst of the 2012 United States presidential campaign, when Republican nominee Mitt Romney's Mormonism was a campaign issue among politically conservative evangelicals.

ton, DC, is not the end, either. ©

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The Two Cultures: A Lifetime Later

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by James S. Gidley

In May 1959, C. P. Snow delivered a lecture at Cambridge University, later published as “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution.” Snow made two main points: (1) scientists and humanists in the academy are two distinct cultures, each with its own language and concerns, and neither able to understand or to appreciate the other; (2) the world is impoverished by the decisions of a British ruling class drawn exclusively, or nearly so, from the humanist camp. Snow was not the first to comment on the two-cultures problem; Baylor Professor Alan Jacobs traces it back to the 1880s debate between Matthew Arnold, poet and humanist, and Thomas Henry Huxley, scientist and Darwinist.² And Snow has certainly not been the last to comment on it. What follows is my own humble attempt to say something about it.

The time since Snow’s lecture has spanned al-

most my entire life. Snow commented on a divide in his day in English institutions of higher education. How stands the academy a lifetime later? Having spent my entire adult life in higher education, I can testify that the divide is still with us. The sciences and the humanities are still at odds.

And it is not merely that the sciences and the humanities are divided from each other; they are also divided among themselves. Historians do not speak the same language as philosophers; musicologists and classicists have little in common. Chemists do not really know what biologists are doing, and physicists do not know—well, physicists know everything: just ask them. Then there is the host of other disciplines that were not even invited to the table for the original squabble: the social sciences and the various professions. The postmodern multiversity embodies the postmodern view of human discourse: everyone’s thoughts are culturally conditioned and, therefore, incommensurable across cultures. Each academic discipline is a subculture that cannot really communicate with the others.

The reward structure in academia reinforces the Balkanization of the disciplines. With few exceptions, the path to recognition and prestige in the academy is through specialization—often minute specialization. A well-rounded intellect is not much in demand. The well-rounded intellect is like the three-sport athlete in high school: he is unlikely to excel at the college level in all three, and the chances of multiple success at the professional level are vanishingly small. The big money goes to the specialist. This may be a pervasive theme of our society. Specialization in medicine is another example.

Another change has occurred since Snow’s original lecture. The playing field has tilted considerably in favor of the sciences (and the professions). In Snow’s day, particularly in England, the humanities still had pride of place in the academy. Now science has the greater prestige. In my view, there are two main reasons for this, one internal and the other external.

The internal reason for the present preeminence of the sciences is epistemological. Science is

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=446&issue_id=99.

2 “The Two Cultures, Then and Now: The Sciences, the Humanities, and Their Common Enemy,” *Books and Culture* (March/April 2014): 11–14, <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2014/marapr/two-cultures-then-and-now.html?paging=off>.

still, to a large extent, based on the Enlightenment assumption that truth is universal and noncultural. Therefore, when scientists teach their subject or make new discoveries, they do not hesitate to treat them as true. They know that theories change and that new discoveries will modify currently received explanations, but they still act as if what they are professing is objective truth. Humanists, on the other hand, are dominated by a postmodern epistemology, in which all truth-claims are regarded as assertions of power on behalf of some social group. Many natural scientists had already suspected that there was no truth-content in humanistic learning; when they hear humanists admitting it, they feel justified in ignoring what humanists say.

It is true that postmodernists have subjected the natural sciences to their cultural critique. The standard line is that scientific theories are the product of a scientific culture seeking to consolidate its power. The sciences greet such analyses with laughter or a shrug; the idea that there could be a feminist physics has generated zero traction among physicists.

The external reason for the current preeminence of the sciences is economic. For a generation or more, the cost of a college education has been rising faster than the general rate of inflation. Now that tuition and fees for four years of college routinely exceed \$100,000, parents and students have begun to consider the wisdom of the investment much more carefully. We have probably all heard some version of the following joke: "What did the liberal arts graduate say to the engineering graduate? 'Do you want fries with that?'" While the earning power of a liberal arts degree is not nearly as dismal as the joke suggests, there is still a substantial differential.³ This appears to be a significant factor leading to declining enrollment in the humanities. College administrators, faced with the need to control costs, will almost always make the pragmatic decision to cut the humanities programs

3 Melissa Korn, "Liberal Arts Salaries Are a Marathon Not a Sprint," *At Work* (blog), *Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/atwork/2014/01/22/liberal-arts-salaries-are-a-marathon-not-a-sprint/>.

that are generating less revenue than science and professional programs.

The problem is exacerbated when humanists exhibit a lack of concern for the employment prospects of their graduates, arguing that employment is not the purpose of a humanistic education. Unfortunately, one of the current realities in higher education is the nearly universal belief that the purpose of a college degree *is* to get better employment and guarantee a higher lifetime earning potential. Scientists and professionals take this in stride and use it as a marketing device for their programs. Humanists often seem to be ambivalent about it or hostile to it.

So, a lifetime later, are we on the verge of a resolution to the two-cultures divide by way of the triumph of science and the withering away of the humanities? Some would greet such a development with indifference, others with satisfaction.

Before reaching such a conclusion, it would be well to consider what higher education might look like without the humanities, or what the sciences and the professions might look like without some grounding, however minimal, in the humanities. Loren Graham, in *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer*,⁴ has provided a vivid portrait of such a development in the Soviet Union. The executed engineer of the title was Peter Palchinsky, a Russian mining engineer and an ardent socialist, who spent a number of years in self-imposed exile in Europe to avoid being exiled to Siberia by the Czar. Palchinsky willingly worked for the Communist regime, but fell afoul of the Party on at least two counts: 1) He insisted on healthy living conditions for laborers in any mining development; Joseph Stalin, on the other hand, insisted that technological development on a monumental scale was the only consideration. Stalin's priorities were to be brutally executed on projects like the White Sea Canal, produced by slave labor with appalling loss of life and dubious economic benefit. 2) Palchinsky insisted that there were technical, economic, and other limitations to what could be

4 Loren Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

achieved by engineering, “saying, ‘We are not magicians, we cannot do everything.’” Stalin, on the other hand, “maintained ‘There are no fortresses that Bolsheviks cannot storm.’”⁵

The latter clash was to destroy a generation of engineers in the Soviet Union. Engineers who complained that the ambitious goals of the five-year plans were infeasible were accused of “wrecking,” that is, deliberately sabotaging the success of the plan. On the other hand, engineers who remained quiet about the infeasibility of the plan were accused of “wrecking” when it became apparent that the goals of the plan would not be met. The crisis came with the Industrial Party Trial of 1930,⁶ a show trial in which eight prominent engineers were found guilty.

These events were only the beginning of a reign of terror among Soviet engineers, several thousand of whom were arrested. There were only about ten thousand engineers in the entire Soviet Union at the time. In the end, about 30 percent of Palchinsky’s colleagues were arrested—most of them thrown into labor camps with little chance of survival.⁷

Palchinsky himself had already been secretly executed.⁸ As a dead man, he made a convenient scapegoat and was labeled the ringleader of the imaginary conspiracy.

What might this have to do with higher education? Graham paints a vivid picture:

One of the ways in which the new Soviet engineers differed from engineers elsewhere first became apparent to me in 1960 when I came to Moscow as an exchange student at Moscow University. Five years earlier I had received a degree in chemical engineering from Purdue

University. At Purdue I had been distressed by the narrowness of the curriculum. The few elective courses I had to take were inadequate windows on the large and complex world beyond thermodynamics and differential equations that I wanted to explore.... Finally, during a student excursion outside Moscow I met a young woman who said that she was an engineer. “What kind of engineer?” I asked. “A ball-bearing engineer for paper mills” was the reply. I responded, “Oh, you must be a mechanical engineer.” She rejoined, “No, I am a ball-bearing engineer for paper mills.” Incredulous, I countered, “Surely you do not have a degree in ‘ball-bearings for paper mills.’” She assured me that she did indeed have such a degree.⁹

Graham goes on to discuss Soviet education in more general terms, commenting along the way, “The humanities, as known in the West, played almost no role in Soviet education in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods.”¹⁰

One aspect of education, at least since Plato wrote *The Republic*, has been the interest of the state in the education of its subjects or citizens. Plato dilates on the education that would be necessary if the ideal republic were to be supplied with the required philosophical leaders. Whether the state undertakes the task of education directly or indirectly, it must insure that its content is not subversive. Humanistic education at its best addresses questions of ethics and the human good that must eventually be brought to bear upon the existing political and economic arrangements of the society. Such scrutiny may prove to be at least embarrassing to the wealthy and the politically powerful.

The Soviet education of the Stalinist era was designed to produce human automata that would fit as cogs into the machine of socialist planning directed from the top. Today’s nearly exclusive concern with employment as the only valid outcome of a college education has the potential to produce

5 Ibid., 42.

6 Described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), as the Promparty Trial.

7 Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, 45.

8 Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 375. Solzhenitsyn inferred that he was secretly executed because he had refused to sign a confession incriminating himself.

9 Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, 68–69.

10 Ibid., 70.

the same kind of education, if it is not already doing so. The only difference is that no force is required. The consumers of the education themselves demand to be narrowly “educated” to fit into some niche in the current economy. The grim story of Soviet-style education is a chilling warning that we should not desire this for our children and grandchildren.

How might we respond to the two-cultures issue and the challenges of higher education today? While I do not have a specific plan, I suggest that the following principles, among others, should guide Reformed Christians:

1. The purpose of education is the same as the purpose of life: “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”¹¹ This requires not only grounding education on the Bible but also a full exploration of what it means to be human, which is to say what it means to be created in the image of God. The humanities are indispensable for this purpose.

2. Higher education ought to show an appreciation for the Reformation principle of calling and its concomitant elevation of the dignity of labor, even—or especially—manual labor. Some of the “two-cultures” problem is caused, or at least exacerbated, by the Greek legacy in the humanities. In the Greek view, labor is something for slaves. Liberal education is to provide *otium cum dignitate* (leisure with dignity) for those who do not have to work. Humanists should be cognizant of the fact that the vast majority of our graduates will have to earn a living and should be able to pay off their college loans some time before they die. According to philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Whatever be the justification that a college in the Reformed tradition of Christianity offers for engaging in the liberal arts, that justification will abjure any suggestion that the life of the mind is nobler than the work of our hands.”¹²

3. One specific biblical doctrine that has

11 Westminster Shorter Catechism 1.

12 Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Should the Work of Our Hands Have Standing in the Christian College?” in *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, ed. Clarence W. Joldersma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 271.

momentous implications for education is soul-body dualism. The reductionistic materialism of our time dismisses the idea of the soul as nothing but the discredited biological doctrine of vitalism. The humanities cannot thrive in a materialistic atmosphere. If everything is ultimately matter, then all explanation is ultimately physics. Biologist Edward O. Wilson argues for this at book length, not coincidentally praising the Enlightenment to the skies.¹³

4. While the academy is not the church, the biblical doctrine of the one body of Christ with many members is helpful by way of analogy. The scope of knowledge is too vast for us to avoid specialization. But we may aspire to view our specialties as gifts for the good of the entire body of the academy.

If another lifetime passes during which the Lord does not return, I think that it is safe to say that the two-cultures debate will still be with us in some form. If some scholar of a future generation should recover my words from the oblivion that they most likely deserve, I would say to her or him: you may or may not be better equipped to resolve the question than my generation has been, but in any case trust in Jesus, be humble, and be kind. ©

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13 Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

✦ Servant Humor

From the Back Pew

Eutychus II continues the tradition of Eutychus I, Ed Clowney’s pen name in the initial issues of *Christianity Today* (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutychus (and His Pin)*: “Eutychus 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, Eutychus 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.

With All My Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind?

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by Eutychus II

Distractions in worship are a problem—the little kid who won’t sit still, the little kid who continues to bounce around after the initial fidgeting, the little kid’s parents who won’t attend to the bouncing toddler fast enough, the teenager two aisles ahead who looks back to see if the parents are attending to the little kid. Incidents like these are what lead congregations to create nurseries or designate seating for families with young children. Of course,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=402&issue_id=91.

these “solutions” don’t remove distractions. Loud children are still a distraction even if they sit at the back of the meeting space or don’t wind up in the nursery. And that leads to the post-worship distraction of wondering about whether to talk to the parents and calculating the good that may come for peaceful services over against the antagonism that such an intervention may produce.

And then come the distractions beyond the control of parents or the progress of covenant children’s self-control. During a recent service, elders went forward to sit in the front pew nearest the communion table to receive and distribute the elements of the Lord’s Supper. One of the elders noticed a bee flying around the front of the room. When it landed on the table, the elder thought the pastor would also notice the insect and take proper action. But the minister did not since he was in the middle of instructions about the sacrament. The elder tried to concentrate on the words of institution but could not because the bee had crawled from the table into the napkins that enfolded the loaf of bread about to be broken by the pastor before being distributed to the congregation. The pastor went ahead, seemingly oblivious to the danger.

The elder did not know what to do. He considered intervening, which would have meant standing up, walking to the table, picking up the tray, and provoking the bee to fly somewhere else. But this would turn the elder’s distraction into a complete disruption of the sacrament. On the other hand, the elder also considered what kind of distraction would ensue if the pastor went ahead, opened the napkin, alarmed the bee, which then inflicted its stinger on an exposed part of the pastor’s body. And if the pastor were allergic to bee stings and started to swell up, the disruption would have been disproportionately much greater than if the elder had intervened.

As it turned out, the service went ahead, the pastor removed the napkin, the bee flew away, the pastor broke the bread, and the elders took the pieces to the congregation. Whether the elder had actually examined himself properly or heeded the pastor’s exhortation is not hard to say since he had

not. But he had avoided acting in a way that would have distracted everyone else.

The greatest commandment—to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind—is a challenge any day of the week. But it takes on dimensions not sufficiently appreciated when Christians gather together to embody such love in corporate worship. I may be prepared to give my whole being (as much as possible, anyway) to the worship of God on a given Sunday morning, but the presence of other people can ruin that effort to give up my entire self. What other people wear, how they smell, what noises they make can throw any worshiper off. If I worshiped God all by myself—in the proverbial prayer closet—I could conceivably approach God without any distraction, though everyone would likely admit to having thoughts during prayer or Bible reading that make us less than single-minded.

The challenge of distractions is arguably greater for pastors. An easy example is the challenge a minister faces when he sees one of his adolescent children—no longer seated with and policed by his mother—whispering and laughing too frequently during the service. Should he call out his child by name—even during a sermon or administration of a sacrament—or should he wait to discipline the child at home? Either way—the child making noise or the pastor calling attention to the child—the pastor distracts the congregation.

But the duty of not diverting attention away from worship falls to ministers and officers in more subtle ways than the obvious ones that come with fractious children. Leading in worship requires a pastor to function as a kind of moderator. Whether he announces every element or calls on the congregation to rise or sit, the pastor has a duty to monitor the time (when to begin, how long the service is going), observe the actions of the people and ensure they occur in good order (such as allowing people taking the offering to complete their rounds before the congregation rises to sing a hymn), and to follow the order of service printed in the bulletin (admittedly some Presbyterian communions frown on bulletins, but Orthodox Presbyterians generally do not). If a minister forgets

a part of the service that has been listed in the bulletin—and this can happen any time a guest minister leads worship—congregants likely will take notice and wonder, for instance, whether the pastor simply will skip the Lord's Prayer entirely (because he forgot to say it at the designated time) or make up for his mistake and insert it at another point in the service.

A similar calculation extends to how much a minister inserts his own personality into the way he conducts a service. Of course, voice modulation, pronunciation, volume, cadence—in other words, the simple manner in which a pastor speaks is part of his personality and will be part of the way he leads a service, not to mention facial expressions and body language. But pastors can insert more of themselves than they realize in distracting ways. A joke in a sermon, an illustration, even the way he makes announcements can take members of the congregation's thoughts away from the elements of worship to wonder about the propriety of the example or to consider the illustration more than the sermon's biblical text. Some have argued that the minister needs to “get out of the way” when he preaches so that the people will give their due attention to God's word. This is no less true for the rest of the service where the pastor leads in such a way that worshipers do not notice him as they offer up praise and prayer to God.

The danger in our time of a subdued minister who goes out of his way not to draw attention to himself is that he will not be attractive to would-be members who evaluate a pastor by his likability. Pastoral restraint, of course, need not govern interactions after a service or other forums. But pastoral moderation for the sake of congregational participation is not a recipe for displaying a minister's charisma. And if people are going to look for a church on the basis of a pastor's personal charms, looks, or demeanor, a get-out-of-the-way approach to leading in worship could harm the appeal of a local congregation.

In the end, whether something in a service appeals to people or distracts from worship is impossible to control. God's people come in all shapes, sizes, and personalities, and that means

that what some believers find disruptive, others will not even notice, or what some find attractive will put others off. The lesson, then, may have less to do with each Christian's temperamental idiosyncrasies and more with the corporate nature of the Christian life. If Christianity is less about me, my needs, my criteria for a good pastor, my pet peeves with unruly children, and more about what I share in common with all believers—from a common confession to sitting under the oversight of the same elders—then perhaps we as a body will have fewer distractions in worship and in the life of a congregation. If that is so, then maybe the Greatest Commandment needs to be understood not simply as a directive for me to be all consumed, but for Christians corporately to worship with all of their collective heart, soul, strength, and mind. In which case, I end up giving up of myself for the good of the body just as little Johnny does as he tries to sit still and stay quiet for seventy minutes. ©

Do Presbyterians Lack Joy?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2014¹

by Eutychus II

Does Jesus want us to be happy? Definitions are important, of course, but Christ did say that he came to make his followers' joy complete (John 15:11). So the answer should be the affirmative. Help also comes from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which begins by affirming that man's "chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever"

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=444&issue_id=98.

(WSC 1). Even if Christians experienced a degree of suffering in this life, the catechism teaches that in the world to come believers will experience a form of happiness that will last eternally.

The reason for asking what seems like such an obvious question is that Pope Francis recently gave an interview in which he enumerated ten ways to bring "greater joy" to life:

- 1) Live and let live;
- 2) Be giving of yourself to others;
- 3) Be kind, humble, and calm;
- 4) Have a healthy sense of leisure;
- 5) Make Sundays a day for family time, not work;
- 6) Find dignified work for young people;
- 7) Care for creation;
- 8) Let go of the negative;
- 9) Inspire through witness and engage in dialogue;
- 10) Promote peace.

Aside from a bit of redundancy—"live and let live" sounds a lot like "let go the negative" or even an informal way of saying "be kind, humble, and calm"—what is striking about the list and the larger interview is that the pope doesn't mention Jesus or any specific devotional practice. Roman Catholics might have expected to hear something about praying to Mary who can assist with joy, or about the peace that the Mass produces which in turn yields joy. Christians more broadly might have expected the head of the largest Christian communion in the world to mention Jesus as the only true source of joy or happiness. But Francis did not.

The pope may have had a good reason for not mentioning Jesus in connection with a life of happiness because our Lord himself did not necessarily come across as joyful, and in many of his interactions with followers and opponents, his remarks could readily have produced discomfort or even pain. In Matthew 10:34, when Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword," he was certainly not proclaiming himself a freedom fighter in the modern political sense, but

neither was he offering the sort of encouragement that many Christians seek. For Jesus goes on to utter those stupendous words, “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” (Matt. 10:35). As many modern Roman Catholics and Protestants construe the family and its importance to a joyful life, Christ’s words are a significant challenge. Just a few chapters later, Jesus expressed a seeming disregard for natural family ties that supported his prior claim about the demands of discipleship. Upon hearing that his mother and brothers were waiting to see him while he was speaking, Jesus replied in a manner that would trouble many Christians today: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” (Matt. 12:48). That Jesus followed up with an affirmation of “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” showed that he was not without care for those close to him (Matt. 12:50). But this seeming disregard for maintaining harmonious—even happy—family relations is not what most contemporary Christians expect.

Jesus’s prickliness toward the Pharisees, the people who were after him and whom his own ministry clearly threatened, is understandable—but not its apparent extension to his disciples. For instance, in Matthew 15, Jesus calls the Pharisees “hypocrites” and claims that Isaiah was prophesying about them when he wrote: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8–9). When the disciples responded that Jesus had offended the Pharisees, he referred to the Pharisees as “blind guides” (Matt. 15:14). Peter still did not understand and asked Jesus to explain. Jesus replied with apparent impatience, “Are you still without understanding?” (Matt. 15:16). Jesus’s frustration not only with the Jewish authorities but also his followers continued in Matthew’s account of Peter’s confession of Christ as the Son of God. Just prior to this, when his followers discovered they had no food for a meal, Jesus replied, “O you of little faith,” certainly an understandable reaction after he had just fed the four thousand (Matt.

16:8). But it was likely not the response that we would encourage of young pastors when discouraged by stubborn members of a session. The text goes on to record Jesus’s reaction to Peter’s effort to comfort his Lord by saying that Christ would not have to endure being executed. Jesus’s response, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance,” is again understandable but arguably not the model for people who want to experience joyful relations with fellow believers (Matt. 16:23).

As much as these interactions raise serious problems for anyone who might recommend that Christians should do what Jesus did, they also underscore an emotional range to Christ’s incarnate existence that challenges the way many believers conceive of happiness. In his remarkable essay, “On the Emotional Life of our Lord,” Benjamin Warfield tried to account for the range of Jesus’s reactions. The Princeton theologian devoted a section of his essay to Jesus’s love for his companions and acquaintances, a love which originated from compassion, or Christ’s commiseration with the grief and anguish of the people to whom he ministered. Warfield also devoted careful attention to Christ’s anger and again attributed it to the savior’s indignation at the ravages of sin. But when Warfield commented on Christ’s joy, he made sure to distinguish the happiness that could only come through Christ’s sinless life and atoning death from modern substitutes for joyfulness. Warfield wrote:

The perversion is equally great, however, when there is attributed to our Lord, as it is now very much the fashion to do, “before the black shadow of the cross fell athwart his pathway,” the exuberant joy of a great hope never to be fulfilled: the hope of winning his people to his side and of inaugurating the Kingdom of God upon this sinful earth by the mere force of its proclamation. Jesus was never the victim of any such illusion: he came into the world on a mission of ministering mercy to the lost, giving his life as a ransom for many (Lk. xix. 10; Mk. x. 4; Mt. xx. 28); and from the beginning he set his feet steadfastly in the path of suffering (Mt. iv. 3 f.; Lk. iv. 3 f.) which

he knew led straight onward to death (Jn. ii. 19, iii. 14; Mt. xii. 40; Lk. xii. 49–50; Mt. ix. 15; Mk. ii. 1–9; Lk. v. 34, etc.). Joy he had: but it was not the shallow joy of mere pagan delight in living, nor the delusive joy of a hope destined to failure; but the deep exultation of a conqueror setting captives free. This joy underlay all his sufferings and shed its light along the whole thorn-beset path which was trodden by his torn feet... If our Lord was “the Man of Sorrows,” he was more profoundly still “the Man of Joy.”²

Calvinists have a reputation for being dour. That image may owe to the ongoing sinfulness of Reformed Protestants. But the problem could be an insufficient standard by which to judge happiness. If Christ’s example is any indication, the joy that Christians experience is different from having a nice day. ☺

² Benjamin B. Warfield, “On the Emotional Life of Our Lord,” in *Members of the Theological Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, Biblical and Theological Studies* (New York: Scribner’s, 1912), 69–70.

✦ Servant Reading

Briefly Noted

God's Astounding Grace

by *D. Scott Meadows*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2014¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

God's Astounding Grace: The Doctrines of Grace, by D. Scott Meadows. North Bergen, NJ: Pillar and Ground, 2012, 32 pages, \$3.99.

This little booklet displays a warmth of devotion and a clarity of truth that makes it very useful in convincing others of the truth of God's amazing grace. It will be valuable in persuading Arminians, as well as unbelievers, of the richness and wonder of God's grace. Professor John Murray always maintained that part of the work of evangelism is to convince poorly taught believers of the Reformed faith. This, of course, is best done by simply opening God's Word. Thus, Meadows only quotes Scripture, and does so with the care and acumen of a true pastor-theologian.

The booklet presents the five points of Calvinism without saying so. Meadows simply opens the Bible in a winsome way, designed to show the reader the glory of God's grace. He brings Scripture to bear on all of the well-known false notions and misconceptions that have always surrounded these doctrines. For example, in dispelling the idea that "foreknowledge" is simply a cognitive

awareness, he shows that Scripture uses the word to "denote an intimate and particular love" (19). In doing so, Meadows build a theological case with peerless logic. He articulates these familiar doctrines with a care that makes them fresh for the novice or the theologically mature reader. It is obviously the work of a pastor as he frames his argument in a most irenic way. As a physician of the soul he convinces the reader of the dangerous nature of his spiritual disease and sets before him the wonderful cure offered in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The booklet is attractively designed and can, thus, be given to anyone with confidence that its looks reflect its content. D. Scott Meadows is a Reformed Baptist pastor serving as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church (Reformed), in Exeter, New Hampshire. I highly recommend this booklet. ☺

Gregory E. Reynolds serves as the pastor of *Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC)* in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=406&issue_id=92.

✚ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

Pierre Viret

by R. A. Sheats

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2014¹

by Riley D. Fraas

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation, by R. A. Sheats. Tallahassee, FL: Zurich Publishing, 2012, xx + 323, \$30.00.

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation, by R. A. Sheats, is the finest example of a spiritual biography that I can recall reading in recent memory. If the reader is looking for a work of academic history that objectively reports all the facts about Viret, this is not the source. Its bias is clearly in favor of the Reformation in general and Viret's ministry in particular. However, if the reader is looking for a source of inspiration, encouragement, and devotion to the Almighty, this work is highly recommended. Here are six reasons why I recommend that you read it.

1. It Is an Action-Packed, Page-Turning Thriller

From conflicts with Romanists (55), Bernese Protestant magistrates assuming all ecclesiastical authority in Pays de Vaud and forbidding church

discipline (151–202), ignorant parishioners, being poisoned (44–46), illness (206), exile from his home country (167), and blessed ministerial fruit, to his surprisingly gentle character in the face of opposition, capture, and imprisonment (251), I just could not put this book down. The action is nonstop. One memorable episode is this anecdote of the first impression the reformer Guillaume Farel made in a Catholic village:

Arriving thus in Orbe with the Bernese ambassadors, Farel proceeded immediately to the town church where he mounted the pulpit and attempted to preach. A Catholic eyewitness recounts the event:

... after vespers were said, Farel, with presumptuous audacity, without asking leave of anyone, mounted to the pulpit of the church to preach, and as soon as everyone saw him, men, women, and children all cried aloud and booed with every exclamation, seeking to prevent him, calling him dog, scoundrel, heretic, devil; other abuses they hurled upon him, so much so that one couldn't even hear God thunder.²

Farel, however, was not to be cowed, and patiently awaited the cessation of the noise. At sight of his calm obstinacy, the men of the city rose furiously from their seats and rushed forward with the intention of pulling Farel from the pulpit. The courageous preacher would certainly have perished at the hands of the incensed mob had not the bailiff taken him in hand and personally escorted him to his lodging. (11)

2. It Is Well-Written

Sheats writes with an effusiveness and expressiveness of style that can only come from being immersed in sixteenth-century French literature for months on end. Her English prose ebbs, flows, and punches. This quality admittedly is easier to recog-

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=400&issue_id=91.

2 Quoting Pierrefleur, *Memoires de Pierrefleur* (Lausanne: Editions La Concorde, 1933), 16.

nize than to describe, but I will offer an example: “Again, as in the years of Catholic power, the Scripture had been replaced, though it was now done not by a bishop’s command or papal decree, but by the pen of a Protestant magistrate” (166).

3. It Is Doxological

As a spiritual biography should, this book glorifies God in all things. It will drive you to your knees in thanks to God for his mighty acts in history. Sheats recounts the successful disputation held versus the Catholic clergy at the cathedral of Lausanne in 1536:

Upon this vital battlefield each of these three men contested for the Faith, the mystery hid from ages, but now revealed to the saints (Col. 1:26). And within this combat each among this brilliant array of Reformers was noted in his own way: men shuddered at the thunderings of Farel, they sat amazed at the memory and clear-headedness of young Calvin, and they marveled at the startling wisdom and refreshing gentleness of Viret. (70)

And,

Viret and Calvin. How often the Lord had brought the paths of these two men together! How often the Swiss Reformer had enjoined his French counterpart—in preparing Geneva to receive the man they had banished, in aiding Calvin upon his return to the city ... ever spurring each other onward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. But now, after a lifetime’s friendship and companionship, it was Calvin who first attained the prize. (246)

4. It Fills in Important Historical Gaps

Pierre Viret (1511–1571) is a name that is largely forgotten, but clearly should not be. Viret, along with the more famous Calvin and Farel, together formed the *Triumvirate* (71–72). These three pastors worked closely together, were dear friends, and were used mightily in French-speaking Switzerland. Viret spent a significant part of his ministry in Geneva, so much that the Genevans

thought of him as “our pastor” long after he had departed that city (247). At the founding of the Genevan Academy, the principal and most competent faculty members were those who had been exiled from Pays de Vaud as a result of their dispute with Bernese Protestant Lords over fencing the Lord’s Supper, professors from the Reformed Academy of Lausanne (204). This Academy had been established to train ministers for the newly Reformed city. During its short existence, the Academy of Lausanne, of which Viret was a founding faculty member, yielded some of history’s most influential Reformers. Sheats writes:

Indeed, in the days prior to the establishment of Calvin’s Academy in Geneva in 1559, the preeminent place of study in the pays de Vaud was unquestionably Lausanne. The Academy turned out countless pastors for the Reformed faith, and, aside from the preachers who left the Academy to proceed as missionaries to the surrounding Roman Catholic countries, were many world-renowned men of the Faith who also received their training at Viret’s school. These students included Zacharias Ursinus and Casper Olevianus, authors of the Heidelberg Catechism of 1562, and Guido de Brès, author of the Belgic Confession of 1561. (92)

5. Pierre Viret Is an Inspirational Figure

Viret was known for being dauntless, courageous, gentle, pastoral, and a true peacemaker. Here are some notable quotes from the author: “If Farel was the Peter of the French Reformation and Calvin was the Paul, of a certainty Viret was the John” (64). “Only the fear I have of Him holds me to my post”³ (175).

Just as Beza, Viret recognized the innumerable difficulties and almost certain defeat that awaited him in Lausanne. But, despite the seeming hopelessness surrounding him, he knew he could not forsake his call. As pastor

3 Quoting Henri Vuilleumier, *Notre Pierre Viret* (Lausanne: Librairie Payot, 1911), 228.

of Lausanne, he must remain and fight for the Reformation of that city until every means possible had been exhausted. (174–75)

Sheats describes an incident in Lyon, France, where Viret ministered for a time, involving a Jesuit priest who had newly been condemned to death by the Protestant authorities for his false teachings:

Viret requested that clemency be shown the condemned man and that time be granted him to consider the Reformed teaching before he was brought to execution. The baron, however, would hear of no delay, and ordered the execution to continue. Viret, seeing that all entreaties were vain, leapt upon the scaffold and, interposing his very life to save his enemy, declared that if Auger were to die, he also would share his fate. (223)

As a result, the execution was interrupted, and Auger was not long after sprung out of prison by Catholic comrades, and lived on to trouble Viret's ministry (246). Viret was so universally appreciated as a peacemaker that when the French crown issued an edict that only French-born pastors could remain in the country, the Catholic clergy in Lyon, fearing what might happen in their city if his peacemaking influence were absent, lobbied for the Swiss Viret to be given special treatment by allowing him to remain in Lyon (235).

6. The Beautiful Glossy Color Photographs

This book contains copious photographs taken on location in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands of cities, cathedrals, castles, and council buildings relevant to the life and ministry of Pierre Viret. If you have never been to any of the locations pictured, as I have not, you may want to go after seeing these photographs. The abundance of photographic pages and the extended bibliography and index reduce the prose sections to considerably less than the official 323 pages.

I won't say that you must read the book. I will only say that if you don't, you're really missing out. ©

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God's Lyrics

by Douglas Sean O'Donnell

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2014¹

by Alan D. Strange

God's Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs, by Douglas Sean O'Donnell. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, xxiii + 210, \$15.99, paper.

Great music has the power to move our whole being. This is undoubtedly why some of the most memorable and magnificent moments in my life have occurred in the concert hall or the opera house. I have marveled at Pierre Boulez conducting Mahler's Second Symphony and Leonard Bernstein conducting Beethoven's Third. Luciano Pavarotti has thrilled me in *Il Trovatore*, as has Anna Netrebko in *La Boheme*. And then there are the countless performances on radio and recordings (one calls to mind Joan Sutherland singing *Norma*—or anything, for that matter—Birgit Nilsson in *Der Ring* and Franco Corelli in *Tosca*). As great an impact as these works have had on me, however, they cannot compare with the times that sacred music, live or on recording, has moved me: Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*,

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=405&issue_id=92.

Mendelsohn's *Elijah*, Brahms's *German Requiem*, and many others.

Great music is indeed moving, and when wedded to sacred text, is unparalleled in its evocative power. The hymns of the church (which term I use comprehensively, to include the Psalms) are also great music, though more widely singable than what is often called classical or sacred music would be. The great hymns of the church, whether taking the words of Scripture directly or impliedly (as expressed in great Christian poetry), manifest clearly the ancient dictum “cantat bis orat” — “he who sings prays twice.” The singer prays in both the words that he sings and the music that he employs to sing it, both serving as an out-breathing of the pious soul to God.

In arguing here for great music and biblical words, I make no argument that either the music or the words must be of a certain age or complexity. Contemporary words and music, if well-rendered and composed, can both be simple (note, not simplistic) and altogether lovely, as can contemporary music on the radio and in the concert hall and opera house. The illustrations I gave were of classics because they are better known than most contemporary examples would be. Music that is fitting for worship can be of a variety of origins and styles, but needs to be reverent, whether joyful or mournful, depending on the character of the text, to which affect it ought to correspond. Certainly the worship of our triune God, a God of infinite majesty and holiness, should never be shallow but always full of depth and meaning.

Sadly, much of what passes for music in worship these days lacks profundity—a strange trait, given the character of the God whom we worship. Douglas Sean O'Donnell, in his volume *God's Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs*, has given us a much needed work, for a church that has succumbed in its worship, particularly in its worship music, to shallow sentimentalism. This sentimentalism dictates that worship should be comforting and never convicting. In the support of such sentiments, music in worship must be sweet and positive.

While such positive themes pass muster in

our sentimentalized worship services, themes like God's wrath against sin and God being a warrior who conquers his and our enemies are rarely heard in such circles. O'Donnell's book is a call to recover a better, deeper, richer pattern of worship, to rediscover a more thoroughly biblical worship through Old Testament songs given proper reflection in the context of New Testament worship.

O'Donnell, Senior Pastor of New Covenant Church (Naperville, Illinois), divides his book into three main parts. Part one consists of sermons on the six Old Testament songs that are his focus. The first is the “Song of Moses” from Exodus 15, in which Yahweh's triumph over Pharaoh is celebrated. The second is from Deuteronomy 32, and O'Donnell calls it the “Song of Yahweh: An Exodus from Israel's Apostasy.” The third is the “Song of Deborah” from Judges 5, celebrating the Lord's victory over Israel's enemies. The fourth is in Samuel, consisting of two songs, the “Song of the Barren Woman” (1 Sam. 2) and the “Song of the Fertile King” (2 Sam. 22). And the fifth is the “Song of Habakkuk” (from chapter 3), expressing faith in God even in the midst of judgment. The five sermons exposit these texts, showing their place in redemptive history—of God delivering his people from his and their enemies, especially pointing in all of them to the ultimate deliverance which we enjoy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Part two, chapters 6–10, following the five chapters of part one, continues to focus on the six aforementioned Old Testament songs. In part two, entitled “Applications for Christian Worship,” O'Donnell argues for the ongoing fitness of these Old Testament songs and their themes for worship in the New Covenant church. In chapter 6, O'Donnell notes that the six songs have four themes:

1. The Lord is at the center; that is, our God is addressed, adored and “enlarged.”
2. His mighty acts in salvation history are recounted.
3. His acts of judgment are rejoiced in.
4. His ways of living (practical wisdom) are encouraged (113).

In chapters 7–10, O'Donnell “illustrate[s] how the six scriptural songs sing of these themes.” He compares these themes “with the most popular contemporary Christian choruses, as well as the most popular classic hymns sung in today’s churches” (113–14).

The purpose of O'Donnell’s comparative exercise is “to show some strengths and weaknesses of our favorite lyrics, and to suggest compensating for those weaknesses by using the six scriptural songs” (114). In short, the best of the hymns and songs of the church teach and preach Christ. These six songs support that and serve additionally as a corrective for the places in which the church’s hymnody and choruses fall short. O'Donnell notes that even the best of our ecclesiastical music tends to fail with respect to rejoicing in God’s acts of judgment. The worst of our choruses and hymns (as O'Donnell surveys particularly the top fifty contemporary Christian choruses and the top twenty-five hymns) woefully lack in the four themes, and even the best rarely contain all that these six scriptural songs do.

All of Scripture has as its theme the person and work of Christ, as do these six songs. O'Donnell wants us to see how each part of the Hebrew Scriptures—not just the Psalms, but the Torah, Prophets, and all the Writings—points to and sets forth Christ. His concern in this book is to highlight that we can, and ought, by the use of the Scripture’s own songs, come to enjoy this Christological richness, which many contemporary churches leave untapped and by which neglect they are spiritually impoverished. Especially helpful in this volume is O'Donnell’s extensive interaction with what the church is actually singing. The appendices contain lists of both the choruses and hymns most used by the churches, and he interacts with them extensively in this work. He offers these neglected songs of Scripture (at least neglected in more recent times) as part of the cure that ails us in our sentimentalized church culture.

Part three of this book contains O'Donnell’s own versions (text with music) of five of the six Old Testament songs (excluding the second one from 2 Samuel), along with a sixth song from Revela-

tion 5:9–11. Whether or not one finds O'Donnell’s poetic skills adequate—and the affect of the tunes appropriate for the words he selects—his attempt is an admirable one. This reviewer agrees that the church would do well to sing more of Scripture, both the Psalms and other Scriptures of the sort that O'Donnell furnishes us, and in so doing enjoy a more robust view of God and his work.

We need more of what O'Donnell is endeavoring to do in this helpful volume. Surely the church needs to recover its best hymnody, to employ its richest psalmody, and to sing the songs of Scripture themselves. So many evangelical churches have fallen prey to theologically, poetically, and musically impoverished worship that O'Donnell’s call to embrace the richness of the whole counsel of God in worship, and especially in our singing of sacred songs, is quite welcome. One hopes that O'Donnell’s sounding of the alarm will, along with other such efforts, have a salutary effect on the church. ©

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How Jesus Runs the Church

by Guy Prentiss Waters

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2014¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

How Jesus Runs the Church, by Guy Prentiss Waters. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, xxx + 178 pages, \$13.49, paper.

It has become an axiom since I entered the ministry in 1980 that the most neglected doctrine in American Christendom is the doctrine of the church. In the following decades, a number of fine works have been written or republished from earlier times when this doctrine was seen as essential to true Christian faith and practice.

The title is an eye-catcher: **How JesusHOW-TO RUNS THE CHURCH. "HIS CHURCH"** might have made the point even stronger, but it is a nice contrast with the "how to" pragmatism that pervades American evangelical ecclesiology. All along the way, Waters references every main point with lots of Scripture, demonstrating that ecclesiology is an essential part of biblical doctrine. Numerous quotations of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms reinforce this fact. He also gives ample, footnoted references to other authors, demonstrating that his ideas are not spun out of whole cloth. He refers often to the Form of Government in *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (sixth edition, 2010), in which he is a minister, demonstrating the importance of good order in Presbyterian churches.

Waters covers the five major topics of sound ecclesiology by defining the church, the nature of its government, the source and delegation of its power, its offices, and its courts.

Waters's pastoral and ecumenical sensibilities are evinced throughout the book. For example, he fairly represents those who do not believe that church membership is necessary, and goes on to gently but firmly argue its necessity by asking and answering a series of questions on the topic (16–21). Ecumenically, Waters makes it clear that by arguing that Presbyterianism is the most consistently biblical view of church government, he is not saying that non-Presbyterian churches are not true churches (xxvii).

My only real difference with the book is the "two-office" view held by the author (86–90). But, as is typical in the PCA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Waters is actually functionally three-office—what is often oddly referred to as "two-and-a-half-office." It is a tribute to how much these two views have in common in our two denominations that T. David Gordon, a staunch three-office defender, wrote the foreword. Waters's distinction between the teaching and the ruling elder is so sharp that the four differences between the two (94) make a strong argument for the three-office view. It is telling that almost all of the writers Waters quotes are three-office.

One other disagreement I have with the book is not in principle but in an application of a principle about which we both agree. In arguing that the church's judicial authority does not extend beyond ecclesiastical matters, he qualifies the point by quoting WCF 31.4 to show that the church may address the civil authority with "humble petition in cases extraordinary" and when the civil authority seeks the church's advice on a matter. Waters then cites the PCA General Assembly's "Declaration of Conscience on Homosexuals and the Military" (1993) as a "positive and constructive example" (68) of the former. The OPC passed similar motions on the same subject in 1993 and 2010. The traditional Presbyterian understanding of what constitutes "cases extraordinary" is a direct threat to the church's liberty or when the safety of any of its members and officers is at stake. Egyptian Presbyterians, for example, might legitimately petition their government on this issue. But when it comes to ethical problems with government policy, where

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=407&issue_id=92.

does the number of such petitions end? Good men in our denominations disagree on this issue, and so this footnote does not detract from Waters's book.

In the section on ordination, it would have been helpful to add the idea that ordination confers authority for the office to which a man is being ordained (106–8).

I would like to have seen more references to old covenant church government, such as are found in works from the era of the Westminster Assembly, like George Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod Blossoming or the Divine Order of Church Government Vindicated* (1646), or most recently Leonard Coppes's *Who Will Lead Us: A Study of the Development of Biblical Offices with Emphasis on the Diaconate*.²

Apart from these differences, Waters gives us a robust and nuanced presentation of the biblical doctrine of church government. Its clarity and depth are a rare combination, especially on this topic.

The "Select and Annotated Bibliography" is an excellent resource for further study. The biblical, name, and subject indexes are very well done. This is a perfect book for an adult Sunday school class. It took me about twelve weeks to cover the material with a few excursions on the three-office view and women in office. I highly recommend this superb little book. ☺

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² Leonard Coppes, *Who Will Lead Us: A Study of the Development of Biblical Offices with Emphasis on the Diaconate* (Chatanooga: Pilgrim, 1977).

Extravagant Grace

by *Barbara Duguid*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2014¹

by **Bruce and Sue Hollister**

Extravagant Grace, by Barbara Duguid. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, xxx + 178 pages, \$13.49, paper.

How are Christians to understand their ongoing struggle with remaining sin? In *Extravagant Grace*, Barbara Duguid brings an answer from John Newton, as she summarizes his teaching on the nature of sanctification. In particular, Duguid demonstrates the emphasis this eighteenth-century pastor brought to those he pastored: biblical sanctification is more about humility, dependence, and loving Christ, than about securing a seamless victory over besetting sin.

How are humility, dependence, and love for Christ produced? Duguid's answer may surprise some modern-day believers who assume that Christians are always able to have victory over sin, if only they believe the right doctrine, faithfully apply the right principles, and pray. According to Newton, although *new* believers may enjoy a measure of victory over sin, early victory may lead to false self-confidence. New believers commonly conclude that their victory over sin is due in some measure to their own efforts. They have yet to understand the depravity of their own hearts.

At some point, says Newton, Christians enter into the second phase of Christian growth. Rather than granting a uniform victory over sin, God allows *maturing* Christians to struggle with sin. They now learn humility in a new way— from their experience of failure to obey God from the heart.

Duguid is brutally honest about her own struggle with sin as she seeks to illustrate the biblical

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=412&issue_id=93.

concepts discussed. Thus, she demonstrates how God uses painful experiences of failure to produce inward humility and dependence upon Christ for victory over sin. While her transparency is to be commended, and is actually a strength of the book, some stories may not be helpful to all readers.

Some readers may grow impatient, as Duguid lingers on the inability of the Christian in the matter of victory over sin. They may (rightly) ask, “What, then, is the proper activity of the Christian in sanctification?” However, because Duguid believes Christians today suffer from a lack of clarity about sanctification, she does not rush to answer that question. Rather, she emphasizes that though Christians are commanded to live righteously, they are helpless in themselves to do so. God gives victory in his own time; he is entirely sovereign in the matter of our sanctification.

Ironically, learning that God is sovereign over our struggles with sin does not produce laziness; it rather energizes Christians to fuller obedience. In the latter chapters, Duguid describes how God leads Christians to maturity as they faithfully utilize the means of grace, public and private. The preaching of the Word, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, and the fellowship of believers are instrumental as Christians learn dependence upon and love for Christ in an ever increasing way.

Readers may react to some perceived theological imprecision early in the book, particularly as the author endeavors to flesh out the inward/outward dynamic of sin. However, Duguid’s emphasis is insightful and her meaning becomes clear. Outward sins comprise only one dimension of indwelling sin; inward sin is a deep and complex abyss. Read the book *all the way through*, and then *read it again!* The careful reader will be richly rewarded. ©

Bruce Hollister serves as the pastor of New Covenant Community Church (OPC) in New Lenox, Illinois, where his wife **Sue** is a member.

Center Church

by *Timothy Keller*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2014¹

by **Shane Lems**

Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City, by Timothy Keller. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, 400 pages, \$29.99, hardcover.

For various reasons, a book like this is difficult for me to review. It is difficult to review because it’s a long and very detailed book that covers numerous topics. I would need many pages to give a thorough review. It is also difficult for me to review because there are so many helpful parts of it that I would like to explain in depth; but there are also a few parts of it that I would like to critique from a confessional Presbyterian point of view. That being said, I hope this brief review will stimulate readers enough to consider reading this helpful resource on church planting and, in the good sense of the term, church growth.

Center Church has three main sections: 1) “Gospel,” 2) “City,” and 3) “Movement.” In the first section, Keller spends around seventy pages explaining the gospel of grace. He doesn’t give a detailed exegetical explanation of the gospel, but he does explain how the gospel is rich, counterintuitive, and affects every area of our lives. In the first section Keller also talks about gospel renewal, which is something like revival.

The second section of the book, “City,” contains 160 pages discussing these three topics: contextualization, focus on the city, and cultural engagement. Keller argues that there are poor and unbiblical ways of contextualization—but there are also good and biblical ways to contextualize the gospel. Very obviously, *Center Church* is mostly

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=417&issue_id=94.

about churches and church plants in large cities. Keller spends time in this section talking about the biblical theme of “city” and also discusses it from a sociological point of view. Finally, in this second section of the book, Keller talks about the different views of Christ and culture and ends up attempting to utilize the strength of each “Christ/culture” view. Keller’s cultural vision is what he calls “cultural renewal.”

The third section of *Center Church*, “Movement,” is a 130-page explanation of what it means to be a missional church having an integrative ministry that is more of a movement than an institution. Keller spends time defining a missional church (even giving “marks” of a missional church). He also talks about how people relate to each other in church and out of church—including how a missional church should interact with non-Christians during the week. Here he advocates an “every-member gospel ministry” that has to do with evangelism and mercy ministry. What should “missional” worship look like? Keller answers that question in this final section and also explains justice and mercy in the city. Finally, he says that though “Center Churches” should not throw out the institutional model of ministry, they should be closer to the “movement” model of ministry, which includes following a vision for the church and city.

To be sure, this book isn’t technically a manual for church planting. It is all about church planting, but 1) it is a “big picture” view of church planting from a theological, philosophical, and sociological angle, and 2) it doesn’t give a detailed step-by-step time line or “how to” of church planting. Also, the reader should note that the book is not about a church planter’s piety and life. While it will help church planters, it isn’t a book about church planters.

So what are the strengths of this book? Many! This book was one of the most thought-provoking books on ministry and church planting that I’ve ever read. I’d suggest reading it with a notebook and highlighter handy so you can highlight and write the insights that apply to your own ministry, evangelism, and church planting. I appreciated Keller’s interaction with an unbeliever’s mind-set

and how we can engage them in a way that is biblically relevant. I was also motivated to think about healthy outreach at a local level that includes the members of the church. I’m glad Keller got me thinking again about contextualization and how we should be careful not to let our traditions become idols in our ministry.

There is such a thing as a good, godly interaction of church and culture, or the Christian and culture. I certainly need motivation to be a good neighbor and let the light of Christ shine in every area of my life. This book pushes the reader in that direction. I was also glad to be reminded that we should not let the church as institution swallow the church as organism. I have more good things to say about this book, but, suffice it to say, *Center Church* is on my “top five” list of church ministry/planting books.

Yet there are some significant weaknesses of *Center Church*. To me, it felt like Keller was writing from a conservative evangelical perspective to conservative evangelicals—yet, the book is neither distinctly Presbyterian nor confessionally grounded. On a different note, Keller did explain the gospel clearly and well, and the book is grace-centered. However, he used the term “gospel” as an adjective so many times I was uncomfortable with it by the end of the book. For example, Keller talks about gospel neighboring, gospel renewal, gospel contextualization, gospel movement, and so forth. Using “gospel” as an adjective sounds good, but often is ambiguous and, therefore, not overly helpful.

I was also troubled by Keller’s tri-perspectival and flexible views of the regulative principle of worship. Many readers, who subscribe to the Westminster Standards, will disagree with Keller when he makes the elements of worship and church polity part of “ministry expression” rather than part of the philosophy of ministry or doctrinal foundation. In other words, Keller’s views on church polity and worship are not in line with Old School Presbyterianism. I also had some questions about Keller’s model of church polity, which seems at first glance to be a sort of hybrid Presbyterian model.

As I noted above, Keller’s main emphasis is

on the city. This book is so focused on the city that big portions of it don't really apply to churches in small cities and towns. Certainly, I believe that we need to be planting churches in big cities—but in doing so we should not downplay rural areas that also need solid churches. On the topic of city, I would also hesitate to adopt Keller's "cultural renewal" model. Some points he made about cultural renewal were actually quite good, but I thought he spent too much time with the "Christ/culture" debate.

More could be said about this helpful book on church planting and church renewal. I certainly recommend it for those who need a good resource on these topics. But it is not for everyone. The book is thick, detailed, and printed on large pages with small font and even smaller endnotes. You'll need time, concentration, and dedication to work through the entire book. But for me it was definitely worth it; even the disagreements I had with parts of it made me think more about these crucial issues. In fact, though I don't think it is "the" church planter's book, I do think it should be on the shelves of pastors, church planters, elders, and informed laypeople who are involved in Christian ministry and church planting. ©

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A Personal Appreciation of D. A. Macfarlane

by J. Cameron Fraser

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2014¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

A Personal Appreciation of D. A. Macfarlane, by J. Cameron Fraser. Belleville, Ontario: Guardian, 2013, 62 pages, \$8.50.

Similar to Cameron Fraser's *Thandabantu: The Man Who Loved the People*, *A Personal Appreciation of D. A. Macfarlane* is a supplement to the fuller (147 pages) biographical material, *I Shall Arise: The Life and Ministry of Donald A. MacFarlane* (Aberdeen: Faro Press, 1984), edited by John Tallach.

J. Cameron Fraser is a Westminster Theological Seminary graduate (1978), and served as the last editor of *The Presbyterian Guardian* (1978-80), serving a largely OPC constituency prior to the beginning of *New Horizons* as a denominational magazine. Fraser was, until recently, the pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Lethbridge, Alberta. Macfarlane was Fraser's uncle by marriage to his mother's sister Ella, but what makes the account more personal is that Fraser lived with him after his mother, Christina (née Finlayson), died in 1961 when Fraser was six. Fraser's father, James, had been a missionary in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), sent by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1938. He died in 1959. Their missionary labors are chronicled in the biography by Alexander McPherson, *James Fraser: A Record of Missionary Endeavor in Rhodesia in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967).

While the era in which Macfarlane ministered—he was ordained in 1914—is distant and

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=418&issue_id=94.

different from ours, his life and ministry should be a great encouragement since we all live in the larger new covenant era in which the New Testament was written, and into which the gospel of Jesus Christ has entered with sublime power.

Fraser's narrative tells us of a man of superior intelligence and a fine education who served his Lord faithfully in humble local ministry, eschewing the fame and fortune he might have achieved had he been chosen for another calling (43) or born into a wealthier family. As his ministerial mentor J. R. Mackay remarked, "Mr. Macfarlane has such a capacious mind that you can pour all you have into it and it will hold it all—and more!" (15). While not esteemed in the world's eyes, Pastor Macfarlane was appointed tutor of Greek and Hebrew by the Free Presbyterian Synod in 1932 (42). He upheld the need for rigorous academic ministerial training throughout his ministry

His first call was to serve the congregations of Lairg and Bonar, Dornoch and Rogart, north of Inverness in the Northwest Highlands. In 1921, he accepted a call to nearby Oban, and finally in 1930 to the joint congregation of Dingwall and Beaully, just outside of Inverness (15). He retired in 1973 after 59 years of ministry.

Macfarlane's steadfastness is made all the more remarkable considering his lifelong struggle with depression. After a nervous breakdown in his second pastorate, he found relief during his convalescence from a page in John Owen's commentary on Psalm 130. Owen comments on verse 4, "But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared," in which he is dealing with "objections to believing from the power of sin." Macfarlane tore out the page that encouraged him and carried it with him for years afterward. After the death of his first wife, many years later, he suffered another breakdown (17). His recovery reminds us that it was God's grace and presence in his life that enabled him to endure such hardship. Such examples serve to encourage us in our own dark hours.

Among Macfarlane's imitable attributes was his exemplary faithfulness to his denomination (24). Another was his gentleness, especially for those with whom he disagreed (25). From the

effect of his preaching to instances of his pastoral kindness, Macfarlane leaves a deep impression on the reader, and sets a wonderful example for ministers of the Word. Throughout Fraser's narrative, the personal influence of his uncle on his own ministerial development is instructive and touching. He recalls, "My own recollection of his preaching has more to do with the heavenly atmosphere he brought to the pulpit than the actual content of the sermons. He was deeply conscious of being in the presence of God and communicated that awareness to his hearers" (37). The black-and-white photographs add to the interest of Fraser's fine story. The appearances of Edmund Clowney (24) and John Murray (42) in the text add to its interest for OPC officers. I reviewed Fraser's *Thandabantu* in *Ordained Servant Online* in December 2010,² an appreciation based on Alexander McPherson, *James Fraser: A Record of Missionary Endeavor in Rhodesia in the Twentieth Century* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1967).

While Macfarlane was well known in his small area of the world, he is a fine example of the most important kind of Christian leader—the ordinary, everyday pastor of a local church. We need more biographies of similar ministers in our more recent history, and even more examples. God often calls extraordinary men to ordinary ministry. ©

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2 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=229&issue_id=60; *Ordained Servant* 19 (2010): 114.

Renewing the Evangelical Mission

edited by Richard Lints

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2014¹

by David A. Booth

Renewing the Evangelical Mission, edited by Richard Lints. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, 282 pages, \$34.00, paper.

The paradox of evangelicalism is that it retains extraordinary vitality while its theological core is rotting away. The clash of these conflicting realities generates an endless stream of renewal movements and gives cause for both despair and hope about evangelicalism's future. It is, therefore, particularly fitting that David Wells, the keenest critic of Western evangelicalism, would be honored by a conference devoted to renewing the evangelical mission. This volume of essays arose from the lectures given at that conference.

The erudite article "Found Faithful," by Os Guinness, can serve as a useful lens through which to view the book's twelve essays. Like several of the authors, Guinness draws our attention to the rise of global Christianity and the shift of the church's center from the West to the global South. He writes:

The churches in the global south are truly exploding, but most of the global South is pre-modern. They have yet to face what Peter Berger calls "the fiery brook" of modernity, in which we were so badly burned. This means that much of what we have to share with our sisters and brothers in the global South is a confession and a caution: "don't do what we did." (94)

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=422&issue_id=95.

The pessimism that this comment reveals about Western Christianity is striking. Yes, we must work and pray with our brothers and sisters in the global South in the hope that they will not repeat our mistakes. But where is the sense of gratitude that the Western church has been entrusted with important doctrinal insights gained through centuries of debate and reflection? Where is the sense of duty that, as stewards of this deposit, we have the privilege of contending for these truths while handing them on to those who are first- and second-generation Christians? This pessimism about the Western church can also be found in Tite Tiénou's article "Renewing Evangelical Identity from the Margins," which expansively treats the relationship between worldwide mission and evangelical identity. The primary concern of this article seems to be how Western Christianity marginalizes non-Western churches or perceives non-Western theologies "as threats to orthodoxy" (43). These are important themes for consideration, but what's odd in a series of articles designed to honor the author of *No Place for Truth*,² is that the authors in this volume seem utterly unconcerned with the possibility that such theologies may actually be a threat to orthodoxy.³ Indeed, it is difficult to see what is distinctly evangelical about these discussions of global Christianity and why Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants couldn't say the very same things.

It would be unfair to conclude from the above that the essays in this collection are not concerned with truth. Dr. Guinness, for example, expresses a longing for God to send a modern day Martin Luther to liberate us from our own Babylonian captivity (105–6). He even urges the church to recapture its prophetic voice in the tradition of Elijah on Mount Carmel (107). Yet, apparently unaware of the irony, Guinness is simultaneously

2 David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

3 For a brilliant work which seeks to integrate insights from global Christianity into a doctrinally orthodox Christianity see Tim Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

calling evangelicals away from extremism (97–98). It is difficult to imagine a scholar of such wit and wisdom missing the incongruity of wanting a Luther or an Elijah but without the extremism. The only person unquestionably more extreme and divisive than Luther and Elijah is the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ Perhaps Guinness only wants to eliminate the bitter political divisions that increasingly have come to define American life. If so, who could demur? But the irony of wanting the results of a Luther or an Elijah without the extremism permeates the articles in this book and may be the central tension in this strand of evangelicalism. Indeed, it would be difficult to find anything in these articles that would offend anyone anywhere—and that seems to be the studied point. The vision of evangelicalism which emerges from these articles is one that seeks the results of reformation without the real-world conflict that genuine reformation necessarily entails. It defines itself over against fundamentalism every bit as much as it does against liberalism. It seeks to engender a robust theological self-consciousness without throwing anyone out of evangelicalism’s big tent or being called names by Christianity’s cultured despisers. It seeks orthodoxy without borders. That is, it wants what never was and never will be.

Will this collection of essays on evangelical renewal be remembered as the last gasp of a dying coalition? Given the vitality of evangelicalism, that would be a premature conclusion to draw. Professor Lints wisely opens the book with the questions: “Whose evangelicalism? Which renewal?” (1). We should remember that the articles in this book reflect only the small slice of evangelicalism which is centered on parachurch educational institutions in North America.⁵ Nevertheless, although this is only a slice of evangelicalism, these institutions are influential. Orthodox Presbyterians will want

4 E.g., Matthew 10:21–22, 34–39; Luke 14:26; 18:22.

5 Trinity Evangelical Divinity School is the one significant denominational seminary in this evangelical coalition. TEDS promotes itself on its website as “pan-evangelical” with a “commitment to broad evangelicalism that welcomes voices from various denominational and theological traditions.”

to consider the view through the window of these essays before entrusting these institutions with our financial resources or with the formal education of our children or future pastors. It is difficult to find any other compelling reason to read this book. Perhaps those who enjoy discussing the aesthetics of fire while watching a house burn down can happily wile away several hours perusing this work. Those willing to put on a helmet and actually rush into the fire will be far better equipped to do so by reading (or rereading) David Wells’s *The Courage to Be Protestant*.⁶ ©

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6 David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

Greek for the Rest of Us

by William D. Mounce

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2014¹

by Allen Tomlinson

Greek for the Rest of Us: The Essentials of Biblical Greek (2nd ed.), by William D. Mounce. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013, xviii + 293 pages, \$29.99, paper.

This book on beginning New Testament Greek is designed to give a working knowledge of some of the basics of the subject. The reader then can make better use of Bible software programs, critical commentaries, and lexicons, as well as analyze a text both in the English and Greek (though not as exhaustively as someone who took traditional courses in Greek, such as one preparing for the ministry of the Word). I am not convinced that this object is best served by Dr. Mounce's approach in this book, but first the positive aspects.

In my view, this textbook could be used best by those who have studied New Testament Greek but need a quick and easy review. Ministers who have grown "rusty" in their use of the language can return to a former facility in their exegetical skills, which may have been dulled by nonuse or by being out of the ministry for a time. Those who are not ministers, nor intend to be, but who have studied New Testament Greek at some point in their education, would find this an easy tool to sharpen those skills.

Those of us who studied our Greek decades ago will also pick up some suggestions for a clearer understanding of the language. For example, I had been taught that often $\mu\eta$ ($m\bar{e}$) with the present imperative suggested a command to stop a process already in motion. However, in the course of over forty years in which I have been translating and

working with the Greek New Testament, I had observed that often this did not appear to be the case. Often this construction is just commanding that something not be done, without necessarily suggesting whether it is being done and needs to stop, or it is not yet being done and should not be initiated.

"For many years it was believed that $\mu\eta$ with a present tense imperative was a prohibition to stop something currently in progress. $\mu\eta$ ($m\bar{e}$) with an aorist tense imperative was a prohibition to not even start an action. Although you will find this distinction throughout the commentaries, grammarians today are for the most part agreed that this distinction is invalid" (226). Such information can be very useful for those who need a "refresher" course that will help them stay abreast of some of the current conclusions by the scholars.

Mounce's approach to helping a Bible student learn how to analyze a text is very good. By not using the language of academia, he makes wonderful suggestions that will be of great help to those who want to dig deeper into the biblical text but who do not have formal training in the language. He includes exercises to help the reader learn to do this first in the English and then in the Greek. Though I question whether the average reader can actually do the Greek exercise, the exercise for the English text is great, and I believe the Christian of average intelligence can make very profitable use of this section.

This brings me to my concerns about the approach and object of this book. First, having examined Mounce's more traditional method of teaching Greek on the Internet, I found it extremely well organized and clear. In fact, it may be one of the very best ways for a layman to learn New Testament Greek, sufficiently to work with the Greek text in a profitable manner. The approach of *Greek For the Rest of Us* would not, in my opinion, work for the average layman, the audience for which the book seems to be intended primarily.

The book does not have the student learn the language from the "ground up," as in traditional courses. The main conjugations for verbs and the declension forms for nouns, pronouns, and

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=423&issue_id=95.

adjectives, for example, as well as a host of other important materials, are not assigned to be memorized in a logical order. Instead they are covered as “bits and pieces,” with the view that the reader will pick up what is necessary. At first this would mean being able to make better use of commentaries, lexicons, and Greek software, and hopefully growing into an ability to analyze the Greek text itself. The first part of this might be true, but I fear most average English speaking people would find it confusing and disconnected. When it comes to analyzing the Greek text (199 ff.), most readers would not have enough information to perform this task. I would recommend a more traditional approach, though not necessarily having to attend a school in person, like Mounce’s or a similar program online.

Fearing that I am just stuck to my ways (at least the way in which I learned the Greek language), I asked my son-in-law, who studied New Testament and Classical Greek for a year at Covenant College, to evaluate the book. I tried not to influence him. He is not a minister and has not made extensive use of his Greek over the years. While I think he appreciated the review, he also came to the same conclusion. He, too, questioned the stated purpose of the book, because the more traditional approach, teaching the language with all its parts from “the ground up” would be less confusing. He did not believe he could have learned the language in this format. He thought it would offer a good review for someone who had learned the language traditionally and needed a refresher.

Since there are more than twenty years difference in our ages, our personalities are different, and he is far more proficient with computers and other modern tools than I am, I thought our agreement as to the best use of this book was significant. At least some of us could not learn the language in this way, not even enough to significantly help us with the “tools of the trade.” We would be left confused by the book, *if* we did not already know the language from a more traditional approach.

On a more positive note, Mounce has some terrific essays at the end of the book on textual

criticism, translations, the choice of commentaries, etc. Though I hold to a different view of textual criticism, I found these articles extremely well written, fair to all sides, and gracious.

For those who need to sharpen their formerly acquired skills in New Testament Greek, this book is a helpful and quick read and provides a great review. ☺

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David's Sword *and* David's Shield

by David, Lee, Marybeth, and
Dan Elliott

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2014¹

by Jennifer Foley

David's Sword, by David, Lee, and Marybeth Elliott. Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2008, 38 pages, \$7.99, paperback.

David's Shield, by Dan, Lee, and Marybeth Elliott. Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2010, 63 pages, \$7.99, paperback.

Child sexual abuse is a profoundly solemn topic. It is not an anomaly either, but, unfortunately, too common of an occurrence in this broken world. In all likelihood, there are very few of us who remain untouched, in some way, by child sexual abuse. Maybe you were a victim as a child. Perhaps a colleague at your workplace has a son or daughter who was a victim, or a school friend of your own child has fallen prey. In fact, there may be someone in your life right now who is an ongoing victim of abuse and you are unaware of that tragic part of his or her life. This is terrifying to face, yet there may even be a child in your own church who is being abused—maybe even in your own household. This is the nightmare that suddenly pierced the Christian home of the Elliotts, permanently changing each family member in different ways.

Late one night, Lee and Marybeth Elliott were asleep in their bed when their youngest child, David, knocked on their door. Confused and frightened, David had been trapped in a terrifying secret for several months. And so begins the story

of the victory of truth over evil, as told compellingly by the Elliotts in *David's Sword* and *David's Shield*. The first book centers on David's perspective, telling of God's healing for the deep wound that gashed him with the complete exploitation of his innocence. It is the first of its kind written by a child survivor to other children to encourage them that it is safe to tell. Indeed, David uses his real name and a photograph of himself to demonstrate that it is safe to come forward and seek help. His example has proven to be a highly effective tool, helping both children and adult victims to disclose abuse more readily. The second book focuses on Dan's perspective, David's older brother and protector. It tells of God's healing for the myriad feelings with no emotional outlets that gripped Dan when he learned of David's abuse. It further encompasses the unique challenges of helping a child with special needs, as the story also includes the oldest brother in the family, Mark, who has autism.

In *David's Sword*, David is a trusting boy who enjoys playing with neighborhood children in the backyard and making people happy. A "trusted older brother of a friend" visits the Elliott family often and eventually becomes "like a brother to David." This "Goliath" finds small ways to gain time with David while all of the children are playing outside. Eventually Goliath introduces David to a "game" to "play" in the woods that makes David uncomfortable and scared. David is confused, and the abuser's threats of "trouble" silence him. David needs to step out of the darkness and bring the suffocating secret—and Goliath—into the light. The sexual abuse continued for several months, and then God mercifully answered David's prayers. He gave David the courage to tell, which provided a voice to conquer Goliath, with the faithful, patient help of his parents and of many other adults serving at the forefront.

David's Sword speaks of the way that God gave words to David and tells of the gentle steps taken by others both to listen to and to protect him. The story is one of hope for other victims, hope that they are not alone and may be free of the abuse, the shame, and the fear that keep them captive.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=427&issue_id=96.

The threats of abusers are real and powerful, chaining the children to silence. Yet this book returns the power, as well as extraordinary courage, to the child's hand.

In *David's Shield*, Dan wrestles with feelings of vengeance toward the abuser, and of guilt for having been stripped of an ability to help his younger brother escape the evil imposed on him. Dan now feels forced to stand by while the abuser seems to go unpunished and must learn to wait on the justice system. Dan needs to learn how to wait on and trust in God. The tangled, knotted feelings of the sibling of a survivor can stay trapped inside the brother or sister, but *David's Shield* offers that sibling hope and a better way, God's way. The story tells of the beginning of Dan's decision to take the first step—often the hardest step—in the journey of learning to seek God for full healing, full trust, and full forgiveness of self and others. Siblings of survivors, too, have hope to find their voice, seek peace, and gain wholeness. Siblings deal with a host of deep and scary issues, and the Elliotts have responded to the need for a book that addresses these unique issues with the children. *David's Shield* also helps parents understand how their other children may be suffering and provides insight and help for coming alongside the siblings of survivors during the delicate process of coping and healing.

This book series shows the remarkable courage of the Elliott family, especially David, in publicly sharing their most private thoughts, painful experiences, and spiritual struggles. Each book serves as an excellent tool for educating ourselves on the journey of healing, and how we can be alert and ready to help when a need arises. The Elliotts help equip us on how to enter into another's painful reality and assist with providing healing for the abuse victim and family. Readers will be blessed by the books and ever thankful that God gave grace to the Elliott family to use what Goliath intended for harm as good to accomplish God's holy will (Gen. 50:20; 2 Cor. 1:3–4). These books would be well placed at church book tables and in pastors' studies to be readily available as need arises. Please note that many people will not request help openly,

and so, offering these books in visible places where they can be purchased outright will enable more families to be helped.

Both *David's Sword* and *David's Shield* have been endorsed by professionals in a variety of disciplines. The first has been approved by the top medical doctor in New Hampshire, an expert on sexual abuse, a school counselor, a police captain, a guidance counselor, and others. The second has been approved by Don Davis of the New England Patriots, Natalie Grant (who is an award-winning singer/songwriter), a school principal, and others. Also, the Elliotts have spoken by invitation at several conferences, churches, and other venues and have been both pleased to do so in order to reach as many adults and children as possible.

Both books have been translated into French and German (Spanish will be forthcoming) and may be purchased directly through the Elliotts. David autographs each book so that the children may see, and be encouraged by, his personal message. To order, send an email to Silvertrumpets@comcast.net with "books" in the subject line. If you cannot pay and know of a child who needs help, please contact the Elliotts for assistance.

The Elliotts intend to write two additional books to complete the series. *David's Sheath* will offer parents insight and concrete help for navigating the entire situation. *David's Soldiers*, the fourth and final book, will address caregivers and professionals regarding the various services and support that they can seek out when promoting the wellness of the children.² ©

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2 On a personal note, this reviewer shared both *David's Sword* and *David's Shield* with my sons (middle school and high school age) to help them gain understanding about the terrible evil of child sexual abuse and prepare them to offer help when God calls upon them. We should be mindful that our children likely will be nearer to situations in which abuse is occurring and serve as a more direct avenue for immediate help.

Anselm of Canterbury

by *Simonetta Carr*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2014¹

by **Cynthia Rowland**

Anselm of Canterbury: Christian Biographies for Young Readers, by Simonetta Carr; with illustrations by Matt Abraxas. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2013, 63 pages, \$18.00.

Anselm of Canterbury is one in a series of books written about distinguished characters from church history. It is a well written, beautifully illustrated biography of one of the medieval church fathers for younger and older kids alike. It also provides a nice overview for adults. Unlike many of the other church history biographies available, the books in this series contain illustrations, pictures, and drawings on nearly every page. They are full of great information and appeal to the eye as well.

This series, subtitled *Christian Biographies for Young Readers*, is written by Simonetta Carr. She is a mother of eight children who has home-schooled them as well. During her homeschooling, she noticed that there weren't many books available about church history for children. Friends and family encouraged her to write. The series now consists of seven books: *Anselm of Canterbury*, *Lady Jane Grey*, *John Calvin*, *Augustine of Hippo*, *John Owen*, *Athanasius*, and the most recent publication *John Knox*. Carr has a contract with her publisher to produce a book every eight months. When asked how she decides on her subjects, she said she tries to choose "men and women who've had a major influence on Christian thought."² Her main goal is to teach kids

"to know what they believe and why,"³ which has become a sort of slogan. Carr makes church heroes come to life.

Carr was born and reared in Italy. She grew up Catholic; her father was a monk. Interestingly, her father met her mother in a confessional booth, and they fell in love. Her mother helped him leave the church without getting excommunicated. As she grew up, Simonetta started questioning the Bible. She came to the evangelical faith through an American missionary family visiting Italy. Eventually she married a Protestant. She describes her spiritual journey this way: "it took a very long time to understand fully."⁴ Currently she resides in California and attends Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, California, where Michael Brown is pastor.

In the book *Anselm of Canterbury*, Carr tells us how Anselm pondered the question, "Why did God become man?" She tells about how God instilled in this man a passion for learning and a love for studying God's Word. Early in life, he became a monk and eventually a teacher of other monks. He encouraged kindness in teaching as opposed to the harsh correction he had received as a student. He also enjoyed writing, and Carr includes brief summaries of his two books and excerpts from them. Writing in Anselm's day was expensive and time consuming because paper was expensive, so Anselm had to choose his words very carefully.

Anselm lived during the volatile times of William the Conqueror and was entangled in these political affairs. King William appointed Anselm Archbishop of Canterbury, despite Anselm's protests. But King William did not prove to be an easy king for Anselm to work with, and the unhealthy intermarriage of church affairs with ungodly statesmen made Anselm's job difficult. During Anselm's time, there was also unrest in the papacy. Two men claimed to be pope: Urban, appointed by the church, and Clement, appointed by the emperor. Anselm took on the hard task of telling the emper-

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=428&issue_id=96.

2 Carl Trueman's interview with Simonetta Carr, <http://www.mortificationofspin.org/mos/archive/201305>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

or that it was not his place to appoint church leaders. Thankfully, the emperor agreed to recognize Urban as pope. In the midst of these issues and other turmoil, Anselm had time for contemplation. His few, but important, writings have had a lasting impact on church doctrine and theology.

Anselm of Canterbury, along with the other books in this series, are hardcover picture books made to look old-fashioned. The pages simulate parchment. On every page, Carr includes illustrations painted by Matt Abraxas; maps; photographs of significant places (e.g., what is believed to be Anselm's childhood home, still standing in France), statues, and other relevant artifacts (e.g., a Roman wax tablet, a portrait of Anselm). These graphics allow Carr to include a host of information that would be tedious to include in the story itself. The main part of the book includes about sixty pages of a summary biography. At the end of the book, Carr provides supplemental information: a one-page time line, a "Did You Know?" section of interesting and relevant facts, and finally a short section of the author's writings. This format is the same in all the series.

From my experience as a homeschooling mother, I own few books that have similar content: *Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History*, by Richard M. Hannula (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), is a 300-page book summarizing the lives of forty-six church mothers and fathers, and *Reformation Heroes*, by Diana Kleyn and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), is a 240-page book covering the lives of about thirty Reformers. A book more similar to Carr's is a biography of Martin Luther called *Martin Luther: A Man Who Changed the World*, by Paul Maier (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004). Could this last book have inspired Carr to write others like it?

In these well-researched, clearly-written, attractive books that educate children of all ages on church history from a Reformed perspective, Sim-onetta Carr teaches us what we believe and why. You can find them at Amazon, Westminster Book Store, or other Reformed book stores. ©

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God in the Whirlwind

by David F. Wells

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2014¹

by Carl Trueman

God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World, by David F. Wells. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014, 266 pages, \$24.99.

For the last two decades, David Wells has been the stern conscience and prophetic critic of the culture of conservative American Protestantism. In a series of books, he has laid bare the theological and moral bankruptcy of much of evangelicalism. Critics of his work have accused him of simply saying the same things over and over again, and of offering critique without any positive or constructive principles. In his latest book, *God in the Whirlwind*, he attempts to do precisely that: to map out a way forward for the church into the twenty-first century.

I have offered more general thoughts on the book elsewhere.² In this brief reflection, I want to give a short summary of his thesis and then to focus on one or two key points. Essentially, Wells

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=433&issue_id=97.

2 http://www.firstthings.com/index.php?permalink=blogs&blog=firstthoughts&year=2014&month=01&entry_permalink=the-god-of-job; <http://www.placefortruth.org/placefortruth/article/the-evangelical-dilemma>.

regards evangelicalism as worldly and as having lost sight of a central tenet in Christian orthodoxy: the “holy-love” of God. Tendencies to prioritize either the former or the latter part of that term lead either to legalism or to license. Both are functions of the worldly mind-set and both involve a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s grace. The examples in the American world might be old-style fundamentalism, with its litany of taboos, and new-style evangelicalism, where anything goes (as long as it does not look like old-style fundamentalism). Wells has articulated the basic outlines of this thesis before; here he adds the theological dimension by focusing on God’s holy-love.

New subplots emerge in Wells’s narrative, too. The distracting and kaleidoscopic role of information technology and the rise of the politics of sexual identity are both prominent themes in the early chapters and supplement the emphasis on the culture of therapeutic consumerism of earlier books. Over against these, Wells pits the narrative of biblical theology and the sheer Godness of God. A holy God who loves us without compromising that holiness is not a God who has any time for the therapist’s chair. If the world is broken, the answer is not to be found by turning inward to our own psychological foibles but rather outward to the God who has acted, who acts, and who will act, to bring creation back to himself in the consummation of the Lamb’s wedding feast.

What is clear from Wells’s analysis is that the tragedy of much modern life is that it has no sense of tragedy. Evangelical Christianity is in general no exception to this. Consumerism is built on the idea that all problems can be solved by purchasing the right product. Therapy is built on the idea that happiness can be achieved by looking inward and unlocking latent potential or healing inner damage. Secular politics is built on the idea that making the government just the right size (whether bigger or smaller) will cure all social ills. The blithe atheism of a Christopher Hitchens or a Richard Dawkins sees life as nothing more than a glorious firework display which fades painlessly into the ether. Nowhere in the liturgies of the secular world does one find acknowledgment of

the fundamental tragedy of human existence: we all die, and death is devastating. In short, every human life is doomed to end in failure. One does not have to believe in an afterlife to see that: death reduces those left behind in cruel and painful ways. The mind that produced the Mass in B Minor or the theory of relativity or the simple joy brought to another human being by a loving glance or an affectionate word finds its destiny in the grave. Yet such is life—contemporary life, at least—that this basic reality is denied or hidden for as long as possible everywhere one looks.

There is an obvious way in which this touches on the contemporary conservative evangelical scene. One of the hardest lessons now being learned by the so-called New Calvinists is that the power of our consumerist culture is such that anything, even orthodox theology, can be turned into a commodity. The power aesthetic of the Mars Hill rock bands is ultimately as subversive of the ethos of orthodoxy as the prosperity gospel is of its content. That we now see a rapprochement of the two, combined with the confused silence of those who once rode on the coattails of the former, is scarcely a surprise. Wells has warned for two decades of the pernicious ubiquity of consumerism in the church. It has finally come close to the Calvinist home and we can only lament the fact that most powerful voices within the movement seem even now unwilling to take a clear public stand.

Yet here is the problem: the power of consumerism is such that none can be complacent. If pop megachurch Calvinism is a soft target, then high Presbyterianism too can prove vulnerable to consumerism. Any liturgy in any idiom can potentially degenerate into mere formality, and traditional worship can end up merely providing a superficial aesthetic gratification all of its own. This is where the centrality of preaching is important. Biblical preaching mediates the presence of God, reminds the people of who they are by reminding them of whom they stand before, and points them to their life in Christ.

This is surely where the vital importance of the local church comes in to play. There is perhaps an irony that Wells has spent much of his

life connected to big-tent conservative evangelical movements when it is arguable that the kind of vital Christianity, involving elaborate doctrinal confession and everyday practical expression, can only really be realized in the particularity of the local church context. The Christian as consumer is a much more practical option in large churches, where a full-time staff keep the operation running, than in a congregation of two hundred or less, where everyone is required to take turns in the day-to-day chores. And doctrinal breadth or laxity is much more tolerable in such large churches as well, where there is an increasing degree of anonymity in the congregation. This is not to say that large churches necessarily fall into these sins, any more than smaller churches are necessarily immune to them. But it is to say that the possibility of such a fall is that much greater.

This is perhaps the one place where I would have wished for more practical direction from Wells. The answer to the church's ills cannot be reduced simply to getting the doctrine and the preaching straight. He does not suggest that it is, but he does not provide a larger vision of what faithful churches might practically look like on a weekly basis beyond this. My concern would be that those of us who place a premium on preaching and doctrine might not see ourselves as indicted by the book. That would represent a failure to understand the deep-seated cultural malaise to which Wells points. We can all turn our particular convictions into consumerism commodities and forms of therapy and our personal tastes into transcendental imperatives.

This is a fine book. It deserves a wide readership. It should not be read by Orthodox Presbyterians with an attitude of "I thank you, Lord, that I am not like other men." Rather, a judicious "Is it I, Lord?" would be more appropriate. ☉

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The Kuyper Center Review

edited by Gordon Graham

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2014¹

by **David A. Booth**

The Kuyper Center Review, Volume Three, edited by Gordon Graham. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, xiv + 184 pages, \$26.00.

Garrison Keillor assured us that in Lake Wobegon "all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average." In the rest of the country, however, half of every college class is made up of men and women who are academically below average. These are their essays. It is difficult to understand why someone at the venerable Eerdmans Publishing Company didn't just say "no" to this volume. Those interested in investigating the relationship between Calvinism and culture, or in this case Neo-Calvinism and culture, will be much better served by reading scholars such as Nicholas Wolterstorff and David VanDrunen.

For all the shortcomings of this collection, it inadvertently did raise an interesting question: if a Reformed professor enjoys eggs Benedict for breakfast, does that transform it into Reformed cuisine or does it simply remain a breakfast option? Surprisingly, several of the articles seem to opt for the breakfast transformation paradigm. For example, in her article "The Calvinian Eucharistic Poetics of Emily Dickinson," Jennifer Wang acknowledges that Dickinson never made a public profession of faith nor became a communicant member in any church (94). Yet Wang writes:

Rather than rejecting Calvinism wholesale,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=434&issue_id=97.

it is more probable that Dickinson rejected the specific practices of her Puritan Congregational church, which treated partaking of Communion as evidence of moral transformation, a marker of one's piety, rather than as a reception of grace on behalf of her imperfect faith. (99)

The trouble with this argument is that the four Dickinson poems Wang appeals to in support of her position never mention Christ, God, grace, sin, or forgiveness. Furthermore, the poems could plausibly be read as presenting nature as a better sacrament than the Lord's Supper. So why should we call such poetry Calvinian? Doesn't Reformed theology provide us with the framework to enjoy and appreciate the poetry of non-Christians as well as non-Calvinists?

Matthew Kaemingk discusses a very public expression of art in his article "Theology and Architecture: Calvinist Principles for the Faithful Construction of Urban Space." This is one of the better essays in the volume. Kaemingk undoubtedly is correct to recognize that Reformed Christians should care about architecture and also that our worldviews will shape how we assess the aesthetics, functionality, and social ramifications of different approaches to urban development. He writes:

Augustine, famously commenting on the politics of the earthly city, argues that each city will organize its political affairs around its deepest love. One can easily imagine unique political structures designed to serve the demands of war, market growth, radical equality, or individual pleasure. This essay will be Augustinian in spirit, in that it will seek to explore how a city's physical structure and design reflects its deepest loves, and more specifically, how a deep and primary love for God might develop a robust architectural imagination that can go beyond the contemporary urban aesthetic of growth and speed. (51–52)

This seems like a promising start, but as Kaemingk moves from describing what some Calvinists have done to developing specific principles to

inform what Calvinists should do, his project unwinds. The four principles that Kaemingk proposes are humility, craftsmanship, justice, and delight. It is difficult to see why any liberally educated Westerner in the twenty-first century would disagree with any of these themes, and therein lies the rub. If my Jewish, Muslim, and secular neighbors all agree with these principles, what makes them distinctively Christian, let alone Calvinistic?

The real challenge comes when we need to choose between these principles as actual architects are forced to. It is simply a historical fact that most of the landmark architecture that people have enjoyed throughout history resulted from significant concentrations of wealth and power in the hands of individuals, corporations, churches, or civil governments. It would have been interesting if Kaemingk had dealt with the tension between such extreme concentrations of wealth and power (which seem to run counter to his understanding of social justice) and the creation of exceptional architectural beauty. Instead, like the politician who promises both more government services and lower taxes, Kaemingk seems unwilling to choose or even to acknowledge that such choices need to be made. To be fair, other than condemning the extremes of oppressing the poor or denying the value of beauty, it is difficult to see how Scripture provides a working framework for making such choices that is not available to everyone by common grace. In fact, Kaemingk never quotes any passage from Scripture in favor of his position. He merely refers to the architectural judgments of a few men who happen to be Reformed. But doesn't that leave us with Reformed Christians thinking about good and bad architecture rather than thinking about distinctly Reformed architecture? Why then do the modifiers "Reformed" or "Calvinistic" need to be in the discussion at all? Does every opinion that Abraham Kuyper held automatically become Reformed simply because he was?

The temptation to relate all good things in some way to our tribe has been with the church since some church fathers began treating Plato and Aristotle as Christians before Christ. American evangelicals, likewise, occasionally attempt to

recast Abraham Lincoln as a model Christian in spite of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Perhaps this temptation is natural, but it is also unbiblical. All the way back in Genesis 4:19–22, we see that the crafting of musical instruments and the practice of metallurgy developed from the line of Cain rather than the line of Seth. The LORD grants aesthetic skill and wisdom to Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike. For this we should rejoice. ©

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Saving Eutychus

by Gary Millar and Phil Campbell

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August–September 2014¹

by Mark Debowski

Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God’s Word and Keep People Awake, by Gary Millar and Phil Campbell. Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013, 171 pages, \$16.99, paper.

“Preaching is hard work” (7). We who preach know the truth of this sentence all too well. Preaching in a way that is both faithful and fresh, week after week, is an exercise that requires our diligence in applying all of God’s resources. While many of us reading this review are likely faith-

fully preaching sound doctrine, we can probably all agree that preaching in a way that is fresh or interesting is arduous and sometimes daunting. It is here that the book is most challenging and most helpful.

As the name intimates, Presbyterian coauthors Gary Millar and Phil Campbell want to save Eutychus. That is, they don’t want any more people to fall asleep during sermons, and they certainly don’t want those people to fall out of windows and die. While some of us in the Reformed community may be tempted to tune out the book at this point, we all should listen closely to what the authors have to say. These men have not produced another publication describing pragmatic techniques and methods for entertaining and satisfying itching ears. These men are committed to a biblical and Reformed theology of homiletics yet believe that “preaching should never bore people to death” (8). Furthermore, instead of blaming the culture or the sinful disposition of our listeners, they are “convinced that when attention wanders and eyes droop, it’s more often our fault than our listeners” (14). This is a challenging word to those of us who are preachers.

At 171 pages, and written in a conversational style, the book is a quick read. The different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences of the two authors complement one another. Millar and Campbell hit topics that are essential for good preaching and are covered well in many other preaching books: prayer, preaching with purpose, structuring the sermon around a central idea, historical-grammatical and redemptive-historical hermeneutics, good delivery practices, and sermon construction steps. Here, the book is a good summary of sermon basics, and reviewing these principles is a helpful exercise for any preacher. Most notable, and possibly most helpful for those of us in the Reformed community, though, are chapters three and seven. These chapters are a homiletical gold mine. It is here that the book addresses issues that are not as well handled in Christian preaching literature. If each of us committed to implementing the ideas found in these two chapters, many of our current weaknesses as preachers would be

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=435&issue_id=97.

overcome.

Chapter three addresses the question of how we can be less boring and more interesting. Their answer: be clear. Crystal clear. As the authors point out, we have good biblical precedent for desiring to be clear in our preaching. The remainder of the chapter covers ten practices for enhancing clarity. Understanding and employing them will likely be a lifetime challenge for most of us. Instead of pitching them as ten tips for growing your church or making people like our sermons more, the authors remind us that growing in our skill of being clear is growing in faithfulness and stewardship of the gift and opportunity that God has given to us.

Chapter seven emphasizes the importance of seeking out educated, constructive, and honest critique. Many of us would agree with the author when he writes, “Getting feedback on my preaching is just about the worst thing there is. It’s about as desirable as having pins stuck in my eyes” (111). He continues, “And yet there is probably nothing more important for anyone who teaches the Bible than loving, godly, perceptive criticism” (111). He insightfully diagnoses the motive behind preachers’ resistance to feedback: sin. The remainder of the chapter lays out ideas for gathering helpful feedback both before and after sermons. Here, ruling and teaching elders need to pay special attention. Ruling elders have the duty of guarding the teaching of Scripture in the visible church, as well as the privilege of encouraging and helping the teaching elder become a more effective preacher. If each session carefully and humbly implemented chapter seven in a quarterly or yearly session meeting, much godly fruit could result. Those of us who are preachers need to ask for the feedback on a regular basis from people we trust. We would do well to create a system of loving, honest feedback to spur us on to better preaching.

There are a few weaknesses to the book, including an uncritical use of video clips and slides. Here, the authors would be well advised to consult the wise warnings of others with a background in Christian media ecology. Thankfully, they never promote these practices as means of making a sermon more interesting. Some may disagree with

their insistence on shorter sermons (in the twenty-five-minute range), but we would do well to at least consider their point.

Overall, the book is a humble, informed, biblical, and straightforward preaching tune-up book. I plan to read it at least once a year for the foreseeable future. It’s that good. I highly recommend it to teaching elders, ruling elders, elders’ wives, and any Christian who is interested in being a better listener to sermons and more educated and effective encourager of preachers. ☺

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Delighting in the Law of the Lord

by *Jerram Barrs*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2014¹

by **David A. Booth**

Delighting in the Law of the LORD: God’s Alternative to Legalism and Moralism, by Jerram Barrs. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013, 247 pages, \$25.00.

Sanctification is one of the most challenging doctrines for Christians to grasp in a biblically robust and balanced way. It is even more challenging to pursue sanctification without wandering from time to time into legalism, moralism, or both. So when an experienced pastor and professor at Covenant Theological Seminary pens a book on delighting

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=442&issue_id=98.

in God's law, it should be a cause for celebration.

Delighting in the Law of the LORD is organized into twenty-four chapters written in a conversational style that is easily accessible to those without formal theological training. The opening three chapters focus on our need for God's law, while the final five chapters interact with questions of practical application that arise from trying to live in light of God's law in a secular society. Christ's relationship to, and use of, the law constitute the main body of the book. Each chapter concludes with a set of "questions for personal reflection and group discussion." One of the drawbacks to crafting a book fit for group study is that the repetition, which serves as the mother of learning when chapters are read a week apart, becomes the grandmother of tedium when the book is read over one weekend. Those reading this book on their own would have been better served if it had been edited into a much shorter work.

However, the chief shortcoming of this book is neither its length nor repetitiveness, but its own failure to demonstrate delight in God's law. Instead of closely reading the biblical text, comparing Scripture with Scripture, Barrs points the reader toward generalities along the lines of "be more generous" and "be kinder" and risks falling into the very moralism that he wants to help the reader avoid. For example, commenting on the gleaning laws, Barrs writes:

Harvesting by hand leaves a lot of grain behind, and so from a purely economic viewpoint the command not to go through the fields a second time was very costly. However, rather than thinking of their own economic advantage, the farmers were required to leave the excess for the poor, the fatherless, the widow, and the alien in the land....

We should notice that there are no statements in these laws about whether the poor are the "deserving poor" (as some speak about such matters of charity). Whether a person was poor because of tragedy or because of sin and laziness is not an issue for consideration in these commandments. A lazy or otherwise sin-

ful man has a needy wife and children quite apart from his own needs. (105)

There are portions of God's Word, such as the "Parable of the Good Samaritan," which teach that we ought to help any and every person under such circumstances without regard to how they fell into such hardships. Yet it seems odd to suggest that the gleaning laws required giving aid to the lazy man without regard for his laziness, when such laws offered him the backbreaking work of harvesting by hand in a field that had already been picked over, rather than simply a handout of food. Shouldn't we notice that the gleaning laws maintain both the dignity and the necessity of work and fit hand-in-glove with the apostle Paul's admonition, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10)? In a similar vein, readers might imagine that the law of the Lord forbids providing or withholding diaconal assistance to widows based upon their good works, hospitality, and service to the saints, but this is the very thing that the Lord commands through the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:9–10. Actually delighting in the law of the Lord means paying attention to its details and holding everything the Bible says on a subject together, rather than using it simply to illustrate our own preferences.

This book also truncates the law of the Lord by talking almost exclusively in favor of those aspects of the law that a liberally educated Westerner would be happy to have his or her neighbor practice. For example, it condemns a woman for insisting on modest swimsuits at a church youth group pool party because unbelievers invited to such a party "would think we are crazy to have rules like that" (196). The book consistently encourages Christians to act in a manner that is attractive to unbelievers. Without any qualification Barrs writes:

Unhappily, sometimes we are taught not only that we are to separate ourselves from sinners, but also that we are openly to condemn their behavior and to challenge them with the requirements of God's law. (274)

Granted that there is a wrong type of separation from sinners (1 Cor. 5:10) and that Christians sometimes unwisely condemn sinful behaviors rather than ministering God's grace and truth in other ways. Yet, Barrs fails to mention that it is God who calls his people to separate from sinners (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4) and that there are ample examples in Scripture of righteously condemning sinful behavior. It may prove salutary to remind ourselves that Jesus likened his disciples to salt and light rather than to sugar, and spice, and everything nice. Even the book's treatment of the application of the law to unbelievers is strikingly man-centered and therapeutic. Barrs writes: "In seeing the loveliness of what God intends for human life, people become aware of how deep the damage is that they have done to themselves by ignoring God's commandments in favor of what will give them pleasure" (277). The emphasis falls entirely on the harm sin causes the sinner rather than the offense it is before a holy God. This is a far cry from Paul's treatment of the law in Romans 7 which culminates in the cry: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24–25).

Those seeking to grow in their understanding and delight in the law of the Lord will make far more progress by meditating on the Sermon on the Mount and the Larger Catechism's exposition of the Ten Commandments than by reading this book. Not recommended. ☹

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The Perspective of Love

by R. J. Snell

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2014¹

by David VanDrunen

The Perspective of Love: Natural Law in a New Mode, by R. J. Snell. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014, xii + 207 pages, \$24.00, paper.

This is a very Roman Catholic book—written by a Roman Catholic philosopher (although he teaches at the historically Baptist Eastern University), mostly navigating intra-Roman Catholic discussions about moral philosophy and theology. *The Perspective of Love*, however, may be of interest to Reformed readers for several reasons. First, it provides insight into the state of contemporary Roman Catholic thought (albeit mostly of a conservative stripe). Second, the author, R. J. Snell, addresses common Protestant objections to natural law theory—not to critique them, but to acknowledge their cogency and to try to incorporate their valid concerns into his natural law proposal. Finally, this book offers helpful illustration of why Roman Catholic theories of natural law fall short: not only because of a deficient view of sin, but also because of an inaccurate understanding of salvation.

After discussing in his first chapter how natural law can be thought of, in a preliminary way, as a matter of *common sense*, Snell turns to discuss natural law as *theory* in chapter 2. This way of understanding natural law represents a classical approach to the subject, associated especially with Thomas Aquinas. In this approach, natural lawyers begin by developing a metaphysics and anthropology (usually wedded to Aristotelian philosophy) and, drawing upon this theoretical view of the world and especially human nature, derive moral conclusions which constitute the natural law. In

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=449&issue_id=99.

chapter 3, Snell notes that most Protestant critics of natural law are responding to this classical approach, and he says that the classical approach is in fact not well equipped to answer Protestant objections. According to these objections, natural law theory makes nature autonomous, fails to recognize the necessity of grace, and especially fails to account for the noetic effects of sin.

Thus, Snell sets out in Part Two—what he refers to as “Natural Law in a New Mode”—to consider a number of contemporary Roman Catholic figures who offer a revised way of understanding natural law. Chapter 4 treats John Paul II and Martin Rhonheimer, a Swiss Roman Catholic moral philosopher, chapter 5 deals with several figures associated with the so-called “new natural law theory,” and chapter 6 discusses the intentionality analysis of the twentieth-century Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan’s work is the most central for Snell’s project.

These different writers and schools of thought develop matters in distinct ways, yet share some common convictions that I will try to summarize briefly. These writers do not believe that natural law is derived from a metaphysics or anthropology; in fact, they do not believe natural law is *derived* from anything. Instead, natural law is *understood* by turning to the human subject, following what Snell calls the “mode of interiority” (73 and elsewhere). These writers look within and perceive how human beings actually think and act. By doing so, they realize that we are creatures who act with purpose, pursuing certain kinds of goods. These goods are self-evident, not in the sense that everyone acknowledges them, but in the sense that they explain the coherence of human action. People are capable of denying these goods and the basic structure of human thought, but they ensnare themselves in self-contradiction when doing so, for they implicitly acknowledge the things they seek to deny in the very attempt to deny them. Snell pursues a kind of transcendental analysis here that may be of interest to practitioners of Van Tilian apologetics.

Snell strongly appreciates this approach to natural law “in a new mode.” In Part Three he

attempts to defend and build upon it, in considerable part by showing how it can account for Protestant objections regarding sin and grace in ways that the classical approach to natural law cannot. Chapter 7, therefore, focuses upon how this new mode incorporates the noetic effects of sin into its understanding of natural law. Chapters 8 and 9 follow by discussing the gracious work of the Spirit in bringing redemption. Snell appeals to the classic Thomist formula: grace perfects nature. The natural law is not opposed to grace, he explains, because grace heals, elevates, and perfects nature, enabling nature to be what it is supposed to be.

This book wrestles with far too many weighty issues for me to interact with in detail here. I offer only a few observations in conclusion.

First, I cannot avoid mentioning that this book presents several illustrations of the kind of butchery of English that can result from (presumably) trying to avoid sexist language. One horrific example: “While dialectic has an objective structure, it matters whether *the dialectician* is *themselves* converted or not” (179, italics added). Who am I to say, but that must be a violation of natural law in one mode or another.

Second, I note that Snell’s attempt to account for Protestant objections to natural law should not ultimately be convincing to Protestants—at least to Reformed Protestants—because it is not properly grounded in the dynamic of redemptive history or in a biblical doctrine of salvation. To mention a few specific matters: it does not treat natural law as a covenantal reality, its soteriology centers almost entirely around sanctification, and its view of nature and grace treats nature as something to be healed and elevated rather than as destined for eschatological consummation. While it is interesting, and in some ways encouraging, to see a Roman Catholic philosopher try to take modern Protestant objections to natural law theory seriously, the much better way to address them is not by refining traditional Roman Catholic theology but by explaining the critical role of natural law in a full-orbed Reformed theology, of which the biblical covenants, forensic justification, and the consummation of the present creation are essential

features.

Finally, while I cannot recommend this book as providing a satisfactory way forward on the topic of natural law for people of Reformed conviction, it does provide useful insight into the state of contemporary conservative Roman Catholic moral theology. For all sorts of reasons, it is very important that Reformed pastors and theologians keep abreast of developments in recent Roman Catholic thought and not be satisfied with outdated views, and perhaps caricatures, about Rome. This book would be more useful in this regard if it also dealt with progressive Roman Catholic thought (which likewise is essential for understanding Rome), but as it is, readers wishing to get caught up on the dynamics of conservative Roman moral theology could do worse than reading this modestly sized volume. ☺

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Playing before the Lord

by Calvin R. Stapert

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2014¹

by Stephen Michaud

Playing before the Lord: The Life and Work of Joseph Haydn, by Calvin R. Stapert. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014, 282 pages, \$24.00.

Presbyterians have long enjoyed the music of Joseph Haydn in their worship, whether singing “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” to the majestic tune *Austrian Hymn*, or “Exalt the Lord, His Praise Proclaim” to the uplifting melody extracted from Haydn’s sublime masterpiece, the *Creation* oratorio. But just underneath the surface of the more familiar oeuvre of the old master, a tremendous gold mine of unforgettable music waits to be discovered—all the more so for Christians, as some of Haydn’s music is powerfully imbued with distinctly biblical themes. One of many poignant examples is Haydn’s setting of the seven last words of Christ to the string quartet medium. This alone should be enough to whet the appetite of any warm-blooded saint who desires to explore some profoundly moving music. Of course, the more religiously themed works yield a high rate of devotional return for the Christian, but it is really the exuberant joy running through much of Haydn’s music which helps the listener to meditate on the God-given happiness still to be enjoyed in this fallen world.

Haydn, however, was such a prolific composer, that the sheer vastness of his output can be intimidating. How helpful would it be to have a book which provides the important background to understanding this composer and his music! Thankfully, in Calvin R. Stapert’s new book, *Playing before the Lord: The Life and Work of Joseph*

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=454&issue_id=100.

Haydn, such a resource has been provided.

Clearly, this is an author with a mission. For him, Haydn belongs to the upper echelon of the great composers. Sadly, the more recent diminishing of Haydn's reputation—no doubt due to the “happy” tone of his music, which is seen to be escapist and out of step with reality—has led some to think (erroneously so) that this composer lacks the depth of the best composers. But Haydn, though certainly not avoiding the darker elements of life in his work, has nevertheless chosen to paint his musical vision in the shades of light and beauty for good reason: in the words of the author, here quoting Abraham Kuyper, “Haydn's music is fulfilling art's ‘mystical task of reminding us of the beautiful that was lost and anticipating its perfect coming luster’” (257).² Stapert, resonating with this vision, thus seeks to persuade his readers to *love* Haydn's music. He sees himself as writing in the same spirit as the seventeenth-century minister and metaphysical poet Thomas Traherne, whom he quotes as saying, “You never enjoy the world aright, till you so love the beauty of enjoying it, that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it” (x).³ Indeed, the author's enthusiasm for his subject is contagious throughout, making this a very engaging read.

Stapert explains that his book is both a biography and a “listener's guide.” He first gives a bird's-eye panorama of Haydn's work, but also provides more specific summarizations of representative pieces from various genres, so that the reader might listen to other works more perceptively. In a few instances, the book even provides a much more detailed analysis of several pieces. While there is a certain amount of technical language in these portions of the book, the text does not allow itself to get overly bogged down, and the author wisely includes a glossary at the end to aid the reader.

At first, the book leans heavily on the bio-

graphical, focusing on Haydn's ancestry and boyhood years in Rohrau and Hainburg, through his years as a choirboy at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, then to the years he spent literally cast out on the streets. One marvels at how Haydn worked so industriously despite his “wretched existence,” eventually becoming a freelance musician and music director for Count Morzin. It is at this point that the reader is introduced to some musical analysis of an early work, the *Salve Regina*, scored for soprano, choir, and strings. The first of his string quartets was soon to follow. Haydn, frequently called the “father of the string quartet,” would go on to write sixty-eight such pieces—more than any other composer. Not surprisingly, he is also known as the “father of the symphony,” as attested by his 104 works in that genre, and Stapert takes a good amount of time dealing with these two important categories of Haydn's music.

To fully appreciate the book, the reader should find recordings of the pieces described. Most of Stapert's analysis of Symphony no. 15, for example, would be lost if you were not listening in tandem with the reading. This by no means is a shortcoming of the book. On the contrary, the author himself underscores that his book is a *listener's* guide and is intended to accompany the actual hearing of these pieces.

At this point, the book moves to the period in which Haydn was employed as Vice-Kapellmeister at the Esterhazy Court—a time which yielded, among other things, a trilogy of symphonies, nos. 6, 7, and 8. Stapert offers a helpful diagram of Symphony no. 6 that can be consulted throughout his analysis. With Symphonies no. 7 and no. 8, he notes the programmatic features of these works, as well as their respective influences. While there is some musical notation given in Stapert's analysis, it is not overly cumbersome and can be skipped over by the nontechnical reader without too much detriment. The same could be said of the description of musical examples peppered elsewhere throughout the book.

The remaining chapters finds the author deftly weaving the unfolding phases of Haydn's life with key works of these periods, from his church

2 In Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures in Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 155.

3 In Thomas Traherne, *Centuries* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse, 1985), 15.

music to the *Sturm and Drang* symphonies, to the divertimenti, sonatas, quartets, and keyboard trios, to his forays into opera and song. To cap off an exciting journey, Stapert gives detailed attention to Haydn's celebrated oratorios, *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. The author counsels us to listen to *The Seasons* in the Christological context that Haydn intended.

Stapert wants his readers to appreciate Haydn as one who composed and played "before the Lord," as the title suggests, as evidenced in the words he wrote often at the end of his scores: "LAUS DEO!—PRAISE TO GOD!" Although Haydn was a devout Catholic, the Protestant need not be deterred from enjoying this composer fully, with his accents on joy and other biblical themes. Certainly joy, biblically understood, is no less "profound" than the tragedies of life! Stapert appropriately quotes Jeremy Begbie in this regard: "Any music which dares to bear the name 'Christian' will resound with the heartbeat of joy."⁴ The Christian who wants to nurture these inner sympathies with the help of some sublime artistic expression could do no better than to imbibe a heavy dose of Haydn. Stapert's book is a ready aid to keep at hand for the task, along with Haydn's music itself. I would heartily recommend, for starters, obtaining Antal Dorati's complete coverage of the symphonies, the Lindsays' profound recording of *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, and the moving DVD of *The Creation*, celebrating the 250th anniversary of Haydn's birth, under the baton of Gustav Kuhn in the Great Hall of the Old Vienna University, the very place in which Haydn himself attended a festive performance of this great work.

In summary, I know of no other book that is better suited as an introduction to this highly rewarding composer. Highly recommended! ©

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⁴ Jeremy Begbie, *Music in God's Purposes* (Edinburg: Handsel, 1989), 18.

✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Part 3

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2014¹

by **Dennis E. Johnson**

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Volume 6: *The Modern Age*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007, xxii + 997 pages, \$60.00.

Dr. Old's seven-volume *The Reading and Preaching of Scripture in the Worship of the Christian Church* rewards slow and sustained reading and reflection. For that reason this review has been appearing piecemeal over several years. Part One, covering the first three volumes (the biblical period, the patristic age, the medieval church), appeared in the August-September 2012 issue of *Ordained Servant*. Part Two, surveying volumes four and five (the Reformation, and the subsequent era of "moderatism, pietism, and awakening"), came out in February 2013. This third segment now addresses only volume six, the period extending from the late eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth, which Old characterizes as "the modern age." A fourth and final review, yet to

come, will address the seventh volume, which describes and analyzes preaching in "our own day" (mid-twentieth century through the first decade of the twenty-first).

Not surprisingly, as the series has moved toward the present day, Old has been able to consult an increasingly large treasury of resources. Thus, he can give more detailed examination to more preachers, homiletical schools, and (to some extent) liturgical traditions. The vastness of these resources may explain aspects of Volume Six that seem somewhat at odds with the emphases of the series as a whole. As noted in previous reviews, two distinctive strengths of the series are its *catholicity* and its attention to the liturgical significance of the *reading* of God's Word in corporate worship (not only preaching). Old intends to be catholic by describing and evaluating the ministry of the Word not only across the centuries but also across the spectrum of Christian traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant—and, where sources allow, throughout the global church. In this volume, on the other hand, the focus is virtually exclusively on the Western church in the United States (six chapters), the United Kingdom (three chapters), and the European continent (three chapters). The missionary outreach of the American Adoniram Judson in Burma (6:202–5), the Scotsmen Robert Morrison in China (6:636–42), and Alexander Duff in India (6:675–83) are briefly discussed. Old regrets that he had had no access to resources on the preaching of Scotland's groundbreaking evangelist to Africa, David Livingstone (6:634). Two of the "American" chapters deal with the beginnings of black preaching (ch. 7) and German preaching to westward-bound settlers in what would become the Midwestern states (ch. 8)—a reminder that in the nineteenth century these were still "missionary territory." Nonetheless, this volume is less geographically and demographically "catholic" than volumes one through five and volume seven.

Ecumenically, this volume, despite its massive length (over 1,000 pages, including front matter) concentrates on Protestantism in a way that the other volumes do not. Dr. Old profiles Reformed and Presbyterian preachers in the Netherlands,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=411&issue_id=93.

Scotland, England, and America (with individual chapters on New England Calvinists and the Presbyterian “old school”), Lutherans in Germany and America, Southern Baptists, and what he calls “the great American school,” a theologically diverse “tradition” that will be discussed below. Four Roman Catholic preachers on the continent of Europe, along with three Reformed, are profiled in the first chapter, which narrates “religious revival in a secularized Europe.” Several sermons of John Henry Newman, who moved from high church Anglicanism to Rome, are treated in the chapter on “the Victorians.” But that is about all the attention that Roman Catholicism receives, and even less is said of Eastern Orthodoxy in this volume.

Volume Six is also exceptional in the series because of its almost exclusive concentration on *preaching*, with little treatment of the *reading* of Scripture in the churches’ worship liturgies. Earlier volumes narrated the development of lectionaries to structure the systematic and extensive hearing of the Word of God by congregations gathered for worship, and volume seven will note the influence of Vatican II on the recovery of the hearing of the Word in twentieth-century Roman Catholicism. Old previously has expressed admiration for the delight in the reading of extended biblical passages in earlier eras (2:295; 3:72, cited in my first *Ordained Servant* review). Fixed lectionaries are not the only way, of course, to ensure that the breadth of Scripture is read and heard in our worship, and Old is aware that lectionaries have drawbacks: a lectionary may place a biblical text in a particular conceptual context that differs significantly from its setting in Scripture (6:128). On the other hand, Old also notes that preaching *lectio continua* through biblical books, though reinforcing each text’s biblical context, has its potential dangers, such as when young preachers imitate the slow pace and extended series of a master like Martyn Lloyd-Jones (6:949).² Old’s

2 Despite this caveat, after deep study of “the Doctor’s” sermons, which “came to my attention only rather recently,” Old is persuaded that Lloyd-Jones’s blend of Calvinistic conviction, exegetical fidelity, and evangelistic boldness, “rather than being

discussion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* gives him opportunity to stress the importance of the church’s continuous exposure to substantial portions of the Scriptures, heard in their biblical context (6:807–9). We who are heirs of the Westminster Assembly, which produced a *Directory for Publick Worship* instead of a revised *Book of Common Prayer*, do well to consider how our worship services can and should be permeated by God’s Word, read and heard, prayed and sung, as well as preached. Perhaps the relative paucity of comment on this “reading” motif in these last two volumes reflects the “famine . . . of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11) that our author finds in the liturgies, whether fixed and formal or ad hoc, of recent Protestantism (mainline and evangelical).

As a confessional Presbyterian, I found much to value in Old’s evaluation of the various streams of post-Enlightenment Protestant preaching. I was heartened by his appreciation for the biblical insight, focus on Christ’s cross and resurrection, eloquence, and personal fervor in the sermons of Abraham Kuyper (6:45–60). My appreciation grew for Charles Spurgeon’s skill with language and his vivid, down-to-earth illustration, even as I was reminded that the power of Spurgeon’s preaching resided not in his technique but in his confidence in God’s sovereignty, his commitment to preach Christ and his grace, and his dependence on the Holy Spirit’s presence (6:422–43). In chapter 4, I learned more about the preaching of Old School fathers about whom I knew something (Archibald and J. W. Alexander, John Livingston Nevius), and I met others for the first time. Old’s brief introduction to Klaas Schilder highlighted the Dutch preacher’s meticulous exegesis, literary art and imagination, and sensitivity to the Old Testament’s witness to Christ and his sufferings (6:856–63). My curiosity was piqued to learn more about preachers such as James Stewart, “a Presbyterian Bonaventure,” under whose theological instruction and pulpit ministry Old had profited spiritually

a vestige of the past . . . is an intimation of the future . . . the example a whole host of young evangelical preachers intend to follow” (6:944).

during a winter spent in Edinburgh in the 1950s (6:902–27).

I also agreed with the negative assessments rendered over influential preachers and theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Friedrich Schleiermacher's sermons and his homiletical theory, Pietism's subjectivism met the Enlightenment's anti-supernaturalism to yield a message that affirmed humanity's intrinsic divinity, replaced vicarious atonement with Jesus's exemplary faith, and substituted for the apostolic testimony to Christ's bodily resurrection "a moment when the risen Savior appears to our spirits and with his life-giving power empowers us," in the words of one of Schleiermacher's Easter sermons (6:81–87). Old comments, "One cannot help but wonder if what we are hearing here is not some sort of self-realization philosophy, hiding in tabs and pulpit gown" (6:88). It is puzzling that Old allots nine pages to New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann, who "rarely entered the pulpit" during his professorial tenure at Marburg and whom "no one would claim ... was a great preacher" (6:764). Yet Bultmann's single volume of twenty-one sermons "have been widely acclaimed," since they express his existentialist slant on New Testament theology (6:765). Old shows that these sermons clearly express both doubt and indifference toward the historical events of the gospel. He judges them to be "unbearably abstract" and questions whether Bultmann's hearers would have even understood the response he sought from them, much less be moved to offer it (6:770, 773). So, perhaps those pages are well invested as a cautionary tale about ways that error in the academy can wreak ruin in the pulpit. Moreover, it is no secret where Old's sympathies lie as he profiles two twentieth-century British preachers, contrasting the Anglican William Temple's urbane explanation of "The Meaning of the Crucifixion," in which he took pains to deny "that Jesus bore the penalty that was really due us" (6:693), on the one hand, to the Methodist William Sangster's proclamation of Christ our substitute and punishment-bearer, on the other. From Sangster we hear "the historic Christian doctrine of the atonement, found so clearly in the New

Testament, lost sometimes at one point or another in the history of the church, but clearly recovered in the Protestant Reformation" (6:935).

Then again, at points Old's theological discernment and his irenic inclination to offer a "judgment of charity" seem to stand virtually at an impasse. We see this, for example, in his discussion of the sermons of Harry Emerson Fosdick, a name well known to those familiar with the Presbyterian conflict that birthed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. (In case OS readers wonder: No, Fosdick's 1922 manifesto, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" is *not* mentioned in the 20-page treatment of "the most influential preacher of the Great American School," 6:530–51.) Old faithfully summarizes the arguments and cites selections from several of Fosdick's famous sermons, gently injecting his own assessment along the way. Of "On Catching the Wrong Bus," for instance, he concludes, "There is not a trace of Calvinism in this sermon. It is Puritanism without Calvinism. There is no suggestion of grace anywhere in the sermon" (6:538). Old finds hints of grace in "No Man Need Stay the Way He Is." However, in this sermon, ostensibly on Romans 8:1, "Fosdick's understanding of grace does not come very close to the eighth chapter of Romans" (6:541). The pages devoted to this sermon clearly demonstrate the accuracy of Old's assessment that Fosdick's view of grace was far removed from the apostle Paul's. Yet the author's irenic conclusion is:

This is an evangelistic sermon. It may not be quite the same gospel that other evangelists were preaching in that day, but Fosdick ... was concerned to find some way of presenting the gospel that his generation could accept... Given the presuppositions of those to whom he preached, it is probably not a bad attempt. (6:542)

I would grant that willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt is a hallmark of both Christian humility and scholarly wisdom. But how can a sermon that offers "grace" and "good news" that are unrecognizable by apostolic standards, to avoid running afoul of hearers' self-confident

presuppositions, be judged “not a bad attempt”?

The longest chapter surveys “The Great American School,” from Charles Finney to Norman Vincent Peale (6:445–581). The chapter opens with a clarification that helps to explain Old’s measured critiques of preachers such as Fosdick: “These volumes have been written for the heirs of this [Great American] school, to help us figure out where we fit into the big picture.... We have a great heritage and yet that heritage has obvious flaws” (6:448)—among them, as Old had already admitted, “a rather weak understanding of Scripture” (6:447). To retain credibility from his primary audience, our author adopts a low-key strategy, using historical description and understated evaluations to plant the thought that preaching should be significantly better than many of his mainline and evangelical readers have ever experienced.

I mentioned above that this school is theologically diverse. It includes, on the one hand, popular evangelists who held to biblical inerrancy such as D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Billy Sunday; and, on the other, mainline spokesmen like Fosdick, who scorned those fundamentalists’ views of Scripture, miracles, the incarnation, and salvation. The school is broad enough denominationally to include Congregationalists (Horace Bushnell and Henry Ward Beecher), a noted Episcopalian bishop and homiletician (Phillips Brooks), Methodists (Sam Porter Jones), Presbyterians (Sunday, Fosdick, Henry Sloan Coffin, and George A. Buttrick), and Peale, who is given this introduction, despite his affiliation with the Reformed Church in America: “With no preacher in the Great American School does Arminianism surface so obviously as with Norman Vincent Peale.... Here is the ultimate preacher of American optimism, the ultimate evangelist of self-help” (6:572).

What factors, then, lead Old to view men who differed in so many ways as belonging to a single school of homiletics? In general, they assumed a revivalistic, rather than a churchly catechetical, approach to entering and maturing in the Christian faith. Some filled pulpits in established congregations, while others preached in crusades and other

venues that transcended ecclesiastical oversight and tended to minimize denominational distinctive. Subjective spiritual experience and individuals’ decisions overshadowed confessional orthodoxy and corporate nurture through and accountability to covenant communities. In response to the growing influence of naturalistic science, rising democratic populism, and other social shifts, these preachers sought to attract and retain Americans’ ears both through both innovative methodology and theological adaptation of their message. In this school, preachers’ perceptions of their hearers’ and the wider society’s needs (whether abolition and “temperance” or improving self-esteem) typically took precedence over the consistent exposition and application of the whole counsel of God, as historically understood by the church. Old concludes the chapter with an analysis of the once-great American school’s demise of effectiveness, and thus of influence, and with it the mainline denominations who are his primary audience. He blames not only the critical biblical scholarship that subverts confidence in and submission to Scripture, God’s Word written, but also the spreading biblical illiteracy across the whole landscape of the American church. “Even more significant in the fall of the American pulpit at the end of the twentieth century was that American Protestantism, by and large, capitulated to the secular culture of its age” (6:580).

It is against this backdrop, I believe, that Old identifies the Calvinistic, evangelistic, expositional preaching of Lloyd-Jones—which seemed to be an archaic replay of classic Reformational and Puritan proclamation of God’s sovereign, saving grace in Christ—as a harbinger of better things to come. Volume Seven will open with “the end of the mainline” before going on to profile Reformed preachers such as William Still, John Stott, Richard Lucas, Sinclair Ferguson, and Timothy Keller; the ministry of Billy Graham; contemporary preachers of Africa, Latin America, and Asia; and the proclamation of the Word in the black church in America, the Charismatic movement, post-Vatican II Catholicism, and evangelical megachurches. Not surprisingly, the preaching of God’s

inerrant Word and its focal point, Christ's gracious redemptive achievement in history, has quite easily survived the demise of a "great" homiletical school. It, presumably with good intentions, sought to attract and engage an increasingly secularized audience by reconfiguring its message to suit their presuppositions. The story continues and the good news still goes out in life-changing power, for "the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9). ©

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The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Part 4

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by **Dennis E. Johnson**

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Volume 7: *Our Own Time*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, xx + 714 pages, \$55.00.

This multivolume survey of the history of "the reading and preaching of Scripture" in the church's corporate worship spans over three millennia (from Moses to the present). Because its

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=441&issue_id=98.

4,000+ pages demand careful reading and reflection, this review has appeared piecemeal over the last couple of years. Part One, covering the first three volumes (the biblical period, the patristic age, the medieval church), appeared in the August-September 2012 issue of *Ordained Servant*. Part Two, reviewing volumes four (the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestantism and Catholicism) and five (the era of "moderatism, pietism, and awakening"), came out in February 2013. The third segment, which appeared in March 2014, addressed only volume six ("the modern age," from the late eighteenth through the mid-twentieth century). Now at last we reach the final volume, which surveys preaching in "our own time," the closing decades of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first. Old completed the writing of volume seven in January 2008, two years before its publication and six years before this review.

The survey and analysis of preaching in our own time continues the author's aim to give us a catholic perspective on the church's preaching and worship. This volume, like its predecessors, includes preaching from a variety of theological and ecclesiastical traditions. Individual chapters are devoted to the mainline Protestant denominations in North America, to a "new breed" of American Presbyterians, to recent homiletical trends in the Roman Catholic church, to African-American preaching, to charismatic churches, to Anglican and Church of Scotland preachers, and to evangelical megachurches. Geographically, too, Old strives to introduce readers to preaching in the global church, surveying the ministry of the Word in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and East Asia. A special treat is derived from Old's personal friendship with Romanian poet/professor/preacher Joan Alexandru: in one brief but moving chapter, he recounts the role that *a single sermon*, preached by Alexandru in December 1989, played in the liberation of Romania through the fall of the regime of Nicolae Ceausescu.

Old has lived and ministered in the context of mainline Presbyterianism, but he is well aware of its weaknesses and appreciative of the strengths to be seen elsewhere in Christ's church. The open-

ing chapter is entitled, tellingly, “The End of the Mainline.” It profiles the preaching ministry of Henry Sloan Coffin and James A. Forbes Jr. at Riverside Church in New York City, Fred Craddock of Candler School of Theology, Fleming Rutledge and Stephen Bauman in historic Episcopalian and Methodist New York City congregations, and Methodist Bishop William Willimon. With the exception of Rutledge and Willimon, who dare to affirm and proclaim (rather than demythologize) such historic biblical doctrines as the resurrection of Jesus and carefully to expound biblical texts, Old finds mainline preaching sorely deficient in content. Though he appreciates mainline preachers’ effectiveness as communicators, he critiques their existentialist hermeneutic and liberal political agenda, citing, for example, Coffin’s sermons advocating acceptance of homosexual relationships and attacking opponents of abortion, preached and then published over thirty years ago (1982) in *The Courage to Love*. Old finds Coffin’s handling of biblical texts unpersuasive and suggests that “prophetic” preaching, such as Coffin’s, emptied mainline pews because “the problem was the message” (15). Readers of *Ordained Servant* would no doubt join me in concurring with Old’s diagnosis—until he goes on to explain that Coffin’s message was “not the right word for the right time,” but an outdated expression of liberal social conscience during an era of political conservatism (16–17). Although Old’s irenic and empathetic spirit is admirable, I hope (and, from other comments elsewhere, expect) that in his heart of hearts he could not envision a “right time” at any point in history for a Christian preacher to dismiss biblical ethical standards or fundamental gospel truths, as Coffin’s preaching did.

This volume’s cover photo of Billy Graham leads us to expect a substantive discussion of this globally recognized evangelist of our time. Chapter two is devoted entirely to Graham’s ministry. Although Old acknowledges, “If I am to be completely honest, I have to admit that Billy Graham has never turned me on, to use a slang expression” (82), he fairly sums up and frankly admires Graham’s biblical convictions regarding our universal

need of salvation from sin, God’s provision of salvation through “the blood sacrifice of Christ’s atonement” (68), the reality of coming final judgment, and the imperative of faith in Christ, which initiates a new way of life as a follower Jesus. Old also appreciates the populist flavor of Graham’s “Bible belt oratory,” which communicates across both generational and educational boundaries in both urban and exurban contexts.

Ordained Servant readers especially will be interested in chapter three, “A ‘New Breed’ of Presbyterians,” where we meet names familiar to most of us: Sinclair Ferguson (then pastor of First Presbyterian Church [ARP] in Columbia, South Carolina); Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in New York City; and, perhaps less known in the OPC, Scotty Smith of Christ Community Church (PCA) in Franklin, Tennessee, near Nashville. In a footnote, Old explains that “to preserve at least a certain amount of objectivity,” he will not discuss his own family’s pastors at Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia, James Montgomery Boice and his successor, Philip Ryken (87). Along with these pastors in confessional Presbyterian denominations, Old groups pastors such as Earl Palmer and John Huffman in the more evangelical wing of the Presbyterian Church USA. The affinity that Old discerns among these preachers, despite the theological distance between their denominations, is that they exemplify a robust confidence in the Bible as God’s Word and a bold readiness to “push back” against the anti-supernaturalism of the existentialist mainline. These “new breed” Presbyterians are conversant with the issues raised by modern biblical criticism but not cowed by them, and their pulpit ministries exemplify a rebirth of consistent expository preaching in extended *lectio continua* series—a rich legacy from the patristic and Reformation eras that fosters Christians’ and churches’ spiritual vitality and evangelistic witness. Noting that many of these preachers, such as Keller, expound God’s Word at length each Sunday, “typically forty or forty-five minutes” (149), Old concludes with evident pleasure, “Strong expository preaching as well as strong doctrinal preaching are beginning to fill the pews

that the fifteen-minute homilies of a generation ago succeeded in emptying” (172).

In a footnote at the start of this chapter (87), Old notes that he has been informed of a resurgence of expository preaching among Baptists, “especially Reformed Baptists.” I am more than a little surprised, therefore, by the omission of such preachers as John Piper, who pastored Bethlehem Baptist Church from 1980 to 2013 and authored many books extolling the supremacy of God, and Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Access to an abundance of resources about our contemporaries in the pulpit demanded hard choices, no doubt, about whom to include and to exclude. But I would have thought that the influence of Piper, at least, to draw young evangelicals toward an appreciation of God’s sovereign grace would have warranted at least honorable mention.

Chapters four and five lift our sights beyond the borders of the United States, introducing us to “Protestant preaching in Black Africa” and then to the role of preaching in disseminating liberation theology among the Roman Catholics of Latin America. Old profiles Presbyterian preachers in Kenya and Anglicans in Uganda and Nigeria, primarily offering biographical sketches but occasionally analyzing specific sermons. In some sub-Saharan African voices, he hears a Christianized Marxist political agenda; in others, he hears the gospel of God’s grace in Christ; in still others, he hears a bracing call to moral integrity and to the resistance of syncretism with indigenous African religions. In Zambia, we meet Conrad Mbewe, “the African Spurgeon,” who still today proclaims God’s sovereign grace in Christ to the congregation of Kabwata Baptist Church in Lusaka. Calling attention to the theological substance of this pastor in southeastern Africa, Old devotes several pages to Mbewe’s sermon series on justification, the foundational doctrines of the faith, and Romans.

The chapter on liberation theology in Latin America shows empathy for the economic disparities and political injustices that have made Marxist activism attractive to such Roman prelates as Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo of Mexico, Archbishop Hélder Câmara of Brazil, Archbishop Oscar

Romero of San Salvador, and Cardinal Eduardo Pironio of Argentina. Yet, despite the grave societal problems that liberation-theology preachers seek to address, when their preaching replaces exposition of God’s Word with naked polemical assaults against “North American imperialism, enemy of Central America,” the title of a sermon by Arceo (246), Old concludes, “I find the good bishop seriously lacking” (255). In Old’s estimation, Archbishop Romero stood out as a conscientious interpreter of Scripture who rejected Marxism’s reductionistic diagnosis of Latin America’s ills in merely materialistic terms, as well as its merely political-military prescription for those maladies, calling hearers to spiritual (as well as social) liberty through Christ.

Chapter six opens with the observation that one effect of the Second Vatican Council’s reform of Roman Catholic worship was a reemphasis on the preaching of the Word, which had been largely marginalized by the mass. Although appreciating Vatican II’s desire to bring the proclamation of the Word back to its rightful place in worship, Old finds the quality of biblical interpretation uneven in the sermons he samples. He surveys preachers and theologians serving Roman Catholic congregations and institutions in Washington, DC; Trenton, New Jersey; Berkeley, California; Detroit, Michigan; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is surprised to encounter a sermon in which Jesus’s transfiguration is made the grounds for a summons to oppose the death penalty (331); a Lenten sermon in which a summons to rigorous Sabbath observance “manage(s) to crowd out John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8,” the Gospel and Epistle readings assigned for that Sunday (337); and an Easter sermon in which, “instead of proclaiming that Christ is risen, the preacher begins by remarking that we don’t have to believe this” (342). Much of the blame, though not all, Old lays at the feet of the practice of lectionary preaching, which works against reading and preaching biblical texts in their contexts and leaves preachers free to pick and choose among Old Testament, Gospel, and Epistle readings for a particular Sunday.

The chapter on “black preaching” in the

African-American church demonstrates the soundness of Old's conclusion that "it is a magnificent art form" (355), distinguished by oratorical skill in delivery, a sense of biblical typology in its content, and a love for Jesus in its piety. The preaching of Martin Luther King Jr., Evangelist Tom Skinner, and T. D. Jakes, is analyzed, as well as other sermons by pastors with whom I was not previously acquainted. The sensitivity to redemptive typology that Old found in this preaching especially intrigues me. His summary of a sermon by African Methodist Episcopal Minister William Watley in Newark, New Jersey, on David and Goliath almost led me to dismiss it as the predictable "be like David" moralistic exhortation, but suddenly Pastor Watley stressed that none of Israel's great leaders down through history—neither Abraham nor Moses nor Joshua nor Gideon nor any other commander—could slay the giants that threaten us. "So," Pastor Watley concluded, "God, in the wisdom of divine providence, sent the supreme giant slayer, whose name was Jesus." I look forward to reading the sermon in full to see how the preacher brought his congregation from David to Jesus, but I resonate with his Christ-centered homiletical instinct!

The chapter on "the Charismatics" introduces the ministries of preachers well-known (Aimee Semple McPherson, Oral Roberts, Jack Hayford) and lesser known (Tommy Barnett, Frederick Price) outside charismatic circles, including Sister Aimee, who died in 1944. Technically this trespasses the chronological boundary of "our own time," but it sets the backdrop for successors who followed her lead by skillfully exploiting communications media to disseminate their message. In this chapter, Old's inclination toward irenic appreciation was working overtime to give the benefit of the doubt to these effective communicators, despite weaknesses for which he had critiqued others more sharply. He concludes, for example, that McPherson "preached a simple gospel of the love of Christ to a very specific people at a particular time" (404), even though the cross of Christ and atonement for sins are strangely absent both from the articulation of the "foursquare gospel" (401) and from

Old's summary of Sister's entertaining preaching style. Price's serious effort to exposit biblical texts using the exegetical resources accessible to him is praised (435), while Hayford is critiqued for being "too confident that what comes off the top of his head is the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (443). Hayford preaches from his own religious experience, and Old recognizes that this focus on the preacher's subjectivity can be unedifying. Yet he concludes that, as Hayford does it, "there is something very right about this ... a balance between preaching as Word of God and preaching as personal witness" (446). A most gracious conclusion, but not altogether persuasive.

The "new age in Britain" (chapter 10) is represented by William Still (Church of Scotland); Anglicans John Stott, Richard Lucas, and (charismatic Anglican) Nicky Gumble; and Irish Presbyterian Trevor Morrow. Still, pastor of Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, is introduced as "one of the most creative innovators of the late-twentieth-century pulpit" (449). Yet it turns out that his "creative innovation" is a return to "regular, systematic expository preaching" (451), a recovery of the Puritan plain style in which Scripture is shown to interpret Scripture (455–57). So it appears that "creativity" in our own time sometimes takes the shape of reviving the sound approaches to preaching that have borne fruit in past generations! Although three volumes of Still's collected works have appeared, Old expresses the hope that the large cache of Still's sermons in the Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi) library will eventually be published. John Stott's *Between Two Worlds* is judged to be "far and away the most important book on preaching in our day" (461); and Stott's thirty-year pulpit ministry at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, demonstrated the life-transforming power of his consistent exposition of Scripture, grounded in thorough exegesis. The discussion of Lucas's fruitful ministry at St. Helen's Bishopgate, in London's financial district, is tantalizingly brief, especially for those who are familiar with Rev. Lucas's friendship with Dr. Edmund Clowney and his initiative in founding The Proclamation Trust and the Cornhill

Training Course for expository preachers.

The megachurch pastors whose preaching is surveyed include Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, Lloyd Ogilvie of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, Southern Baptists Adrian Rogers (Memphis, Tennessee) and Charles Stanley (Atlanta, Georgia), Chuck Swindoll, and John MacArthur—but not, curiously, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church in Illinois or Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Southern California). Despite vast differences in community contexts, demographic profiles, and ministry styles, Old finds a common thread in the pastors' commitment to "a recovery of classical Christian preaching . . . systematic expository preaching" (494). Whether addressing unchurched young surfers and "Jesus freaks" (Old's term), as Chuck Smith began to do in the 1960s, or Southern suburbanites, these preachers buck the trend toward shorter and shorter sermonettes, expecting and receiving from tens of thousands of worshipers rapt attention to expositions lasting forty-five minutes or more: "If you have something to say, people will listen" (495). Confidence in the Bible as God's inerrant Word, unreserved commitment to Scripture's bold supernaturalism and God-centeredness, and insightful diagnosis of their hearers' true and deepest needs are the hallmark of the megachurch preachers surveyed here. A statement from Ogilvie's preface to the Communicator's Commentary series seems to capture Old's perspective: "A growing renaissance in the church today is being led by clergy and laity who are biblically rooted, Christ-centered, and Holy Spirit-empowered. They have dared to listen to people's most urgent questions and deepest needs and then to God as He speaks throughout the Bible. Biblical preaching is the secret of growing churches" (506, citing Ogilvie, *Hosea-Jonah*, xi.) We confessional Presbyterians will have theological disagreements with these preachers (as, admittedly, we do with each other). Yet, when their message is viewed, as Old does, in the wider context of the various ways that God's Word is being handled in our time, we can be grateful to God that such men, rather than protégés of William Sloan Coffin, are addressing congregations numbering in the tens of thousands.

Speaking of large congregations, the final chapter discusses preaching in "the young churches of East Asia," concluding with profiles of several mega-megachurches that Old was privileged to visit in 1993. En route to Korea, the chapter introduces us to Japanese, Sri Lankan, and Chinese heralds of the gospel. Our author acknowledges that his "rapid sketch" (a mere 102 pages!) may be "fumbling and premature," but his purpose is to make us aware of ways that Christian preaching is developing on that populous continent which has been dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, Islam and Maoist communism. Readers are introduced to Toyohiko Kagawa (1888–1960), Presbyterian evangelist and social reformer, whom Old credits with shaping the social conscience of Japan—a remarkable assessment in view of the minuscule minority of Japanese who profess faith in Christ. Two collections of Kagawa's sermons in English translation enabled our author to explore his preaching in some depth. The evangelistic sermons that Kagawa preached during the Movement for the Conversion of a Million Souls (1927–34)—bold endeavor!—focused on Christ's cross as God's provision of substitutionary atonement for sinners and on how the cross summons believers to respond in devotion toward God and compassion toward the powerless and sufferers.

Technically, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is located in South Asia, off the coast of India; but Old did well not to exclude its Methodist preacher, D. T. Niles, whose great-grandfather had been baptized by missionaries in 1821. Though unable to access sermons that Niles preached to Sri Lankans, our author devotes several pages to summarizing the missiological insights expressed by Niles in his 1957 Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale University, *The Preacher's Task and the Stone of Stumbling*. Over a half century after Niles brought these addresses, evangelical missions continue to wrestle for clarity on such issues of contextualization, syncretism, and compromise. The summary of Niles's remarks on why Christ, his incarnation, his death, and his resurrection must always remain a "stone of stumbling" to Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists

was so tantalizing that I immediately went online to order a used copy of the collection.

For his survey of Christian preachers in China, especially under the current communist regime, Old was largely dependent on secondary sources such as David Aikman's *Jesus in Beijing* and the autobiographical *The Heavenly Man* by Liu Zhenying, also known as Brother Yun. Some sermons and sermonic materials from Wang Mingdao (1900–1991) and Watchman Nee (1903–1973) are available in English translation, so our homiletical guide was able to summarize and assess the content and tone of these preachers' ministry and piety under persecution. No doubt Old would concur with my sense that a more complete narrative of the preaching of the Word in China in recent times remains to be researched and written.

The final section of the final chapter narrates, with the flavor of a travelogue, worship services attended, sermons heard (via immediate interpretation), and interviews conducted during an extended visit to Seoul in 1993. The visitor spent time in large Presbyterian and Methodist congregations, as well as Yoido Full Gospel Church (reportedly the largest congregation in the world, at over 700,000 members). He observed the strong emphasis on prayer in the Protestant churches of Korea, the Presbyterians' extended (yearlong) and conscientious catechizing of new members, and the commitment to consistent expository preaching expressed by most of the pastors whom he heard and interviewed. (A notable exception was Sun-Do Kim of Kwanglim Methodist Church, who takes Harry Emerson Fosdick as his model, begins with his congregants' life problems as his homiletical starting point, and critiques the negativity and fundamentalism of other Korean preachers.)

When Old asked Pastor Sang-Bok Kim of Hallelujah Church what produces effective preaching, the pastor gave two necessary ingredients: "That the preacher must speak from an unshakable confidence in the authority of the Word of God, and ... that he must be unswervingly faithful to the text." Our author concurs: "I think he put it about as well as I have ever heard it put" (666). Although a one-and-a-half-page conclusion follows this last

sentence of chapter 12, Pastor Kim's observation and its affirmation by Dr. Old aptly concludes this astonishingly vast—vast globally and temporally—survey of the reading and preaching of Scripture as God's very Word, his Word of grace in Christ, in the worship of God's people, under old covenant and new.

In these seven volumes Hughes Oliphant Old has given a priceless gift to the church and its preachers. His overview of the ministry of the Word in the midst of the church's worship is by no means exhaustive, but it is astonishing in its scope, mind-expanding in its perspective, and highly motivating—especially for those to whom God issues the high and humbling calling of heralding his glory and his grace in Jesus Christ the Lord. *Soli Deo gloria!* ©

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A Conflicted Qohelet

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by **Meredith M. Kline**

Ecclesiastes, by Peter Enns. Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011, xiv + 238 pages, \$25.00, paper.

The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary series attempts to integrate exegesis with biblical

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=414&issue_id=93.

and systematic theology. Therefore, the first half of this book has a traditional commentary format beginning with discussion of introductory matters like date, authorship, structure, and message (1–29), which is then followed by exegesis of the text in interaction with major commentators (30–116). The book's second half consists of three theological essays covering the theology of Ecclesiastes (117–35), the relation of Ecclesiastes to the rest of the Bible (136–91), and contemporary application of Ecclesiastes (192–219). The book concludes with a bibliography (220–27) and indexes of authors and ancient literature (228–38).

While Qohelet is a mask for Solomon, Enns argues with the modern majority for non-Solomonic authorship, a postexilic dating, and the need to differentiate the voices of Qohelet and a frame-narrator (16–22).² Because topics keep returning and shift abruptly, when Enns evaluates the book's structure he divides it into sixteen units based on perceived changes of theme, thus producing a linear string of sections whose logical relations are not readily apparent. He is not convinced by contemporary proposals that the book is divided into halves or quarters, or has alternating themes, or exhibits a hierarchical structure (22–25).

Conflict within Qohelet

The standard paradigm for understanding Ecclesiastes is to see it as containing a combination of cynical (Qohelet's theme is "life is absurd, you die anyway, and God is to blame," 77) and pious sentiments. In Enns's opinion, the "tension between affirming Qohelet's harsh criticisms of God while affirming traditional Israelite theology lies at the heart of the interpretive difficulties with Ecclesiastes throughout Jewish and Christian history" (116).

Interpretations of Ecclesiastes differ in how they relate its negative, positive, and pious ideas. Negative concepts include the idea that death can-

cels the profit of toil and the advantage of wisdom over folly, as well as the idea that divine retributive justice is absent from earthly life. Positive concepts include the idea that labor and wisdom provide earthly benefits. That God should be feared and obeyed and that there will be an ultimate, eschatological judgment are among the book's pious ideas.

One interpretation sees the book's thrust as cynical. Its negatives express the absurdity of life, its positives are hedonism, and its pious sentiments are editorial insertions inconsistent with the book's pessimism. The interpretational tension results from apparent contradictions inherent in the received text. A common evangelical perspective perceives the book's negatives as cynicism presented for argument's sake in order to contrast it with traditional Israelite piety that is correlated with heavenly blessing. The tension is seen as a contrast between a pagan worldview that the book argues against and a biblical perspective that it promotes. A third position sees Qohelet's negatives and positives as cynicism but the epilogue as a combination of traditional piety and a critique of Qohelet. The tension is viewed as a difference of opinion between Qohelet and a frame-narrator.

Enns presents a variation on the latter option by positing that Qohelet's negatives and positives not only represent cynicism but can also reflect a believer's doubts. This strategy by Enns moves the interpretational tension into Qohelet's mind. He is simultaneously a rebellious cynic and a doubting saint. Qohelet is painted as a spiritual schizophrenic. In addition, for Enns the frame-narrator summarizes Qohelet's cynicism in 1:1–11, approves it in 12:9–10, and supplements it in 12:13–14 with a traditional pious exhortation promoting obedience to God's law while being ambivalent about the existence of a final judgment. According to Enns, for the Israelite covenant member (and analogously for the New Testament believer), the message of Ecclesiastes is that Qohelet's "complaints are *affirmed as wise*, but the reader is challenged to move *beyond* this state, even against all reason, to one of fear of God and obedience to his commands—to continue being a faithful Israelite regardless of the absurdity" (148, italics original).

² In addition to the commonly perceived frame of 1:1–2, 7:27, and 12:8–14, Enns also attributes 1:3–11 to a narrator because 1:12 reads like the beginning of a typical ancient Near Eastern royal autobiography.

The frame-narrator reinforces Qohelet's emotional conflict.

Enns does not consider eliminating the tensions associated with the standard interpretational paradigm by following an alternative paradigm which considers the book's negatives that distress a faithful Qohelet as common curse plus human folly while the positives that he appreciates are common blessing. In such a "realistic" view of providential miseries and mercies, there is no conflict of a Qohelet simultaneously criticizing and revering God.³

Enns definitely portrays Qohelet as a discontent who paints life as absurd.⁴ Qohelet supposedly is angry with God (54, 123), who is arrogant and consuming (72), and blames him for making life meaningless and incoherent (39, 210–211). God is exasperating (67) and capricious (89), not comforting (50, 56, 60, 94), and approaching him in worship is risky (69) because he is not to be trusted (84). Qohelet rejects the idea of an afterlife (59, 109, "a useless theological category" – 178) with a divine judgment (106),⁵ so "God is the ultimate purveyor of injustice" (93). The fear of God "is not a healthy, covenantal fear ... but something dysfunctional, born out of frustration" (84). Wisdom is unreliable (81) and, like righteousness, does not consistently pay off (83). So, "being an obedient

3 A "pragmatist" interpretation which similarly views the negatives as normal experiences of Adam-kind while emphasizing the joy theme in Ecclesiastes differs from a "realist" perspective in not believing that Ecclesiastes teaches there is an eschatological Doomsday.

4 That a cynical-Qohelet portrait dominates the interpretation of this commentary is revealed by the fact that the bibliography and footnotes (which are minimal in the theology section) do not interact with works arguing for an "evangelist" or a "realist" interpretation of Ecclesiastes, even if they cite articles by such authors on particular exegetical details. The few evangelicals referred to in the commentary section for grammatical or philological support are disregarded in the theology section. The bibliography does not include anything published after 2008, so unfortunately Enns was not able to interact with recently published Reformed works on Ecclesiastes such as the commentaries of Bartholomew, Fredericks, and Ryken or to *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes* by Greidanus.

5 The reference in 11:9 to the judgment of God is interpreted as referring to old age (106–7). Similarly the statement in 3:17 that God will judge the righteous and wicked "is at best a temporary and shallow consolation" (57).

Israelite, at the end of the day, amounts to nothing" (94), and "living life with all our strength is our biggest protest against a fundamentally unjust and absurd circumstance that God has given us" (97).⁶ Qohelet is resigned to the snippets of joy that wise work engenders but providence snatches with death (45), making one "a pawn in a cruel game" (73–74). Although Qohelet perceives one's portion from labor as a gift of God (3:13, 5:18 [19]⁷), Enns says "one's portion is not the generous provision of a gracious God. It is humanity's only recourse in carving out an island of provisional 'meaning' in the face of an ocean storm of divine injustice" (132).

For Enns, Qohelet's epistemology is also an integral part of his cynicism: "For Qohelet, what is knowable is that which can be observed, either in time or space or in the mind's eye. He has little patience for considering that, perhaps, there is more to reality than meets the eye. What is beyond our ability to experience is unknowable, plain and simple (e.g., what happens after death, 3:18–22)" (118). Also, "What is intriguing about Qohelet's theology is that he undermines his own epistemology in the sense that, at the end of the day, there is very little we can know with certainty, and what one does know collapses into absurdity" (119). Qohelet is skeptical of wisdom and God. For Enns, "Qohelet's conclusions about God and the world are drawn not on the basis of revelation but on his own vast ("under the sun") experience" (118).⁸

At the same time, in his contemporary ap-

6 Enns, however, believes the frame-narrator offers counsel to persevere despite apparent injustice, thus having the frame narrator approximate a "realist" position, but Enns claims not to understand or like such advice (217).

7 The Hebrew text in chapter 5 is different than the English text and thus bracketed.

8 Here, presumably, Enns means special revelation, not general revelation, but Ecclesiastes certainly has intertextual allusions to Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Kings; Solomon is surely masked by Qohelet. Also, a secularist, empirical epistemology does not jibe with Qohelet's statement in 9:10 that there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol. How can he be sure empirically that there is no earth-like living in that realm, since some ancients provided the dead with vessels and food for post-mortem existence or since Saul had an encounter with the deceased Samuel?

plication of Ecclesiastes, Enns encourages the Christian to press on in life's journey, trusting and obeying God despite physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering, sometimes even of horrendous magnitude. For the Christian reader the purpose of Ecclesiastes is to challenge us "to affirm the normalcy and benefit of being in a state of struggle, despair, and disorientation in one's relationship with God at certain stages in our spiritual journeys" (207, italics original). For the interpretation of Ecclesiastes, the significant portion of this sentence is what Enns did not italicize. He tries to appropriate a "cynical" negative outlook of Qohelet that he develops in his commentary section as the *sporadic* psychological doubt of a believer. For Qohelet, however, the stressful aspects of life "under the sun" apply to the whole of every individual's life throughout earth history to the consummation. Enns understands a pagan perspective of resignation to absurdity as sometimes characteristic of a believer's psychological oscillations, but Qohelet's hating of life (2:17–18), because death wipes out earthly benefits, always coexists with his fearing of God.

Conflict of Qohelet and the Bible

For Enns, conflict exists not only within Qohelet's mind but also between Qohelet and the rest of Scripture. Enns thinks that the words of Ecclesiastes are counter to most other OT literature, being "not only in suggestive tension with other portions of the same Scripture, inspired by the same God, but are openly critical of those Scriptures—and even of God himself" (195). "Qohelet's words do not simply contribute a particularly discordant voice to Scripture's ultimately harmonious polyphony. He does not seek to add a dissonant note to a complex chord, thus producing an unexpected and richer harmony. His presentation of God, which is his considered and final opinion on the matter, calls into question the very notion of harmony. He neutralizes rather than adds to Scripture's polyphonic testimony. He does not wish to be in conversation with other voices; he wishes to overtake them, to silence them. Synthesizing Qohelet and

other voices is not just difficult—Qohelet would consider it foolishness" (196–97).

Like his Qohelet, Enns thinks it is foolish to harmonize the clashing cynical and orthodox pieties of Qohelet and the epilogist, so he maintains the dissonance and sculpts Qohelet into a changeling who morphs back and forth between a rebellious cynic and a reverent doubter. In addition, Enns does not try to harmonize the contrasting voices of Qohelet and Moses on retribution or the supposedly incompatible ideas of Qohelet and Jesus on the afterlife.

Ecclesiastes and the OT

Are the inscrutably distributed positives and negatives of Qohelet's world the capricious impositions of a divine despot that contradict the retributive sanctions of Deuteronomy or the deeds-consequences teachings of Proverbs? Or, are Qohelet's vanities and joys the common providences of an inscrutable sovereign which complement Deuteronomy and Proverbs? Enns holds the former⁹ because he does not believe Ecclesiastes teaches there is an afterlife when divine justice will be executed and vindicated. Passages such as 3:17 ("God will judge the righteous and wicked"), 11:9 ("but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment"), possibly 8:6 (if translated "for every desire there is a judgment time"), and even 12:14 ("God will bring every deed into judgment"). Enns understands this as not pointing to an afterlife judgment but to the implementing of just deserts during earthly existence.¹⁰ Enns is even ambivalent about 12:14 which "does not necessarily imply an eschatological judgment, although the possibility should be left open" (115; compare "is not an allusion to eschatological judgment," 156). Ecclesiastes is therefore cynical about divine

9 Even for Enns to have the epilogist promote Torah observance with the admonition to fear God and keep his commandments is not as much in keeping with traditional Israelite piety as he imagines, since Deuteronomy in addition motivates covenant faithfulness with the pointer to divine, redemptive grace in the exhortation to *love* God and keep his commandments.

10 Despite Qohelet's statements to the contrary (7:15, 8:14, 9:1–3, 11).

retribution because it recognizes no post-death, consummation event where justice becomes evident. Nevertheless, the epilogist, says Qohelet, is wise and advises his son to commit himself to God “as a precondition to seeing the just God” (149). Enns adds that “this borders on the nonsensical, but this is precisely where the strength and wisdom of Ecclesiastes can be seen, not despite the despair but through it” (149). In this fashion, Enns has no need to invoke a contrast between common, inscrutable providence and typological, Israelite-theocratic, retributive sanctions or between common and redemptive grace.

Also, the way Enns handles the contrast between individual and communal experience within theocratic Israel is confusing. He feels OT wisdom has no redemptive-historical value if it reflects a common, individual rather than a theocratic, national Israelite context (164–67). Thus, he transforms Qohelet’s individual complaint about common providence into a postexilic, national, theocratic lament. But then, why is Ecclesiastes stripped of theocratic features? The activities of the Solomon-figure do not include building and dedicating the Israelite temple of Yahweh, even though in those times kings proudly produced self-glorifying texts about their temple-building and deity-honoring cultic activities, nor do they include theocratic (or even common) military victories. Even Solomon is renamed so he becomes a generic rather than a theocratic king. The book’s terminology focuses not on the sons of Israel but on the sons of Adam. Ecclesiastes is about experiencing non-retributive providence rather than theocratic sanctions. So it is inappropriate to equate the abandonment a saint feels under perplexing providence with the lament of faithful Israelites experiencing a national curse or to allegorize the latter as the former.

Enns also ends up with a postexilic Qohelet whose response to the exile differs from other biblical folk: “The book’s relentless focus is on the deeply felt sense of disconnect between Israel and its covenant God” (166). Qohelet is a voice for an

anger against God by faithful Israelites.¹¹ But such a perspective conflicts with the biblical picture that the exile was God’s punishment for national, covenant disobedience. For Enns, Ecclesiastes is about righteous Israelite captives questioning God’s ultimate goodness and justice, whereas the prayers of godly, postexilic Israelites, like Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, indicate human sin was the source of the nation’s difficulties.¹² Similarly, Qohelet certainly sees sin as responsible for life’s personal afflictions (1:13; 3:16–17, 7:20–22, 29; 11:9–10). Also, a wise, postexilic Israelite might have lamented the fact that God’s chosen nation warranted theocratic curses and jeopardized the reputation of its gracious God or that individually faithful covenant members experienced the national curses. But lamenting theocratic curses is not the same as a NT believer doubting the Lord’s beneficence while undergoing divine common curses, Satanic persecution of the elect, or the folly of human oppression (5:6 [7]).

By correlating Qohelet’s negative outlook with the distressing conditions of domination by foreign oppressors, Enns also undermines the emphasis of Ecclesiastes. This focus of Ecclesiastes results from having Qohelet masquerade as Solomon so that the book’s negative reality is an appropriate analysis even in the *best* of earthly times for the wisest and wealthiest human.¹³

Ecclesiastes and the NT

When Enns compares Qohelet with Jesus, he reverts to a “Qohelet-as-cynic” view to contrast their teachings. What qualifies them both as wise sages is not their ideas but the fact that each was

11 Thus, the fear of God in 5:6 [7] is not the reverence for God found in Proverbs but dread of a capricious deity that is accompanied by pain, anxiety, and frustration (69).

12 Enns notes that the exile was a theocratic sanction against a disobedient covenantal nation (125), but he also applies individual transgression against the covenant lord to the national, theocratic rather than to the individual, common level when he deals with wisdom literature in terms of redemptive history.

13 Even though Enns makes this point about 1:12 (37) and 2:1–11 (45–46), it gets overwhelmed by his postexilic-conditioned view of Ecclesiastes.

contrarily countercultural in his own context and that both utilized empirical observations of nature and human activity in their teaching, even if reaching different conclusions (172–77). What Enns blurs, however, is that Qohelet supposedly counters traditional, orthodox Israelite wisdom, whereas Jesus counters aberrant Israelite religiosity. Enns says one should not attempt to unify the divergent ideas of Qohelet and Jesus, but should respect their historic conditionedness and see how they cohere (180–81). By “cohere” Enns does not mean how ideas are compatible, but how when juxtaposed it is obvious they changed over time, so the ideas of Qohelet and Jesus are held in tension. Both Qohelet and Jesus are approved, even if they contradict each other.

Thus, as presented by Enns, Qohelet, as an early second-temple sage supposedly does not integrate the idea of an afterlife into his thinking, whereas Jesus, who came after Second-Temple developments subsequent to Ecclesiastes, believes in an afterlife with eschatological judgment. Not only does Enns undermine specific statements of Qohelet to the contrary, as well as the implication of Qohelet’s spatio-temporal framework, but he fits his contrast between the views of Qohelet and Jesus into a matrix of culturally determined thought. Supposedly, an exilic Israelite could not envisage an afterlife with a divine judgment,¹⁴ whereas such an idea was established in the mind-set of Jesus’s generation because of intervening Second-Temple apocalyptic literature. The ideas of Qohelet are culturally and temporally determined.

Enns does exhibit a typical, historically *conditioned* hermeneutic in relation to Ecclesiastes, whereby Qohelet’s negative outlook is purportedly derived from the distressing conditions of domination by foreign oppressors. Even though in this

14 Despite Job 19:25–26, Isaiah 24–27, or Daniel 12:2–3 (though Enns dates Daniel after the rise to prominence of the afterlife concept in later second-temple Judaism, 178 note 44). In his comments on 3:20–21 Enns inconsistently acknowledges that some Israelites must have entertained the idea of an afterlife but Qohelet “rejects it, or at least any way of knowing for sure. It is worth mentioning that some notion of the afterlife in Israel must have been current for such a denunciation to have made sense” (59).

fashion Enns diminishes the force of Qohelet’s negatives as characteristic of the best of times, what is distressing is his historically-*determined* hermeneutic. Ironically, Qohelet as countercultural could undermine traditional Israelite orthodoxy, but he could not question pagan disbelief in an afterlife, eschatological judgment!

Similarly, Enns’s view of Scripture as incarnational, limited by the perspectives of its human authors,¹⁵ means Qohelet’s views can be inspired errors. They are not like those of Job’s friends, bad theology presented as wrong-headed, but bad theology presented as truth. They are the best he could do at the time. The Bible contains wrong views of God presented as truth: “In Scripture God allows to have ascribed to him the limited and fallen view of his creatures” (201). Enns’s hermeneutic eschews harmonizing the Bible’s theology by presuming it is impossible because of the inescapable historical confines of its authors.

Enns’s discussion of the relationship of Ecclesiastes to Jesus focuses on different concepts of an afterlife rather than on a redemptive-historical understanding of how Ecclesiastes and Jesus relate on such themes as the power and wisdom of God and humans, topics that the book’s structure makes prominent. Enns’s Christotelic instead of Christocentric hermeneutic also disapproves of typical “Qohelet-as-evangelist” or “Qohelet-as-realist” ways of preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes (27–29, 138–41, 168). A Christotelic perspective concentrates on Christ’s death and resurrection while neglecting his heavenly and consummation glorification, a view which fits with Ecclesiastes’ supposed disinterest in an afterlife or final judgment.

Missed Theological Issue

Because Enns predominately portrays Qohelet as a cynic, he does not deal with a theological issue that traditionally has led most evangelical interpreters in a different direction. Qohelet teaches that

15 With the term “incarnational,” Enns puts the emphasis on the human nature of the Bible: “Israel’s Scripture was an expression of self-definition” (167). But in covenant literature the suzerain, rather than the vassal, does the defining.

work is in vain, whereas Paul teaches that work in the Spirit is not in vain. A typical “evangelist” way to harmonize this contrast is to understand Qohelet as presenting a pagan perspective that needs to be repented of so that earthly toil can be perceived as worthwhile. Life is better when one fears God. Enns rightly thinks this view undercuts the force of Qohelet’s position that life is difficult even when God is faithfully feared. Enns additionally disagrees with the “evangelist” interpretation since it takes the book’s positives as depicting the way in which work is not in vain. Instead, Enns’s view is that the book’s positives present Qohelet’s resignation to temporary benefits accompanying vain labor. Life is not necessarily better when God is revered.

Enns so concentrates on countering the “evangelist” interpretation that he does not deal with the contrast between Qohelet and Paul. His commentary has no interaction with a “realist” interpretation that views Qohelet’s negatives as common curse and his positives as common blessing. A “realist” interpretation supports a “two-kingdom” theology. The earthly kingdom, cultural-mandate task of producing ever-living generations of the family of the first Adam is a failure (1:3–8), whose futility Qohelet laments. His “under the sun—until the consummation” framework of a world which lacks retributive justice and implies a doomsday is complemented by the Christian’s realization that Great-Commission labor in building the heavenly, eternal family of the second Adam, is not in vain. Faithful perseverance in the futility of even flourishing, God-honoring earthly work serves to preserve the environment in which Christ-kindred are born by the Spirit’s power.

Thus, despite properly emphasizing the comfort Ecclesiastes can provide for contemporary believers by encouraging Christians to persevere in faith despite life’s hardships, Enns’s conflicted Qohelet and interpretation of Ecclesiastes should be dissatisfying to preachers and confusing to suffering believers. ☺

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Reading the Puritans and A Puritan Theology

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by **William B. Kessler**

A Puritan Theology, by Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012, v + 1054.

No matter how dark the night, the lamp of the Puritans remains bright, providing a beacon, shining down through the ages, even for our generation. The Puritans, heirs of the spiritualist communities of the Renaissance, animated by the spirit of Christian humanism, employing and building upon the vibrant theology of the Reformation, striving to reform church and nation, spending and being spent for Christ and his church, are part of our godly heritage. Truly, they are our fathers in the faith. Who among us is not familiar with some of the names of those stellar divines: William Ames, William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, Thomas Goodwin, Thomas Manton, John Flavel, John Bunyan, and John Owen? And who among us has not read their works with profit and delight: *The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax*,

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=416&issue_id=94.

The Plague of Plagues, the Mortification of Sin, The Art of Prophesying, A Glimpse of Zion's Glory, The Glory of Christ, The Fountain of Life Opened? The Puritans were bright lights, indeed.

Joel Beeke and Mark Jones have rendered rich service to the church in writing *A Puritan Theology*. The book is a summary of what the Puritans taught and preached; it is organized systematically, using the standard theological loci. There are nine main sections beginning with Prolegomena and continuing with Theology Proper, Anthropology and Covenant Theology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, and Theology in Practice, with an afterword. This is a big book: 977 pages of text, going over 1000 pages with works cited and index. The works cited cover forty-five pages; authors beginning with Thomas Adams and ending with Ulrich Zwingli are listed. I was impressed (really overwhelmed) with the amount of information given in the footnotes, drawn from both classical works of the Reformation, including the Puritans themselves, and modern scholars, including many doctoral dissertations. Containing a wealth of scholarly observation and insight, clearly summarizing what the best of the Puritans wrote, addressing, to some degree, contemporary issues in theology, and giving (in faithful Puritan fashion), exhortations, admonitions, and applications, the book is a treasure chest filled with precious gems and rare jewels.

I have mentioned being overwhelmed when reading *A Puritan Theology*, not with the content of the book (which I found enriching), but with the feeling that there is a large, ongoing, scholarly discussion to which I have not been privy and in which I have little time to be involved. In our time, there has been much written about the Puritans, and, naturally, there have been various debates, issues, and disagreements that have arisen (i.e., the Calvin versus Calvinists controversy; the nature, influence, and benefit of scholasticism; the influence of Erasmus, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the Zurich reformers; the Calvinistic convictions with the recognition of the authority of the Bible among the Anglicans, etc.). For most full-time pastors, it would be extremely

difficult to devote the time necessary to be part of that scholarly conversation (another reason to be impressed with Beeke and Jones, both of whom are pastors). However, the “subtext” of the book (i.e., the assumptions underlying various debated issues discussed today) should not distract the reader from being informed and finding profit and delight by reading *A Puritan Theology*. And, there may be those assumptions and issues that may prove to be a fruitful vein of study for the pastor taking a study leave.

But there is another concern I would like to address, and that is the problem of historical context. I would like to divide the problem of history and historical context into two parts: the first part raises questions about the historical context of the Puritans themselves; the second part raises questions about the historical context of Beeke and Jones’s book itself. In other words, the problem, as I see it, can come down to two questions: How do we read the Puritans? and, How do we read *A Puritan Theology*?

The danger in not raising these questions is to think that Puritan theology has simply fallen out of heaven and has become the standard of theology and life. (I recognize that putting it this way is an overstatement, but hopefully it makes the point clear.) A danger in reading the Puritans is to approach them with a “halo hermeneutic” in which theology before and, to some extent after, is deficient—the Puritans had it right, everyone else has it wrong, to a greater or lesser degree. Granted, there is a danger of judging the Puritans negatively on the basis of theological or intellectual perspectives which are valid today. Carl Trueman explains the danger of misreading past historical actions in this way:

One of the greatest temptations for historians, particularly perhaps for historians studying the history of ideas, is to impose on the past, ideas, categories, or values that were simply nonexistent or that did not have the same function or significance during the times studied. The roots of the problem are obvious: we live in the present; the objects of historical study

relate to the past; and as L. P. Hartley famously quipped at the beginning of *The Go-Between*, “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”²

In part, Beeke and Jones’s purpose is to defend the witness of the Puritans from a misreading that would criticize the Puritans by a contemporary imposition. But can a misreading of the Puritans work the other way, reading the Puritans as a witness that supports the ideals and values of our contemporary authors, disregarding the distance between the Puritans and ourselves, and entertaining a more romantic idealization of the past, resulting in a skewed judgment of the present?

The historical context of the Puritans, which gives shape to their concerns, thoughts, writing, and lives, is complex. Consider the theological influences that were not so neatly categorized for them: John Calvin’s writings and reform; the Geneva Bible; the early place of William Tyndale, John Frith, and John Bale in developing ideas that were peculiarly English and Puritan; Heinrich Bullinger’s influence (who had the highest reputation in England at the time of Henry VI); Martin Bucer’s influence (who spent two years in England at the end of his life and whose influential work *De Regno Christi* was dedicated to Edward VI); the place of Thomistic theology with a strong biblicistic conviction; not to mention the strong moralistic, anti-ceremonial, anticlerical convictions that were voiced by spiritualist movements in the church beginning at, or possibly earlier than, the Renaissance; the Lollards; the typological, Christocentric (for some), or universal/political (for others), interpretation of the Old Testament; the logic of Peter Ramus; humanism with its rediscovering of ancient culture, its new convictions and tools for education, and its strong emphasis on moral behavior, etc. Consider the burdens these Puritans bore: bubonic plagues, and otherwise high mortality rates of their wives, children, and themselves, the London fire, revolutions, civil wars, persecu-

tions, imprisonments, the fear of Roman Catholicism’s winning the day in England, and the burden they carried for the nation and the church, with no separation of church and state, their ministry bearing the weight of national responsibilities. Since a strong secular-humanist ethos in England did not exist as yet (as in our day), and since religion was not yet being defined as a separate compartment of life (although Enlightenment challenges were on the horizon, which have borne bitter fruit for us), and since the modern nation-state was unheard of, this was a culture that took the ministry seriously as a central component in all the spheres of life. How does all this shape the Puritans’ understanding of Scripture and theology? We have arrived in a “foreign country” where things are done differently.

Though reading *A Puritan Theology* with profit and delight, I find I am reading in page after page, chapter after chapter, and section after section, a fairly detailed summary of what some of the Puritans have written, with some discussion of current issues, but with little historical analysis. This book is a great summary of what the Puritans wrote, a great resource in citing the scholarship being done, with ample exhortations to the reader, but it can read like an encyclopedia. Interestingly, the book’s form is like a systematic theology, yet the authors mention throughout that the Puritan writings come mostly in sermonic form. How does this observation change the way the Puritans are understood? How did the various influences upon them shape their theology and life? Beeke and Jones do not answer these questions. Is there a danger, then, of thinking we really understand the Puritans when all we have is a detailed summary organized systematically? Is there not a further danger of making simplistic parallels between the Puritans and ourselves? A more difficult question: can you synthesize in a historically meaningful way the writings of the Puritans in a book like this?

A second issue is the context of Beeke and Jones’s book itself. One of the authors’ aims in writing the book was to show an overall consensus among the Puritans. To demonstrate unity of Puritan thought was a primary objective (5–6)—but can it be more fruitful understanding where the

2 Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 109.

disunity lies? They also desired to write “responsible, historical theology” (6). For them, doing historical theology is giving “an accurate picture of what the Puritans said” (6). Is this really doing historical theology? They concede some weaknesses in Puritan theology, using as an example Thomas Goodwin’s eschatology. They admit that while Puritans did not excel in eschatology, “Reformed theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have provided the church with a more exegetically sustainable account of how to understand, for example, the book of Revelation” (6). But does not eschatology today cover far more than accounting for the book of Revelation, specifically, seeing eschatology as a basic structure for the entire New Testament? Their purpose, however, is to vindicate the Puritans as theologians and honor them as faithful pastors:

We believe that the Puritans were not only correct but that they excel in most areas of theology. Few theologians prior to the Puritans could write with such theological precision while also applying theology to the hearts and minds of those who listened to their sermons and read their books. (6)

Is this evaluation overly hagiographic?

But a further aim, and it seems a primary aim, is to apply Puritan theology and spirituality to the churches today. The concluding eight chapters show “a variety of ways in which the Puritans put their theology into practice” (7). There is a strong emphasis from beginning to end to “emulate Puritan spirituality” (971). One of the authors calls us to self-examination, attempting to penetrate the conscience, with a barrage of questions.

Let us ask ourselves questions like these: Are we, like the Puritans, thirsting to glorify the triune God? Are we motivated by biblical truth and biblical fire? Do we share the Puritan view of the vital necessity of conversion and of being clothed with the righteousness of Christ? It is not enough to just read the Puritans. A stirring interest in the Puritans is not the same thing as a revival of Puritanism. We

need the inward disposition of the Puritans—the authentic, biblical, intelligent piety they showed in our hearts, lives, and churches.

Will you live godly in Christ Jesus like the Puritans? Will you go beyond studying their theology, discussing their ideas, recalling their achievements, and berating their failures? Will you practice the degree of obedience to God’s Word for which they strove? Will you serve God as they served Him? Will you live with one eye on eternity as they did? (971)

If that inquiry were not challenging enough, immediately following is the section entitled “Afterword” with Chapter 60 entitled “A Final Word.” Describing the difficult conditions the Puritans had to live through, the final word “is really a reflection upon the various strengths of Puritan theologians that should characterize today’s theologians and ministers in the church” (977). And so the Puritans are described as committed to the great truths as preachers, pastors, and theologians; well-educated men who had a deep knowledge of the Scriptures; and men motivated “to reform the church in the direction of true godliness and practical righteousness” (975–76). This emphasis is consistent with the full title of the book, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*.

Clearly, the writers have a burden for the spiritual well-being of the present church. Using the Puritans’ writings (mostly sermonic material for their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century congregations), and presenting Puritan theology and life as a rule, Beeke and Jones judge the contemporary church as wanting. Furthermore, according to the authors, the church’s hope is found in conformity to the Puritan norm. Though sympathetic with their concerns for the church’s faith and life, I question whether “asking for the old paths” (971, quoting from Jeremiah 6:16, the “old paths” referring to the Puritans) can serve as the remedy for the church’s ills. Are the Puritans and their writings essential to our ministering effectively in the church? I believe they are; we need to study the Puritans’ writings if we would be knowledgeable and effective ministers on behalf of Christ. Histori-

cal theology is important. But simply evaluating and applying the Puritans as a rule of faith and life would be counterproductive. By becoming so “Puritan,” our ability to communicate and relate to our time, our community, and our people will be stunted, provincial, and stilted. We must recognize that we no longer live in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Our concerns and burdens, though similar in many ways to the Puritans’, are also radically different from theirs.

Geerhardus Vos, in a review article covering Herman Bavinck’s first volume of systematic theology, published in 1895, describes advancements made by Abraham Kuyper and Bavinck as having a historic sense, which is keeping continuity with the old Calvinism without merely reproducing seventeenth century theology, and in shaping Reformed theology to communicate to their present age. Vos writes:

In the first place it [the advancing movement] has displayed a high degree of historic sense. The break in the theological history of Calvinism was keenly felt, and it was recognized that only historical study could restore the continuity. In the second place this historical enthusiasm for the old Calvinism did not blind men to the fact that with a mere reproduction of the seventeenth century theology little would be gained. There has been a conscious effort to develop further the Calvinistic principles and to shape the Reformed dogma to a form suitable and congenial to the consciousness of the present age.³

Beeke and Jones serve us well in keeping our continuity with the Puritans. However, are they advocating a reproduction of seventeenth theology and life? If so, little is gained.

Nowhere is the expression of theology and life more relevant than in preaching. Preaching, as a means of grace, is central to the life and health of the church. If the church is in a deplorable state, preaching will be a primary means of addressing

the sick and sad problems within the church. The authors believe that “no group of preachers in church history has matched their [the Puritans’] comprehensively and powerfully biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical preaching” (681). They call upon us to emulate the Puritans in their love for preaching: “If we could cultivate half of the love for preaching that the Puritan preachers had, the church would soon know better days” (682). The church has become anti-intellectual:

The Puritans understood that a mindless Christianity fosters a spineless Christianity. An anti-intellectual gospel spawns an irrelevant gospel that does not get beyond felt needs. We fear that is happening in our churches today: we have lost our intellectual understanding of faith, and for the most part we don’t see the necessity of recovering it. We do not understand that when we are no different from non-Christians in what we think and believe, we will soon be no different from unbelievers in how we live. (687–88)

Furthermore, the conscience needs to be confronted, which was an essential task for the Puritans, but is neglected today: “Today, many preachers are reticent to confront the conscience. We need to learn from the Puritans that a friend who loves you most will tell you the most truth about yourself” (688). But a follow-up concern needs to be raised which is relevant for our discussion with Beeke and Jones: not only do we need a friend to tell us the truth about ourselves, but we need a friend who is humble, discerning, and gracious in telling us the truth about ourselves. So for ministers preaching to the conscience, care must be taken not only in what they preach but in how they preach.

In the history of preaching, the Puritans are master preachers; we need to study them and learn from them. But care needs to be taken in emulating Puritan preachers, lest we become oddly dressed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century garb while walking down twenty-first-century streets. We will gain attention but not a hearing. William Still, in his *The Work of the Pastor*, commenting upon contemporary ministers, says:

³ Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 475.

It is striking that we find far more preachers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than in the first. But whether our one scholarly foot is in the first or sixteenth century AD, or the sixth or tenth century BC, our other dynamical foot must be firmly planted in our own day.⁴

He continues:

Perhaps your temptation is not to live in the sixteenth century, or in the world of its discoveries or impacts: you prefer the seventeenth century. It may be that even now you are in the process of absorbing not only the solid teaching of Puritan writers, and therefore acquiring the stable character those teachings inculcate. But you may be seeing the Word of God through their eyes in such a way that you are really living three hundred years ago, and have acquired a detachment from the present day, and even a cold disdainful attitude toward it that makes you excessively unattractive and forbidding. What a pity.⁵

Admittedly, on the one hand, there is a danger of dismissing historical sense which loses the essential continuity with the Puritans. But, on the other hand, there can be a romantic, irresponsible adoption of Puritan preaching that distracts, or worse, results in the disdain of our own generation, exhibiting an ugly self-righteousness. We need the Puritans to give us insight into how good preachers ministered to their congregations in their age with their concerns so that we might minister to our own congregations in our own age with our own concerns.

And so the Puritans burn on, shining brightly for our generation. We are not called to stare into their light, a burning, splendid, light. But we are called to use their light, illuminating our own work and age. Learning what it takes to minister God's Word faithfully; being committed to uncompro-

⁴ William Still, *The Work of the Pastor* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2010), 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

mising biblical orthodoxy; adopting language that addresses the hearts and consciences of our people, and our generation; sacrificing in spending and being spent for the sake of the gospel, in our time; understanding the unique season and spirit God has ordered for this time and place; advancing his rule and reign through the church—these all call us to prudent communion with our fathers, the Puritans. ☺

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Law and the Bible

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by **Diane L. Olinger**

Law and the Bible: Justice, Mercy and Legal Institutions, edited by Robert F. Cochran Jr. and David VanDrunen. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013, 269 pages, \$24.00, paper.

Introduction

Law and the Bible is a collection of nine articles, surveying the theme of civil law throughout the Bible. Each article is coauthored by an attorney and a Bible scholar. David VanDrunen, an OPC minister and professor at Westminster Seminary California, is the coeditor of the volume and of its first article. *Law and the Bible* is a valuable resource for those who ask, What light does the Bible shed on contemporary legal systems, and particularly on Christian participation in those

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=429&issue_id=96.

systems?

A quick look at the article titles shows the Genesis-to-Revelation scope of *Law and the Bible*, one of its greatest assets along with its interdisciplinary approach:

1. “The Biblical Foundation of Law: Creation, Fall and the Patriarchs,” by Randy Beck and David VanDrunen.
2. “Law and Political Order: Israel’s Constitutional History,” by William S. Brewbaker III and V. Philips Long.
3. “Criminal and Civil Law in the Torah: The Mosaic Law in Christian Perspective,” by David Skeel and Tremper Longman III.
4. “The Law of Life: Law in the Wisdom Literature,” by Roger P. Alford and Leslie M. Alford.
5. “Crying Out for Justice: Civil Law and the Prophets,” by Barbara E. Armacost and Peter Enns.
6. “The Kingdom of God, Law, and the Heart: Jesus and the Civil Law,” by Robert F. Cochran Jr. and Dallas Willard.
7. “Civil Law and Civil Disobedience: The Early Church and the Law,” by Joel A. Nichols and James W. McCarty III.
8. “Living as Christians Under Civil Law: The New Testament Letters, Law, and Politics,” by David M. Smolin and Kar Yong Lim.
9. “Expectation and Consummation: Law in Eschatological Perspective,” by John Copeland Nagle and Keith A. Mathison.

Overall Approach—Realistic Expectations

The focus of each of these articles is on civil law, the law that orders human societies and is implemented and enforced through human government. The Bible addresses many areas of civil law, including evidence, civil and criminal pro-

cedure, court administration, and welfare regulations. However, the editors and most of the authors of *Law and the Bible* take pains to dampen our expectations of finding immediate applications to our current situation. They remind us, again and again, that not every moral exhortation of Scripture should be codified and that not every piece of civil legislation in Scripture (for example, certain civil laws of the Old Testament theocracy) would be appropriate for the modern nation-state. The authors pay careful attention to context (narrative, historical, cultural, and redemptive-historical) with the hopes that this will help us avoid the temptation of “cherry picking” verses to justify already-existing political agendas. An example of this type of cherry picking is cited in the article on political order and Israel’s constitutional history, where the authors, William S. Brewbaker III and V. Philips Long, warn us against the pattern of argument of a royalist bishop who used Jeremiah’s admonition to submit to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:5–6) as authority against resistance to monarchy generally (50n4).

While I generally found this approach instructive, I question the emphasis on historical and cultural differences when exegeting some texts. After all, I am in the same redemptive-historical context as the original audience of the New Testament letters;² I think, perhaps, I need to be cautious in allowing this to be trumped by cultural or historical differences. The kind of exegesis I’m concerned about occurs in a discussion by David M. Smolin and Kar Yong Lim about the meaning of Paul’s admonition against Christian v. Christian civil litigation. They emphasize the corruption and injustice of the Roman legal system, which strongly favored those of wealth and power, and contrast it to our own. The authors write:

Based on this background, one can see that the application of Paul’s words on civil litigation could vary greatly depending on the circumstances. Thus, where Christians are a

2 See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 303.

vulnerable minority and the courts are often corrupt, the circumstances would parallel those that Paul addressed, and his admonitions against Christians going to court against one another would appear directly applicable.... On the other hand, trying to apply Paul's words where Christians have composed the majority for hundreds of years is more difficult.... The entire concept of Christians bringing their disputes before nonbelievers assumed by Paul would be inapplicable. (233)

Arguably there are legitimate uses of the legal system by Christians against Christians in our modern society, which don't come within Paul's admonition,³ but I think the authors overstate the case.

Most of the article authors in *Law and the Bible* are reticent when it comes to advocating for particular legislation or policies, and limit their role to suggesting the principles that should guide a Christian in making policy decisions. For example, in their article on the Mosaic law, David Skeel and Tremper Longman III conclude that the Mosaic law "recognizes both the importance of lending and the crushing effect that debt can have, and it is unabashedly paternalistic in its concern for the dignity of the poor" (97). However, they stop short of advocating any particular program of international debt relief for developing nations, noting that the further we get from the Old Testament context of individual debt relief the harder it is to apply the Mosaic principles. One exception to this reticence in advocating for particular legislation or policies is in the article on civil law and the prophets by Barbara E. Armacost and Peter Enns. In discussing U.S. immigration law, the authors take a firm stand against "anti-immigrant legislation that is calculated to be oppressive" (143)

³ I am thinking here of instances where bringing a case before a judiciary of believers would be unworkable due to the fact that the Christians involved in the dispute are not joined to a common institutional body, or instances where there is a "distance" between the believers in the case which might keep them from knowing anything about the other's faith or from engaging with one another personally (as might be the case for Christians doing business through corporate entities).

(examples include laws prohibiting illegal aliens from contracting for utilities, laws which require public schools to determine immigration status of students, and laws which empower local police as deputy immigration enforcers). The Israelites were not to mistreat the foreigners living among them, for they too had been oppressed in Egypt (141–42, citing, *inter alia*, Exod. 22:21 and Jer. 7:6; 22:3). From this imperative, Armacost and Enns conclude that Christians should oppose and seek the repeal of laws like those mentioned above and "should prayerfully consider disobeying them as circumstances require" (143).

Natural Law and Other Themes

Other topics addressed in *Law and the Bible* include civil disobedience (with a case study on apartheid in South Africa), form of government, war, abortion (only *very* briefly, more on this below), catastrophic climate change, and nuclear holocaust (as part of a discussion of end times prophecies in Daniel and Revelation). Natural law is a theme set forth in the book's introduction and first chapter and is revisited by a number of the authors. As Cochran and VanDrunen write in their analysis of law from creation through the patriarchal period:

When the patriarchs have legal disputes with their pagan neighbors, they do not appeal to a parochial moral standard known only through special revelation, but they presume (as their pagan neighbors often do also) a standard that is accessible to all.... However Christians may develop a theory of natural law, the existence of a universal moral standard has many potential implications for how they approach legal life in a diverse society. (45)

Although VanDrunen does not mention his Two-Kingdoms theology explicitly, Cochran and Dallas Willard, authors of the article on Jesus and the civil law, critique VanDrunen's argument that Jesus's demanding kingdom ethics apply institutionally only to the church, and not the state, which is to enforce *lex talionis*, "an eye for an eye"

(173). According to Cochran and Willard, “this too neatly avoids the difficult work of determining the implications for the state of Jesus’ teaching on love” (173).

What would VanDrunen’s natural law arguments and Two-Kingdoms theology look like in action? In other words, how would his ideal Christian lawmaker or policy advocate operate in the legal system? If I have understood VanDrunen, the task of such a Christian lawmaker or policy advocate would be to go to Scripture to confirm and clarify the natural law (perhaps helped by a guide like *Law and the Bible*) and then, so equipped, the lawmaker/advocate would enter the public square to make arguments based on this natural law, arguments which are accessible to all and not just to Christians.⁴ In other words, the Christian would not make arguments based on special revelation, or, at least, not solely from special revelation. Of course, there is much disagreement about whether this is the proper stance for a Christian lawmaker/advocate, with some believing that it is exactly the Christian’s task to bring the wisdom of God’s Word, special revelation, into the public square.⁵

4 For more information on the use of accessible religious arguments in the public square, see Michael J. Perry, *Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). In *Love and Power*, Perry makes the case for the possibility of ecumenical political dialogue using a public accessibility standard. Interestingly, he uses the book’s conclusion to confront concerns expressed by Professor Smolin, coauthor of the article in *Law in the Bible* on the New Testament letters. Smolin’s concerns then were that Perry’s prerequisites of fallibilism and pluralism effectively shut out conservative Christians from the envisioned ecumenical political dialogue. *Love and Power*, 139. Perry’s response was that public accessibility is the “essential criterion,” more important than an acceptance of fallibilism and pluralism. *Ibid.*, 140. Perhaps Perry’s arguments were persuasive, since Smolin’s article in *Law and the Bible* includes a defense of natural law as a common platform between Christians and pagans based on his analysis of Romans 2:14–15 (*Law and the Bible*, 225–27).

5 See, e.g., John Frame, “Review of David VanDrunen’s A Biblical Case for Natural Law,” <http://www.frame-poythress.org/review-of-david-van-drunens-a-biblical-case-for-natural-law/>. While convinced that there is such a thing as natural law, Frame rejects the idea that it, as opposed to Scripture, must be our only basis of argument in the public square. In his “Conclusion” Frame writes: “Scripture is God’s word, and God’s word is the foundation of morality. When we want to draw people, believers or unbelievers, to that foundation, we should be unashamed to refer to Scripture. I grant that there are many cultural forces

There are practical problems as well with natural law and other “accessible” forms of argument by Christians. For instance, the courts are on the lookout for proffered legislative rationales which are really only covers for underlying religious motivations of lawmakers. See *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987) (striking down a state law that prohibited the teaching of evolution in the public schools unless accompanied by instruction in creation science, which law had a stated secular purpose of protecting academic freedom); *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, 400 F. Supp. 2d 707 (M.D. Pa. 2005) (holding that a school district’s Intelligent Design policy violated the Establishment Clause of the constitution because ID is a religious teaching, despite proponents’ statements to the contrary). Furthermore, the courts have not been friendly to arguments labeled as moral or natural law arguments, treating them as attempts to insert religion into matters where it does not belong. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973) (holding that a state criminal abortion law violated the constitutional right to privacy); *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003) (striking down a state law criminalizing homosexual sodomy and overturning an earlier case, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1986), in which the Court cited the “ancient roots” of such prohibitions and referred to homosexual sex as an “infamous crime against nature”).

The legal cases I’ve cited in the paragraph above deal with the teaching of evolution in the public schools, abortion, and homosexual conduct, three issues on which many Christians have felt conscience-bound by their interpretation of Scripture to take a stand about matters of civil law. Interestingly, these three issues receive very little attention in *Law and the Bible* (exceptions being a discussion of tactics of abortion protesters in the article on civil disobedience [206] and discussions touching on gay marriage in several places, including the article on criminal and civil law in the Torah [98–99]).

telling us not to refer to Scripture in the public square. But we should not listen to them. The attempt of VanDrunen and others to convince us not to apply Scripture to civil matters is a failure.”

A Valuable Resource

Regardless of how one frames the task of the Christian lawmaker/advocate or even the concerned Christian citizen, that task will be aided by a thorough knowledge of what the Bible has to say on matters of civil law, making *Law and the Bible* a valuable resource. The style of writing in this volume is described in the forward as “learned but accessible,” and that is a good description. The authors’ approach to their topics is similar to what one might read in a theological or legal journal (serious, orderly, objective), but the authors have left behind the heavy hermeneutical and jurisprudential jargon of their respective disciplines. This makes *Law and the Bible* a viable resource for not only lawyers and law students, pastors and seminarians, but also individual Christians with an interest in the implications of the Christian faith for civil law, and even non-Christians who want to understand how Christians approach these issues. Although this would be heavy fare for a Sunday school class, it might be a profitable tool for a church conference or study group. ©

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Recovering Eden

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by Meredith M. Kline

Recovering Eden: The Gospel according to Ecclesiastes, by Zack Eswine. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014, xiii + 246 pages, \$14.99, paper.

Organization

Recovering Eden is a homiletical, rather than an academic, presentation of the message of Ecclesiastes. The series is directed to lay readers and pastors, so there are few footnotes and most of the bibliography is of cultural or theological works not focusing on Ecclesiastes. The text is sermonic, written in an engaging style with many illustrations and rich metaphors.

The format of the book is not a linear commentary through each section of Ecclesiastes. It begins with two chapters introducing the reader to unexpected aspects of Ecclesiastes. In the first chapter Qohelet’s ideas are portrayed as disconcerting because they present the exceptions encountered in life to the more familiar concept of Proverbs that righteous behavior results in positive experiences and because, unlike most of the Old Testament, Qohelet’s message does not deal with distinctive features of the redemptive covenant community but with the common miseries and mercies experienced by all humanity. In the second chapter the method of Ecclesiastes is pictured as unsettling because its negative language—that all is meaningless, life is hated, and the stillborn is better off because not experiencing the evil of this present world—dominates the sporadic recommendations to enjoy life.

Next, Eswine begins to proceed through the text. He perceives Ecclesiastes as a sermonic thesis (“all is vanity,” 1:2, 12:8) which is explained in chapters 1–10, applied in 11–12:7, and supple-

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=432&issue_id=97.

mented in 12:9–14 with an evangelistic call to fear and obey God. He spends five of his remaining nine chapters focusing on the first three chapters of Ecclesiastes. This organization works, however, because topics recur throughout Ecclesiastes, so much of the last half of Ecclesiastes has been included in the discussion. Nevertheless, some passages do not get covered, including the programmatic questions of 6:8–12, since Eswine’s last four chapters concentrate on only selected portions of the remainder of Ecclesiastes. That Eswine in his discussion of 12:13–14 includes references to God as judge in 3:17 and 11:9 and that the command to fear God also occurs in 5:7 along with the term God-fearers in 7:18 and 8:13, however, indicate that the concluding remarks are integral to the book’s message and not just a pious addition. Recognition of the alternation of the work and wisdom themes as well as their integration with the thematic questions about what profit or advantage accrues to humans would also warrant changes in how common, recurring topics might have been more organically arranged.

Interpretation

Is Ecclesiastes about exhorting a secularist to become a God-fearing theist or about reminding a devout believer to remain faithful despite an inscrutable divine providence overlaying a world of rampant human wickedness? Is the message of Ecclesiastes to trust God in order to experience the blessings of his presence or to trust God and enjoy life’s blessings despite his seeming absence from a world filled with human folly, demonic activity (associated with the *הַבְּלִים* *hābālīm* idols of 5:7 [6 in Hebrew]), and the common curse culminating in death?

For Eswine the warning of ultimate divine justice in 12:13–14 is a final appeal to a deity-repressor to trust God. Unlike the common evangelistic interpretation of Ecclesiastes, which perceives the book’s negatives as the view of someone who is skeptical about God’s goodness, however, Eswine believes Qohelet trusts God but is only cynical, as he supposedly explains in 2:1–11, about the ability

of earthly endeavors to satisfy humanity’s deepest longings for fellowship with God. The thrust of Ecclesiastes is to warn of the dangers of human folly and to point to the joys associated with trusting God. While Qohelet does promote righteousness and wisdom rather than sinfulness and folly and believes God is just, what disturbs him is not just that humans warp reality but that God is behind life’s inexplicable (1:15, 7:13, 8:16–17), “unhappy business” (1:13).

Are the efforts described in 2:1–11 examples of self-centered, foolish worldliness? Supposedly they would not supply the satisfying joy recommended in 2:24–26; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10; and 11:7–10, yet Qohelet says in 2:10 that he did get enjoyment from such labors which, as the text highlights in 2:3, 9, were guided by wisdom. Is not what he laments with his vanity judgment in 2:11 that death cancels any earthly gains or joys he experienced through his projects, even as divine gifts? Is 2:1–11 informing a secularist of the futility of his ways or lamenting the fact that, even for the righteous-wise, exhilarating earthly endeavors cannot recreate Eden or escape the disheartening effects of death on individual and cultural labor?

Eswine’s title unveils his interpretational stance: Ecclesiastes tries with the “joy” passages to persuade the reader to recover the shalom of Eden. Such a position seems plausible if the negatives of Ecclesiastes are construed as only folly rather than a combination of folly and the common divine curse evident in providence. But not only did pre-Fall theocratic Eden not have a common curse falling on its king, but vassal Adam also had physical, visible interaction with the divine suzerain. Qohelet laments the permanent loss of both features in life under the sun. The fact that God accompanies believers even in their present difficulties is not the same as Adam’s Edenic fellowship with God. Neither is Ecclesiastes explicitly about experiencing the glory of a visibly integrated heaven and earth, but only about how to navigate the current frustrations and fortunes of earthly reality.

Preaching Christ and the Gospel

The stated challenge for books in this series is how to present the gospel from the Old Testament by means of Christ-centered preaching. Eswine relates Christ to Ecclesiastes in two ways. First, he draws parallels between Ecclesiastes and Jesus. Many of the teachings of Qohelet can be replicated by the words of Jesus. Additionally, Jesus had experiences like characters in Ecclesiastes; he knew the joys of common blessings and the opposition of the wicked. Second, Jesus transcends aspects of Ecclesiastes. He speaks of heavenly, not just earthly, treasures, and he is not only a servant leader but also the wise and righteous good shepherd who conquers death.

What about the gospel? How can the message of a divine doomsday in 12:13–14 be a comforting conclusion if all are sinners (7:20–21)? The phrase “fear God” in 12:13 should recall the same phrase in 5:7 in a context about paying a vow, which assumes God has graciously answered a plea for deliverance in dire earthly circumstances. By implication, the hope is that God would save from his own wrath, not only from the dangers of folly, evil, or the common curse but from the ultimate, eschatological curse. Eswine does indicate how Ecclesiastes points to the accomplishment of redemption. The sacrifice at the house of God (5:1) is a type of Christ, the slain Lamb. In discussing 5:1, though, Eswine does not focus on self-evaluation when entering the presence of a holy God by developing the parallel with the flaming sword guarding the way to Eden, which might support his theme of recovering Eden. Instead he concentrates on separating oneself from unbelievers in the church.

Are the ideas of the application of redemption and the doctrine of saving grace evident in Ecclesiastes? Eswine refers to the transforming work of the Spirit in his discussions about how Jesus transcends Ecclesiastes, but not as a message inherent in a pericope of Ecclesiastes. Is the idea of redemptive grace explicit in Ecclesiastes or only elicited by contrast? Qohelet may assume that there are people who are righteous and wise, but does Ecclesiastes have anything to say about the

change from sinner to saint? By what power can the youth depicted in 11:8–10 obey the command to rejoice in energetic activity yet stand acquitted before the divine judge?

In Ecclesiastes, rejoicing may be evidence of special grace, a gift of God (3:13; 5:18), but it is happiness for common grace, not a celebration of redemption. Nevertheless, salvation by grace alone is indicated explicitly in Ecclesiastes by the fact that it joins wisdom with righteousness so that when 2:26 indicates God gives wisdom and knowledge along with joy, the gift of righteousness is hinted at. In addition to passages like 3:12–13 and 5:18 which indicate contented joy is a gift of divine grace, the message of the provision of God’s transforming grace is inherent in 12:11 if the difficult poetic imagery and wording is rendered so that what is given by the supreme shepherd is not inspired words (“collections”) of the wise but rather the “gatherings (of the harvest)” of righteousness and wisdom, the fruit of sage instruction that ripens only by the gracious gift of God.

Thus, though *Recovering Eden* could be sharper on the existence of the theme of spiritual transformation in Ecclesiastes, Eswine repeatedly offers rich pastoral wisdom, with insights not found in commentaries, so its intended audience will profit immensely from this book. Whether one takes an evangelistic tack on Ecclesiastes that concentrates on exhortations to be wise and righteous rather than wicked and foolish, or emphasizes a realistic view of how to live amidst the positive and negative features of our wacky world, *Recovering Eden* provides its readers with an abundance of sagacious fruit from the tree of life for strengthening a healthy mind to make wise spiritual decisions amidst the trials and temptations of ordinary living outside Eden. ©

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Getting or Not Getting Religion

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by John R. Muether

Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church, by Kenda Creasy Dean. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 254 pages, \$24.95.

Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations, by Vern L. Bengtson with Norella M. Putney and Susan Harris. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 267 pages, \$29.95.

When sociologist Christian Smith published his 2005 study of contemporary teenage American spirituality, his term “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (MTD) entered the vocabulary of Christian educators and youth ministers as the dominant idiom for assessing the crisis of faith among the church’s children.² Each of the two studies under review devotes some attention to this term and the phenomenon it describes, as they examine the ways in which today’s youth get (or don’t get) religion.

In *Families and Faith*, Vern Bengtson and his associates at the University of Southern California tackle the heart-breaking scenario of parents watching their children abandon the faith. Since the sixties, the expression “generation gap” has been employed to describe the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between parents and children.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=437&issue_id=97.

2 Very briefly, MTD asserts that a good God created and watches over the world, intervening in our lives when we encounter problems. God wants us to be good, and our goodness depends on being happy and feeling good about ourselves. Such good people go to heaven when they die. Christian Smith, with Melinda Lunquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). See the review essay by Gregory E. Reynolds in *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 136–39.

However, the research in this book, based on a four-decade survey of 350 families, suggests that generational continuity tends to exceed, and often significantly, the presence of any “gap.”

Why then do we commonly perceive a crisis in both institutions? The authors suggest several factors, including secularization and the rise of the “ethos of individualism and self-fulfillment” that has eroded our sense of belonging to a community. Increases in interfaith marriages and skyrocketing divorce rates have proven particularly disruptive to religious socialization. But Bengtson adopts the prevailing scholarship and counters that under these conditions, the family is not in crisis; rather, it is changing. We may object to definitional elasticity that describes any amicable social arrangement as a “family.” But we should acknowledge the dangerous extremes to which Christians tend to romanticize and privilege the nuclear families at the expense of the extended family and especially the church (the family of God).

Bengtson argues that the sum of these social disruptions does not render inevitable the failure to transmit religion to our children. Contrary to popular impression, “something about religion seems to ‘stick around’ families over generations,” far more so than political loyalties or social views (192). Sixty percent of adult children in this study had the same religious affiliation as their parents, a percentage that has remained fairly steady since Bengtson began his research in 1970. The term that Bengtson employs to describe this faith transmission is “intergenerational religious momentum,” and he outlines conditions under which this momentum is most successful. Most often it takes place in faiths with “high boundaries,” tight-knit communities with coherent “rituals and traditions that help to maintain the continuity of their faith across generations” (181).

Other important findings stick out in a reading of this book, including these:

- Echoing the findings of Christian Smith, Bengtson argues that teenagers’ peers are no match for the effect that parents continue to have on their children: “The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adoles-

cents is their parents” (7).

- Grandparents are a vastly overlooked influence in spiritual formation. With longer life spans and expanding roles in the duties of child care, grandparents are shaping the faith of their grandchildren more than ever, either in reinforcing the values of the parents or in exerting a religious influence that has skipped a generation (101).³

- Bengtson stresses persistence and endurance in spiritual nurture. There are grave consequences, his research indicates, when the busyness of life encourages families to “put religious practice on hold for a season” (40–41).

This is not to suggest, of course, that faith development functions take place automatically. Certainly, there are parents who have been faithful in the religious upbringing of their children who still suffered the heartache of children rejecting the faith. But even here, there is encouraging news from Bengtson’s study. Among the most stubborn of prodigals, faith can yet prove to be “sticky.” There is a residue of influence even where religious transmission seems to have failed (118). And so many prodigals do return.

The stress on “high boundaries” brings to mind a previous study of the decline of mainline Protestant religious transmission, in a book appropriately entitled *Vanishing Boundaries*. In that study, the authors look at the failure of the mainline to transmit a meaningful and coherent faith: “The children have asked over and over what is distinctive about Presbyterianism—or even about Protestantism—and why they should believe and cherish it. The answers have apparently not been very clear.”⁴ Bengtson urges that religious nurture in today’s world requires careful discernment: what are appropriate boundaries? Here we should

3 Here is one compelling story about attending church with a grandfather: “We sat in the same seats. It was really predictable. And most of what was going on in my family life just wasn’t really that predictable.... He didn’t just go to church or talk about it; he actually lived the tenets of the faith.... He was like a rock for me” (103–4).

4 Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 200.

not expect the book to provide much theological direction. Bengtson describes one ex-evangelical’s incredulity at the arbitrariness and inconsistency of a faith community that would prohibit women from teaching in the church and yet permit the eating of shellfish (136).

A recurring frustration of this book is its broadly religious scope that demands the most generic of categories. So, for example, the author speaks of “religious socialization” and not Christian nurture. The findings are expressed in terms of vague interfaith trajectories. So while it is true, as the book’s title implies, that families and faith remain very deeply connected in American culture, it comes as small comfort for Orthodox Presbyterians that Bengtson’s greatest success stories for intergenerational religious momentum are found among orthodox Judaism and Mormonism.

Here is where the ecclesiastical orientation of Kenda Creasy Dean offers more insight. Dean, who was part of Christian Smith’s National Study on Youth and Religion research team, now serves as Associate Professor of Youth, Church and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. She keenly observes that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is no sign of the church’s failure to pass its faith down from generation to generation. To the contrary, it is the result of successful enculturation by churches that distort the gospel. This is how the church today produced, in the haunting phrase of her title, young people who are “almost Christian.”

Though the concept of religious “boundaries” is implied in Dean’s analysis, she prefers sociologist Ann Swidler’s term “cultural toolkit.” By these, she means a set of four “cultural tools” that mark one as a member of a faith tradition: creed, community, calling, and hope. She goes on to caution that no religion is more successful in developing these toolboxes than Mormons, who “top the charts” in these sociological categories. Moreover, she insists that these tools are no magic bullets for faith formation (49). These ingredients can “foreclose faith identity” as easily as they can develop it (53). “Consequential faith” requires a measure of detachment (“liminality”), liberating our youth from their self-indulgent comfort zones

and nurturing them in a missional faith characterized by outreach, hospitality, and prayer.

Achieving such detachment may entail “experimentation for education and growth” (168), hinting at a liberationist mindset that hardly conduces to the transmission of religious orthodoxy. Indeed, Dean’s approach to faith development bears unsurprising resemblance to Protestant liberalism. But to her credit, Dean is careful to observe that “situating ourselves within deeply held traditions” can render Christians “less rigid” (190), and that owning a tradition enables greater articulation of the faith.

This brings us back to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Dean suggests that our young people may not be as fooled by this false religion as we may suspect. They do not “buy it” as a faith so much as “buy into it” as a strategy for worldly success (and to repeat, this may largely owe to parental example). The hopelessness and cynicism of MTD may be best countered by Christian eschatology—churches and parents modeling a theology of hope “marked by patience, determination, and above all, humility” (191).

Both Bengtson and Dean would have us believe that religious transmission—for good or ill—can and does take place even in our age. If what they write is true of generic or mainline Protestant religious transmission in twenty-first-century America, consider how much encouragement this should provide for Presbyterian confessionals, equipped with a Reformed ecology of Christian nurture that includes infant baptism, catechetical instruction, Sabbath observance, family worship, home visitation, and preeminently the ministry of the preached word—all with the view to bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Let us have the courage to believe that these are the means God has provided for genuine “intergenerational religious momentum.” ©

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Abraham Kuyper

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by **Danny E. Olinger**

Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography, by Jan de Bruijn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014, 418 pages, \$40.00.

In his biography of Abraham Kuyper, Jan de Bruijn, professor of political history at the Free University of Amsterdam, takes the unusual path of having pictures play a major part in his telling of the story of Kuyper’s life. In each of his ten chapters de Bruijn provides an opening summary of one or two pages of that period of Kuyper’s life. He then proceeds to the pictures not only of Kuyper, but also of the main people, places, brochures, and documents of that period of Kuyper’s life. Each picture has an explanation that often runs one paragraph.

The strength of the book is the intimacy that comes through the art, particularly as it relates to Kuyper’s personal life. Given this familial touch, one might think that de Bruijn would be light on interpretation, but that is the surprising aspect of this work. De Bruijn proves himself a first-rate biographer, who persuasively shows how Kuyper increasingly gravitated towards politics.

The book starts with art that vividly portrays the sense of mid-nineteenth-century life in the Netherlands. Although Kuyper’s father, the Rev. J. F. Kuyper, always had a call in the Dutch Reformed Church, the family had to live frugally in order to survive. Death was also common, as four sisters of Kuyper died in childhood, and one picture shows a lock of hair from his younger sister Louise Susanna, who died when she was nine years old.

De Bruijn then follows Kuyper from his home school education, to his *magna cum laude* gradua-

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=448&issue_id=99.

tion from the Leiden gymnasium, to receiving his Bachelor of Arts *summa cum laude* at the University of Leiden, often showing Kuyper's actual report cards. Kuyper proposed to sixteen-year-old Joanna Schaay on September 14, 1858, and her parents approved two weeks later on the condition that it would not be announced publicly until after her confession of faith at Easter. However, word of the engagement leaked to such an extent that Kuyper exclaimed that the news had even spread to Rotterdam. The two would be engaged for five years before their 1863 marriage, when as a new pastor Kuyper finally felt equipped financially to enter into the union. During the engagement period, Kuyper often gave advice to Jo on how she should develop herself so that she could move in academic circles. In one letter to her, Kuyper wrote:

If I enumerated all the grammatical mistakes you make in your letters I would frighten you—but alas, that's an obstacle for all young girls. When you are here again we shall go over them together; it's easier that way. (28)

Kuyper would pastor Dutch Reformed congregations from 1863 to 1874, the last being the Dutch Reformed congregation in Amsterdam. Here de Bruijn cleverly develops the outworking of Kuyper's belief that the church has both a spiritual task and a secular task, emphasizing Kuyper's close relationships with two men, one a politician and the other a theologian. Politically, Kuyper grew close to Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, leader of the Anti-Revolutionary movement. Theologically, he turned for advice to H. F. Kohlbrügge, the Calvinist pastor of the Reformed congregation in Elberfeld, Germany. The question of whether to remain a pastor or become a politician dominated this period of Kuyper's life. It came to a head in 1871 when Groen Van Prinsterer threw his support behind the election of Kuyper to Parliament. Kuyper sought out Kohlbrügge's advice on what to do. Kohlbrügge encouraged him to remain a pastor. Said Kohlbrügge, "I quietly made it quite clear to him that he was arguing too much with the world in mind." However, Kuyper was already inclined toward government service and allowed

his name to stand.

Kuyper lost the 1871 election, but three years later he ran again for Parliament and this time was elected. On March 16, 1874, Kuyper not only resigned as pastor of the Dutch Reformed congregation in Amsterdam, but also gave up the office of minister, in accordance with the requirement of the law for serving in Parliament. On March 20, he was sworn in as a member of the second chamber of Parliament. De Bruijn makes the compelling case that, after this election to Parliament, Kuyper was primarily a politician for the rest of his life.

During the same period in which Kuyper was aspiring to Parliamentary office, he began writing articles for the weekly newspaper *De Heraut*, which eventually became the daily newspaper *De Standaard*. He became *De Standaard's* editor-in-chief in 1871, a position that he would hold for the next half century. In line with Anti-Revolutionary principles, Kuyper continually argued in *De Standaard* that Calvinism was by nature democratic and progressive, and that if the people of the Netherlands wanted to be free, they should look to the principles of the Reformation and not the French Revolution. Although Kuyper gave up his seat in Parliament in 1877, he stayed in the political spotlight by organizing the national petition campaign that formed the basis for the establishment of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in 1879.

In 1877 Kuyper reinstated *De Heraut* as a weekly publication where church issues would be discussed in contrast to the political issues that were discussed in *De Standaard*. Although he never returned to the pastoral office, Kuyper used *De Heraut* to comment upon the Dutch Reformed Church and also to publish a weekly devotional.

One of Kuyper's constant personal battles was with exhaustion from trying to do so much. In 1876 a nervous breakdown led to a prolonged rest. For the remainder of his life, Kuyper kept to a very fixed schedule. He wrote between nine and twelve in the morning, and then worked on the newspapers. His afternoon included a daily two-mile walk. He also incorporated into his yearly schedule a two-month stay abroad in the summer, during which time he climbed mountains. Pictures of

Kuyper as a mountaineer in Switzerland and hiking with his adult sons in South Tyrol beautifully illustrate this side of Kuyper's life.

Disappointingly, and also somewhat shockingly, Kuyper also became infrequent in his church attendance from this time forward. Instead of attending the morning worship services on the Lord's Day, he spent the time writing his devotions for *De Heraut*.

The pictures and commentary on the establishment of the Free University in 1880 display Kuyper's showmanship—he reserved a special bench for journalists up front while he delivered the inaugural address. He also had an official staff topped by Minerva created for the occasion. Seceders, members of the Christian Reformed Church that had broken away from the state church in 1834, characterized the staff as “heathen.” Kuyper replied that the image of Minerva had appeared in the works of the Reformed theologian Voetius. When others criticized the opening for its extravagance, which included serving wine at dinner, Kuyper commented that his enemies “said of the banquet that those Reformed were not the sort to *water down their wine*. That's true. From the chocolate kettle and the milk-and-water bottle one does not breed a race of bold Calvinists” (130).

After such fanfare, when the Free University opened with only eight students, a prominent political cartoon in the *Uilenspiegel* ridiculed the smallness of the student body by showing Kuyper teaching a single student. The reason for the low enrollment was twofold. On the one hand, the state did not recognize the institution; on the other hand, the Dutch Reformed synod, which was primarily modernist in orientation, prohibited Free University graduates from becoming ministers within the Dutch Reformed Church.

This led to conflict between the consistory in Amsterdam, where Kuyper had begun serving as an elder in 1882, and the classis and synod. The classis suspended eighty members (five ministers, forty-two elders, and thirty-three deacons) of the consistory on January 4, 1886, including Kuyper. He did not acknowledge the suspension, and with two others forced open the door of the *Nieuwe*

Kirk to take control of the church archives and the safes containing the savings of the church. A picture of the door of the vestry of the *Nieuwe Kirk* with a missing panel shows that the events of January 1886 were not mere philosophical clashes but the actual struggle over physical control of the church property. Kuyper and his allies held the consistory room until December, when the synod permanently discharged the suspended members from office.

As a result of these events, the discharged consistory members on December 16 formed the Dutch Gereformeerde Churches with the affix “Lamenting,” indicating their grievance over what happened. Here, de Bruijn reproduces a January 1887 political cartoon of Kuyper, dressed as the Pope, making a plea for the Lamenting congregation at Amsterdam to give generously to the new church. By 1889, two hundred congregations with 180,000 members had joined the Dutch Gereformeerde Churches. In 1892, the Lamenters joined with a majority from the Christian Reformed Church to form the *Gereformeerde* Churches in the Netherlands.

In 1898, Kuyper travelled across the Atlantic to receive an honorary doctorate in jurisprudence from Princeton University and to deliver the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary on the cultural importance of Calvinism. Although de Bruijn omits that Kuyper stayed with Geerhardus Vos and his family during this time, he does mention Vos's role in helping to get Kuyper's theological writings translated into English and includes a rare picture of Vos from that time. Kuyper's five lectures over a two-week period at Princeton were met with great enthusiasm, and when Kuyper received his honorary degree, there was prolonged applause. Kuyper later told his wife, Jo, that it was a perfect day.

Kuyper extended his stay in America with a tour to Grand Rapids and Holland, Michigan, Pella, Des Moines and Orange City, Iowa, Chicago, Cleveland, and Rochester, primarily addressing Dutch immigrants. His constant message was that in order for Calvinism to penetrate the social life of America, the Dutch people themselves would have

to learn English.

He concluded his stay in America by visiting President William McKinley. Kuyper was not overly impressed with McKinley as a statesman, but he held him in high admiration as a man of prayer.

In 1901, Kuyper's political ascent climaxed when the Confessional coalition, which included the Anti-Revolutionary Party, gained victory in the elections to Parliament. Kuyper was given the task of forming the new government, but before Queen Wilhelmina would appoint him as prime minister, he had to promise that the Netherlands would remain neutral in the Boer conflict in South Africa. Kuyper lost public support for his handling of the 1903 railroad strike. Liberals and Socialists, who had been split in 1901, successfully united to defeat Kuyper in the 1905 election.

The last years of Kuyper's life were spent initially trying to regain a place at the political table. He resumed leadership of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in 1907 from Herman Bavinck, then professor at the Free University. However, Kuyper's reputation suffered greatly from a decorations scandal (in which certain honors—decorations—were awarded to political donors) in 1909, and his political career was essentially over, although he returned to the first chamber of Parliament in 1913.

The end of the book features some of the best art in the entire volume with numerous pictures of Kuyper in old age. Among the interesting tidbits was his friendship with Kaiser Wilhelm. Although Kuyper took the stance of Dutch neutrality for the Great War in print, he was personally pro-German and visited Germany every summer during the War. In February 1917, the Kaiser even sent Kuyper a portrait of Martin Luther.

Pictures of Kuyper's funeral on November 12, 1920, show the streets lined with mourners. De Bruijn states that conservative estimates put 20,000–30,000 people lining the streets and 10,000 people at the churchyard. The book ends with a photo of Kuyper's grave in the cemetery in the Hague.

Overall, this is a fascinating book. It is a quick

read, but de Bruijn's editorial skill in selecting the art and his accompanying commentary leaves a lasting impression about who Kuyper was and what he sought to accomplish politically, leading with a Calvinistic worldview. ©

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Music at Midnight

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Music at Midnight: The Life and Poetry of George Herbert, by John Drury. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, xx + 396 pages, \$35.00.

George Herbert is *the* poet. Reviewer Fram Dinshaw nicely sums up Herbert's attractiveness as a poet:

When John Drury, himself an Anglican divine, told James Fenton (the son of a canon of Christ Church) that he was writing about George Herbert, Fenton replied with gnomic brio "*The poet!*" adding "both in intention and execution." Herbert's authentic lightness and strength, pathos and wit, alertness and sympathy have long been as precious to poets as to fellow believers.² (321)

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=450&issue_id=99.

2 Fram Dinshaw, "Music at Midnight, by John Drury—Review" *The Spectator*, September 28, 2013, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/9032551/music-at-midnight-by-john-drury-review/>.

John Drury, author of *Music at Midnight*, is the chaplain of All Souls College, Oxford. This makes his assessment of Herbert all the more interesting. He labors throughout the book to convince the reader of the wrongheadedness of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's view that to truly appreciate Herbert's poetry one must be

a *Christian*, and both a zealous and an orthodox, both a devout and a *devotional* Christian. But even this will not quite suffice. He must be an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church. (318)

There is a grain of truth in Coleridge's view, since many believers have used Herbert's poetry in their devotional lives, according to Herbert's own intention in having his poems published after his death. Nonetheless, apart from devotional appreciation, there are many critics whose deep admiration for Herbert is not rooted in Christian faith.

Two examples will suffice. First, the Shakespearean scholar *par excellence*, Harold Bloom, no fan of Christianity in general or devotional poetry in particular, acknowledges that

there are only a few extraordinary devotional poets in the language, including Donne, and the Victorians Gerard Manley Hopkins and Christina Rossetti. By any standard, George Herbert is the devotional poet proper in English.³

My second example is extraordinary in a different way. Camille Paglia is a feminist lesbian who has made it her business to be an explosive critic of feminism and liberalism. Academically, she is an extraordinary cultural and literary critic, a kind of female version of H. L. Mencken, sometimes even defending orthodox Christians, even if somewhat unwittingly. Her defense of the humanities and her literary criticism are of an unusually high quality, given the state of both in today's academy. In *Break, Blow, Burn*,⁴ (a phrase taken from a John

³ Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2004), 183.

⁴ Camille Paglia, *Break, Blow, Burn* (New York: Pantheon,

Donne poem "Holy Sonnet 14"), she devotes a dozen pages to Herbert. In her analysis of three of Herbert's poems, she demonstrates a remarkably accurate understanding of Herbert's orthodoxy, without a word of judgment, along with a true appreciation of his theology. Her analysis of the poetry's structure, craftsmanship, and influences, is simply brilliant. Drury is her equal in this regard. However, he lacks her accuracy in understanding Herbert's theology.

The problem this raises in Drury's literary biography is that he often blunts the sharp edges of Herbert's Anglican Calvinism in order, presumably, to make Herbert more palatable to non-Christian readers. In the introduction he maintains, "The primacy of love over theology and everything else is a major reason for the hold Herbert's Christian poetry has on modern readers" (15). I doubt that anyone will be reading this biography who is not already keenly interested in Herbert's poetry, Christian or not.

Drury goes on to set Herbert's poetic sensibilities over against orthodox doctrine, billing Herbert as "a mystic for whom the actuality of immediate religious experience mattered intensely, and more than orthodox doctrine" (4). A fair reading of Herbert shows that orthodoxy was his way into God's mysterious presence. Drury asserts that Herbert "put theology on a level with astronomy as a futile speculative exercise: otiose and subject to a certain officious absurdity" (108). The poem in question, "Affliction (I)", says:

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show

Yet these lines are not demeaning theology, but rather asserting that we cannot predict our own earthly future by studying theology. Drury quotes Francis Bacon's assessment of Herbert's poetry as where "divinity and poetry met" (135), although elsewhere he seems to portray the two at odds.

And then there is his usually subtle antipathy toward Puritan Calvinism. In analyzing "H.

(2005), 134-46.

Baptism [II]” he sets Herbert’s love for children and childhood over against the Puritans’ attitude toward them:

For Calvinist puritans [*sic*] the Church was emphatically a fellowship of conscious and confessing believers. So they had a worry. Could an inarticulate infant be said to believe? (50)

The reader is left to draw his own negative conclusions. “Herbert yielded to no Calvinist in his enthusiasm for the Bible” (8). While Herbert certainly would have had differences with the Puritans (5), Drury exaggerates those differences (though he acknowledges Herbert’s appreciation of their devotion [7]). In his review in *The Spectator*, Fram Dinshaw comments:

But mostly he [Drury] clings to a rather bland view of what he anachronistically calls “Jacobean Anglicanism,” to which Calvinism is as antipathetic as popery. It will be interesting to see how his forthcoming Penguin edition deals with Herbert’s poem “The Waterfall” (not mentioned here) with its uncompromising recitation of double predestination.⁵

In a number of places, Drury suggests that Herbert is pushing the orthodoxy of the Church of England beyond its limits. Barton Swain, in his *Wall Street Journal* review observes:

In the poem “Discipline,” for example—
“Throw away thy rod / Throw away thy wrath:
O my God, / Take the gentle path”—Mr. Drury thinks that Herbert is saying that God “needs to behave himself, stop lashing about and learn to love.” In “Love (3),” Herbert’s most famous poem, the poet “steps gracefully over the regular encumbrances of religion” by calling God “Love” instead of “God.”⁶

Drury attributes these theological adventures to the influence of Herbert’s brother Edward, who

was a Unitarian (105). But Drury demonstrates that *he* is under Edward’s rather than Herbert’s theological influence when he claims, “Everything we need to know to be saved is clearly put in two italicized lines: love, watchful prayer and doing as one would be done by” (108). The lines referred to, in “Divinity,” are followed by this remarkable quatrain:

But he doth bid us take his blood for wine.
Bid what he please; yet I am sure,
To take and taste what he doth there design,
Is all that saves and not obscure.

Drury attempts, unsuccessfully, to impose his moralism on Herbert (306–7).

I say all of this to alert readers to these weaknesses so that they will not distract from Drury’s superb literary criticism. And I should add that in many places Drury shows a fine appreciation of Herbert’s theology (344). For example, he emphasizes the centrality of the resurrection in New Testament theology in his analysis of Herbert’s Easter poetry (267).

Drury embeds his literary criticism in the details of Herbert’s life (322). Herbert was born into a noble family and thus received the best education available at Cambridge. His genius was recognized early and he rose quickly in the ranks of the university, eventually achieving the prized position of university orator. But with the death of James II, his hopes of preferment in the king’s court were dashed. Meanwhile, the powerful influence of his pious and refined mother took hold as he wrestled with a call to the ministry. He pursued this call during the last three years of his life, which ended prematurely just shy of age forty. Drury is no hagiographer as he describes the subtlety of some of Herbert’s dealings, especially in his seeking of the office of university orator (230). Nor does he shy away from criticizing Herbert’s poetry. Of “The Sinner” he opines, “The poem fails to ignite. The next, ‘Good Friday’, is a double poem and particularly disappointing” (271). Herbert had known worldly privilege and the refinements and enjoyment of high culture. It was in this context that he learned to humble himself before God. In turn,

⁵ Dinshaw, “Music at Midnight, by John Drury—Review.”

⁶ Cf. Barton Swain, “Book Review: Music at Midnight by John Drury,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2014.

that fueled his poetic abilities so that he wrote some of the finest verse in the English language. How else could he have written:

Perhaps great places and thy praise
Do not so well agree.
("Submission," stanza 4)

or these words about God keeping Adam from entering into his rest:

Yet let him keep the rest
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.
("The Pulley," stanza 4)

Drury is himself a wordsmith—a master of lively and interesting writing. In commenting on the moveable dates of Easter, and thus the number of Epiphany Sundays, he observes, "This calendrical conundrum having been solved by careful calculation, the Church was ready to enter on the five weeks of Lent in which it prepared itself, by prayer and fasting, for Easter itself" (266).

Another great strength of Drury's work is his meticulous research. This is especially evident in his chapter on the Williams' manuscript (139–51). He is a scholar of the old-fashioned kind, making extensive use of original sources. He is also masterful in recreating historical context, as he does with the importance of Charles I's attempt to marry a Spanish princess (117–24).

Drury brilliantly analyses dozens of Herbert's poems, without boring the novice with too much technical jargon, and yet with enough finesse to keep the diligent student interested. For example he interprets "Affliction (I)" in great detail (155–61). He excels in pointing to the subtle, intentional structural elements in each poem, enhancing the appreciation of even the most experienced Herbert reader. He often speculates on the influence of great writers of Herbert's time, such as his friend John Donne, or slightly before his time, Shakespeare. Drury gives a penetrating analysis of several of Herbert's imitators (285ff.), but at the same time demonstrates the value of imitation (291).

There is a very helpful index of works referred to and analyzed, as well as twenty-four colored plates, and numerous integrated illustrations. This book is essential Herbert reading.

Herbert's craft and wit were not for themselves alone. I say alone, because they are certainly there to be enjoyed as pure artistry, but not alone. Herbert's craftsmanship was conceived to serve a grand purpose: the glory of Herbert's God. ©

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Precious in God's Sight, but What Do God's People See?

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

Aliens in the Promised Land: Why Minority Leadership Is Overlooked in White Christian Churches and Institutions, edited by Anthony B. Bradley. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2103. 256 pages, \$15.99.

Imagine two African-American young men who around the age of twenty consider a vocation as Reformed pastors. One of these young men, let's call him James, grew up in a major metropolitan area

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=455&issue_id=100.

and attended with his parents a congregation that belongs to one of the NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) denominations. The church was mainly white but included about a half-dozen African-American families, as well as members from other ethnic groups, as you would expect in a large American city. This young man received his high school education at an inner-city Christian school that was a mix of white and black students before going to an evangelical college familiar to many in his denomination. From there he enrolled at one of the larger Reformed seminaries, interned at a generally white suburban congregation, and then sought a call in the denomination to which his family belongs.

The other young man in this thought experiment, let's call him Omar, was reared in a predominantly black congregation that belonged to one of the largest African-American holiness denominations. He attended public schools before enrolling at an Assemblies of God university and then decided to attend a seminary with deep ties to the black church in the United States. There he became exposed to popular writings on Calvinism in a theology and culture class while writing a paper and became convinced of the truth of Reformed Protestantism. Instead of transferring to another seminary, he started attending a nearby Presbyterian church that catered to university students and finished his seminary degree. Session members at the Presbyterian congregation put him in touch with the home missions coordinator of their denomination who placed Omar on a list of potential church planters.

When James and Omar receive a call to minister in a largely white Presbyterian communion, how similar will their experience be? Will James, who spent his whole life as a minority member of a Presbyterian church, feel like his life as a pastor is all that different from what he knew while growing up and going to school? Probably not. But Omar likely will begin to feel like an outsider since he has had little experience in all-white churches and knows little of the networks that set the tone for his new church home. But to what degree is Omar's sense of being an outsider a function of race? If

he were white, would the adjustment to a new denomination and its set of practices and expectations be easier? If, for instance, Omar were not black but a white young man who grew up in holiness and Pentecostal circles, came to the Reformed faith in young adulthood, and then sought ordination in a white ethnic church, such as the United Reformed Churches, would a white Omar have an easier time than his African-American version? In other words, do white conservative Presbyterian and Reformed denominations lack black pastors because church members prefer white ministers? Is race the explanation for the awkwardness that persons like Omar feel? Or is it a function of the different institutional networks that African- and white Americans inhabit? If the answer to the latter question is yes, then the hope for integrated Reformed communions may involve a project much bigger than any NAPARC denomination can muster. It may depend on an overhaul of American society, and if the United States government has not succeeded at eliminating the residue of racism and segregation, how could a denomination that comprises 0.001 percent of the U.S. population possibly do it?

The place of ethnic and racial minority pastors in predominantly white denominations is the topic of the collection of essays edited by Anthony B. Bradley in *Aliens in the Promised Land*. Although the contributors come from different backgrounds (Asian-, Latino-, and African-American) and labor in a variety of Protestant traditions, Reformed Protestants will be particularly interested in chapters by Bradley, Lance Lewis, Vincent Bacote, and Carl F. Ellis Jr., who write from experiences in Presbyterian and evangelical settings.

The perspectives of each author are by no means the same, even if frustrations with white majorities inform each account. For instance, Bradley has been a member of the Presbyterian Church in America for almost two decades and is surprised by reactions to some of his writing on race. He admits that he was aware of historic patterns of racism among Southern Presbyterians. But ongoing signs of it within the PCA prompt him to conclude that conservative Presbyterian churches

are culturally captive to white and Western norms even as the center of gravity in the Christian world is moving to the southern hemisphere among Africans, Asians, and South Americans. Lance Lewis, a church planter in the PCA, praises Reformed Protestantism for teaching and defending biblical truth but, like Anthony, has also suffered from careless if not hostile remarks about his racial identity. He cautions against white denominations attempting to plant mixed-race congregations for a variety of reasons—presumption of white superiority, ignorance of black Americans, and black distrust of whites in the United States. For this reason, Lewis calls for a moratorium on planting churches among black people even when the church planter is of African descent. The reason is that as African-Americans migrate from historically black communions into white denominations, they “lose touch” with the minority community. “The fact that a man has a black face and comes from a black church doesn’t mean that he’ll be able to connect with black people” (36).

Ellis, who teaches practical theology at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, explains, though perhaps unintentionally, why an African-American pastor might lose touch with the urban sector of his racial group. The “meltdown” of neighborhoods and the growing animosity between “achievers” and “non-achievers” (i.e., those who did or did not take advantage of Civil Rights legislation) saw the flight of the black middle class (138). The result has been the triumph of “ghetto nihilism” among the African-American urban population (139). Meanwhile, Vincent Bacote, who teaches theology at Wheaton College, wonders if white Protestants will be able to include minority perspectives in theological conversations if they do not “take seriously the theological questions that are central to minorities.” If the problem of evil, for instance, is merely an abstraction that avoids discussion of the history of lynching, the theology of white and black Christians will remain separate from a common enterprise (84).

These points illustrate the difficulties that minorities confront in trying to minister or do theology in predominantly white settings. The

challenges are personal, historical, and theological—in other words, not easily overcome. Nor is it clear that these contributors are all on the same page. Lewis, for instance, considers the differences between blacks and whites to be so great that the idea of preserving blackness in predominantly white churches (or vice versa) seems almost impossible.

Part of the book that sheds helpful light on the possibility of cultivating mixed-race churches is the 1994 Lutheran Church Missouri Synod study, “Racism and the Church,” and reprinted as an appendix. The historical section of the report is especially instructive because it demonstrates that ethnic Lutherans did not adopt explicitly racist or segregationist policies. In fact, the Missouri Synod’s experience was like that of many mainline Protestant churches in attempting to integrate churches and train black clergy. What such policies could not overcome, however, was the formation of independent black denominations in the late nineteenth century that became, in many cases, the most important institutions within the African-American community. In addition, the voluntary migration of whites and blacks throughout the twentieth century into distinct neighborhoods, the demise of inner-city Lutheran congregations and concomitant rise of suburban churches, were social dynamics that no American Christians, not even those with an infallible pontiff, could fight. For that reason, as much as the LCMS did and continues to provide biblical teaching in support of integration and mixed-race communions, it has not been able to control social and economic forces that inform how ordinary Christians make a living, support families, and join congregations.

As insurmountable as the barriers posed by the tragedy of race relations in the United States may be, this book is valuable if only to make readers aware of those minority pastors, church elders, and families that are part of the conservative Presbyterian and Reformed world. These brothers and sisters in Christ need encouragement and support. For the sake of overcoming the barriers of race, conservative Protestant churches need the presence of minority families and church officers who will

put down ecclesiastical roots. Perhaps after several generations of African-, Asian-, or Latino-American presence within Reformed Protestant circles, minority families and pastors will feel at home. ©

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Present Shock

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now, by Douglas Rushkoff. New York: Penguin, 2014, vii + 296 pages, \$16.00, paper.

Douglas Rushkoff seeks to bring Alvin Toffler's 1970 bestseller *Future Shock* up to date. A long-time member of the Media Ecology Association, he was awarded the Neil Postman award for Career Achievement in Public Intellectual Activity and the Marshall McLuhan Award by the Media Ecology Association for his book *Coercion*. He is technology and media commentator for CNN, and has produced commentaries aired on CBS and NPR's "All Things Considered." While Toffler asserted that the future was coming at us too rapidly for us to cope, Rushkoff insists that we are trapped in the now without a sense of the future or the past, "diminishing anything that isn't happening now" (2). Our technologies have undermined the idea of

story, with beginning and end. Thus, we are out of sync with the normal rhythms of life, especially as they are related to the natural order. He calls this new situation "Presentism." He suggests helpful ways of navigating this environment by reasserting our priorities in the use of our electronic devices and networks in order to stay better connected with the real world in real time.

Rushkoff is an authentic media ecologist, neither shunning nor embracing the new electronic world, but considering ways of wisely navigating it to avoid being sucked into the vortex of the electronic present.

The Christian will be most alarmed by the first chapter of the book which describes the collapse of narrative. In an interview with Ken Myers (*Mars Hill* Audio, vol. 120, February 2014), Rushkoff surprises Myers by favoring the collapse of narrative. It turns out that what he favors is the demise of twentieth-century metanarratives, such as National Socialism, that were used as ideological weapons to oppress entire nations (4). This does not mean there is no value in storytelling, only that Presentism has destroyed the concept of story. We have arrived in Toffler's future and do not find stories to be compelling explanations of the present (15). It's as if we are in the midst of a giant happening, but unlike the sixties phenomenon it is not an event that ends but comprises our entire environment. He quotes the cautionary statement of Aristotle, "When storytelling in a culture goes bad, the result is decadence" (23).²

The Internet by its very nature decontextualizes everything. Rushkoff cites the television program *The Office* as an example of appealing to the "narrative-ware" viewer. The YouTube "cutscreens" rules (27). What television used to do so well, the dramatic, has given way to a purposeless present. *Seinfeld* is a classic example—a show about nothing (31), a pastiche of plots without denouement (34). Watchers want the immediate sensations that the dangerous rescue, extreme sports, or painful, violent reality show deliver, often in the basest

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=456&issue_id=100.

2 From Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: ReganBooks, 1997).

forms (37).

Rushkoff maintains that “always-on news becomes the new approach to governance,” (47) as leaders respond to constantly changing polls and news stories, crafted by the media. The need to shock the viewer to keep him watching creates a sense of panic (48). Intelligent commentary loses its force and the idea of objective truth disappears (50–51). Mediated reality undermines traditional institutions and fosters an “astonishing—and unwarranted—confidence in the self” (53). The post-narrative landscape favors the endless movement of video games (58–62). Rushkoff oddly sees much good in video games because, as a kind of antidote to Presentism, the player becomes the story, which would seem to enhance, rather than modify, the solipsism Rushkoff seems to reject. There is also some evidence that gaming may help those with post-traumatic stress (64–65).

In the second chapter, “Digiphrenia,” Rushkoff begins to hint at some strategies to help deal with Presentism. He brilliantly and provocatively observes that “[p]eople are still analog” (71). But our “virtual identities” are spread over “device, platform, and network.” And then this media ecology zinger— “[t]he things we use do change us.... It’s not about how digital technology changes us, but how we change ourselves and one another now that we live so digitally” (73). While this may sound contradictory, Rushkoff is offering hope that we are responsible for our media and can do something about the existential crisis we face.

By trying to keep up with the multitude of electronic intrusions and distractions, we actually lose touch with the real present, hence becoming disoriented and experiencing what Rushkoff calls “digiphrenia” (75). The Industrial Revolution invented a way of measuring time and thus dictating the rhythms of life. People were being “tuned up like machines” (81). The analog clock left a vestige of the cyclic movement of a day based on the sundial, while the digital timepiece doesn’t move it “flicks,” distancing us completely from the natural order (83). Rushkoff quotes IT researcher Mark McDonald, “The nature of change is changing because the flow and control of information has

become turbulent, no longer flowing top down, but flowing in every direction at all times” (86).

Remaining captive to this “new temporal order” exacts a price. Being out of sync with the cycle of night and day is unhealthy for body and soul (90–92):

Yes, we are in a chronobiological crisis depression, suicide, cancers, poor productivity, and social malaise as a result of abusing and defeating the rhythms keeping us alive and in sync with nature and one another. (93)

But the good news is that while our inventions are “fungible ... our bodies are resistant.” Thus, we may use our technologies to “reschedule our lives in a manner consistent with our physiology.” We need to offload time intensive tasks to our machines to regain time to think—what technology analyst Clay Shirky calls “cognitive surplus.” Instead of keeping pace with our machines, we need to make our machines work at our pace (93). This proposed solution is a refreshing antidote to the artificial intelligence (AI) crowd’s idea that we can reinvent ourselves in whatever way we wish, *imago siliconi*. Not bad for an atheist.³ Like the founders of media ecology, Rushkoff believes that we are not determined by our inventions if we choose to wisely understand and use them.

So we need to reject the “always-on philosophy” that suits business but not our humanity (94):

By letting technology lead the pace, we do not increase genuine choice at all. Rather, we disconnect ourselves from whatever it is we may actually be doing.... The opportunity offered to us by digital technology is to reclaim our time and to reprogram our devices to conform to our personal and collective rhythms. Computers do not really care about time. They are machines operating on internal clocks that are not chronological, but events-based: *This* happens, then *that* happens. (98)

We need to program our technologies to follow the

³ Douglas Rushkoff, *Nothing Sacred: The Truth about Judaism* (New York: Three Rivers, 2003).

natural cycles of days and seasons like farmers have always done. Rushkoff goes on to discuss scientific evidence that shows the relationship between seasons and our human natures.

Then he secularizes the Edenic “myth” by describing the eating of the forbidden fruit as a maturing process which “introduced humanity to the binary universe of active choice that computers now amplify for us today” (111). Theology is a discipline from which Rushkoff needs to steer clear. Relating his misinterpretation of Genesis 1–3 to the Apple computer logo is, however, insightful. Using computers is like taking a bite of the forbidden fruit. On January 27, 2010, Steve Jobs introduced the iPad as “a truly magical and revolutionary product.”⁴

As an aside, I would note that magic became a reality as the scientific order began to take form in the sixteenth century. This should not be a surprise as the ultimate issue is autonomous human control over God’s world. C. S. Lewis explores the relationship between science and magic in *That Hideous Strength* (1946). The book’s name comes from Sir David Lyndsay’s *Ane Dialog* (1555), in which he describes the Tower of Babel, “The shadow of that hyddeous strength sax mile or more it is of length.” The evil Lord Feverstone—a telling name—states his agenda, “If Science is really given a free hand it can now take over the human race and re-condition it: make man a really efficient animal.”⁵ Rushkoff doesn’t explore the connection between magic and science, although he is clearly opposed to Feverstone’s agenda. Jobs, however, seems to have had it in mind.

The penultimate section of this second chapter describes a crucial distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* measures time quantitatively, whereas *kairos* considers time qualitatively in terms of historical meaning (112). Christians understand this in terms of eschatology. “Digital time ignores nearly every feature of *kairos*, but in doing so may offer us the opportunity to recognize *kairos* by its

very absence” (112). Like the light bulb, *chronos* creates an environment without any content. This is what Marshall McLuhan meant by the medium is the message (115). What we call “information overload” should, according to Clay Shirky, be called “filter failure” (116). Push notifications can be turned off, thus protecting our personal *kairos* of real time (117).

Then there is the matter of multitasking. Rushkoff contends that computers can do this, but not humans (123). The tenfold increase in attention deficit disorder is directly related to humans seeking to imitate the multitasking of computers. Intelligence is increasingly wrongly equated with speed (125). The cognitive dissonance this creates is a major source of society’s ills (126). Thus,

our ability to experience sync over disphrenia can be traced to the extent to which we are the programmers of our own and our businesses’ digital processes. In the digital realm we are either the programmers or the programmed—the drivers or the passengers. (128)

Chapter 3 is “Overwinding: The Short Forever.” The concept of temporal diversity is central to this chapter, “to understand and distinguish between the different rates at which things on different levels of existence change.” *Whole Earth Catalog* founder Stewart Brand divides society into six levels from the slowest to the fastest rates of change: 1) geological, 2) cultural, 3) civil governance, 4) infrastructures, 5) commerce, 6) fashion (133–34). Failure to distinguish among these leads to “overwinding,” or temporal compression, when we live only at the “fashion” pace (incidentally, watches and clocks cannot be overwound, a minor mistake in Rushkoff’s analogy). Instead, energy needs to be stored like the photosynthetic process. Rushkoff uses the example of the difference between cramming the night before an exam and studying over months for the same exam (135). Only the latter way of dealing with time will yield memory. Or consider the difference between RAM and hard drive. Presentism is like RAM, “all processing, with no *stuff* to hang onto” (140). “Where we get into trouble is when we treat data flows and

⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2010/TECH/01/27/apple.tablet/>

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 41.

data storage interchangeably” (142). There is no space for deep thinking left. “When everything is rendered instantly accessible via Google and iTunes, the entirety of culture becomes a single layer deep. The journey disappears, and all knowledge is brought into the present tense” (153). This is what Rushkoff calls “the short forever.”

Rushkoff goes on to chart the rise of consumer culture. “While mass production may have disconnected the worker from the value of his skill set, mass marketing has disconnected the consumer from the producer” (166). Moreover,

the economics of consumption have always been dependent on illusions of increasing immediacy and newness, and an actuality of getting people to produce and consume more stuff, more rapidly, with ever more of their time. (167)

A classic example of economic present shock is seen in the way the expansion of credit undermines the ability to consider the future consequences of present purchases (175).

Rushkoff concludes this chapter with a call for community as the solution to the problem of the individualistic, short forever. “We must be able to expand our awareness beyond the zero-sum game of individual self-interest.... The individual is flow, and the community is storage” (194). Here’s where the doctrine of the church and the communion of saints would be of immense help to Rushkoff.

In Chapter 4 we encounter another Rushkoff neologism, “Fractalnoia: Finding Patterns in the Feedback.” The problem is that we encounter links without a narrative to connect them to. This leaves people unable to interpret the present (199). Fractals seek to make sense of cyberculture by discovering patterns, whether they are actually there or not (200). This, as McLuhan recognized, is the only way to navigate a chaotic electronic environment. This requires looking more at the medium than at the message (202). “In the presentist world the feedback loop gets really tight.” It’s like the screech of the microphone getting feedback from the speakers that are too close This why we need to step back and consider what’s happening (208).

Rushkoff observes that unlike electronic broadcasting, which is a one-way form of communication, digital networks give people the ability to engage with one another (215). Here Rushkoff begins to engage in a bit of utopian egalitarianism. While it is true that long-standing falsehoods may be quickly undone through the availability of information and networking, it is certainly not true that the transparency of WikiLeaks is helpful to the safety of sovereign nations. His mantra is that it is as easy to cooperate as to compete (221). This simply ignores the reality of sin and deception, by locating the problems of humanity in systems without feedback. In the actual fallen world in which we live, civilization is based as much on what we refrain from saying as on what we say.

“Hierarchies of command and control began losing ground to networks of feedback and iteration” (224). This is good in fighting tyranny, but may also undermine respect for legitimate authority. Rushkoff helpfully cites Norbert Weiner, the inventor of cybernetics. Weiner developed this theory in connection with improving the timing of anti-aircraft fire during World War II. “Feedback allows a source gradually to self-correct the effectiveness of a series of messages, making them closer and closer to what is needed to accomplish their intent.”⁶ Based on this brilliant insight, however, social scientists have believed that by building feedback into social structures they could improve the human condition (225). Rushkoff concludes with a healthy skepticism about such proposals: “Pattern recognition may be less a science or mathematical than it is a liberal art” (230). The liberal arts deal better with complexity and nuances than do the formulaic tendency of the sciences. Fractalnoia is a self-oriented “networked sensibility” that defines paranoia (240). Pattern recognition realizes that that there are not more shark attacks now than a hundred years ago, only more reporting of them.

The concluding chapter “Apocalypso” deals with the “belief in the imminent shift of humanity into an unrecognizably different form.” This is a

6 Everett Rogers, *A History of Communication Study: A Biographical Approach* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 394–99.

secular version of Christian eschatological hope. For the secularist it represents relief from the stress of present shock (245). The zombie phenomenon, Rushkoff observes, taps into our deepest fears of being consumed (248). Because “[p]eople are the bad guys” the postnarrative future is thought to belong to the zombies (251).

Rushkoff proceeds in a section titled “Transcending Humanity” to describe several mystical alternatives, from Irish folklorist Terence McKenna to the Taoist Book of Changes, the *I Ching*, to Jesuit evolutionary mystic Teilhard de Chardin (251–54). Their quest is to get everyone to appreciate the interconnectedness of all things, the staple of all mysticism.

Finally Rushkoff comes out of the closet to with the author’s message:

As I have come to understand technology, however, it wants only whatever we program into it. I am much less concerned with whatever it is technology may be doing to people than what people are choosing to do to one another *through* technology. (257)

To the techno-enthusiasts he responds, “I find myself unable to let go of the sense that human beings are somehow special, and that moment-to-moment human experience contains a certain unquantifiable essence” (258). Rushkoff continues by insisting that DNA gives only a small part of the total picture of what comprises humanity. Neuroscience is inadequate to account for human cognition. Finally, outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins reduces humans to information in organic form. Rushkoff responds, “It seems to me this perspective has the medium and the message reversed. We humans are not the medium for information; information is the medium for humans. We are the content—the message” (259).

Here Rushkoff reminds me of philosopher Thomas Nagel’s challenge, in *Mind and Cosmos*,⁷ to the materialist philosophers and evolutionary

7 Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford, 2012).

scientists to the effect that their scheme is unable to adequately account for our humanity, especially our cognitive abilities as well as consciousness itself.

In the final section of the book, Rushkoff posits that the urgency to envision an endgame is a religious impulse exemplified by the Puritans who colonized America. “[T]hey came with the express intent of bringing on the eschaton” (260–61). “Present shock provides the perfect cultural and emotional pretext for apocalyptic thinking. It is destabilizing; it deconstructs the narratives we use to make meaning; ... it drives us to impose order on chaos” (261). He asks, “Without time, without a future, how do we contend with the lingering imperfections in our reality?” (262). Here he reminds me of Neil Postman’s proposal in *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century*.⁸ Reimposing the Enlightenment of the past on the present is not much different than Rushkoff’s appealing to the “foundational framework” of the monotheistic culture of which we are a part as a way to help us out of our current dilemma (262). The real question is whether Christian belief in the eschaton is a theological imposition on reality or the actual plan of the One who created it.

Rushkoff calls the reader to take responsibility and dominion in the present moment to confront present shock. He admits that this book has been the hardest to complete of any he has written. Ultimately, he humbly resorts to thoughtfulness that resists hasty conclusions. As a Christian I appreciate his modesty, honesty, and what appears to be his soft atheism.

While I have found Rushkoff’s analyses and many of his navigation proposals useful and even compelling, what he does not take sufficiently into account is the cultural force of a culture that is not very attuned to his sensibilities. Furthermore, his essential belief in the uniqueness of humanity is in need of the fortitude that only a biblical anthropology can offer. Although he feels the pervasiveness of the cultural pressure, his lack of a metanarrative

8 Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

that transcends the cultural moment leaves him at loose ends, which ultimately only the Christ of Scripture can tie together.

This is not an easy book, but one well worth reading, if for no other reason than that it slows the reader down to think. ©

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