

Ordained Servant

Volume 27
2018



A Journal
for
Church
Officers

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

published by:
The Committee on Christian
Education of *the*
Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Ordained Servant

A Journal for Church Officers

VOLUME 27, 2018

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A Journal for Church Officers

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

ISSN 1525-3503

Volume 27 2018

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

Subscriptions: Copies of the annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* are sent to each ordained minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, each organized congregation, and each designated mission work, and are paid for by the Committee. Ordained elders, deacons, and licentiates of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may receive copies gratis upon request. *Ordained Servant* is also available to anyone in the United States and Canada who wishes to subscribe by remitting \$10.00 per year to: Ordained Servant, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 607 N. Easton Rd., Bldg. E, Willow Grove, PA 19090-2539. Checks should be made out to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, designated for *Ordained Servant* in the memo line. Institutional subscribers in the US and Canada please remit \$15.00 per year. Overseas individual and institutional subscribers please remit \$20.00 per year. All remittances should be made payable in US funds. Subscriptions, both paid and gratis, may also be received through our website on the “Publications” page under “Resources” on the top right of the OPC.org home page.

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✦ From the Editor

This is the thirteenth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* as we enter our twenty-eighth year of publication in 2019.

I am dedicating this issue to a beloved minister in the presbytery (New York and New England) of which I have been a part since 1978. Harold Dorman, who went to be with his Lord December 27, 2017, was a kind of Shamgar among ministers—easy to overlook, not well known outside of his presbytery and local church. He was a quiet and unassuming man who served his Lord and his Lord's church with humble faithfulness as a pastor for fifty-six years since his ordination in 1958. He is, thus, a sterling example to us all—“Harold Leonard Dorman: Spokesman for Almighty God.”

A new feature in 2018 is *Servant Classics*, in which brief reviews of classics of Christian literature, which many have heard about but never read, will be presented. In 2018 I began this feature with Richard Sibbes's *The Bruised Reed*. In 2019 David Noe, who is a professor of classics at Calvin College, and a member of the Committee for the Historian of the OPC, will provide original translations of classical theology beginning with Theodore Beza on the Trinity.

The cover picture is of the Congregational Church in Exeter. In 1638 the Reverend John Wheelwright had been exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for preaching what the Puritans called anti-nomianism, emphasizing God's grace without a call to obedience to God's law in response. Forced north, he led a small band of about 175 followers into the New Hampshire wilderness and settled on the banks of the Squamscott River. The community that emerged there became Exeter, New Hampshire, and in those days every New England town had to have a church in order to receive a charter. It became the first capital of the state. The current building dates from 1798 and is the fifth meeting house.

Once again I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange, and the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, 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 Judith Dinsmore for her excellent final proofing and formatting of this printed volume.



—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Tribute

Harold Leonard Dorman: Spokesman for Almighty God (July 4, 1917–December 27, 2017)

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2018¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds



Harold Leonard Dorman was born in Hamden, Connecticut, on July 4, 1917.² He first joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a member in June 1938 at age twenty-one. The church was Westminster OPC in Hamden, Connecticut. After thirty-eight months in the army he went to Calvin College, where he received the bachelor of arts

degree in 1950. Better yet, Harold met Marjorie VanDerWeele at Calvin, and they were married on September 2, 1950. They have four grown children: Gerald, Ronald, Laurel (Trundy), and Leonard.³

In the fall of 1950, Harold attended Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, where he received his bachelor of divinity (BD) in 1953. He studied under professors Edward J. Young and Meredith G. Kline in Old Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse and John H. Skilton in New Testament, John Murray in systematic theology, Paul Woolley in church history, Cornelius Van Til in apologetics, and R. B. Kuiper and Edmund P. Clowney in practical theology. To support himself Harold worked as a handyman for most of the professors; he even helped Dr. Kline build his house.⁴

He began preaching in the Cornville Orthodox Presbyterian church in 1954 and was ordained and installed by the Presbytery of New York and New England as pastor of Skowhegan Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Skowhegan (formerly Cornville), Maine on April 10, 1958, where he served as pastor until 2014.

That congregation had been received as a particular congregation in 1941. They met in the Union Church in Cornville, Maine, built in 1850. The church was heated by a wood stove, just right for those hearty New Englanders. After two pastors, Harold Dorman became stated supply in 1954. He was paid the handsome sum of \$8.00 a month. He supplemented his income with “odd jobs such as carpentry, cabinet making, plumbing, heating, and electric wiring. He also served for six years as treasurer and thirteen years as overseer of the poor for the Town of Cornville.”⁵ Pastor Dorman was also a chaplain for the Redington-Fairview General Hospital in Skowhegan since 1972.⁶

On May 8, 1977, the first worship service in a new building in Skowhegan was held. The building

3 *Ibid.*, 29.

4 *Ibid.*, 30.

5 *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church: 1936–1986*, Charles G. Dennison, ed. (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian, 1986), 166.

6 Reynolds, “Harold Leonard Dorman,” 32.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=719&issue_id=141.

2 Gregory E. Reynolds, “Harold Leonard Dorman: Spokesman for Almighty God, an Interview” *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 29–34.

previously had been a laundromat. Pastor Dorman reflected, “The congregation is fully committed to the preaching and teaching of the Reformed Faith. Their trust for the future and present rests solely in the sovereign God of grace. Their desire is to live, witness, and worship for the glory of our triune God.”⁷ He preached for sixty years to the same congregation in two locations.

Harold remembered Professor Murray visiting



to help with the work of preaching and evangelism. “Professor Murray impressed me very much with his sincerity.”⁸ Pastor Dorman was a dead-earliest preacher of God’s Word.

When I interviewed Harold in 2010 for *Ordained Servant*, the article was titled “Harold Leonard Dorman: Spokesman for Almighty God.”⁹

That nicely sums up his ministry in Maine. When asked what advice he had for young men entering the ministry, he said: “I would tell them to study as much as you can for each sermon, because the more you know the better it is. Because you’re God’s spokesman, and that’s a tremendous responsibility—to be a spokesman for Almighty God.”¹⁰

Harold Dorman was a living exemplar of the ordinary, faithful ministry of the Word of God. Such persistent, enterprising labor is rare today. I remember as a student coming under care in the Presbytery of New York and New England in 1978 that Harold was always in the front row at presbytery meetings. He was hard of hearing, and he was interested in what was going on. He didn’t want

to miss a thing. He loved his Lord and his Lord’s church. I was impressed with his down-to-earth, quiet faithfulness.

On his last visit to presbytery in Bangor, he was asked what was most important for younger ministers. He said, “to preach the Word.” Sounds ordinary, but God does extraordinary things through the ordinary means of grace and his ordinary servants. The apostle Paul saw his ministry in the same light: “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Pastor Dorman took seriously the words of Paul to Timothy: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

In the end, I am certain that Harold would want all that he was able to accomplish as a Christian and as a minister to be attributed to the goodness and grace of his Lord. We will miss him. ☺

Gregory E. Reynolds is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

7 *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 167.

8 Reynolds, “Harold Leonard Dorman,” 31, 33.

9 *Ibid.*, 29–34.

10 *Ibid.*, 33.

✦ Servant Thoughts

Editorials

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: A Sermon on Romans 10:14-21

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2018¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

There are so many different kinds of sermons and preachers, and those preachers have such a variety of training, backgrounds, and ecclesiastical traditions and settings.² How can God, the Good Shepherd, speak through such a variety of imperfect men and their messages? It is clearly a supernatural work that requires the presence of the Spirit of the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd of his sheep.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept

the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:12–16)

There once was a fiddler named John Skinner. He wanted to upstage a famous preacher. So he placed a ladder outside of the church next to an open window near the pulpit. He was quiet as the text was announced. He began to tune his violin during the Scripture reading, hoping to annoy the preacher. But the power of the preached Word so affected him that he never began to play. The gospel pierced his heart with an irresistible power. He listened to the entire sermon and became a new man. The preacher was George Whitefield.

Today preaching has reached its lowest point since the Reformation, at least in much of the Western world. Electronic media are competing for the attention of God’s people, and seducing many into thinking that preaching is an inferior form of communication. The entire Bible makes it plain that this is not true. Preaching is the main means that God has chosen to convert and edify his people. We are not here to blow our own horns. We are called to sound the trumpet of the Lord with confidence in the face of much that seeks to distract us, distort our preaching, and discourage us.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for “Their voice has gone out

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=685&issue_id=135.

2 This article is based on a sermon that I preach at the end of my media ecology conferences, “Christian Living in the Electronic Age,” last delivered on February 25, 2018 at the Granite Seminar sponsored by the Granite State School of Theology and Missions at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church.

to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.” Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” (Romans 10:14–21)

I. The Good Shepherd Sends His Preacher

Preachers Must Be Called and Sent by the Good Shepherd

Look at the Pauline sequence in verses 14 and 15: to call upon the Lord one must believe; to believe one must hear the voice of Jesus, the one he is called to believe; to hear this voice there must be a preacher preaching Jesus the Christ; and for there to be a preacher one must be called and sent by Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to preach.

This call is often misunderstood in American evangelicalism today. Many appoint themselves preachers of the Word of God. Presbyterian and Reformed churches practice the more biblical idea of calling by distinguishing between the internal and external call. As Paul tells Timothy, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). While this inner aspiration is necessary, it is not sufficient to constitute a call to office. The character and gifts of ministry must be recognized by the church, especially its officers. Hence the portrait Paul paints of what an overseer ought to look like in the next six verses in 1 Timothy 3:2–6. The Good Shepherd is the divine sender.

Preachers Must Preach: The Priority of Preacher and Church

WSC 89 “How is the Word made effectual to salvation? A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up

in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Preaching is central throughout Scripture, but comes into its own in the New Testament. We see Moses the preacher, then the Prophets, who look forward to the New Covenant era in which John the Baptist announces the final preacher, a greater prophet than Moses, Jesus the Christ. The prophetic ministry of the Son worked proleptically in the Old Covenant era:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. (1 Pet. 1:10–11)

The preaching ministry of the Apostles is a continuation of the Son’s prophetic ministry as Luke informs us in Acts 1:1 “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). The Book of Acts is chock full of preaching. It ends with Paul teaching from prison, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31).

Based on the completed apostolic foundation, faithful preaching of the Word became the first mark of the true church. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:1–2).

Notice the public and churchly nature of this task. It stands contrary to the individualistic tendency in our culture that believes that personal Bible reading is a sufficient motivation and guide to the Christian life. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13).

Preachers Must Be Respected and Supported by the Elders and the People

Paul quotes Isaiah's description of the gospel preacher: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isa. 52:7). What is it about the messenger's feet that makes them beautiful? In and of themselves feet are usually not beautiful. In the ancient Middle East sandaled feet were often filthy. The beauty of the preacher's feet is in the swift-footedness of the messenger coming to captive Israel with good news of the coming liberation of God's people. The character of the message, not the anatomy of the messenger, is what is beautiful.

This made the feet of the apostles beautiful: "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). The beautiful message of amnesty from the bondage of sin and death.

While the modern church is tempted to fashion its ministers after secular models, such as the CEO, celebrity, or psychologist, faithful churches and their leaders must free their pastors to focus on preaching, so that every other aspect of the pastors' work flows from it. The apostles protected this central task: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. . . . we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2, 4).

This is a supernatural calling. Ministers are first of all accountable to the Good Shepherd of the sheep. This does not mean he is above criticism. The faithful preacher must always humbly seek to grow in his ministry. Constructive criticism will help him in this development. He must have the prayerful support of elders and people in order to prosper in this great work (Eph. 6:18–20).

II. The Good Shepherd Speaks Through His Preacher

Christ Speaks in the Ordinary Preaching of His Word

Preaching is not the same as a lecture and it certainly is not the preacher's opinions on the

Bible. So then, what is preaching? Two basic words are used by Paul to describe preaching. *Kerux* is the noun form of the verb (κηρύσσω, *kērussontos*) used in Romans 10:14 to describe this activity, "someone preaching," and in Romans 10:15 "to preach" (κηρύξωσιν, *kēruxōsin*). This is an authoritative public proclamation by a spokesman or herald for a king like Caesar. The second word Paul uses is *Evangel*, the root for our English word evangelism. It is the noun form of the verb (εὐαγγελίζομαι, *euangelizomenōn*) translated by the phrase "preach the good news" in verse 15. The noun "gospel" (εὐαγγελίῳ, *euangeliō*) occurs in verse 16. It is a public announcement of military victory, also the work of a herald.

So we may define biblical preaching as an authoritative proclamation of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death, or as Puritan Thomas Hooker described preaching: "open publication of heavenly mysteries." In Romans 10:17 "the word of Christ" reminds us of the nature of a herald, in contrast to the persuader desired by some in the Corinthian church.³ A herald was a public proclaimer of the message of another with authority over the message and messenger. The preacher, then, comes with the message given by God in his Word; he "brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation" (Isa. 52:7).

Preaching is the voice of the Good Shepherd. Charismatics are not the only ones to claim that God speaks today. The difference, of course, is that the Reformed have always believed that God speaks through the reading and preaching of Scripture, not through special new extra-biblical revelations. The *Second Helvetic Confession* puts it this way: "preaching of the word of God IS the word of God" (emphasis added).

In most translations, Romans 10:14 puts an unnecessary distance between Christ and the

3 See Gregory E. Reynolds, "A Medium for the Message: The Form of the Message Is Foolish, Too," in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, John Muether, ed., (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 311–34.

hearers of the gospel. Instead of “of whom” it should be “whom.” The New American Standard Version of 1995 gets it right: “How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” Commentators John Calvin, John Murray, and William Hendricksen agree, “Christ speaks in the Gospel proclamation.”⁴ The speaking Son is to be listened to: “a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; Listen to him!”” (Luke 9:35). He told the preaching apostles: “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me” (Luke 10:16). Christ is immediately present as the true speaker in the preaching moment. Preaching is not speaking about Christ, but Christ speaking to his people.

Preaching conceived of in this way exalts the Lord not the preacher. In as much as he preaches scripturally it is the voice of Jesus. He is not six feet above criticism. But beware of the opposite egalitarian spirit which resists authority in every form. Christ addresses his people thru the official means of gospel proclamation. This was Paul’s confidence as a preacher: “When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Preachers Must Be Confident in God and His Word

WLC Q. 159. How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?
A. They that are called to labour in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 58.

Preachers, you must trust the Spirit of Christ in the preaching moment:

praying at all times in the Spirit, . . . making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18–20)

Preachers, you must believe that you are proclaiming God’s Word as Paul did in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:13). The “boldness” Paul asks for Ephesus is not brash or pulpit pounding; in the New Testament bold preaching is preaching with confidence in the message and the God who gave it.

Preachers, you must not give in to discouragement. There are many sources of ministerial discouragement: the moral and spiritual decay in our culture; the lack of concern for ultimate and spiritual realities, even in the church; the electronic distraction that steals attention with its many voices drowning out the preacher’s words; and the pervasive belief that preaching is an inferior form of communication. But there is nothing more important than what you do—even if to only five or ten people. Eternal destinies depend upon it. We have our marching orders: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Preaching Must Be Heard and Heeded

WLC Q. 160. What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

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

People of God: we are told in this passage, Romans 10:14–21, that Israel heard but did not heed Christ’s Word. Israel refused the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ, even though it has been preached to them. As we see in Romans 10:16, the problem is Israel’s unbelief, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’” (Isa. 6:8). Romans 10:21 sums up the problem of unbelief: “But of Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people’” (quoting Isa. 65:2). There is no salvation without preaching, but hearing must be mixed with faith. Both the message and the medium of proclamation are foolish according to Paul, thus the gift of faith is required. “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of preaching to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21, my translation). Again, both the message and the act of preaching are folly to the unbeliever. But, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32). There have been plenty of messengers sent to Israel, so there is no excuse. Just as the creation leaves everyone without excuse, “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (v.18, quoting Ps. 19:4, cf. Rom. 1:20). The gospel is being preached throughout the creation, as Paul says of the apostolic preaching, “the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Col. 1:23).

In Romans 10:19–20 Paul tells us that ironically, the nations, once condemned by general revelation, now respond to the gospel, while Israel, who knew God’s plan for the nations, rejects the gospel in favor of idols. Moses warned of this, as seen in the context of Paul’s quotation of Deuteronomy 32:21 in Romans 10:19: “They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded” (Deut. 32:17). Because Israel turned from the Lord and worshiped the “no gods” of the nations, so the Lord turns to those who are “not a nation” with the gospel to

make Israel jealous. He is saving those who neither sought nor asked to be saved (v. 20, quoting Isa. 65:1). This is exactly the picture Paul gives of the Thessalonian reception of the gospel: “you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

So, people of God, heed the message from the messenger. True hearing is obedient hearing, hearing that changes the inner life. Don’t let personal or doctrinal differences with the preacher prevent obedient hearing. Come prepared to receive the Word, as well-rested and prayerful Bible readers, expecting to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

True hearing requires a messenger gifted and called by the head of the church. This, in turn, requires the visible church and its public worship. Be whole heartedly committed to the visible body of Christ and its mission. From the church the Lord sends out messengers to all nations. And don’t accept substitutes for preaching: TV, MP3, Internet—or even fellowship or private devotions. For only through the public reading and preaching of Scripture will you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. ©

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Lessons in Leadership from Nehemiah

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2018¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Nothing is more necessary in the church and its witness to the world than godly male leadership, including church officers, husbands, fathers, and any man in a position of influence. Nehemiah gives us a sterling example from God's Word of what faithful leadership looks like. He oversaw the temporary restoration of the City of God, looking forward to the ultimate heavenly city described in Hebrews 11:16: "They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

The temple worship, law, and city of Jerusalem needed to be restored. The walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed in 586 BC at the beginning of the exile, and again in 446 BC, ninety years after the return from seventy years of captivity in Babylon. High priest Joshua and ruler Zerubbabel restored the Temple; Ezra re-established the authority of the Mosaic Covenant and God's law; and Nehemiah restored the City of Jerusalem as the center of God's kingdom. After Ezra's reform, the Jews in Jerusalem had begun to rebuild the walls, but the Samaritans agitated to have King Artaxerxes (464-424 BC) of Persia order the rebuilding halted.

Nehemiah: Priest and Cupbearer

Nehemiah was the son of Hacaliah (Neh. 1:1) and one of his brothers was called Hanani (Neh. 1:2; 7:2). He was probably a priest, since Nehemiah 10:1-8 lists him first in list of names ending "these are the priests." In 2 Maccabees 1:21 he is called "Nehemiah the priest," (DRA)² and possibly

by 2 Maccabees 1:18, where it is said that Nehemiah "offered sacrifices, after that he had builded the temple and the altar" (KJV). He must have been raised by godly Jewish parents in exile in Babylon. His integrity and giftedness led to his being appointed by Artaxerxes to the responsible position of cupbearer to the king.

Cupbearer to the king was an office of "no trifling honor."³ One of the chief duties was to taste the wine for the king to see that it was not poisoned. He was even admitted into the king's presence while the queen was present (Neh. 2:6). "It was on account of this position of close intimacy with the king that Nehemiah was able to obtain his commission as governor of Judea and the letters and edicts which enabled him to restore the walls of Jerusalem."⁴ So he was not only a sommelier, but a trusted counselor.

Nehemiah: Governor of Judea⁵

Hanani and other men of Judah visited Nehemiah in Susa in the ninth month of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (445 BC). They told him that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and its gates burned. The Jews were enduring a great trial. So, Nehemiah grieved, fasted, and prayed that the Lord would grant him favor with the king in order to engage in restoration. In the first month of the following year (444 BC), Nehemiah was granted permission to go to restore Jerusalem. In order to do this, he was given letters of introduction to the governors of Syria and Palestine and especially to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, who provided materials for rebuilding. He was also appointed governor, and given authority over the province of which Jerusalem was the capital.

As Nehemiah began the restoration of the walls he was opposed by Sanballat, the governor of Samaria. Eventually, with God's help and the exercise of faith and diligence, the restoration was

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=702&issue_id=138.

2 Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition.

3 *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (1939), s.v. "Nehemiah," from Herodotus iii.34.

4 *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (1939), s.v. "Nehemiah."

5 *Ibid*.

completed.

He then instituted a number of social reforms among God's people.

He appointed the officers necessary for better government, caused the people to be instructed in the Law by public readings, and expositions; celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles; and observed a national fast, at which the sins of the people were confessed and the covenant with Yahweh was renewed. The people agreed to avoid marriages with the heathen, to keep the Sabbath, and to contribute to the support of the temple. He also provided for the safety and prosperity of the city.⁶

In this work of reformation, he was assisted by Ezra, who had gone up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (458 BC).

The Covenantal Context

In the Mosaic covenant, as an administration of the covenant of grace, Israel's continuance in the promised land was conditioned on their obedience to the law. The exile resulted from disobedience (Neh. 1:8–9; Neh. 9:26–27). In Ezra the Levites took an oath to keep the law of Moses (Ezra 10:3–5). So, Nehemiah was a believer in exile, seeking faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant, undergirded by the covenant of grace and looking forward by faith to the new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (Jer. 31:31–32)

This new covenant would be different in the way Paul explains in Romans:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God,

but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom. 10:1–9)

So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (Rom. 11:5–6)

Principles of Leadership

From Nehemiah we learn the nature of the covenant commitment that fortified him to perform his God-given task in restoring the walls of Jerusalem and restoring integrity to the government of God's people according to the law of God.

Nehemiah's Covenant Commitment

Because of Nehemiah's covenant commitment, graciously given to him by Yahweh's commitment to his people, based on the underlying covenant of grace, he learned to overcome fear with faith. Not that he didn't struggle with fear, "Then I was very much afraid" (Neh. 2:2), but he overcame it by faith.

1. Nehemiah Had Trusted God's Agenda

God's agenda was Nehemiah's agenda. Nehemiah was thoroughly committed to the building of God's kingdom. This was his chief motivation: to glorify his Lord. Nehemiah practiced the answer

⁶ Ibid.

to Shorter Catechism question 1. He knew how to genuinely motivate God's people to assist in following God's agenda because he knew that God was at work: "I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. . . . the God of heaven will make us prosper" (Neh. 2:17–20). He was not afraid to confront the sin of God's people, because he feared God more than men. "You are exacting interest, each from his brother. . . . The thing that you are doing is not good" (Neh. 5:6–13).

2. Nehemiah Believed in the Power of Prayer

Nehemiah regularly availed himself of his connection with heaven via prayer. He recognized that the LORD dwells in the invisible heavenly realm to which he had access by grace through prayer. He made all his plans to rebuild Jerusalem prayerfully, depending on the Lord to bring his plans to fruition (Neh. 1:4–11; 2:4). His example was followed by others around him (Neh. 4:9). He had a healthy sense of his own inadequacy and God's adequacy. As he planned to protect the city against God's enemies he reminded the people: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome" (Neh. 4:10–17).

3. Nehemiah Had Faith in God's Sovereignty

Nehemiah trusted God's sovereign control of history. Nehemiah respected God's providential authority structure in the common grace order. He knew that ultimately God controls the "powers that be" since they are, wittingly or unwittingly, his "ministers," as Paul teaches in Romans 13:1–7.

4. Nehemiah Trusted God's Word and Worship

Nehemiah called God's people to return to the Mosaic covenant. In Nehemiah 8, Ezra read the law at the Feast of Tabernacles and the people repented and renewed their commitment to the LORD and his covenant. This was the first such renewal since Joshua's day. Covenant renewal looks forward to the new covenant. Meanwhile, Nehemiah promoted the means of grace by restor-

ing true worship according the Mosaic regulations (Neh. 9:1ff), so the people "made confession and worshiped the LORD their God" (v. 3b). Their worship was heartfelt: "they cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God" (v. 4b). Repenting of idolatry, they acknowledged their covenant LORD as the Creator and only true God: "You are the LORD, you alone" (v. 6).

Nehemiah's Covenant Practice

5. Nehemiah Was Wise and Careful in His Decision-Making and Communications

Nehemiah was wise and thoughtful in decision-making, unlike Moses, who was hasty in defending God's people in murdering an Egyptian. God sent Moses for Shepherd training in the wilderness for forty years. He learned patience and covenantal deliberation.

Nehemiah understood the need to consult wise counselors, so, he worked with a group of trusted leaders, not independently. As Proverbs teaches, "in an abundance of counselors there is safety. . . . victory" (Prov. 11:14, 24:6).

But Nehemiah was careful not to reveal his plans until he could identify trustworthy people. He did not broadcast his plans to everyone, but was wise in his communications. Early on, only the king knew of his plans in Jerusalem. He wanted to survey the situation prior to making his plans known to the Jerusalem leaders (Neh. 2:11–16).

Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. . . . And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work. Then I said to them . . . (Neh. 2:11, 16–17a).

Later he took the same approach regarding the problem of usury mentioned above: "I took counsel with myself" (v. 7a).

On every session confidentiality and unanimity are essential in order to preserve the peace and unity of the church (Eph. 4:1–6). In Acts 15 an

important issue was debated by the church leaders at the Jerusalem Council; after debate the decision was supported by all.

6. Nehemiah Made Definite Plans Prayerfully

Prayer is the most fundamental exercise of faith. Nehemiah knew that he needed to use this essential means of grace to rebuild the City of God. But this did not preclude planning. He planned prayerfully. But he never wavered in his God-given purpose. He was not hasty in making his plans or presenting them to the king. Once prayerfully planned, he was deliberate and unwavering in his execution. He knew how to organize God's people to achieve godly plans. Human planning and God's purposes work together in Scripture: "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. . . . Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established. . . . The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Prov. 16:1, 3, 9).

7. Nehemiah Faced Opposition with Spiritual Weapons

Nehemiah's determination can only be explained because, like Paul, he employed spiritual weapons, understanding that his God-given enterprise involved spiritual warfare. "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

So, Nehemiah was willing to risk his life in seeking the king's aid and in facing down the enemies of the kingdom.

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel. . . . But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against

the king?" Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." (Neh. 2:10, 19–20)

And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes." (Neh. 4:14)

Nehemiah was not intimidated by the threats of these enemies of the kingdom (Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem). He did not give in to the counsel of fear and the opposition of the enemy. He responded to their intimidating letters: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" (Neh. 6:3).

Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind." For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands. (Neh. 6:8–9)

Nehemiah was unflustered by leaks (Neh. 6:1) and false accusations that he was seeking to be king, usurping the authority of King Artaxerxes.

What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king? . . . And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, "There is a king in Judah." And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together." (Neh. 2:19, 6:7)

Nehemiah responded affirming God's power to rebuild and a wise assessment of the nature of their plot:

Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." . . . Then I sent

to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” (Neh. 2:20, 6:8)

He dealt firmly and gently with internal complaints (5:1–14). The rich had caused some Jewish debtors to sell children into slavery; to sell possession; and take out equity loans to pay their debts. Nehemiah confronted the rich with God’s law (Neh. 5:6–13). He was not afraid to deal with those who were divisive or sinful. This was also Paul’s approach and it should be ours.

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Rom. 16:17–20)

Nehemiah promoted godly discipline (Neh. 13:1ff; cf. Gal. 6:1, Matt. 18).

He did not quit under pressure. This is a great temptation in the midst of spiritual battle. But, he persevered as a good soldier of Christ as Paul did: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” (2 Tim. 2:3–4, Neh. 4:1ff.). Only the employment of spiritual weapons and the wisdom of God’s Word and patient, pleading prayer will keep leaders from quitting.

8. Nehemiah Trusted God to Provide All of the Resources for His Plan

Nehemiah trusted God to provide all human and material means to fulfill his plans. Prayer and faith are not incompatible with ordinary means. He used wise planning in gathering people and materials (Neh. 2:7–8); and in taking precautions

in all of his activities, such as the king’s escort (2:9), and guards (4:22–23, 7:3) on the walls.

9. Nehemiah Made His Trust in God and His Plans Known in All of His Communications

Nehemiah took responsibility for God’s declared mission: “what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem” (Neh. 2:12b). So, in the new covenant, leaders must take responsibility for the mission of the whole church: local, presbytery, national, international. We must take to heart God’s revealed will in the commission of our risen Lord to us (Matt. 28:16–20).

10. Nehemiah Exemplified Jesus Christ as a Self-Sacrificing Leader of God’s People

Nehemiah pleaded his own righteousness. “Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people” (Neh. 5:19). Thank God that Nehemiah and we are united to an obedient Christ, whose active obedience has been imputed to us: “just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works” (Rom. 4:6). He recognized that God would achieve the ultimate victory over sin and death: “by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col. 2:14–15).

Nehemiah possessed Christ-like character as set forth in the qualifications/qualities of the elder (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1). Nehemiah entered into the experience of his Savior, suffering for the sake of God’s people. Paul says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24). Nehemiah denied himself by refusing remuneration and spending his own allowance (Neh. 5:14–19).

He faced the enemy with calm trust in God’s deliverance and determination to fulfill his plan. Ultimate deliverance was always within Nehemiah’s purview: “For he must reign until he has put

all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25–26).

Only Christ can keep the promises of covenant obedience in Nehemiah 8.

For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:19–21)

Nehemiah as a type of Christ restored the ruins of people and places, of bodies and souls. He helped the poor, and called for reformation and discipline in Sabbath keeping, mixed marriages, and tithing.

Nehemiah trusted Jesus Christ as Savior. “Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love” (Neh. 13:22). He knew himself to be a sinner in need of God’s grace. He confessed his own sin in verse 1:6 “Even I and my father’s house have sinned.” God’s tenaciously faithful love was his ultimate hope (Neh. 1:5, 9:17, 32, 13:22).

Nehemiah faithfully used God-provided resources, worked with God’s people in community, and trusted God to bless every activity in his service. As leaders and officers in the church of Jesus Christ we are called to be kingdom builders, waging spiritual warfare to build the church with trust in God, prayerfully, wisely, and with moral integrity. ©

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✦ Servant Truth

The Theology of *Frankenstein*: Deism vs. Biblical Theism

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2018¹

by James Gidley

Mary Shelley used a quotation from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as the epigraph on the title page of *Frankenstein*:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?²

These lines, spoken by Adam after his fall into sin, imply that *Frankenstein* will be about Creation and Fall. In this article, I will focus only on Creation. The evidence supports the thesis that *Frankenstein* is an essentially Deistic creation story, in deliberate contrast to the biblical creation narrative as reflected in *Paradise Lost*.

An Abiding Misconception

In assessing the creation theology of *Frankenstein*, it is first necessary to clear away an abiding misconception. It is commonly assumed that Frankenstein created his creature by stitching together parts of various dead bodies. Further, it is commonly assumed that these parts were relatively large, consisting of entire organs or organ systems: a head (or a brain), legs, arms, torso, etc.

The novel itself, however, while never explicit about the process of creation, strongly suggests that Frankenstein did not use dead organs and organ systems, but manufactured tissues and organs from more basic constituents.

There are at least four strands of evidence for this view. First, Frankenstein says:

I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in the process of time (although now I found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.³

He contrasts “lifeless matter” to that which was once alive and had died. And how could he reanimate dead body parts any more than a whole dead body? Of course, Frankenstein’s disclaimer here is essential to the plot, since an ability to raise the dead would have allowed him to reverse the murders perpetrated by his creature. But this disclaimer has a much deeper meaning, as I shall argue later.

Second, Shelley’s own description of the genesis of *Frankenstein* suggests a contrast between the resuscitation of a corpse and the manufacture of a creature. In her preface to the 1831 edition of the novel, she says:

Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth.⁴

Note that in the latter process the component parts are not taken from dead bodies but *manufactured*. That Shelley intended the latter process to describe what her Victor accomplished is plain from her later statement, where her “pale student of unhallowed arts [kneels] beside the thing he had put together.”⁵

Third, Frankenstein states:

3 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, J. Paul Hunter, ed., Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1996), 32.

4 *Ibid.*, 171–72.

5 *Ibid.*, 172.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=722&issue_id=141.

2 Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, book X, lines 743–45.

As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved . . . to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large.⁶

If he were stitching together *large* parts of dead bodies, why would the minuteness of the parts be a hindrance? If he were stitching together parts of dead bodies, how could he make them add up to a figure “eight feet in height, and proportionably large?” He must either find gigantic corpses or add extra body parts, neither of which is plausible within the novel’s setting.

Fourth, when Frankenstein sets out to manufacture the female creature, he relocates to the remote and sparsely populated Orkney Islands, where it would be impossible to find a sufficient supply of recently deceased bodies to stitch together. In describing his preparations for his second act of creation, Frankenstein says:

I packed my chemical instruments, and the materials I had collected, resolving to finish my labors in some obscure nook in the northern highlands of Scotland.⁷

Shelley would understand, perhaps better than we do today, how impossible it would be to conceal the smell of rotting flesh. She does not, therefore, suggest that Frankenstein packed up dead bodies, but inanimate *materials* for manufacture. Another detail of importance is that he packed *chemical* instruments. Frankenstein had been educated as a chemist, not as a medical doctor, though he does later study physiology.⁸ His mentor, M. Waldman, first impressed Frankenstein with a lecture on the history of chemistry.⁹ Frankenstein states, after his illness following the creation of his creature, “the sight of a *chemical* instrument would renew all the agony of my nervous symptoms.”¹⁰ His creation is a triumph of chemistry, not medi-

cine or biology, suggesting that Shelley conceived of life in purely materialistic terms.

The primary evidence for the common view that Frankenstein stitched together the parts of dead bodies is twofold. First, his studies led him to investigate the process of decay in corpses in churchyards and charnel houses: “To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death.”¹¹ But these activities were not for the purpose of manufacturing the creature, but for the purpose of understanding death and life:

After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and of life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.¹²

While the concluding statement in the above quotation comes close to stating that he could reanimate the dead, it must be read in connection with his explicit disavowal of such an ability a page or two later, which I have already cited.

Second, when Frankenstein describes his materials of creation, he does refer to dead bodies:

I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame.¹³

Even here, however, he does not explicitly say that these collected bones were raw materials for manufacture, though it seems to be implied. He may have taken them for further study, or as models to be copied in other materials. When he does explicitly mention materials, he says, “The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials.”¹⁴ Taking this evidence in the context of the narrative as a whole, the most that seems to be implied is that Frankenstein used some tissues from dead bodies, animal as well as human, for the construction of his creature.

So what? How does this absorption with the

6 Ibid., 31–32.

7 Ibid., 109–10.

8 Ibid., 30.

9 Ibid., 27.

10 Ibid., 42, emphasis added.

11 Ibid., 30.

12 Ibid., 30.

13 Ibid., 32.

14 Ibid.

technology of Frankenstein's achievement bear on the meaning of the novel? In particular, how does it bear on the theological themes of the novel? In a nutshell, *Frankenstein* is a creation story, not a resurrection story.

The possibility of raising the dead, even if only dead body parts, introduces the biblical theme of resurrection. There can be no resurrection theme in the novel without at least implicitly introducing the theme of redemption, and there is no redemption in *Frankenstein*. This is the deeper meaning of Frankenstein's inability to reanimate corpses.

If this analysis is well-founded, then a general conclusion about the theology of *Frankenstein* emerges. The main themes of biblical religion are creation, fall, redemption, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life or eternal punishment. The theology of *Frankenstein* truncates this to creation, fall, and judgment. As a corollary, there can be no Christ figure in *Frankenstein*. If there is no redemption, there can be no Redeemer.

Frankenstein's Creation Doctrine

If *Frankenstein* is a creation story, what sort of creation doctrine does it espouse? Frankensteinian creation exhibits a number of contrasts with the biblical narrative.

First, the biblical creation of man was a consultative act: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26). At least since Augustine, Christian theologians have regarded this statement as revealing the Trinitarian nature of God. There is but one God, but he exists as three persons. God is never alone, for the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three persons who are cognizant of each other and can converse and commune with each other. In contrast, Frankenstein's act of creation is the act of a solitary individual.

Second, the Triune God creates man male and female: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). The Triune God has within himself both unity of essence and diversity of persons. This provides the basis for

creating a humanity with a diversity of individuals, particularly the diversity of male and female, and yet a unity or community. In contrast, Victor Frankenstein as a solitary creator can only create a solitary creature.

Third, the complementary account of creation in Genesis 2 adds to the contrast with *Frankenstein*: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). Man is made of two parts, the dust of the ground and the breath of life. The two parts proceed from two realms: the dust from the earth, the breath of God from heaven. The biblical creation account is inescapably dualistic. In contrast, Frankenstein creates entirely from the earthly realm. His "spark of life" is just another earthly element or force, probably electricity. Biblical man is soul and body; Frankenstein's creature—indeed Frankenstein himself—is only body.

Frankenstein thus raises the issue of vitalism vs. materialism, and he comes down strongly on the side of materialism. Marilyn Butler, literary critic and scholar of the Romantic movement, outlines the contemporary debate over vitalism between Dr. John Abernethy and Dr. William Lawrence, Percy Shelley's physician and a champion of materialism. Abernethy, though putatively a vitalist, described the vital force as "some 'subtle mobile, invisible substance,' analogous on the one hand to soul and on the other to electricity."¹⁵ Lawrence astutely rejoined that "'subtle matter is still matter; and if this fine stuff can possess vital properties, surely they may reside in a fabric which differs only in being a little coarser."¹⁶ To describe the vital force as a material substance or physical force is to concede the whole debate to the materialist position.

Butler goes astray, however, in identifying Victor Frankenstein as a bungling vitalist like Abernethy.¹⁷ If Frankenstein were a vitalist, he

15 Butler, Marilyn, "Frankenstein and Radical Science," in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, J. Paul Hunter, ed., Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1996), 304.

16 Ibid., 306.

17 Ibid., 307.

vindicates vitalism by his success in animating his creature. But in fact, Frankenstein is a materialist, for he succeeds in creating his creature entirely with natural materials and with the aid of natural forces alone. His long nights in the churchyards and charnel houses were not prayer vigils, mystical ecstasies, or supernatural revelations; they were times of painstaking scientific observation. If the debates between Abernethy and Lawrence affected Mary Shelley, it seems more likely that they impressed upon her the idea that materialism was the only possible scientific alternative. *Frankenstein* is after all the tale of the modern Prometheus. In 1818, to be a modern scientist was to be a materialist.

Thus, *Frankenstein* stands in resolute contrast to the biblical account of the creation of man. In Shelley's crucial account of the creation,¹⁸ she does not even mention the soul, whether to affirm or deny its existence. Whenever the word "soul" does appear in the novel, it can be readily understood as a reference to the inner feelings, and carries no ontological weight.¹⁹ No one in the novel ever warns Frankenstein that his soul is in danger or that he might lose his soul. I conclude that Shelley meant us to understand that Frankenstein himself did not have a soul, in the orthodox, Christian, ontological sense. And this is not because Victor is especially monstrous or demonic. In *Frankenstein*, humans simply do not have souls in the ontological sense; such a view is ancient myth, unbecoming of the modern, scientific Prometheus.

A fourth contrast between Frankensteinian creation and the biblical narrative arises because the inbreathing of the breath of life in Genesis 2:7 speaks not only of the soul, the origin of the soul in the transcendent realm, and the contrast with the earthly realm which gives rise to the body, but also of the possibility and reality of communion between the Creator and the creature. God's breathing in the breath of life is an intimate act

18 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 34–38.

19 For example, Frankenstein says of the glacier of Montanvert: "It had then filled me with a sublime ecstasy that gave wings to the soul, and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy." Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 64.

of communion, a loving impartation of his own image. Therefore, Adam and Eve are not left to themselves, but God speaks with them. In both Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Old and New Testaments, the same word is used for "breath" and "spirit." Therefore, the breathing of the breath of life into Adam suggests the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God creates the intimate communion between God and man.

Victor Frankenstein, in contrast, never has any communion with his creature. He lacks a spirit to impart to his creature. He never seeks his creature to speak to him; the creature must find him and can never be anything but an enemy to him. The creature himself recognizes the contrast with the biblical creation account as mediated through Milton:

Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone.²⁰

Fifth, the theme of communion is worked out in the biblical narrative in the creation of Eve. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" (Gen. 2:18). God himself recognizes Adam's need and takes steps to meet it. In contrast, Frankenstein's creature must accost him and demand a female companion, and Frankenstein, after reluctantly agreeing to create one, destroys the female creature before animating her.

In the biblical account, God creates Eve from Adam's rib (Gen. 2:21–22); this insures that she will be a suitable companion for him, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23), as none of the other creatures of God could have been (Gen. 2:20). In contrast, Frankenstein cannot form a female creature from his male creature's rib, or

20 Ibid., 87.

from any other part of him. His process of manufacture leaves open the possibility that every creature he makes will be *sui generis*, a new species, unrelated to any previous or subsequent creature he might have made or could make. Therefore, his forebodings about the creation of the female are not sophisms but plausible:

she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn in disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species.²¹

Though he speaks of her as of the same species as his male creature, his forebodings are founded on a deeper recognition that she might not be. But whether one species or two, he cannot affect communion between his creatures. In contrast to the God of the Bible, Frankenstein cannot create diversity in unity, or unity in diversity.

Frankenstein, thus, does not fit the historic, orthodox, Christian view of creation. What does it fit? Deism.

Deism is a form of Christian heresy that purports to replace the supernaturalistic outlook of the Bible with a naturalistic view. For example, Deism requires no supernatural revelation. The Bible can only state truths that are derivable independently by the use of human reason, providing at best only a short-cut for lesser or lazier minds.

The Deistic view of creation is illustrated by the classic example of the pocket watch. The universe is like an exquisite watch that the Creator has made and wound up. It is now unnecessary for the Creator to have anything further to do with the universe, since he has wisely created it to run well without him.

21 *Ibid.*, 114.

Deism fits Frankenstein's creative act closely. He creates, and then abandons his creature. His creature is able to discern what he needs to know about his creator without any revelation. He learns to speak, not because he is spoken to, but because he overhears others speaking. He learns from books, not because they were taught to him, but because he stumbles upon them accidentally. That is, he discovers language, it is not imparted to him.²²

Thus, Shelley's depiction of the creature's self-education, early regarded as the most original and effective part of the work, is a concrete depiction of the Deistic view of the universe. The creature's self-education is thus a microcosm of the education of mankind over countless generations; "it can be read as an allegorical account of the progress of mankind over aeons of time."²³

There is a clinching argument that Shelley is writing a Deistic account of creation, which arises from the story of how the creature learns language. From his hovel on the side of a cottage, the creature observes the family in the cottage speaking to each other. Thus, he begins to acquire the rudiments of language. His progress accelerates when an Arabian woman joins the family, and they assist her to learn French by reading to her from Constantin Volney, *The Ruins of Empires*. Volney describes the creation of mankind as follows:

Formed naked in body and in mind, man at first found himself thrown as it were by chance, on a rough and savage land: an orphan, abandoned by the unknown power which had produced him.²⁴

The description fits the Deistic paradigm exactly: a creature abandoned by his Creator. The description also fits the experience of Frankenstein's

22 For a fuller discussion of the creature's education and its implications, see the author's "The Education of Monster," *Ordained Servant* 21, June-July 2012, http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=314.

23 Butler, "Frankenstein and Radical Science," in Shelley, *Frankenstein* 309.

24 Constantin F. Volney, *The Ruins, or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires: and The Law of Nature* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 22.

creature exactly. The parallel between the two accounts is reinforced by the context in both Volney and Shelley. The story of creation in *Frankenstein* is the story of mankind's creation—and it is a Deistic story.

Volney was writing from an Enlightenment perspective to defend the French Revolution. His account of creation is deliberately designed as a polemic against orthodox Christian teaching of any stripe. Deism was the “Religion of Reason,” fit for the philosophers of the Age of Reason.

It is deeply significant that Mary Shelley chose to model her creation story after a Deistic paradigm. The horror of the story is the horror of unbridled human reason let loose in the world. ☺

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Servant Word

What Is Faithful Preaching?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
April 2018¹

by Alan D. Strange

What is faithful preaching? Faithful preaching is an exposition of God's Word, opened up in all its gospel glory, drawing us into the drama of redemption in which all of God's people meaningfully participate. To be faithful in this task means that we evangelize and disciple as our Lord commanded us to do in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). In faithful preaching, we explain and apply God's Word so that we have, and grow in, a true knowledge of God and of ourselves. We do this as we attend to the message, method, and manner of faithful preaching.

The Message of Faithful Preaching

The message communicated in faithful preaching is the saving work of God in Jesus Christ in and by the power of the Holy Spirit (all of grace), the necessity of which is seen in the law that we cannot fulfill after Adam's (and our) fall into sin. Accompanying this good news of the saving work of God in Christ, and in some ways preceding it, is the bad news that the law brings: we are sinners in Adam and by our own desires, and, as such, are under the wrath and curse of God and are headed for hell. The good news of the gospel is that God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son on a divine rescue mission

in which Christ both fulfills the whole law for us (in his active obedience) and pays for our lawlessness (in his passive obedience, finding its focus at the cross).

The message then is that God has sent Jesus to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Salvation lies not in anything that we are or have or do, because we are totally depraved, due to the Fall. Salvation lies rather in resting upon and receiving what Christ has done for us. The righteousness that God requires for us to receive his approval and blessing, to be accepted into his presence, is something that we can no longer produce (after the Fall). Jesus, instead, has won such for us by his perfect obedience so that the righteousness that God requires he freely gives by imputation to us, received by faith alone.

The message of the gospel then centers on the salvation that is ours in Christ and how we should then live, not so as to win the favor of God, but because we have the favor of God in Christ. Salvation is truly a free gift that we spend our lives as Christians responding to in grateful obedience. While it is not warranted to separate this message from the call to believe and repent—this preaching of the person and work of Christ is the object of our faith and the reason for our repentance—it is appropriate to distinguish the good news of who Christ is and what he's done for us from our response to it, as Paul does, for example, in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4. The gospel, above all, is simply the old story of Jesus and his love, of God doing for us in Christ everything necessary, from first to last, for our everlasting salvation. That “salvation is of the Lord” is something that Jonah discovered in the belly of the fish, and this truth is central in all our gospel proclamation, in all our preaching of the Word of God.

The Method of Faithful Preaching

There are a number of methods that have been employed throughout the history of the church in preaching the Word. Even as there are various types of biblical texts (historical narrative, didactic, parnetic, poetic, prophetic, etc.), such

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=686&issue_id=135.

genres influencing our approach to them, there are also several ways in which one might approach the preaching task.² Sermon types are often categorized along the lines of homily, topical, analytical, synthetic, narrative, reconstructive, etc. In the ancient church, preachers like John Chrysostom used what came to be called the “homily” method, a verse-by-verse exposition, which packed significant rhetorical skill and oratorical power.³

Other methods developed over time: topical (e.g., one preaches on “marriage” and finds suitable biblical material for this topic); analytical (akin to the homily, but usually a short text, minutely considered, with much other Scripture brought in; Charles Spurgeon is a prime exemplar of this approach); synthetic (similar to topical but does more justice to the unique message of the text); narrative (often inductive, following the story-line of the text); and textual reconstructive. This last sermon type aims self-consciously to combine the strengths of the analytical (expository text, like a commentary) and synthetic (drawing a single theme from a text). I think that the textual reconstructive method is a most appropriate one, especially useful for congregants to understand the theme of the passage and to remember it and the points developed in support of it.

Each of the approaches have their merits as well as their drawbacks. The most important thing is that one’s preaching be properly redemptive-historical (Christ-centered), expositing the drama of redemption in its original horizon and applying it in that of its hearers. Even as it is important to recognize Christ as present in some sense in all bibli-

2 Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) deals deftly with how modern expositors might best treat different text types. These particular text and sermon types herein cited derive from an unpublished syllabus of P. Y. DeJong, used in the course “Sermon Types,” and additional syllabus materials and notes by Cornelis P. Venema and Alan D. Strange (at Mid-America Reformed Seminary).

3 See, Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 2: *The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 171–74, for an introduction to Chrysostom. This entire seven volume set (completed in 2010) is incomparable and to be consulted for the history of preaching from biblical times down to our own.

cal texts, whatever their types, it is also important to preach Christ always, whatever sermon type one employs.⁴ In any case, it is the Word preached that the Lord is pleased to use, especially to convert sinners and grow saints (WLC 155). The message of salvation in Christ alone must come through in every sermon, whatever method is employed to convey that.

The Manner of Faithful Preaching

The manner, the lengthiest of our considerations, means how the preacher does it, especially as seen in WLC 159, which asks, “How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?” The answer:

They that are called to labor in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.⁵

The Necessity of Sound Doctrine

Those who are called to preach (WLC 158), or, as WLC 159 has it, “labor in the ministry of the Word,” are to preach “sound doctrine.” We live in days when many in the pews demand comfort and encouragement from the pulpit. Indeed, the preacher ought to provide in his exposition of the Word comfort and encouragement. Preachers,

4 Many books well-argue the imperative to preach Christ. I will cite three that I find especially helpful: Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); and Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007).

5 The rest of this article derives from and is summary of pp. 212–25 of Alan D. Strange, “Comments on the Centrality of Preaching in the Westminster Standards,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 185–238, which also may be accessed here: <http://www.midamerica.edu/uploads/files/pdf/journal/10-strange.pdf>.

however, are to preach God's message, not merely what man might wish to hear. And in a confessional church—like the Reformed and Presbyterian churches—we do not have to guess what sound doctrine is. Sound doctrine is defined in the first place by that large body of doctrine which the church agrees upon and is embodied in its confessions and catechisms.

Adverbs of Preaching: Diligently

The minister of the Word, WLC 159 further tells us, is to preach sound doctrine “diligently.” To be diligent in the preaching of the Word over the course of many years is no mean task and requires the constant assistance of the Holy Spirit. Preachers must be diligent in their preparation, starting with their own hearts: the preacher is to be prepared in his heart, coming before God's Word in profound humility, and to be prepared by God's gifting of him, naturally and spiritually. The preacher should think through his text quite carefully, working in the Hebrew or Greek, checking the commentaries—both ancient and modern—and making sure that his interpretation is in line with the confessions and with Reformed commentators. This does not mean that the preacher may not in his exposition or application of a text depart from the main body of commentators (assuming that he does not teach unsound doctrine, that is, anything contrary to the confessions). He ought, therefore, to know the history of the interpretation of his text and depart only because he is convinced that faithfulness demands it, never for the sake of novelty or to be thought clever. The preacher is to be faithful to the text that he is preaching and diligent in preaching that text, understanding that each particular text is in the Bible for a reason.

The preacher is to preach “in season and out of season” (WLC 159). The import of this dictum of Paul to Timothy (in 2 Tim. 4:2) bears upon both the preacher and the hearer, I believe. The preacher is to preach whether he feels like it or not, and the preacher is to preach whether the congregation feels like hearing him or not. How many parishioners have gone to church not desirous of hearing a sermon but have gone away blessed by the preach-

ing of the Word and glad that they had come? Ministers, too, do not always feel like preaching. Perhaps they are not prepared in heart to preach or have not adequately prepared their exposition and application. Nonetheless, when it is time to preach, preachers must do so in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

The exhortation to be ready to stand (the meaning of “be instant” KJV) makes it clear that when a man is called to preach, he is to continue to preach in all the seasons of his life and in all the seasons of the lives of the congregations which he serves. This does not mean that the preacher never needs a vacation, but it does mean that God by his Spirit so equips his preachers that, as they have recourse to him who is the fountain of life, they need not fear “burnout.” It is only as the preacher uses all the means of grace himself and grows in intimacy and communion with his God that he can ever hope to serve in season and out of season.

Adverbs of Preaching: Plainly

WLC 159 also says that the preacher is to preach “plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.” To speak plainly is often exceedingly difficult. The preacher, especially in preaching year in and year out to the same people, is often sorely tempted to be clever, brilliant, artful so as to hold the interest of the people and often, frankly, from a desire to be seen as a profound preacher. The simple truth, though, is that the profoundest preachers are the plainest. Preachers need not fear boring their people because it is the Spirit who makes effectual the Word, and he is pleased to do it not through the artistry of the preacher but through the plainness of his exposition. Paul contrasted his preaching to that of the “disputer of this age,” who speaks merely according to the “wisdom of this world.” Speaking, in Paul's day, was a much-celebrated art, and few things were desired more than the rhetorical skill of a Cicero and the oratorical skill of a Demosthenes. But the task of the preacher is not to impress his hearer but to edify his hearer. This requires humility because able, learned men in the ministry often have the

skill to dazzle the crowd with their speaking abilities, demonstrating the breadth and depth of their learning.

Clear, direct preaching is necessary lest anyone mistake that eternal matters are not at issue. I would argue that the preacher has best done his job, not when hearers are amazed with the cleverness of someone who could get what the preacher got from the text, but when folk have the sense that they too, given sufficient time and gifts, could have come up with the same truths from the text. The best preacher gives valuable insight into the text, to be sure, but not “insight” that the auditor after having heard it has to struggle to see in the text. The best preacher is the preacher who imparts the maximum amount of understanding as to the text under consideration.

The original Directory for Worship (1645) says that “the doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms” and that the preacher is to avoid “obscure terms of art” so that the “meanest may understand.”⁶ The Standards, in other words, are concerned that the preacher preach as clearly as he can so that as many within the congregation will understand him. This does not mean that the preacher may not use theological terms like “justification” or “propitiation”—though he must clearly explain them when he does use them—but that he should make clear the doctrines under consideration and not obfuscate them through the use of technical terminology.

Adverbs of Preaching: Faithfully

The preacher, according to WLC 159, is also to preach “faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God.” There is here, I think, an integral connection between faithful preaching and the whole counsel of God. Paul, in his farewell address to the presbytery in Ephesus, boldly claims, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” The faithful preacher then is one who takes pain to teach the whole of what the Bible teaches and not merely his pet doctrines. Faithful preach-

ing entails a systematic development of God’s Word and not the preacher riding his favorite hobby horse, even if that hobby horse happens to be doctrines particularly dear to the Reformed. However he does it, the true biblical preacher is bound to preach the whole counsel of God.

Adverbs of Preaching: Wisely

Continuing with the fourth of the six adverbs of WLC 159 (“diligently, plainly, faithfully, wisely, zealously, sincerely”), preachers are to preach “wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers.” How does a preacher apply himself to the necessities of his hearers? A preacher applies himself to the necessities of his hearers by an insightful and accurate understanding of the lives that his people lead. No preacher knows his people perfectly. The most sensitive and genuinely intuitive preacher knows something of what his people are really like, but he does not know their hearts. Nevertheless, that the preacher does not know the hearts of his hearers as only the Lord does, does not relieve him of the responsibility of knowing the real needs of his hearers as accurately as possible.

Unbelievers live their whole lives, of course, in self-deceit, pursuing idols that will never satisfy their needy hearts, longing for what only God himself can fill within them. Believers, too, though, are perpetually plagued with heart idols that they must see, recognize, and be instructed to mortify. Often believers do not clearly see their heart idols (because they are self-deceived) and may resist when such idols are pointed out to them. For the preacher to do his job in a heart-searching manner, he must delineate sin in its various guises to his hearers so that the Spirit may make application. This honesty about one’s true needs must begin with the preacher, though, if it is to bear conviction in the hearts of his auditors. A preacher must know the depths of his own depravity and be well-acquainted with his characteristic flesh and the sin that clings so closely. This brings us back to the point that humility is a *sine qua non* for the would-be effectual preacher. True self-awareness and continual repentance for one’s characteristic

⁶ The Directory for the Publick Worship of God, (Inverness, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1981), 379–81.

flesh are constitutive of biblical humility.

It is common, especially for a young preacher in getting to know his flock, to see their shortcomings and to put more guilt on them than they are able to bear, particularly at any one time. This is why great pastoral wisdom is needed not only in truly understanding the necessities of one's hearers but also the capacities of one's hearers, as WLC 159 reminds us. We are preachers not of a legalistic works-righteousness but of God's grace, which grace should suffuse all that we preach, even our very calls to duty. Obedience, preachers of grace must always remember, flows from our continual renewal in the redeeming love of God. It takes ministerial wisdom to recognize the real needs of the various members of the flock and then to minister to them the grace of God so that the flock does not despair in the face of demonstrated shortcomings but continues to draw near to Christ. The preacher must rebuke and reprove as needed, but even then he must take care not to break the bruised reed or to quench the smoking flax.

Adverbs of Preaching: Zealously

WLC 159 further instructs those who preach to do so "zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people." Preachers who preach without zeal betray the very message that they preach. If the gospel message is good news, indeed, the best news that a poor sin-enslaved humanity could ever hope for—and it is—then the one who preaches it ought to be consumed with it and burning with an insatiable passion to deliver this message to needy, dying men. It is one of the tell-tale marks of the need for revival and reformation when the pulpit is held by men who lack conviction and do not burn with the zeal of the Lord but languish with the lukewarm Laodiceans. Sadly, much of what has passed for Reformed preaching has lacked zeal and has lulled whole congregations into dangerous somnolence. It is little wonder that a number of churchgoers these days lack zeal and commitment: they witness so little of it in the pulpits of our churches.

The very words of WLC 159 reveal the cause of our lack of zeal: simply put, we preach-

ers lack—greatly lack—in love for God and his people. The preacher must spend time before God seeking that heart of love and then carrying out the duties of love if he is to be zealous in his preaching. The reason that we fail in love to God and to our people is because we fail to see how much God loves us. It is only when we preachers have frequent recourse to the fires of God's love that our cold hearts are melted and made hearts that burn with a zeal to preach the Word of God above everything else in this world. We only love others as we ought when we love him as we ought—and we always fall far short of this in this life—and we love God as we ought only when we see that he first loved us. Preachers need then to see the love of God for them as a love that comes to them even in the face of their sin, because the diamond of God's love never appears lovelier than when set against the dark, background of our sin.

Adverbs of Preaching: Sincerely

We come finally to the last of the six adverbs in WLC 159 that describe how the Word of God is to be preached by those who are called thereunto: "sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation." That the Word is to be preached sincerely means with one's heart, from one's heart, not for fame, fortune, or the praise of people, but for the glory of God and the good of the hearers. We live in an era in which the media are filled with religious hucksters and charlatans. The sincerity of some well-known preachers is, at best, questionable. Preachers have in every age had among their numbers those who have fallen into gross sin and become public scandals. While we may seem to have more clerical immorality now than in times past, it may simply be that such ministerial sins as there are receive more widespread media coverage. The preacher who would be effective in the pulpit must be a man who lives what he preaches, albeit imperfectly, out of the pulpit. He must be a man known by those closest to him as a man of principle and courage. He must be the kind of man described in Psalm 1—not so much in his own judgment, but in the judgment of those who know him best and who themselves are competent

to render such judgment.

In summary, then, faithful preaching entails the delivery of the message of the Bible, using a method that best sets Christ before the hearers, calling all to faith, repentance, and new obedience, with the preacher employing a manner most suited to win the hearers with the aim of securing their conversion, edification, and salvation. Faithful preaching is undertaken in the power of the Holy Spirit, without which the preacher has no unction and the Word no power to persuade and change the hearer. May God grant to us a reformation in the preaching and the hearing of the Word of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints and the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ©

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Servant Church

Barriers to Ecumenicity

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2018¹

by Alan D. Strange

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

Perhaps we should say that, first of all, in response to the ecumenical imperative of Scripture, we cannot fail to achieve unity ultimately. Psalm 133 extols the unity of the brethren, and our Lord in John 17 prays that we be one. We have in view at this conference² the practical outworking of that in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Can these two bodies thus fail to be one, at least spiritually and essentially (if not in outward organization)? Even though we may be

divided into different denominations, all of those who have been born again of God's Spirit and who partake of the appointed means of grace are by such united in heart and purpose, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism (as Paul says in the beginning of his great unity chapter—Ephesians 4). So, in one very real sense the OPC and the URCNA are one and cannot fail to be one.

That we are, in some sense, already one, does not mean that we ought not to strive to be one, doing all that we can to achieve such oneness even in outward organization. In other words, God calls us in everything to be who we already are in Christ. When our Lord prays (again in John 17) that we be sanctified, we may rightly ask: Can we fail to be sanctified, at least in a measure? Surely, we ought to strive to be sanctified with all that is within us, but in the midst of our struggles, it is encouraging to know that, though we routinely experience much failure, we will be sanctified. Even so, as a part of that, it is truly encouraging to know that what we lack in unity will one day be remedied. We will be perfected, in our unity with Christ and each other, even as we will be made perfectly holy in our sanctification when we are glorified.

The church, though she may be frustrated in her ecumenical efforts, shall be one outwardly (visibly), in glory, and is one already with respect to the invisible church. True ecumenicity is not a foreign work to Christianity but the essence of who we are: all true believers are one in him across all denominational lines. That such denominational lines exist often *discourages* us, but that there is a unity of all true believers in spite of and across these lines should *encourage* us to continue to labor together to come outwardly to a greater realization of what is true of us all inwardly: we belong to Jesus Christ and are in union with him and with each other as members of his mystical body.

I am tasked to talk about barriers to ecumenicity between the OPC and URCNA (and thus thrown into the unenviable role of being an ecclesiastical bad cop to the good cop of other speakers here!), looking first at things that keep us apart, both illegitimately and legitimately. And then,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=667&issue_id=131.

2 This article is based on a lecture given at the United Reformed Churches in North America Classis Eastern US, "Semper Reformanda Conference" on October 14, 2014.

secondly, we will briefly examine how to overcome these barriers.

There are, we must admit, things that keep the URCNA and OPC apart. I think that it's helpful to conceive of what keeps us apart under the rubric of illegitimate and legitimate barriers: the former stemming from our sin, and the latter from our sincerely different understandings of matters ecclesiastical. Let's start with the illegitimate barriers to our relationship with each other. Simply put, both the OPC and the URCNA fail to love God and each other as we ought: we both suffer the effects of remaining sin, personally and corporately. Remaining sin contributes to our ongoing struggle with failing to love God and each other. We fail to love God personally—sad to say, but who among us loves him as we ought? Is it any wonder, then, that we fail to love each other as we ought? This failure, as just noted, is not only personal but has a larger dimension as well. There is a corporate failure to love each other at the local, regional, and denominational/federational levels.

Here's the remedy. We need to repent. We have in view here not only John 17, but the whole epistle of 1 John, which challenges us: how can we love God whom we don't see when we don't love our brother whom we do see? Failure to love our brother (we are to love our neighbor, even our enemy; think of the parable of the good Samaritan), especially those who are our fellow Reformed and Presbyterian brothers (the nearest to us, next to our own communions), is a sad and singular failure. We should love all fellow Christians and those most particularly with whom we share the same biblical and theological convictions.

We fail in this when we are apathetic or even hostile to our brothers and sisters in fellow Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Perhaps this manifests itself by our simply not caring to reach out beyond our own communions (why should I love or care for Christians outside my congregation or federation/denomination?) or by having a party spirit (the OPC is simply the best and the rest of you are seriously lacking). In short, pride, complacency, or even sometimes envy, cause us to lack in love toward each other.

We often simply fail to take seriously the ecumenical imperative of John 17. Things are fine, and we need not strive for more unity than we already have as believers in Christ. This is especially true as to the visible church—it's easy to downplay the significance of such visible unity. But we witness to the world that we love Jesus and each other as we have more and more unity in the visible church. One of the great strengths of the early church was its clear witness to a watching world: "see how they love one another," was the common refrain of unbelievers observing Christians. Should we not strive for this in our own times?

Over the course of decades, that witness of the ancient church so impressed the pagan world that when the Decian persecution came in AD 250, the old canard going back to Nero's time that the Christians were "haters of mankind" received no credence. This is because everyone saw how loving the Christians were, even to non-Christians, whether helping them in need or saving discarded babies (the call for such being seen in the *Didache* and elsewhere). What a witness true ecumenicity can be when we show that we love each other with a love that spills over into all the population about us. The more that we are one, the more loving we are to one another as well as to the strangers among us. Hearts of love for each other manifest good to the household of faith and to all with whom we interact.

Visible unity glorifies God and edifies us. Think about this: how long can we afford to remain apart in the current cultural climate? Because we have unity in the invisible church, as I mentioned above, perhaps we are complacent about it in the visible church. But we should be no more complacent about this than we are about our sanctification. Our Lord's call to sanctification merits our serious regular attention. So, does his call to unity in the body: it merits our most strenuous efforts. Even as we need to strive more to love those within our own communions, we must strive to love each other across denominational and federational lines. This reflects more properly what Christ's body in this world is. If we choose not to concern ourselves with organizational unity,

we fail to take seriously our Lord's imperative to manifest the unity that we truly have in him.

There are also legitimate barriers to our full visible unity in the body of Christ. These are ones that arise from biblical convictions that necessitate our working in separate organizational structures. For example, Baptists have different sacramental and polity views than us that, even though they may be soteriological Calvinists, necessitate our working in different denominations. Do we in the URCNA and OPC have such doctrinal and polity differences? Well, we don't have the same doctrinal standards: the URCNA has the Three Forms of Unity (TFU): the Belgic Confession (BC), Heidelberg Catechism (HC), and Canons of Dort; the OPC has the Westminster Standards (WS): the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (WLC, WSC). Additionally, we have different church orders that have some strikingly different features.

Any doctrinal differences among us then would stem primarily from confessional divergences. Do we have such differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards? The URCNA adopted the following back in 1997:

That synod appoint a committee to study the Confessional Standards, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory of Worship of the OPC with regard to the similarities and differences between them and the Confessional Standards and Church Order of the URCNA in order to work toward ecclesiastical unity with the OPC. . . . (*Minutes of Synod 1997*, 10–11).

Such a study was done, and here is what was concluded with respect to doctrinal differences, perceived and real:

1. Covenant of Works (WCF 7.2, 19.1; WLC 30 and 97)
2. Regenerated Infants (WCF 10.3)
3. Assurance and Faith (WCF 14.3, 18.1–4 / WLC 80–81 / HC LD 7)
4. The Fourth Commandment (WCF 21.7–8 / WLC 117 / HC LD 38)

5. Marriage and Permissible Divorce (WCF 24.1–6)

6. Visible and Invisible Church (WCF 25.1–4)

7. Power to Depose (WCF 31.1–4)

8. Prayer as a Means of Grace (WLC 154 / WSC 88)

9. True and False Churches Easily Distinguished (BC 29)

With respect to item 1, the Westminster Standards speak of the covenant made with man in his innocence as a covenant of works. The TFU have no such comparable designation, as this was a subsequent development in covenant theology. The question here is one of continuity between Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While some, like Karl Barth, have seen a great discontinuity between Calvin and the Calvinists (a popular way of putting this perceived disjunction), many others, like Richard Muller, have argued that while there are different emphases that develop in covenant theology, there is essential continuity between the TFU and the WS.

With respect to items 4 and 8 (the Fourth Commandment and Prayer as a Means of Grace), there is likely more accord in practice here than in precept (as is true with respect to liturgy and catechizing). While it is true that the Westminster Standards have a more robust doctrine of the Sabbath than do the Three Forms of Unity, it is the case, observationally, that the churches in the URCNA have functionally at least as high if not a higher history of practice with respect to the Lord's Day. The OPC, in general, would be happy to have 50 percent of those in morning service return for the evening service. It is customary in the URCNA to have a higher percentage than half of those who worshiped in the morning service returning for the evening service. Similarly, in terms of practice, it is not the case that prayer, ordinarily, plays a lesser part in secret, private, and public worship in the URCNA than in the OPC. Members of the URCNA, as well as churches in the URCNA, appear to be as prayerful as those in the OPC; all could use improvement here, but it is

not the case that the URCNA is demonstrably less prayerful than the OPC.

With respect to the other items, they can all be handily addressed. Several of these—points 1, 2, 5, and 6—simply are not addressed in the Three Forms of Unity. It is not that the Westminster Standards contradict the Three Forms of Unity at these points; the TFU have no specific treatment of “elect infants dying in infancy” (something arguably a bit different than what Dort 1.17 affirms); divorce; the visible and invisible church distinction; or the covenant of works. With respect to point 3, different matters are in view in the two traditions. The assurance of which the Three Forms of Unity speak is a contention made over against Rome’s assertion that assurance is an extraordinary work; Lord’s Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism sees assurance as that which ordinarily accompanies faith. The Westminster Standards treatment of assurance distinguishes faith and assurance, seeing the latter as a reflective act on the former and not of the essence of saving faith itself. The TFU then is speaking of assurance as the conviction accompanying assent and trust, whereas Westminster sees assurance as a reflection on the activity of faith, a believing that one believes.

Point 7 (on the power to depose) points to what will ultimately play out as a polity difference between the OPC and the URC and thus is a real difference, but more of a polity than doctrinal nature. Point 9 (on the true and false church) in the Belgic Confession is written at a point in time when the differences between true and false churches was plainer and a matter of kind not degree. After the proliferation of Protestant groups in the seventeenth century, the matter is less clear: Westminster Confession of Faith 25 is written after the development of Protestantism when it has become the case that the issue is no longer as clearly true or false church *simpliciter* but a matter of degree among a greater number of churches—“more or less pure.”

Even the historic difference with respect to confessional adherence (the OPC permitting scruples and the URCNA maintaining a “stricter” *quia* subscription) is not often what some have

made of it (stricter vs. looser subscription is not the same debate as the *quia/quatenus* debate)³ and reflects a lack of discernment regarding the fuller nature of the WS over against the TFU. What I mean is this: the Westminster Standards contain a more developed doctrinal statement than do the continental standards, with the former addressing matters like lawful oaths and vows (chapter 22) and marriage and divorce (chapter 24).

Permitting scruples about such wide-ranging confessional statements is not the same as permitting such with respect to documents that are more narrowly focused on soteriology and ecclesiology, as are the Three Forms of Unity. There is little that one could conceive of taking exception to in the continental standards, given their narrower explication of soteriological and ecclesiological Calvinism. All this is to say, that our continental brothers need not be nervous over the OPC permitting a few scruples, usually in areas in which their documents are silent or sparse (one thinks particularly here of matters related to the Sabbath as well as those addressed immediately above).

The differences, then, between the OPC and the URCNA, while doctrinal in some measure, are not thought to be chiefly such: the doctrinal differences tend to be matters of emphasis and the OPC coming from a more developed doctrinal statement in the Westminster Standards of the mid-seventeenth century than the earlier Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and Canons of Dort (1618). It is agreed that the most significant differences between the two churches lie in the area of polity. Polity differences are not of the same order as doctrinal differences—we Presbyterians reflect this sometimes in referring to our doctrinal statements as secondary and our polity documents as tertiary (with the Scriptures being irreformable and thus primary). Consequently, one

3 Some Reformed churches made a similar distinction as the Lutherans between those who subscribed to the confessions “because” (*quia*) they were expressive of the Word of God and those who subscribed “insofar as” (*quatenus*) they were expressive of the Word of God, cf. Peter Lillback, “Confessional Subscription Among the Sixteenth Century Reformers,” in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, David W. Hall, ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 33–66.

might surmise that where such differences exist among the OPC and URC, it is better that they are only polity and not doctrinal differences.

And this is true: differences that can be more readily composed (as one might assume with tertiary rather than secondary differences), should present less of a barrier to union between the two bodies than divergences of a more substantive sort. Such polity differences as there are, however, must not be pooh-poohed as if they are unimportant and don't really matter. As important as one's doctrinal standards are, one's polity rules are also important, because they function on the level of day-to-day operations of the organization, arguably more so than the doctrinal standards do, strictly speaking. Polity differences (between the two church orders), then, form the more significant barrier between the two bodies at the level of routine functioning. They are not as daunting as doctrinal differences; they are, however, given their regular role in the life of the bodies, important. If the two bodies are to grow closer, polity differences will need to be honestly admitted and carefully engaged in seeking to make ecumenical progress.

The URCNA Committee that examined all the differences between the URCNA and OPC looked, as I've noted, not only at the doctrinal differences but also polity differences. They looked at the polity differences under the rubrics provided for in the URCNA *Church Order*.⁴ The URCNA *Church Order* is considerably thinner than the OPC *Book of Church Order*. The former contains all the matters pertaining to government, worship, and discipline in the sixty-six articles of its *Church Order*, whereas in the OPC such matters are spread across three distinct books: the Form of Government, the Directory for the Public Worship of God, and the Book of Discipline. Since I am basing this talk in no small measure on that report, here is the organization of the URCNA *Church Order* articles and the order of treatment by the committee of the polity differences:

Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1–15)

Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 16–36)
Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 37–50)

Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 51–66)

With respect to the first section on Ecclesiastical Offices, both the URCNA and the OPC conceive of three offices: minister, (ruling) elder, and deacon, though the two bodies understand them somewhat differently. Both churches see ministers as those who pastor, chiefly, and who administer the Word and sacraments. Additionally, the OPC (in keeping with historic Presbyterianism) views the office of minister as also comprehending that of ruling elder and deacon. In other words, ministers are elders and deacons as well, elders are also deacons, and deacons are deacons. The URCNA conceives of the offices rather more distinctly, so that a minister is not also a church governor (elder). Additionally, in the URCNA the local consistory, of which the minister is a member, has jurisdiction over him, instead of the presbytery, in which body a minister has his membership in the OPC. In the URCNA, the consistory examines and qualifies men (with the assistance of the classis); in the OPC, the presbytery is the examining and qualifying body for ministers and ministerial candidates.

It may also be noted, with respect to the ministerial office, that the OPC, as does historic Presbyterianism and other continental Reformed churches, sees the office of minister as expressing itself not only in the pastorate but in other ways. The OPC church order explicitly describes the teacher and the evangelist, with the former having warrant to teach in the local congregation, as well as in the theological seminary and other educational institutions, and the latter operating in the mission context, including publishing, editing and the like. Formally speaking, it is unclear that the URCNA Church Order provides for any exercise of the office of minister other than that which is carried out in the specific office of pastor of a local church.

With respect to the second section on Ecclesiastical Assemblies, it is also noted that both bodies recognize three assemblies: local (consistory and

⁴ Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America, Seventh Edition, AD 2016.

session), regional (classis and presbytery), and national (synod and general assembly). Here, too, however, there is a somewhat different conception of the matter. The URCNA believes that the consistory is the only continuing judicatory, whereas the OPC believes that the presbytery is an ongoing judicatory as well, and that the “broader” judicatories are not merely functional in securing the peace, purity, and unity of the church, but are necessary for good order. The comparison of these first thirty-six articles are made with the OPC Form of Government.

With respect to the third section on Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks, the committee particularly rejoiced in the similarity (especially with the OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God):

Your committee gratefully acknowledges the striking uniformity between the OPC and the URCNA in their common desire to promote God-glorifying, Word-centered worship, to administer the sacraments in an understandable and edifying manner according to the teaching of Scripture, and to conduct the affairs of the local church decently and in good order.⁵

This commendation notwithstanding, the committee did note some differences with the OPC, chiefly: the URCNA mandates catechetical preaching; when the sacraments are observed in the URCNA, one of the provided liturgical forms must be used; and all mission work takes place under the oversight of a local consistory. One might also interpret the URCNA church order to require that the singing of psalms predominate in public worship.

With respect to the fourth section on Ecclesiastical Discipline, the URCNA is sparse when compared with the OPC’s more robust Book of Discipline. That is the main difference between the two: while both require due process (because it is equitable and God’s Word requires it), the OPC spells out in considerably more detail what comprises and protects that process. There are also

more matters treated in the OPC Book of Discipline than in these Church Order Articles of the URNCA. The main difference between the two bodies continues to be the membership and jurisdiction of the minister, which is in the consistory for the URCNA and the presbytery for the OPC.

How to overcome these perceived and real barriers is the challenge that now confronts us. Most of the real differences between the URCNA and OPC, as we’ve noted, are polity differences, not doctrinal differences. This is a judgment that not a few share, and it is reflected in the cited report.

This is quite ecumenically encouraging. Granted the polity differences are nothing to sneeze at as they impact daily operations. But it’s far harder to amend our secondary doctrinal standards than it is our tertiary polity standards. And rightly so. We only need simple majorities to amend our polity standards where we need (multiple) super majorities to amend our doctrinal ones. We should thus think hard about how we can move closer toward one another in terms of polity.

As we turn our attention to composing our polity differences, we need to determine that we will not die on every polity hill. We need to take a long hard look at our differences and see how we could each benefit from the other. Perhaps there’s a lot to learn from each other, e.g., Presbyterians could do with having every minister tied to some church (whatever he’s doing; in addition to being a member of presbytery) and the Reformed might acknowledge that there is a real church in addition to and beyond the local congregation (classis being seen more like presbytery; for this latter, I especially refer you to my paper to this classis in October 2010 on what a healthy classis looks like and how it operates).

In short, it’s going to take compromise. We will need to make a candid assessment of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Let the denominational/federational committees and each presbytery/classis assess their own strengths and weaknesses relative to the other. And the strengths and weaknesses of the other. In other words, let’s look at ourselves and each other and say, “What

⁵ URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report, referred to the churches by Synod Escondido of the United Reformed Churches in North America, 2001.

can I learn?” “What are we doing better than you, and what are you doing better than we are?” If we don’t think that can properly be done, how are we heeding Philippians 2:1–4?

And let’s value the ecumenical imperative enough to sit down and see if we can hash out our differences, building on some already remarkable examples of doing so, namely, the Psalter-Hymnal Committee. In our work together on that project, it is broadly accurate to say that the OPC yielded to the URC a lot on the Psalms (and learned a great deal from our Psalm-singing brethren in the URC; such Psalm-singing was very much a part of historic Presbyterianism but lost to us in more recent times); and that the URC yielded to the OPC a lot on the hymns (particularly in the rich hymnody that has developed among us in the post-Reformation era).

May the Lord unite us ever in closer fellowship and working relationship, even to the point of union, as the OPC and the CRC came close to doing in the mid-1960s. What kept us from coming together back then was doctrinal, namely, liberalism in the CRC with respect to several matters. Can’t we pick up there, now that we’ve gotten rid of the real differences—the doctrinal differences that kept the OPC and CRC apart? Even then, it wasn’t that the CRC had confessional doctrinal differences with the OPC, having the same confessions and catechism that the URCNA now has. Rather, because of its embrace of liberalism, the CRC was moving in a different direction and away from confessional fidelity.

Those old issues don’t exist in that same way with the URC (you’re not pursuing women in office, lacking clarity on homosexuality, denying the historicity of Genesis 1–11, etc.). The URC really represents all the folk in the CRC that we were so wanting to unite with back then. Why can’t we work together *now* toward what ultimately eluded us *then*? Need it continue always to elude us? I don’t think so. It will take a lot of work, but so does everything worth doing (like sanctification).

The Christian life, rightly lived, involves much hard work, not done in our own strength, however, but as enabled by the Spirit, who empow-

ers us to work out, even in fear and trembling, that which God has worked in us to will and to do his good pleasure. I challenge us all—URCNA and OPC—to think of what this sanctification on a corporate level might mean. Surely, no small part of such corporate sanctification would include a greater realization among us all of the ecumenical imperative. Yes, there are barriers to it, as there are to personal sanctification, and it will not happen automatically and without much prayer and labor. *Sic ora et labor* (“so pray and work”). Let us commit to working out together the unity that we already enjoy as believers in Christ, for our edification and his glorification. Amen. ©

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✦ Servant Mission

The Growth of the Church in Acts: Descriptive and Eschatological

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
May 2018¹

by Stephen D. Doe

It is not possible to assess realistically the extent to which the evangelism conducted by the early Church was successful. For one thing, we have no means of comparing their “successes” with their “failures.” For another, God’s assessment of success may differ greatly from our own: and . . . evangelism is supremely God’s work in the lives of men, in which he enlists human co-operation. Nor is it possible to read off from a study of evangelism in antiquity the answers to our contemporary problems in communicating the gospel.²

—Michael Green

The book of Acts is replete with references to the growth of the early church, as we’ll see,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=691&issue_id=136.

2 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 274.

but are there things that confessionally Reformed churches can learn in facing “our contemporary problems,” in faithfully addressing our times and our culture? In his seminal book on evangelism in the early church, Michael Green is too modest about the guidance he and others draw from study of the early church. I want us to see how the early church in the book of Acts instructs us in eschatological hope of growth, and by eschatological, I mean thinking about the end to which God is bringing the church and all of creation.

It is common, when interpreting the Bible, to distinguish between Scripture passages being descriptive and those that are prescriptive; that is, between passages that tell us things (albeit with God-inspired purpose) and passages that tell us what to do. Believing that all Scripture is “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17), we have to say that *all* of Acts, including the descriptions of the growth of the church, are profitable to us. When we read about the growth of the church in Acts, it seems far removed from the experience many in the church today can even imagine. When was the last time that we thought of the Lord adding to *our* church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47)? Conversions may be happening on a larger scale in the Global South, but surely not here, not in our day, we think. If a study of the growth of the church in Acts seems to be slightly discouraging, we need to think differently. A better way to think about the emphasis on church growth in Acts is to use the biblical theological category of eschatology. That is to say, Luke’s descriptions of the growth of the early church are basically eschatological in their descriptive purpose, but also prescriptively encouraging as we see how God is fulfilling his covenant promises to enlarge the number of people he is saving.

The Language of Acts

Luke emphasizes the growth of the apostolic church in a number of ways.

One way is giving actual numbers:

- 1:15 – 120 names (ὀνομάτων, *onomatōn*)
- 2:41, – 3,000 souls (ψυχὰι, *psuchai*)
- 4:4, – 5,000 men (ἀνδρῶν, *andrōn*)³

A second way is Luke’s so-called “summary” statements:⁴

- 2:41, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”
- 2:47b, “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”
- 5:14, “And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”
- 6:7, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”
- 9:31, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”
- 12:24, “But the word of God increased and multiplied.”
- 16:5, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”
- 19:20, “So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

Yet a third way to see Luke’s emphasis is to note the words he uses. Many studies have noted that Luke has a varied, vivid, and evocative vocabulary in describing God’s work in the apostolic church.⁵ There are two words in particular worth

3 Is there an echo here of Luke’s language in his gospel in describing the feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9:14, *andres pentakis-chilioi* versus *andron chiliades pente*)?

4 See Dennis E. Johnson’s helpful and concise summary in *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), 9–10.

5 Some of the works which gather the lexical data are Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976); Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981);

considering:⁶

1. Multitude, to multiply (πλήθος, *plethōs*; πληθύνω, *plēthynō*):

- 4:32, “Now the *full number* of those who believed . . .”
- 5:14, “And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, *multitudes* of both men and women . . .”
- 6:1, “Now in these days when the disciples *were increasing in number* . . .”
- 6:7, “and the number of the disciples *multiplied* greatly in Jerusalem . . .”
- 9:31, “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it [the church] *multiplied*.”
- 12:24, “But the word of God increased and *multiplied*.”
- 14:1, Paul and Barnabas “spoke in such a way that a *great number* of both Jews and Greeks believed.”
- 17:4, “And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a *great many* of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.”

2. To increase (αὐξάνω, *auxánō*):⁷

Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970); John Mark Hicks, “Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 8 (Spring 1997), 17–34. A different version was given as a lecture before The Evangelical Theological Society 47th Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, November 1995 entitled “Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts: The Role of Pragmatism, Reason and Rhetoric” (available online at <http://johnmarkhicks.com/70-2/>); Craig S. Keener, “The Plausibility of Luke’s Growth Figures in Acts 2:41; 4:4; 21:20” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 140–63; Timothy Keller, “Reformed Church Growth. Part One: The Principles of Church Growth” *Presbyterian Network*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (December 1988): 3–14; Thom Rainer, “Church Growth and Evangelism in the Book of Acts.” *Criswell Theological Review* 5.1 (1990): 57–68; Allison A. Trites, “Church Growth in the Book of Acts” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:578 (April 88): 162–174.

6 Others include “many” (ἱκανός, *hikanos*), Acts 11:24, 14:21; “increase” (περισσεύω, *perisseuō*), 16:5; “many” (πολύς, *polus*), 4:4, 6:7, 9:42, 11:21, 14:1, 17:4, 12, 18:8, 10; “added” (προστίθημι, *prostithēmi*), 2:41, 47, 5:14, 11:24; “number” (ἀριθμός, *arithmos*), 4:4, 6:7, 11:21, 16:5; “received” (δέχομαι, *dechomai*), 8:14; “turned” (ἐπιστρέφω, *epistrephō*), 9:35, 11:21; “followed” (ἀκολουθεῖω, *akolouthēō*), 13:43; “were made disciples” (μαθητεύω, *matheteuō*), 14:21; “joined” (προσκληρώω, *prosklēroō*), 17:4.

7 See Acts 13:49 “And the word of the Lord was spreading

- 6:7, “And the word of God *continued to increase* . . .”
- 12:24, “But the word of God *increased and multiplied*.”
- 19:20, “So the word of the Lord *continued to increase* and prevail mightily.”

There are several points to draw from these and other passages in Acts in understanding the focus Luke gives to the growth of the early church.

First, Luke uses covenantal language, particularly from the book of Genesis.⁸ Both “increase” and “multiply” were familiar to readers of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.⁹ The LXX, as it is known, pairs these two words (αὐξάνω, *auxánō* and πληθύνω, *plēthýnō*) in many passages in Genesis 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4. God commands the birds of the heavens and the sea creatures to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22), and God repeats that command following the flood in 8:17. God creates man and woman and commands them to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” (Gen. 1:28); he repeats the command to Noah and his sons in 9:1, 7. Abraham receives the promise that Ishmael will be blessed, and God will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly (Gen. 17:20). Isaac blesses his departing son, Jacob, with these promissory words in Genesis 28:3; God reinforces that blessing in Genesis 35:11, saying, “A nation and a company of nations shall come from your own body”; and Jacob himself repeats this to Joseph’s sons in Genesis 48:4. Finally, God begins the fulfillment of his covenant promise in Egypt (Gen. 47:27), something which Moses carefully notes in Exodus 1:7, “But the people of Israel were fruit-

(διεφέρετο, *diaphereto*) throughout the whole region.”

8 See especially Harvie Conn, “God’s Plan for Church Growth: An Overview,” in *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 1–20; and John Mark Hicks’s “Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts,” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 8 (Spring 1997): 17–34.

9 “Increase” or “be fruitful” is the translation of the Hebrew פָּרָה *parah*. “Multiply” is the translation of the Hebrew רָבָה *rabah*.

ful and increased greatly and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them” to the dread of the Egyptians (Exod. 1:12).¹⁰ When Luke wants to describe what God was doing in the early church he draws on Old Testament language of covenant promise and command, “increase and multiply.” The growth of the apostolic church was a continuation and partial fulfillment of God’s pattern of blessing his people, a foretaste of the coming great day of the Lord (Rev. 7:9).

Second, growth is associated with the Word of God. Particularly striking is the language that the Word of God grew (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). As Dennis Johnson puts it, “Luke uses the metaphor of organic growth to express both the expansion of the Word’s sphere of influence and the vitality of the message itself.”¹¹ The Word of God was not some mysterious, disembodied divine manifestation but rather the ongoing, embodied announcement of the gospel of Jesus Christ by believers, which God used in the conversion and maturing of others. In other words, the church grows as God’s people faithfully declared the Word of God. Peter preached the crucified and resurrected Christ, and the church grows (2:40–41, see 4:4). In Acts 6:7 the appointment of the seven meant that the apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (6:4), which led to growth (6:7).¹² In 12:24 the increasing power of the verbal witness of the church followed upon the demonstration of the deliverance of Peter from prison and the judgment of God on Herod. In a similar way, the word of the Lord continued to increase in Ephesus after God brought conviction of idolatry (19:19–20). Paul and Barnabas preached the Word of God in Iconium and Derby, and the church grew (14:1, 21). Many of the Corinthians listened

10 See Leviticus 26:9 for God’s promise repeated during the wilderness wanderings. In Jeremiah 3:16 and 23:3 the two words appear together in a Messianic context.

11 Johnson, *Message of Acts*, 15n16. See Calvin on Acts 6:7 and 19:20, John Calvin, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Henry Beveridge, ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), vol. 1, 239; vol. 2, 221–22.

12 We should not think that only the apostles spoke the Word, as Acts 8:4 reminds us.

to Paul and became believers (18:8).¹³ The Word of God was central to the growth of the church from the beginning as believers were devoted to it (2:42). A fledgling church, without worldly power, had the greatest possible power, the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16–17). The Word of the kingdom, to put it another way, has enormous growth potential (see, e.g., Matt. 13:23, 31–33).

Third, the growth of the church cut across all boundaries in fulfillment of Christ's command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20), beginning with Jerusalem (Acts 1:8, see Luke 24:47). The church grew in Jerusalem (4:32; 5:14; 6:1, 7); in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (8:5; 9:31, 35, 42); in Antioch (11:19–26); in Iconium (14:1); and in Thessalonica (17:4); even to the future church in Ethiopia (8:26–39), as Christ's promise began to be seen in fulfillment. And in light of Paul's words in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ Jesus there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female," Luke notes that women as well as men believed (4:32; 8:12; 17:4, 12), and that Romans like Cornelius (10–11), and Greeks as well as Jews (14:1), believed. The church began to represent all the nations as a new, redeemed humanity was being brought together by the power of God. The eschatological character of this is clear when we think of it as prefiguring the eschatological glory of Revelation 7:9.¹⁴ That great day of glory is the culmination of God's promise to Abraham that he would bless the nations through Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true heir of God's promises to Abraham (Gal. 3:16; see Gen. 12:2; 17:4–6; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

Fourth, it is the church that grows. In the gospels Christ often spoke about the kingdom of God or of heaven. He came preaching the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14–15), and in his parables Jesus spoke of the growth of the kingdom (e.g. Matt.

13:19, 23, 31–33, etc.). In the book of Acts the kingdom (*βασιλεία*, *basileia*) is mentioned eight times. Before his ascension Christ spoke of the kingdom (1:3). Then Philip preached the good news of the kingdom and of Jesus to the Samaritans (8:12), and Paul and Barnabas warned that it is through many tribulations we entered the kingdom of God (14:22). In the synagogue in Ephesus, Paul reasoned about the kingdom of God (19:8; see 20:25). And the book of Acts closes with Paul, in Rome, proclaiming the kingdom of God and Jesus from the Old Testament (28:23, 31). But proclamation of the kingdom of God was to the end that people might be added to the church as the most visible manifestation of the rule of God in the world. When people were added, they were added to the Lord (5:1; 11:24) but that meant they were added to the church (2:41, 47) where the Lord reigns over his people.¹⁵ As Tim Keller writes, "The church is an agent of the kingdom because it spreads the word of the kingdom. . . . The church is spreading the kingdom, but it is not the kingdom."¹⁶

How Does Luke's "Theology of Growth" Help Us Today?

It is enough to read of God's work in growing the church in the book of Acts and be filled with praise for his sovereign display of power. And Luke does put God's sovereign, electing work before us repeatedly.

- 2:47, "And *the Lord* added to their number day by day those who were being saved."
- 11:18, "And they glorified God, saying "Then to the Gentiles also *God has granted repentance that leads to life.*"

¹³ See also 8:14; 13:16–44; 19:10; 28:31a.

¹⁴ "After this I looked and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes."

¹⁵ This is very directly seen in the work of the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent to rule by filling believers (2:4; 4:8; 6:5; 7:55; 10:44; 11:15, 24; 13:9, 52; 19:6), and guiding in everything from discipline (5:1–9), to sending out Paul and Barnabas (13:2–4), to dealing with crisis (15:28), to missionary strategy (8:29, 39; 16:6–7), to choosing leaders (20:28).

¹⁶ Timothy Keller, "Reformed Church Growth. Part One: The Principles of Church Growth," *Presbyterian Network* 1, no. 4 (December 1988): 4.

- 14:27, “And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared *all that God had done with them*, and *how he had opened a door of faith* to the Gentiles.”
- 13:48, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many *as were appointed to eternal life believed*.”
- 16:14, “The *Lord opened her* [Lydia’s] *heart to pay attention* to what was said by Paul.”
- 18:9–10, “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, *for I have many in this city who are my people*.’”

The Apostle Paul testified to the sovereign hand of God in his own labors to grow the church when he says in 1 Corinthians 3:5–7 that “only God . . . gives the growth.”¹⁷ The opponents of the gospel in Thessalonica said that Paul and Silas were men “who have turned the world upside down” (17:6), but in reality it was the word of the sovereign God who did it all, to echo Martin Luther.¹⁸ God’s Word cannot be ineffective but must accomplish that for which he gave it (Isa. 55:10–11¹⁹). The early church had utter confidence in the power of the gospel it proclaimed (Rom. 1:16–17; e.g. Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:4–10). Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17), so the apostolic church was constantly testifying to the mighty deeds of God (Acts 2:11). The growth of the church in Acts, as the Word was declared, should strengthen our resolve to faithfully and without fear, be churches where the Word of God is boldly announced in the pulpits and in the course of our individual

17 The verb he uses in vv. 6 & 7 is ἀξάνω, *auxánō*.

18 “I did nothing; the Word did everything.” Sermon preached in Wittenberg, March 10, 1522, Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed. W. R. Russell & T. F. Lull, eds., (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 292–94.

19 Note God’s use of growth imagery here.

lives and witness. Surely in a time like our own, where to be boldly biblical is to invite criticism and even attack, the apostolic church reminds us that true growth cannot take place apart from a firm confidence in God’s sovereign grace working through his Word and Spirit.

There is a second thing we can draw from a study of Acts. The modern church growth movement has pointed out the importance of prayer in the early church.²⁰ To this we should agree. Reading through Acts, we find some twenty-five times when prayer or praying are noted by Luke.²¹ The church prays (1:14, 24; 2:42; 12:5, 12; 13:3), the apostles pray (6:4, 6), Peter and John pray (8:15), Saul/Paul prays (9:11; 20:3; 22:17; 28:8), Cornelius prays (10:4, 30–31), Paul and Barnabas pray (14:23), Paul and Silas pray (16:13, 25). Perhaps the most vital description of prayer and, humanly speaking, its consequences, is found in 4:31,

And when they had prayed [δεηθέντων, *deēthentōn*], the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Believers prayed for courage and boldness and the Lord answered their prayers. Luke immediately tells us about the fruitful life of the church (4:32–37). Today many people lament the so-called “death of the prayer meeting.” It seems increasingly difficult to get people to come to anything beyond a service (or services) on Sunday. Yet if we connect the growth of the apostolic church with the focused prayer of God’s people, we should be earnest in not only teaching the importance of prayer, but creatively seeking ways to get people to pray, and to pray with others if

20 Notably Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); and Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993).

21 The verb προσεύχομαι *proseúchomai* occurs sixteen times and the noun προσευχή *proseuchē* occurs nine times. The verb δέομαι *deomai* is sometimes translated “pray” and sometimes “beseech” and occurs seven times but only twice in reference to praying to God (4:31, 10:2).

all possible. The lack of prayer for God to work, as only he can, is a danger sign that we should heed.²²

These two emphases, on the Word of God and prayer with dependence on a God who is sovereign, come together in passages like:

- 2 Thessalonians 3:1, “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed (τρέγη, *trechē* – to run or progress freely or advance rapidly) ahead and be honored.”
- 2 Timothy 2:8–9, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound (δέδεται, *dedetai*)!”

This confidence of the apostle Paul came because of his awareness of God’s power and purposes. He had seen it in his own life and ministry. We remember, however, that the Scriptures certainly make clear that because God sovereignly works, the application of principles, even sound biblical principles, will not necessarily give us the outcome *we* desire. This has been one of the weaknesses of the church growth movement. God is not captive to our desires, even when they are good desires. Since God is sovereign, he had his own purposes in Noah’s faithful preaching which yielded a harvest of only his own family (2 Peter 2:5), or in God’s telling Ezekiel to preach though he would not be listened to (Ezek. 3:7–9; 33:32; see Isa. 6:9–10; Mark 4:11–12, etc.). While it was faithful, the church in Philadelphia had but little power, yet Christ had set before it an open door (Rev. 3:8) with the promise to keep it in the hour of trial (Rev. 3:10). This is an important lesson from the study of the growth of the church in the book of Acts: trust in God to work as he pleases. The disciples testified to the gospel of God’s saving grace with joyful and expectant hope because Jesus Christ had come, died for sinners, and been

22 The Westminster Standards give us much help in framing our prayers (WCF 21.4, WLC 178–196, see especially Q. 191 on the petition “Thy kingdom come.”

raised. They understood that the “last days” had come (Acts 2:17). The ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit gave them confidence and boldness that sometimes we seem to lack. This eschatological hope filled their writing:²³

- 1 Corinthians 15:45, “the last (ἔσχατος, *eschatos*) Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit.”
- Hebrews 1:1–2, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last (ἔσχατος, *eschatos*) days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”
- 1 Peter 1:3–8, “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last (ἔσχατος, *eschatos*) time.”
- 1 Peter 1:20, “He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last (ἔσχατος, *eschatos*) times for your sake.”

This is a great encouragement we can draw from looking at Acts: Christ has come, he has redeemed a people for God and is building his church (Matt. 16:18; see Eph. 2:21), and we are part of this great work. Christ’s kingdom will fill the earth (Dan. 2:44–45), and the church, as the visible manifestation of the rule of God, also is growing because of what Christ by his Word and Spirit is doing. While we may not see the numbers of conversions we desire in our particular part of God’s vineyard, still we can and must rejoice that the eschatological picture of growth which Luke sets before us is happening. We can preach and pray faithfully with expectation that the day of complete fulfillment is coming. The book of Acts is full of the promise that this is happening. As God says:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For

23 The last days also brought warning, see 2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18.

behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord shall arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isa. 60:1–3) ©

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Servant Witness

How to Reach Roman Catholics with the Gospel

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2018¹

by Matthew Cserhati

Roman Catholics make up the largest church denomination in the country, accounting for one-quarter of the whole US population, and their numbers are increasing. Many of us might have a lot of Roman Catholic friends or even relatives. However, Rome teaches another gospel than that found in the Bible. Thus, it is an increasingly important question as to how to reach the large number of Roman Catholics in our communities.

I am a former Roman Catholic, and I have studied Roman Catholicism in depth and have had discussions with many Roman Catholics. I have also taken part in street evangelization events where we entered into dialogue with Roman Catholics.

There are certain things we as Protestants share with Roman Catholics. For example, we both believe that Scriptures are the Word of God.² Furthermore, we also share concern over a number of societal issues, such as abortion, homosexuality,

and religious freedoms.

However, there are certain key issues, which separate us from them. Some of these are salvation, purgatory, the papacy, Mariology, and the mass. These numerous differences are so great that they make ecumenical union impossible with Rome. Let us remember the words of Amos 3:3: “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?” Thus, in order to be agreed, we must present the gospel to Roman Catholics in a manner which is loving but does not lose sight of the truth.

First, and most importantly, we must keep quoting Scripture. We must know our Bibles well, and also how to defend our views. Since Roman Catholicism relies heavily on human traditions,³ if we stick to the Scripture, then ultimately the truth will shine through. Also, we must be prepared to discuss the topic of *sola Scriptura*, since it is guaranteed that this issue will come up during discussion. This is a key factor in Protestant/Roman Catholic debates, since epistemology defines whether or not we accept certain truths or not. A good Bible verse that supports *sola Scriptura* is Acts 17:10–11:

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

While the Bereans readily accepted Paul’s teachings as a church authority, they still compared it to the sole highest authority, the Scriptures.

Second, we must remember that when we as Protestants speak with Roman Catholics, we might be perceived as antagonistic to their church, since it was Martin Luther who leveled a very heavy criticism at their church during the Reformation. Many Roman Catholics are defensive about what they perceive as multiple attacks on their church

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=676&issue_id=133.

2 R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together? A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 13–21.

3 James R. White, *Scripture Alone* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2004), 169–89.

from many different quarters in society. Therefore, we need to be willing to listen to what they have to say about their own religion and ask questions, and not wish to run them into the ground straight away or be overly offensive to them.

Third, I have found that it is rather easy to talk to Roman Catholics about the gospel, since the main issue during the Reformation was how to achieve salvation. This is a great concern for many devout Roman Catholics, and if we assure them that our goal is not to win an argument but to help them towards salvation, it will be much appreciated. Roman Catholics do not have assurance of faith; the greatest gift we can give them is to tell them that salvation is free, and of no cost to them.

Fourth, devout Roman Catholics prize intellectual discussion of religion, since their priests undergo rigorous intellectual training. Unfortunately, during church history Rome has so overemphasized the intellect, that they have introduced scores of humanistic traditions into their church. Therefore, it is useful to be familiar with Roman Catholic teaching, and to show by contrast that the gospel is logically consistent and biblical. Chick tracts, the cartoon-based tracts produced by Jack Chick until his death in 2006, are definitely not something we should use with Roman Catholics because they portray Roman Catholics in a derogatory manner and may be taken as an insult.

Lastly, and also quite importantly, we must pray for our Roman Catholic friends and family members. Although on the surface Rome may seem like a Christian church, its false doctrines and idolatry stifle the faith of many of its members. Also, since Roman Catholicism is a complete doctrinal system, it makes it that much harder to convince Roman Catholics of their errors and of the truth of the gospel. “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). ©

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The Reformed Faith and the Challenge of Islam

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2018¹

by John R. Muether

When the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was founded in 1936, there were few Islamic mosques in America. The first one was established only 21 years earlier in Biddeford, Maine. A century later, there are now over two thousand. One of the newest opened last fall just north of Orlando, Florida. The Masjid Al-Hayy is a 43,000-square-foot domed building with a 130-foot-tall minaret. The \$16 million building includes three million pounds of white marble from Greece. Its elaborately carved doors are made from Honduran mahogany, and Italian mosaic tiles grace the hallways. Thick silk carpets accommodate worshipers who kneel below custom-made chandeliers from Egypt in the prayer room.²

Ambitious construction plans are necessary to accommodate the sky-rocketing growth of Muslims in America, from 200,000 in 1950 to 3.5 million today (and more than doubling since 9/11). The number of Muslims will double again, by 2050, when Islam will become the second largest religion in the United States, surpassing Judaism. Orthodox Presbyterian ministers today serve in a very different world from the denomination's founders, and the very public face of American Islam is a reminder that it is not just a subject for foreign missionaries anymore. Orthodox Presbyterian pastors, elders, and deacons need to reckon with a basic understanding of Islamic faith and practice to minister effectively in America today. Ten years ago, in

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=679&issue_id=134.

2 Susan Jacobson. “New Mosque Highlights Growth of Muslim Community in Central Florida,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 10, 2017, <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/religion/religion-world/os-mosque-sanford-masjid-al-hajj-20171031-story.html>.

the pages of *Ordained Servant*, Dr. Bryan Estelle suggested ways in which the OPC should respond to the challenge of Islam.³ I wish to supplement Dr. Estelle’s helpful article by pointing out some strategies that are popular, but may be counterproductive and even a hindrance to faithful Christian witness to the Muslim world.

While many Christians perceive Islam as a relatively recent threat to the Christian West, this is a great misunderstanding. If the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I prompted a brief dormancy in Islam’s public face, the threat to the West was well established long before. The Reformers of the sixteenth century, for example, were keenly aware of the threat of the Turks on the eastern border of Europe. Protestants and Catholics, Popes and Emperors alike, were nervously looking at the eastern border of Europe, where Turks were making menacing threats. Even after the Turks were repelled at the gates of Vienna in 1529 the threat was not over. In 1541 Luther wrote his “Appeal for Prayer against the Turks,” in which he expressed the fear of imminent invasion by the Turks. This was a just chastisement of God for the sins of the German people, he wrote in a tone that was grim and gloomy, even while he regarded it as his pastoral duty to prepare Germans for a likely invasion.

To ignore centuries of Christian reflection on Islam is not only an exercise in historical myopia; more seriously, it is to cut ourselves off from the wisdom and insight of voices in our Reformed past. Few today have studied the Islamic world in a more sustained and systematic way than Samuel Zwemer (1867–1952). Zwemer was a pioneering Reformed missionary to Arabia and Egypt for twenty-eight years and later Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary.⁴ He earned the nickname, “Apostle to Islam” for his devotion for carrying the gospel of Christ to the Muslim world, even though

his labors witnessed only a small handful of converts to Christ. His devotion to the study of Islam included his thirty-five-year tenure as editor of *The Muslim World*. Zwemer urged that Christian workers devote themselves to the study of Islam:

Ignorance of the Koran, the traditions, the life of Mohammed, the Moslem conception of Christ, social beliefs and prejudices of Mohammedans, which are the result of their religion—ignorance of these is the chief difficulty in work for Moslems.”⁵ Toward the end of his life, Zwemer was fond of telling students that “only the Reformed faith can witness effectively to Islam.”⁶

Acknowledging the Diverse Expressions of Islam

One popular misconception today is to imagine Islam as a unified and monolithic religion. The Islamic world is remarkably diverse. How can diversity not characterize a religion of 1.6 billion adherents? For comparison’s sake, consider this diverse list of religious groups:

- Roman Catholics
- Unitarians
- Charismatics
- Seventh Day Adventists
- Mormons
- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Mainline Protestants
- Confessional Presbyterians

What do these all have in common? Precious little, we might imagine. But they share at least this much: all of them are lumped together as “Christian” by demographers of world religions. They and many others comprise the 2.1 billion who are numbered among the total world population of Christians. We might object to such broad-brush use of the term Christian; its vague description

3 Bryan D. Estelle, “How Should the Reformed Church Respond to Islam?” *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 48–54, http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=84&issue_id=27.

4 Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross: Selections from “the Apostle to Islam,”* ed. Roger S. Greenway (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002).

5 Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: an Essay on the Life, Character, and Teachings of Jesus Christ According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Fernier, 1912), 118.

6 I have never found this quote in print, but I was told this by John Hesselink, former President of Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI), who remembered Zwemer saying this frequently in addresses to college groups.

seems hardly useful.

But if we insist on distinguishing ourselves from others who claim the term Christian, we owe the same courtesy to the Muslim world. Most of us are at least aware of the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam. The two sects diverged soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad over who should succeed him. But that does not begin to account for the diversity in Islam. Muslims express their faith in many ways, including:

- Folk Islam
- Orthodox Islam
- Secular Muslims
- Ambivalent Muslims
- Mystics
- Fundamentalists
- Militant Fundamentalists

The last category consists of less than 7 percent of the world-wide Islamic population by informed estimates, but most Western Christians struggle to imagine any other form of Islam. Diversity of contemporary Islamic faith and practice serves to warn us of the danger of approaching this subject in simplistic or reductionistic terms. It is vital that we neither romanticize nor demonize the challenge of Islam. Islam is not inherently peaceful, and Islam is not inherently violent. Rather, Islam is complex in its diversity of expressions, and Christians must not let radical Islam radicalize their response.

How then ought we to regard the peaceful overtures from many quarters of the Muslim world? Samuel Zwemer did not hesitate to read these as signs of the work of the Holy Spirit among Muslims, and he attributed this to the Reformed doctrine of common grace:

Whatever be the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Islam, we know that for those in contact with Islam, as missionaries, every virtue these [pious Muslims] possess, every victory won, every thought of holiness, every deed of kindness, every ministry of love, is his alone. It is God's common grace that enabled them, as even

Calvin taught.⁷

Here Zwemer demonstrates that Calvinism can account for the diversity of Islam, both in its peaceful and violent expressions.

Abrogation: Muslim and Christian

When my students at Reformed Theological Seminary read sections of the Qur'an, they are surprised at several unusual features. Sometimes they encounter beautiful sections of sublime poetry such as the following:

God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous. (2:255)

If that vaguely resembles the Psalms, it is not coincidental. Islam considers the Torah, the Psalms, and parts of the Gospels as revelations from Allah. This is what Zwemer described as "borrowed elements" in the Qur'an. It is comprised of Jewish, Christian, and pagan sources (although the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament are regarded by Muslims as defective and corrupt versions of revelation).

There are parts of the Qur'an that seem to portray Muslims as the champions of religious liberty. "There is no compulsion in religion," we read in 2:256. On the other hand, there are so-called "sword verses" that deny any form of tolerance:

Believers, those who ascribe partners to God [i.e., Trinitarians] are truly unclean: do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this year. If you are afraid you may become poor,

⁷ Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross*, 32.

bear in mind that God will enrich you out of His bounty if He pleases: God is all knowing and wise. Fight those of the People of the Book who do not truly believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit. (9:29)

So, which is it: does the *Qur'an* teach a peaceful or violent encounter between Muslims and other “People of the Book?” How can these passages be reconciled? Muslims appeal to the doctrine of “abrogation” to explain many of these apparent contradictions. Simply put, some of Allah’s commands are marked for expiration; that is, later revelation replaces earlier revelation. “Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar” (2:106). Similarly, “When we substitute one revelation for another—and God knows best what He reveals—they say, ‘You are just making it up,’ but most of them have no knowledge” (16:101).⁸

Christians may dismiss the principle of abrogation as an awkward feature of the *Qur'an* that reveals its patchwork, human origins. But is there a similar hermeneutic of abrogation from Christians voices? Dispensationalism can sound a very similar note: God had a plan for Israel, the rejection of which led to his offering a “Plan B” to the Gentiles. Sometimes this goes by the term “replacement theology,” and it is a reading of Scripture that plays right into the Muslim doctrine of abrogation.

Consider how Muslims regard the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, where Jesus describes morning, noonday, and evening laborers, and draws the conclusion that “the last will be first, and the first last.” Muslim interpretation points to Judaism as the morning laborers, the apostles of Christ the noonday laborers, and Muslims as the evening laborers, the last who are now first. Similarly, when

8 Here, as in other parts of the *Qur'an*, Allah speaks to Muhammad in the first person plural. Readers should not conclude that this is an implicit expression of either Trinitarianism or polytheism. Rather, Allah is so high and exalted that the singular voice cannot always capture his magnificence.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the hour was approaching when God will be worshiped “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21), Muslims insist that he was really demonstrating that Allah’s true followers would worship him in Mecca.

In other words, if Plan B is God’s response to Jewish stubbornness and rebellion, is it too much of a stretch to conceive of Islam as Plan C? A dispensational hermeneutic of discontinuity cannot display to the Muslims the beauty of Scripture in its unfolding of redemptive history. It is essential for Christian apologetics to the Muslim world to advance the hermeneutic of promise and fulfillment. The living and true God is a covenant-keeping God. He does not change his mind; rather, he keeps his promises. There is one plan of salvation and one people of God. The work of Christ is portrayed by the patriarchs and predicted by the prophets, and all of God’s promises to his people are fulfilled in Christ.

The Folly of the “Outsider Movement”

Can converts to Christ in Muslim-dominated cultures remain in their Muslim world and even maintain many of the practices of Islam? A growing trend in Christian missions today encourages Muslim converts to do just that. This is known as the insider movement: Muslim converts to Christ are “completed Muslims” (just as Messianic Jews are “completed Jews”), who should find it possible to remain in their Muslim culture. Some missiologists go so far as to claim that such converts can still accept Muhammad as their prophet. After all, he led them to the one true God and he spoke highly of Jesus in the *Qur'an*.

We dare not make light of the sacrifices required of Muslims in coming to Christ. Converts to Christ in Muslim majority countries can experience the demand to “let goods and kindred go” in painful ways that Western Christians can barely imagine. But many believers, from Muslim backgrounds, know that they cannot have Christ in any other way: a Christianity that does not offend is not a gospel that will impact the Muslim world.

This view might be more accurately described as the *outsider* movement, because it consigns Muslim converts to a Christian life without the church, *outside* of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (WCF 25.2). By withholding from converts the privilege of numbering among the people of God, in fellowship with God and his people, the Christian missions are keeping from them the joy of communion of saints and the means of God’s appointment for their growth in grace.

The objection may be raised: Isn’t the effort to contextualize simply a way to follow Paul’s command and be “as Muslims to the Muslims?” Here we can turn again to Zwemer, who predicted this argument a century ago. “We must become as Moslems to the Moslem if we would gain them for Christ,” he insisted. But then he went on to add: “We must do this in the Pauline sense, *without compromise*, but with self-sacrificing sympathy and unselfish love” (emphasis added).⁹

Moreover, upon closer inspection, some of these efforts at contextualization do not involve being Muslims to the Muslims but being evangelicals to the Muslims. That is, they display more evangelical biases than sensitivities to the Muslim community. Specifically, what is at work here is a low view of the church and a disregard for its shepherding and discipline in the Christian life that is all too common among contemporary evangelicalism.¹⁰

Disguising the Trinity

The concept of the Trinity is an abomination to Islam, and the Qur’an is unrelenting in its condemnation of this heresy, in passages such as this:

People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger

⁹ Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*, 118.

¹⁰ A very helpful critique of the Insider Movement is the 2014 study report of the PCA Ad Interim Study Committee on Insider Movements (SCIM), *A Call to Faithful Witness, Part 2: Theology, Gospel Mission, and Insider Movements*, http://pcahistory.org/pca/scim02_2014.pdf.

of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a “Trinity” — God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him. (4:170–71)

In light of these texts, should we present Christ to Muslims in a more accessible way than to call him the “Son of God”? Should we describe the Christian Godhead in more subtle ways that will prompt less offense to the radical monotheism of Muslims? Some Bible translators are doing just that, and here are a few examples.

- Matt. 28:19—“in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” becomes “in the name of God and his Messiah and the Holy Spirit.”
- Luke 1:32, 35—“Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” become “the awaited Christ.”
- Luke 4:3, 9—“the Son of God” becomes “the Messiah of God.”
- Luke 6:36—“your Father is merciful” becomes “God is merciful.”
- Luke 11:2—“Father” in the Lord’s Prayer becomes “Our loving heavenly Lord.”

Samuel Zwemer refused to disguise the Trinitarian character of the Christian faith:

Islam is proud to write on its banner, “the Unity of God;” but it is, after all, a banner to the Unknown God. Christianity enters every land under the standard of the Holy Trinity—the Godhead of Revelation. These two banners represent two armies. There is no peace between them. No parliament of religions can reconcile such fundamental and deep-rooted differences. We must conquer or be vanquished. In its origin, history, present attitude, and by the very first article of its brief creed, Islam is anti-Christian.¹¹

¹¹ Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God: An Essay on the Character and Attributes of Allah According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement, 1905), 119–20.

Here again, the call to contextualization is robbing missions of its greatest weapon to reach Muslims, the fullness of God's love for them as centered in the Trinity. Robert Letham explains: "The Trinity is a crucial element in outreach to Muslim people. It is often avoided because objections immediately arise. However, the implications of the Islamic view of Allah are far-reaching." At its heart, Letham explains, love is something a person has for another person. He concludes: "Only a God who is triune can be personal. Only the Holy Trinity can love. Human love cannot possibly reflect the nature of God unless God is a Trinity of persons in union and communion."¹² Muslims cannot experience the love of Allah, nor can they love Allah in return; all they can offer is their submission to Allah's will. When the stakes are this high, dare we strip the Bible of its testimony to the triune God?¹³

Conclusion

There are other examples of where the Reformed faith serves the cause of Muslim evangelism most effectively. Zwemer has argued that the doctrine of total depravity addresses the functional Pelagianism in the Islamic doctrine of sin, and predestination offers an alternative to Islamic fatalism. This is not to claim that Reformed witnesses are alone wise in their approach to Muslim apologetics and evangelism. But we must not imagine that this is a "new threat" that demands new approaches, and we cannot abandon the rich resources of our tradition in the interest of theological trends that promise greater efficiency or claim to reduce the offense of the gospel.

Reflecting on Paul's commendation of the "work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope" of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:3), Zwemer wrote: "How accurately these three short phrases depict the real task of carrying the good news

12 Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 443–44.

13 Here again I would commend the PCA Study Committee on Insider Movements, in its 2012 report, *A Call to Faithful Witness, Part 1: Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation*, http://pcahistory.org/pca/scim01_2012.pdf.

to Muslims."¹⁴ "For thirteen long centuries," he continued (and which we must now change to fourteen centuries),

whether by neglect or by the pioneer adventure of loyal hearts, this part of the non-Christian world has tested the faith of Christendom as by fire. It has demanded a measure of love utterly impossible except to those who had learned from Christ to love their enemies and his; and again and again Islam has deferred the fruition of hope and left for those who waited on and on, as their only anchor, the patience of unanswered prayer.¹⁵

As we engage with our growing number of Muslim neighbors in North America, the Reformed faith equips us to wait on the patience of God even as we anticipate the coming of his kingdom. Zwemer's calls to faith, love, and hope in witness to the Islamic world find vivid expression in this prayer by the Apostle of Islam:

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who has made of one blood all nations and has promised that many shall come from the East and sit down with Abraham in your kingdom: We pray for your prodigal children in Muslim lands who are still afar off, that they may be brought near by the blood of Christ. Look upon them in pity, because they are ignorant of your truth.

Take away pride of intellect and blindness of heart, and reveal to them the surpassing beauty and power of your Son Jesus Christ. Convince them of their sin in rejecting the atonement of the only Savior. Give moral courage to those who love you, that they may boldly confess your name.

Hasten the day of religious freedom in Turkey, Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and North Africa. Send forth reapers where the harvest is

14 Zwemer, *Islam and the Cross*, 64.

15 Ibid.

ripe, and faithful plowmen to break furrows in lands still neglected. May the tribes of Africa and Malaysia not fall prey to Islam but be won for Christ. Bless the ministry of healing in every hospital, and the ministry of love at every church and mission. May all Muslim children in mission schools be led to Christ and accept him as their personal Savior.

Strengthen converts, restore backsliders, and give all those who labor among Muslims the tenderness of Christ, so that bruised reeds may become pillars of his church, and smoking flaxwicks burning and shining lights. Make bare your arm, O God, and show your power. All our expectation is from you.

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son in the Muslim world, and fulfill through him the prayer of Abraham your friend, "O, that Ishmael might live before thee." For Jesus' sake. Amen.¹⁶ ©

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A Place among the Stars

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
December 2018¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

This presentation was prepared for New Hampshire Public Radio for Christmas in 1996. I present it here as an example of Christian witness to a secular audience in a cynical age. Below is a slightly edited transcript of that radio segment.

When you hear the word "Christian" what is your reaction? Perhaps you think: "There go those right wingers flying off the handle again. They always seem to be saying *no* to something." You may have the impression that Christianity is largely negative: A giant "NO" to life. Christians may be largely responsible for creating this impression; but I would like to offer a different view.

Shortly before the new year, I was listening to Alessandro Scarlatti's "*O di Betlemme altera*, Pastoral cantata for the birth of Our Lord."² In this magnificent piece Scarlatti celebrates the good fortune of the shepherds as they witness the first breath of Jesus the Christ. In the final aria, the *Pastorale*, this master of Italian Baroque vocal music offers this stupendous thought:

The greatest fortune was yours, shepherds,
For Jesus has become the Lamb of God.
Offer your hearts at his cradle,
See how pretty he is, and how beautiful!

Leave your flocks and huts,
Yes, forsake your sheep.
He embodies a hope that does not deceive you
And can give you a place amongst the stars.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=720&issue_id=141.

2 Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725), "O di Betlemme altera, Pastoral cantata for the birth of Our Lord," Choir of the English Concert, Trevor Pinnock conducting from organ and harpsichord, Nancy Argenta, soprano. CD "Gloria" Archiv Produktion, D104904, 1993, Deutsche Grammophon.

16 Ibid., 153–54.

In the 1960s, I was captivated by the enchanting lyrics of Crosby, Stills, and Nash, The Grateful Dead, and The Incredible String Band. I made my sojourn to Oregon and the Redwood Forest to live out the dream they so compellingly depicted. I devoted myself to the texts of the counterculture: *The I Ching*, *The Bagavad Gita*, and *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. I devoured the meditations of Alan Watts, the poems of Kenneth Patchen, and the philosophy of Herbert Marcuse. I lived the communal life to the full. Yet the longings of my soul continued unsatisfied. Death, sin, and guilt hounded me back to the East Coast. Then Janis Joplin and Jimmy Hendrix died too young of drug overdoses. The promise of a place among the stars had proved empty. I felt deceived.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, I opened the one sacred text I had studiously avoided: the Bible. Like English author and Oxford professor C. S. Lewis, I was “surprised by joy.” Instead of the “dos and don’ts” of my childhood church experience, I discovered God incarnate come to rescue a hopeless mankind. I found the “eternal weight of glory” of which the apostle Paul writes so passionately. I found a God who came into history to forgive me for my selfishness and teach me a better, and ultimately glorious, way of life.

The world is full of disappointed hopes and dreams that have been dashed on the rocks of reality. Here was hope for lowly shepherds, that transcended national and racial boundaries. Here was a happiness not rooted in temporary things. My intellectual and spiritual longing finally found a place of rest, actually an infinite personal God in whom I could trust without disappointment and who could guide and enable me to be of some use in this poor world. Like Scarlatti’s shepherds I found “a hope that does not deceive you / and can give you a place amongst the stars.”

Amidst the cynical confusion and meaninglessness of postmodern culture, there is a narrative that is true for all people in all places and for all time. You see, Christianity is really a giant “YES” to life. ©

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✦ Servant Living

Why Reformed and Evangelical Christians Should Not Marry Roman Catholics

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
February 2018¹

by Andy Wilson

The Bible is unambiguous in teaching that God's people are not to take spouses who do not profess the true religion. In the Old Testament, God forbade the Israelites from intermarrying with those outside the covenant community, warning that those who do so will have their hearts turned away from him to serve other gods (see Deut. 7:3–4). Likewise, the New Testament makes it clear that Christians are only permitted to marry “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). This makes good sense when we consider the role that marriage plays in the spiritual edification of spouses and in the Christian nurture of children. How can a husband and wife live together as “heirs . . . of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7) when one of them does not have title to that inheritance through the grace of justification (see Titus 1:4–7)? How can a couple raise their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) when they do not share the same faith in the Lord?

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=674&issue_id=133.

The Question

While the Bible clearly forbids Christians from marrying non-Christians, one question that sometimes arises is whether or not Christians who belong to churches that preach the biblical gospel should be open to the possibility of marrying Roman Catholics. After all, Reformed churches have historically accepted Roman Catholic baptism as a valid Christian baptism,² pointing out that it is done in the name of the triune God and that the efficacy of baptism does not depend on the merit of the one who administers it but on God, the one who has instituted it. Furthermore, while the Roman Catholic Church has significantly departed from the biblical gospel in its official teachings, we grant that there can be individuals in the Roman Catholic Church who have saving faith in Christ.³ In light of this, why can't a Reformed or Evangelical Christian consider marrying a Roman Catholic who appears to have saving faith in Christ? Why does the Westminster Confession of Faith include “papists” among those whom Christians are forbidden to marry under the biblical imperative to marry “only in the Lord”? (see WCF 24.3)

Professing Faith in Christ

One way of addressing this question is to think through what it means to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. According to the Bible, a profession of faith in Christ is not merely a private transaction between the individual believer and God. A profession of faith in Christ needs to be public and accountable to the oversight of church leaders. This is a good and necessary inference

2 There have been a few exceptions, most notably among southern Presbyterians in nineteenth-century America. See the overall survey provided in J. V. Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 368–94.

3 In the words of James Buchanan, “Do we then deny the possibility of pardon and acceptance with God within the Church of Rome? God forbid! What we deny is that any sinner was ever justified, there or elsewhere, by his own righteousness; and we reject the Romish doctrine of justification, as having a tendency to lead men to rely on their own good works rather than on the finished work of Christ.” *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and of Its Exposition from Scripture*, (1867; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 149.

from Scripture, derived from passages such as these:

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

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim. 6:12)

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb. 13:17)

These texts make it clear that Christ does not merely rule over his people inwardly in their hearts. He also rules over us outwardly through the ministry of those whom he appoints to keep watch over our souls. This is why the authority to admit and exclude people from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper resides not in individual believers but in the church, acting through its officers.

The idea that a profession of faith in Christ needs to be public and accountable goes against the grain in our intensely individualistic culture. Many in our day understand faith as a fundamentally personal matter between an individual and God. The problem with this way of thinking is that it leaves no way of discerning whether a person is believing in Christ as he is revealed in the gospel or is believing in the sort of thing that the apostle Paul described as "a different gospel," a gospel of human imagining that is really no gospel at all (see Gal. 1:6–9). In other words, if we make faith into an essentially private matter we create a situation in which Christianity can no longer have any objective meaning, because it can be defined in whatever way each individual believer wants to define it.

Rome's Teaching about Saving Faith

A Roman Catholic is someone whose profession of faith is subject to the oversight of the Roman Catholic Church. The reason why this is a problem is because the Church of Rome has officially condemned the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. This was done most definitively at the Council of Trent, which was held from 1545 to 1563.⁴ While the sixteenth century was a long time ago, Rome's understanding of church tradition makes the pronouncements that were made at Trent just as binding today as they were when they were first made.⁵ Moreover, these pronouncements are confirmed in the contemporary *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.⁶ When we compare what was said at Trent with what is said in the Bible, it is clear that, as an institution, Rome itself officially teaches a different gospel, a gospel of justification by faith plus works.

At Trent, Rome insisted that a believer's good works are not to be understood as the fruit that necessarily flows from justifying faith, but as a means by which a person merits favor from God. Among the many decrees issued by Trent, Canon 9 declares,

If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema.

Similarly, Canon 24 says,

4 It is worth noting that the pronouncements made at Trent actually marked a change for Rome, since prior to that point it had tolerated other views, at least officially. In the words of one historian, "One effect of Protestantism was that the Roman Catholic Church became less inclusive. Heretofore it had permitted diversity of views on some of the issues raised by Protestants. Now it felt itself constrained to state its convictions more precisely. The definitions of dogma framed by the Council of Trent . . . were consciously directed against Protestant teachings. They ruled out opinions held by some who had remained within the Roman Communion." Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, volume 2: Reformation to the Present*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 840.

5 In spite of the softer and more positive tone that was expressed towards Protestants at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), Rome's official teachings on justification remain the same as those expressed at Trent.

6 See especially sections 1987–2011.

If anyone says that the righteousness received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of the increase, let him be anathema.

And Canon 32 adds,

If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that they are not also the good merits of him justified; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.

Stated positively, Trent declared that the good works done by a believer are meritorious and therefore contribute to, and even increase, his righteous standing before God. Compare this with the teaching of Scripture:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. . . . Now to

the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." (Rom. 3:20–28; 4:4–8)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:8–10)

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Phil. 3:8–9)

Paul's contrast between "wages" and "gift" in Romans 3–4 makes it clear that human beings can never do anything to merit God's grace. If justification is a freely given gift, then the believer's good works cannot in any sense contribute to his righteous standing before God. Moreover, the quotes from Ephesians and Philippians both stress that salvation is in no sense based upon anything that we do or upon any righteousness that we ourselves possess.

Roman Catholics typically point to this passage from James to support their position:

But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person,

that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (James 2:18–24)

If those verses mean what Roman Catholics say they mean, then James is in conflict with Paul, who writes the following in his letters to the Romans and Galatians:

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.” (Rom. 4:1–3)

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. . . . Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? (Gal. 2:16; 3:2–6)

If we were to insist that “justified” in James 2 means the same thing that it means in these passages from Paul, we would make God’s Word contradict itself. This is why the term needs to be understood in light of the specific contexts of these

letters, taking into account the different problems that were being confronted by the authors. In Romans and Galatians, Paul confronted legalism by saying that faith, apart from works, is the sole instrument of justification. In James, the writer confronted antinomianism by saying that good works are the evidence that a person has true justifying faith. James is saying that good works are necessary for salvation in an evidentiary sense, while Paul is saying that they are not necessary in an instrumental sense. James is saying that saving faith bears the fruit of good works in a believer’s life, while Paul is saying that these works do not merit anything from God. These teachings are in direct conflict with what was decreed at Trent. As we have already seen, this is precisely what was condemned at that council.

Unequally Yoked

Because of its erroneous teaching on the question of how a person can be made right with God, the Church of Rome is not capable of evaluating an individual’s profession of faith in Christ. A person who belongs to the Church of Rome has not had his or her profession of faith examined by a church that teaches the biblical gospel. While an individual Roman Catholic’s faith may or may not rest upon Christ alone as he is revealed in the gospel, it is not up to an individual Christian to make that determination. On the contrary, this responsibility belongs to the church and needs to be carried out by its officers, because Christ has authorized the church to distinguish between believers and unbelievers through its preaching and discipline. In light of this, it follows that if a person belongs to a church that explicitly denies essential aspects of the biblical gospel, the credibility of that person’s profession of faith is called into question. This is one reason why a Reformed or Evangelical Christian should not marry a Roman Catholic. To do so is to become yoked to someone whose Christian profession is not accountable to a true church, and is also under the authority of an institution that officially condemns the biblical gospel.

A second reason why a Reformed or Evangelical Christian should not marry a Roman Catholic involves the practical problems caused by such a union. A couple cannot help each other grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ when they belong to traditions that have such serious disagreements over fundamental aspects of the Christian faith. Neither can such a couple pass on a biblically robust faith to their children. When a Roman Catholic marries a non-Catholic spouse, the latter has to pledge to raise his or her children in the Church of Rome. How can a Reformed or Evangelical Christian make such a pledge? Furthermore, when a couple dismisses as inconsequential the differences between historic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, they inevitably point to the common ground that they have in their subjective religious experiences, their moral code, and the aesthetic qualities that they associate with genuine piety (perhaps the informality and contemporaneity that are characteristic of Evangelicalism, or perhaps the rites and rituals that are characteristic of traditions that feature a “high” liturgy). The problem with finding common ground only in those things is that it is the doctrinal elements of Christian faith that make it distinctively Christian. The gospel is not an experience, a set of moral teachings, or an aesthetic style (though it does have ramifications in these areas). At its heart, the biblical gospel is the revelation of the righteousness from God that is received by faith alone in Christ alone. Any conception of Christianity that sets that message aside as unimportant is a different gospel. And as the Bible makes clear, a different gospel has no power to save. ©

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Flesh and Thorn: Understanding Addiction as Disease

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
June-July 2018¹

by **James H. Berry**

Americans are dying from addiction at an alarming rate. Almost 64,000 people died in 2016 from drug overdoses. This is more than the number of Americans who died during the Vietnam conflict, more than those who died at the apex of the HIV-AIDS epidemic, more than those who died from drug overdoses in 2015, which was more than 2014, and so on—a horrible pattern that has essentially remained constant for the past decade. Since 2008, more Americans die each year from overdoses than from car accidents and firearms. From 2000 to 2015 more than a half million Americans died from overdoses. Approximately 88,000 Americans die from alcohol related complications every year and around 430,000 die from tobacco-related causes. We are facing an addiction crisis the likes of which has never been seen in this country.²

Astonishingly, the life expectancy for Americans has declined since the turn of the century. While one would assume the richest nation in the world, blessed with the planet’s best technology and resources, would have the longest lifespan, this is not the case. Why not? Are common chronic diseases such as heart disease or diabetes suddenly killing more people? Is there an epidemic of a deadly infectious disease such as meningitis or an exotic virus such as Ebola? No. There are three main factors driving this accelerated death rate: accidental overdose, suicide, and liver failure. All

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=696&issue_id=137.

² These statistics may be found on the Center for Disease Control website: www.cdc.gov.

three are closely tied to addiction-related behaviors and all are *entirely* preventable.³

For every death, typically a spouse, parent, child, or friend endured countless hours of soul-wrenching agony attempting to rescue the loved one. Rarely does addiction go unnoticed by those who are closest. Rather, they are acutely aware (indeed, are the collateral damage) of the destructive behaviors of a life ensnared by addiction. In the wake of the devastation, they are often left to pick up the pieces and futilely make sense of the social- and self-destruction caused by the relentless pursuit of a substance. Thousands of dollars are spent on residential treatment programs and hospital detoxifications promising a cure. Thousands of dollars are spent on bail, fines, and court costs. Thousands of tears are spilled in prayer for change. Thousands of hours are spent in sleepless worry that the next phone call will be from the hospital or the police department.

As a physician who specializes in treating addiction, I recognize a tremendous need for church communities to understand what addiction is and how to care for those suffering from this disease. When I meet fellow believers and they learn that I am an addiction psychiatrist, I usually get one of two disparate responses: skepticism that addiction and mental illness are diseases requiring treatment rather than sin to be confessed, or relief that a Christian is in this profession and pleas for greater instruction on how the church can minister to those who are suffering. Almost daily I find I must persuade others that addiction is primarily a brain disease with significant behavioral consequences that can be effectively treated. Here I introduce the medical model of addiction with the hope that church officers may benefit from this understanding and be better equipped to serve their parishioners who suffer from this disease.

Addiction is a chronic brain disease that has

biological, psychological, and social etiologies and manifestations. The bio-psycho-social model of illness has been established and taught in medical schools for several decades and delineates three interrelated domains forming the basis of disease. The biologic domain consists of a bodily organ or system that is impaired due to any number of factors such as an infectious process, genetic malformations, physical trauma, etc., or due to an unknown cause. The dysfunction of the organ or system results in a predictable constellation of symptoms that are directly correlated with the damaged organ. The psychological domain comprises thoughts and emotions. Thought patterns may lead to decisions that elevate the risk of contracting a disease and then of perpetuating the illness. Furthermore, an emotional state may directly influence the disease state: Research has demonstrated that during periods of heightened anxiety or depression the body makes stress hormones that may wreak havoc on various organs and cause disruptions in normal functioning. The social domain involves the impact that interpersonal relationships have on illness. Humans aren't created as isolated islands but are social creatures. Social relationships have a considerable influence on the genesis of disease and its progression. Additionally, each social demographic carries attending health risks or protective factors. For instance, individuals in Native American communities are at increased risk of heart disease. Certainly, there are genetic and interpersonal factors contributing to this risk, but larger cultural influences affect health disparities.

As an example, let's look at how the disease of diabetes fits within the bio-psycho-social model. In diabetes, the main organ of impairment is the pancreas. The pancreas secretes a hormone, insulin, which is essential for transporting blood glucose to the cells of various organs. These organs need glucose in order to survive. Without glucose, organs become energy deprived and break down. In the form of diabetes known as Type 2, in addition to an impaired pancreas, the body's organs do not respond properly to the insulin available. This dysfunction leads to an overabundance of sugar in the blood and causes symptoms such as frequent

3 Princeton Economics Professors Anne Case and Angus Deaton aptly refer to these deaths as "deaths of despair": Anne Case and Angus Deaton, "Mortality and Morbidity in the 21st Century," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Spring 2017, Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/casetextsp17bpea.pdf>.

urination, excessive thirst, and excessive eating. If left untreated, acute life-threatening consequences such as coma and death may occur. How does someone get Type 2 diabetes? While genetic predisposition plays a strong role, so do personal choices and community. Being overweight and living a sedentary lifestyle are the main factors precipitating this disease. Obesity, for instance, tends to run in families due both to genetics and to family-specific dietary and activity habits. In times of stress or depression, many turn to food with high fat and sugar content to self-soothe, which is typically learned behavior from an early age. All these biological, psychological, and social factors contribute to and compound the disease of diabetes.

In addiction the brain is the main organ of impairment. Brain circuitry responsible for memory, reward, and motivation is dysfunctional due to both genetic and behavioral factors.⁴ Normally, the brain releases a neurotransmitter called dopamine during pleasurable activities. Food, exercise, sex, finding shelter, getting praise from others are all examples of rewarding activities that release dopamine. When dopamine is released, an exquisite series of electrochemical communications takes place within the brain's neural network that reinforce whatever activity has caused the release of dopamine. This is a built-in feedback mechanism designed to encourage the person to continue to engage in the activity. The activity is rewarding, we remember how good it feels, and we are motivated to re-experience the feeling. When this activity is repeated frequently over time, neural networks grow, change, and form to encourage this activity. This is advantageous when the activity is finding a warm fire in the middle of a snowstorm but becomes pathologic and detrimental when the activity is the repeated use of cocaine. Finding warmth in a storm releases a small amount of dopamine. Smoking cocaine releases a massive amount of dopamine. Because cocaine use causes the release of so much more dopamine than natu-

rally rewarding activities, frequent use will cause the brain to rewire to favor cocaine consumption over other natural pleasures. This is aptly illustrated in studies done with rats. Rats who have been frequently exposed to cocaine will choose to press a lever delivering a bolus of cocaine rather than a lever delivering a food pellet. These unfortunate animals will continue to choose the cocaine lever to the point of starving to death. A dysfunctional reward center has contributed to the rat's destruction.

One of the main biologic features that distinguishes a human brain from a rat's brain is the large concentration of neurons in the human forebrain. A basic taxonomy demarcating a brain's functional structure consists of three interconnected components: the hindbrain, the midbrain, and the forebrain. Moving from hind to fore (or inside-out) increases the degree of functional complexity and sophistication of the animal's neurocognitive capabilities. The hindbrain controls very basic life supporting features such as breathing and reflexes. The midbrain houses the pleasure center, emotion center, and memory center. The forebrain, among other higher order duties, houses the prefrontal cortex. This is the primary area responsible for making rational decisions known as executive functioning. Executive functioning involves balancing the pros and cons of particular actions, anticipating consequences, perceiving reality, and making reasoned decisions. Executive functioning allows us to control our tongue or put the brakes on an impulsive urge. Rats are woefully lacking in prefrontal cortical tissue and therefore do not have the degree of impulse control that humans do.⁵ Rats are mostly drive and impulse. Humans are typically better equipped to make good decisions—unless, of course, one has had one too many glasses of wine at a wedding reception. The high amount of alcohol impairs executive functioning, distorts reality, and makes one believe he is a much better dancer than he really is. Over time, frequent

4 For a comprehensive and helpful definition of addiction, see the American Society of Addiction Medicine's Public Policy Statement: <https://www.asam.org/resources/definition-of-addiction>.

5 Not to sell rats too short, they do have executive functioning that is adaptive for survival and allows them to remember and solve puzzles for rewards. They simply do not have it to the same extent as humans (well, most of us anyway).

drinking episodes in large enough amounts may cause changes in the brain such that the midbrain circuits are no longer influenced as strongly by the prefrontal cortex, and the role of the prefrontal cortex becomes diminished. The midbrain has been unmoored. In addition to this loss of a rational rudder steering the brain's drive mechanism, there is a loss of pleasure in normal activities. When copious amounts of dopamine are released repeatedly over time, a negative feedback loop occurs such that the dopamine receptors become less numerous and less active. This results in a persistent state of dysphoria. A dark cloud seems to hang over much of life. The only thing that relieves the doldrums is the pursuit of the substance. Many of my patients report that they don't use drugs to get high anymore, but simply to feel "normal." This is largely due to a brain with low levels of available dopamine and other neurotransmitters affecting a sense of well-being.

Of course, we are much more than a collection of neural tissue. We are bigger than our brains (metaphysically speaking). We are spiritual creatures with minds that are capable of transcending anatomy. We know this is true as Scripture teaches we will continue to be sentient in the time between the loss of our earthly body and the gain of our heavenly body. Nonetheless, while on this earth, we are bound by physical limitations. Matter matters. We see this dramatically illustrated when a person has a major stroke that affects the portions of the brain responsible for speaking or walking. In addiction, the brain impairment causes distorted thinking, severe cravings, emotional dysregulation, and compulsive substance use despite horrible consequences.

This biological foundation must not be pressed to the point of becoming overly reductionistic or fatalistic.⁶ Brain impairment does not *necessitate* addictive behavior at all times and at all costs. If a loaded gun is placed to the head of Tom, who has a serious heroin addiction, and he is threatened with execution for using, Tom will likely not use.

6 In fact, the bio-psycho-social framework was a reaction against the overly reductionist "biomedical" model.

The immediate saliency of a potential bullet to the brain will most likely be enough to dissuade Tom. Tom's prefrontal cortex, although diminished, is not dead. However, if Tom is then released from the immediate threat and told he would be shot if caught using in the future, he will likely still use. Tom's ability to feel the full weight of a future consequence is weak and the drive to find relief with heroin in the moment is much stronger. Tom will likely rationalize his use as necessary to survive another day and minimize the likelihood of being caught using. He may even tell himself that living with such pain and misery is so unbearable that finding relief now may be worth a bullet tomorrow. Addiction also does not absolve one of his or her responsibility for bad behavior. If Tom robs a gas station to pay for heroin, Tom should be held responsible for his crime. Furthermore, we are all required as image bearers of God to behave according to his will. Those who are hindered from doing so are obligated to seek help to manage their disease. Nonetheless, there are incredibly powerful biophysiological forces at work that keep people doing unhealthy, dangerous, and even sinful things.

Much like other chronic diseases, addiction has varying degrees of severity and periods of relapse and remission.⁷ Some people have a mild form of the disease and can successfully abstain from the offending substance with little to no treatment. They make up their mind to quit smoking one day and never pick up a pack of cigarettes again. Likewise, some diabetics can simply change their eating habits and maintain healthy levels of blood glucose. The temptation for many observers is to extrapolate a uniform solution as though these examples are normative. "My brother quit drinking by sheer willpower and so should you!" We can celebrate and rejoice that many are able to quit

7 A good medical review article that outlines addiction as chronic disease and compares rates of remission with other diseases such as diabetes and hypertension is: McLellan AT, Lewis DC, O'Brien CP, Kleber HD, "Drug Dependence, a Chronic Medical Illness: Implications for Treatment, Insurance, and Outcomes Evaluation," *Journal of the American Medical Association* (2000) 284 (13): 1689–95. doi:10.1001/jama.284.13.1689.

using without much help. This does not negate the fact that many others are not so fortunate and may have a more severe form of the disease requiring intensive assistance. Also, I've had many patients who have been able to go years, even decades, without using and decide one day it is safe to pick up a drink. Before long, they were back in the dangerous position of active, unhealthy, compulsive drinking. A common refrain heard in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings is "One's too many and a thousand's not enough." For most, abstaining for life is recommended.

I encourage church officers to begin viewing addiction through the lens of chronic disease. Yes, as creatures bearing God's image, we are morally culpable whenever we make decisions that transgress God's law. We are morally culpable whenever we want anything more than to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. All of us fail mightily to live according to those values we most highly regard. We inhabit a broken world and this brokenness includes our brains and our bodies. In a fundamental sense, all disease is a result of sin since the Fall poisoned everything. Yet, we must be sensitive to the reality that people who struggle with addiction, by nature and experience, are handicapped by incredibly powerful biologic drives. They do not do that which they truly want to do, and they do that which they truly do not want to do. For the Christian, these forces continue to persist despite conversion. The apostle Paul's thorn was not plucked from his flesh when he bowed the knee to Christ. He continued to suffer, but did so in the hope of glory.

Church officers can minister to those entrusted to their care by addressing the biologic, psychologic, and social domains of addiction. Biologically, there are several FDA-approved medications available to help specifically with alcohol, tobacco, and opioid addiction. These medications have demonstrated efficacy to decrease substance use and increase levels of functioning. The use of these medications should not be considered a moral failure any more than the diabetic's use of insulin should be seen as a moral failure. We should praise God that he has given us the

science to curb the devastating effects of many diseases and allow people to live healthy lives. Officers should help parishioners obtain access to qualified physicians who can thoroughly screen for substance use disorders and treat medically if necessary. Additionally, many evidence-based psychological therapies help people recognize the cognitive and behavioral patterns contributing to ongoing substance use and develop positive strategies for dealing with these. Well-trained physicians, psychologists, and social workers may be a tremendous resource for helping your parishioner. Finally, the church has a significant social role to play in keeping the parishioner well. Spending time with fellow believers, especially in worship, is critical to shape us according to God's design of wholeness. God, in his kindness, has given us the church to nurture those who are weak and uplift the downtrodden. We should constantly encourage the diligent use of the means of grace, knowing these are God's graces intended to sustain his people in a world of disease, dying, and death. We should always hold forth Christ as both the example to follow in maintaining faithfulness through suffering and the fountain of forgiveness and strength when we fail. We should constantly proclaim the Word, declaring who we truly are in Christ and the goal of our ultimate destination. We hold forth, at all times, that we will be seated in glory, sweetly enjoying God and one another in the perfect union of resurrected body and imperishable spirit—a body impenetrable by any thorn. ©

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Leisure as a Christian Calling

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* November 2018¹

by Leland Ryken

The past two decades have seen a resurgence of interest in the subjects of vocation and work. In fact, these topics are nothing less than a growth industry in Christian circles, as seen in the appearance of books, conferences, and even permanent institutes. I am happy for the ferment.

The problem is that leisure remains what it has always been—a subject of neglect in the church and among Christians. This neglect can be traced all the way back to the people who thought and wrote most helpfully on the subjects of vocation and work, namely, the Reformers and Puritans. The Protestant tradition has elevated work and undervalued leisure. My heart soars when Martin Luther writes that God put Adam and Eve into the garden to work. And then my heart sinks when Luther adds, “Not for leisure.”² Wait a minute, I say to myself. How do we get *that* from Genesis 2? Why can’t we elevate work without demoting leisure?

I speak of a great mystery, but surely an evangelical author hit the nail on the head when he titled his book *When I Relax I Feel Guilty*.³ Why do we feel guilty when we relax? Partly because we have not studied the Bible to see what it says about rest and leisure. I believe we should dignify the concept of leisure, construct a Christian defense of it, and proceed to practice it guilt-free.

What Is a Calling?

The Protestant tradition has been so ac-

customed to linking the concepts of vocation and work that when the subject of vocation is mentioned, we almost automatically assume that the discussion will focus on work. I can therefore imagine a touch of initial resistance to my claim that leisure is a calling. I do not want to soften my claim, however, so I will proceed to define what I mean by a calling.

A calling is anything that God commands us to do. When the Bible speaks of a calling, the primary frame of reference is neither work nor leisure but the call to follow and obey God. That is what the Puritans called the general calling, which comes in the same form to all Christians. One’s particular calling is any specific task or duty that God places before us.

When I speak of leisure as a calling, I do not abandon the definition that I use when speaking of work as a calling. It is only the application to leisure rather than work that changes.

What Is Leisure?

Before I turn to the biblical data on leisure, I want to summarize what we can learn from the secular sources. What we primarily learn is information about the nature of leisure, starting with the etymology of the word *leisure*. The word can be traced back to two roots, both conveying the idea that leisure is free time. One root word is the Old French word *leisir*, from the Latin *licere*, meaning “to be allowed or to be lawful.” Our word *license* comes from the same root word.

In our leisure time we have license and permission to do as we please (within moral and spiritual constraints, of course). G. K. Chesterton famously said that the concept of leisure “has come to cover three totally different things. The first is being allowed to do something. The second is being allowed to do anything. And the third . . . is being allowed to do nothing.”⁴

The other derivation of the word *leisure* is the Greek word *skolé* or the Latin *schola*, from which we get the English word *school*. This root word

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=714&issue_id=140.

2 Martin Luther, commentary on Genesis 2:14.

3 Tim Hansel, *When I Relax I Feel Guilty* (Elgin: David C. Cook, 1979).

4 G. K. Chesterton, “On Leisure,” in *Generally Speaking* (London: Methuen, 1928), 111.

carried the connotation “to halt or cease,” meaning that in leisure we call a halt to our work and develop ourselves the way we do in our education.

Based on this etymology, experts on leisure offer the following as the defining traits of leisure. First, leisure is free time or nonwork. Work belongs to the category of obligation, and leisure by contrast is free from obligation. This is important: leisure needs to feel like leisure to count as leisure. If we pursue a leisure activity as an obligation, we have missed an essential aspect of leisure.

Secondly, leisure is defined in terms of certain activities that we normally think of as falling into the category of leisure. Examples are cultural pursuits, recreation, entertainment, hobbies, and social activities. Thirdly, leisure is a quality of life. An expert on leisure has written that “anybody can have free time. Not everybody can have leisure. . . . Leisure refers to a state of being, a condition. . . , which few desire and fewer achieve.”⁵

I will allow a Christian leisure theorist to provide a good summary of what leisure is in its highest reaches:

Leisure is the growing time for the human spirit. Leisure provides the occasion for learning and freedom, for growth and expression, for rest and restoration, for rediscovering life in its entirety.⁶

That raises the bar high, and I think we resonate with that.

My thesis for the rest of this article is that leisure is as much a Christian calling as work is. I have found as much biblical data on leisure as on work. The data is more indirect and inferential than the data on work, but it is present. I will offer six strands of biblical data to defend my claim that leisure is a Christian calling.

God at Rest

5 Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1962), 7–8.

6 Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), 35.

Just as a Christian view of work begins with God’s act of creation, so does a Christian defense of leisure. The foundational but not final ingredient of leisure is that it is cessation from work. The great original model for this is God’s rest during the week of creation.

There is an element of mystery in God’s rest, but one of its great uses to us is that it provides an unmistakable model and warrant for human rest. The key text is Genesis 2:2–3, which states, “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” Exodus 31:17 adds to the mystery of divine rest by ascribing refreshment to God’s resting on the seventh day: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

It would appear that God’s Sabbath rest was a day of creation, not a day off. It was, to be sure, a day off from work, but the implication is that the days of creation form a week, so that God can be said to have created and instituted the seventh day of rest. A Jewish scholar claims that “it took a special act of creation to bring [the Sabbath] into being.”⁷

What are the implications of divine rest for leisure? The first lesson is that we have an obligation to have times when we call a halt to work. If God did it, we need to do it.

Divine rest sets a pattern for drawing a boundary around work and making sure that it is balanced by rest. God’s design for the human race is not non-stop work.

The Sabbath and our leisure modeled on it have the nature of letting go of the utilitarian and acquisitive urges that occupy us in the workaday world of getting and spending. In rest and leisure we celebrate what has already been accomplished and realize that for the moment work is unnecessary and inappropriate. I like Kenneth Woodward’s

7 Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 23.

comment that “the essence of leisure [is] time off for the timeless—for thanking God for what has been freely given.”⁸ Also excellent is Leonard Doohan’s claim that “people who refuse to rest on the Sabbath and reject genuine sabbatical living are those who trust in their own strength rather than God’s grace. . . . It is only in the sabbatical pause that we can truly open ourselves to appreciate and acknowledge what God has done.”⁹

Because God established rest as part of creation, it has the force of a creation ordinance, just as work does. Regular cessation from work is a foundational principle that God has built into the fabric of human existence.

The Example and Teaching of Jesus

Divine rest is reinforced by the example and teaching of Jesus as recounted in the gospels. Jesus did not reduce life to endless work and evangelism. He found time to ponder the beauty of the lily and commanded his followers to do the same.

Here is a typical scenario from the life of Jesus: “Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, . . . while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land” (Mark 6:45–47). In other words, Jesus and his disciples drew a boundary around their work and obligations to others.

Here is another typical passage: “The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves” (Mark 6:30–32). If we arrange the public life of Jesus into a series of typical scenes, one of them is Jesus attending what we call a dinner party—a form

of leisure. If Jesus himself, who lived and died to be our Savior, found time for leisure, surely we should do the same.

In addition to the example of Jesus’s lifestyle, we have his teaching and in particular his discourse against anxiety in the Sermon on the Mount. I consider this passage—actually a poem—to be a great primary source on leisure. There are two main thrusts to Jesus’s discourse against anxiety in Matthew 6:25–34. One is the command not to be anxious about acquiring things like clothes and food. In commanding us not to be anxious about these material things, Jesus is asserting a prime principle of leisure, namely, the need to set a curb to the acquisitive life. The second thrust of Jesus’s discourse against anxiety is the command to contemplate nature and let it influence how we live. “Consider the lilies of the field,” Jesus says. Contemplating nature and enjoying its beauty is one of the world’s favorite leisure activities. Jesus commands us to do it.

The Fourth Commandment

In addition to the example of God’s cessation from work and Jesus’s inclusion of rest and leisure in his busy life, we have the command to rest in the Decalogue. The fourth commandment states, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exod. 20:9–10). Although we associate the Sabbath with worship, it is unclear how early the Sabbath entailed worship. The emphasis early in the Old Testament is on the complete prohibition of work. In any case, if God commands rest or leisure in the Fourth Commandment, then it is something that he *calls* us to do. That is why I do not shrink from labeling leisure a Christian calling.

After the Fall

While my topic of leisure as a calling does not require me to talk about the effect of the Fall on leisure, I am going to do so because it is part of the total picture. The effect of the Fall on leisure

8 Kenneth Woodward, “What Is Leisure Anyway?” *Newsweek*, August 26, 1991, 56.

9 Leonard Doohan, *Leisure: A Spiritual Need* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1990), 46.

warns us against abuses of leisure in our lives. The primary data on the perversion of leisure from its godly intention is simply a look around us, where we find empirical proof that the Fall changed everything in regard to leisure.

But the Bible, too, paints pictures of perverted leisure, showing us that after the Fall leisure has had the potential to degenerate into immoral activities and triviality. The book of Ecclesiastes provides haunting pictures of the emptiness of leisure that the quester experienced when he turned leisure into his central life interest. His futile experiment began with a conscious decision: “I said in my heart, Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself” (2:1, RSV). What followed was a litany of cheap and tawdry leisure pursuits: “I searched . . . how to cheer my body with wine. . . . I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man” (2:3, 8). In that same passage, it is obvious that the wealthy quester went shopping on a grand scale—recreational shopping in a courtly mode. Further, “I kept my heart from no pleasure, . . . and this was my reward for all my toil” (2:10). We know that the author is talking about leisure because leisure is a reward for toil—something we enjoy after we have worked to make it possible.

And what was the result of this pursuit of leisure apart from God? Emptiness. We read, “Behold, all was vanity [literally vapor] and a striving after wind” (2:11). There is an important lesson here: despite all my enthusiasm for leisure, it needs to come as a byproduct from something more substantial than leisure itself. Part of the restorative value of leisure is that it offsets the rigors of work. Just as dessert cannot carry an entire meal, leisure cannot give purpose to a whole life.

Old Testament Religious Festivals

Another body of data is the Old Testament prescription of an annual calendar of religious festivals or feasts. Before I unpack the biblical data, let me reply to what is an entirely plausible initial resistance to what I am about to say. Aren't the Old Testament religious festivals worship experi-

ences like our Sunday morning worship services? My answer is no; they were more like the evangelical institution of a Christian summer camp. Certainly worship was a central part of the annual Old Testament events, but there was a social and celebrative aspect as well. I consider them a form of religious and spiritual leisure.

What does the Old Testament say about these events? First, there were six annual required festivals. They went by such names as “holy convocations” and “appointed feasts.” They were accompanied by strict prohibition of work. I think they resembled our Thanksgiving Day celebrations when observed as a day of thanks to God with a church service as part of the mix.

When Moses recapitulated the rules of religious festivals originally recorded in Leviticus 23, three of them were expanded to include annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. These were group events that included camping out.

They were so communal that Jesus's parents left Jesus behind in Jerusalem by mistake, just assuming that he was part of some other family's entourage.

In Nehemiah 8 we catch a glimpse of what the feast of booths was like. The people went out from the city to the hills, where they built makeshift booths from tree branches. On the occasion of the rediscovery of the law recorded in Nehemiah 8, the camping trip lasted seven days.

One reason I put the Old Testament religious festivals into the category of leisure is that they put a halt to work, and this is an essential feature of leisure. A second reason is that they had some of the physical and social properties of leisure. I would call these festivals and feasts sanctified leisure.

Respecting Our Creaturely Selves

I will make one more argument for the necessity of leisure, this one based on inferences about the kind of people God created us to be. I would call this a Christian principle but perhaps not an explicit biblical teaching.

An evangelical author titled one of his books

Your Right to Rest.¹⁰ If we look at what people are like, it appears that the book title understates the case. We do not simply have a right to rest; we have a need for it. Living responsibly includes living in accordance with the kind of creatures God made us. Our mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing require that we rest and refresh ourselves and take breaks from work. Burnout is an established phenomenon in our culture. The chief cause is excessive work and insufficient leisure. Burnout is not God's goal for people.

The person who coined the word *workaholic* speaks of the self-deception of trying to live as if we do not have a body subject to certain limitations.¹¹ One of the limitations of the human body is that it cannot work nonstop. It needs rest and leisure. So do our minds and emotions. Because we are physical creatures subject to physical and psychological laws, to have regular times of leisure is to live in accord with the Creator's plan for us. We are also created to seek reward from our work. I have always found evocative the phrase in Ecclesiastes 4:9 about people having "a good reward for their toil." Leisure is one of the good rewards for our toil.

Applications

I am ready to turn to applications, and these are intended to shift the discussion from *why* leisure is a calling to thoughts on *how* leisure can be a Christian calling. The first of four applications that I will make is that we need to take stock of where we personally stand in regard to our leisure lives. That begins by pondering the case that I have made for leisure as a Christian calling. Are we convinced that God wants us to have rest and leisure in our lives? If the answer is yes, we have a mandate to make sure that the quantity of our leisure reaches a certain minimal and respectable level.

Taking stock also requires that we make a realistic assessment of the special problems that

leadership and service in the church pose for Christians. I do not have space in this article to survey the leisure problem in our culture at large, so I will just summarize what the data shows, namely, that most people do not find enough time for leisure. I believe that this problem is more severe for many Christians because of their sense of duty and commitment to Christian service. In fact, there seems to be a correspondence between diligence in Christian service and lack of leisure in a person's life. It is well established that pastors struggle to find time beyond service to people and the church.

There are no easy answers here. Our initial response is that it would be self-defeating to the work of the church to encourage those who are most active to cut back so they can engage in leisure. It may even seem unchristian. But if leisure is a Christian calling, it should not be regarded as optional or unworthy of cultivation and stewardship. On the surface, leisure can seem like self-indulgence, but *not* to engage in leisure can be a form of shortchanging others, including spouse and family.

For my second application, I want to reach into the wisdom of secular sources on leisure theory. Leisure theorists have evolved a paradigm called the time continuum. It consists of the twenty-four hours that make up every day. At one end of the continuum is obligation, consisting of work (*all* work, not simply our job). On the other end is freedom from obligation, consisting of leisure. We cannot add to one without subtracting from the other, and therein lies our problem.

But leisure theorists have also evolved a category in the middle of the continuum that they call semi-leisure. Activities in this category are a combination of obligation and freedom. The degree to which they are experienced as either drudgery or leisure depends partly on the attitude with which we perform them. My application is that we can make creative use of semi-leisure, importing qualities of leisure into activities that might otherwise add still more work to our lives.

My third application concerns education in leisure. We do in our leisure time what we have

¹⁰ Wayne Oates, *Your Right to Rest* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

learned to do. Learning is simply another name for education, broadly defined. Who is ultimately responsible for seeing that all aspects of the Christian life are being covered in a local church? The minister is—not in the sense that he needs to do all of the educating, but in the sense of ensuring that the issues are being addressed *somewhere* (in sermons, Sunday school classes, small groups, etc.).

It seems likely that the topics of work and vocation are adequately taught in Reformed churches. It is less clear that leisure is receiving its due. I was exhilarated to learn that New England Puritan Cotton Mather preached a sermon on “how to employ the leisure of the winter for the glory of God.” I will add that education in leisure is a parental responsibility and that someone needs to be prompting Christian parents to exercise that responsibility. In our culture at large, children and young people are mainly left to themselves to forge standards and practices in their leisure lives. The standards and practices of many Christian young people are barely distinguishable from those in the youth culture at large.

My final application is that the usual standards of stewardship apply to our leisure as well as our work. Perhaps because my vocation is that of a literature teacher, when I assimilate Jesus’s parable of the talents, I am thinking as much about stewardship of leisure as of work. Leisure is an opportunity that God has entrusted to us. According to Jesus’s parable, God expects a return on what he has entrusted. Applied to leisure, this extends to both the quantity and quality of our leisure activities. In Jesus’s parable, not cultivating an opportunity is pictured as burying the master’s money in the ground.

The take-away value of what I have said in this article might be to ponder what burying a talent looks like in our leisure lives, and then to resolve to be like the faithful stewards of Jesus’s parable rather than the wicked and slothful servant who did nothing with the opportunity that had been entrusted to him. ©

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✦ Servant History

Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (April 1518): Remembering Another Five-Hundredth Anniversary

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2018¹

by Andy Wilson

The year 2017 marked the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety-Five Theses on October 31, 1517, an action that traditionally is regarded as the spark that started the Protestant Reformation. While this was indeed a historic moment, it is more accurate to say that Luther was brought to a comprehension of the issues that became fundamental for historic Protestantism over a period of time.

As it turns out, the year 2018 is the five-hundredth anniversary of another set of theses produced by Luther, and they are more distinctively Protestant than the Ninety-Five Theses. It is good for us to seize the opportunity for reflecting on these anniversaries, especially when we see some Protestants downplaying the doctrinal issues that were at the heart of the Reformation. For example,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=708&issue_id=139.

one prominent Reformed seminary celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of the Ninety-Five Theses by hosting an event in which Roman Catholic and Protestant speakers had a dialogue about how our traditions can give a more credible testimony to Christ by finding common ground and cooperating with each other instead of endlessly rehearsing the reasons why the Reformation took place.² It is troubling to see a seminary that is part of a confessionally Reformed denomination asserting that a more effective witness for Christ can be made by setting aside the issues that separate Protestants and Roman Catholics. Such instances underscore why it is so crucial for us to remember that the Reformation was a recovery of the biblical gospel. The fact that this was the case becomes patently clear when we consider the distinction that Luther expressed in the theses that were defended in April of 1518.

The Two Kinds of Theologians

As the Ninety-Five Theses were being disseminated throughout Europe, Luther was asked by his Augustinian monastic order to prepare a set of theses that outlined his developing theology so that it could be assessed by his fellow monks at the order's regular chapter meeting in the city of Heidelberg on April 26, 1518. This set of theses is now known as the Heidelberg Disputation. Luther's main concern in these theses was to address the question of how we can attain the righteousness that we need in order to stand before God. He begins by emphasizing that while God's law is good, it is utterly incapable of advancing us toward salvation. As the first thesis puts it, "The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him."³ This statement does not mean that the law has no

2 Melissa Morgan Kelley, "Protestant-Catholic Relations on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation," *By Faith: The Online Magazine of the PCA*, September 21, 2017, <http://byfaithonline.com/protestant-catholic-relations-on-the-500th-anniversary-of-the-reformation/>. The article describes a 2017 lecture series at Covenant Theological Seminary.

3 Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 48.

role to play in God's saving plan. On the contrary, the law plays the vital role of exposing our sin and helplessness. As Paul says in Galatians, the law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, driving us to the point of despair over the insufficiency of our works (see Gal. 3:19–26). Unless this happens, we will never cast ourselves entirely upon Christ for salvation. In Luther's words, "It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ" (thesis 18).⁴

Luther follows his discussion of the law in the Heidelberg Disputation by setting a contrast between two types of theologians: the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross. It is important to understand that he is not using the term "theologian" in a professional or technical sense here. We can all be described as theologians because we all have thoughts about God and his ways. Moreover, in our fallen condition we are all by nature theologians of glory. The only way we can become theologians of the cross is by submitting to God's revelation in the gospel. Even then, we still have to contend with the inner theologian of glory that continues to reside in our old nature.

Luther differentiates between these two kinds of theologians in this sequence of four theses:⁵

Thesis 19: That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20).

Thesis 20: He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

Thesis 21: A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

Thesis 22: That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

These statements are not easy to understand upon first reading, but they are at the heart of Luther's protest against Rome. When we take the time to unpack these densely worded sentences, we find a wealth of theological insights.

The basic problem with the theologian of glory is that he thinks that he can figure out how God works apart from divine revelation. He thinks that he can rely on his own reason to understand God. As two contemporary Lutheran theologians explain,

theologies of glory must write a new script for God on the basis of human observations about the world around them. Human reason must penetrate nature and history in order to perceive the invisible things of God. From these observations and experiences, human beings can draw universal conclusions about God, thereby putting human epistemology in charge of divine revelation. But in the blindness of their minds they "exchanged the truth of God for a lie (Rom. 1:26)." They rewrite God's job description! The new job description incorporates human performance into it . . . God becomes someone we can manage.⁶

The theologian of glory assumes that God operates in the same manner that the world operates. He thinks that the principle of reciprocity governs our relationship with God since it governs so much of life in this world. We naturally think that those who do good will be rewarded and those who do evil will be punished, and in a theology of glory we apply this principle to the way of salvation. While the theologian of glory usually acknowledges that no one can be perfectly good, he believes that God's grace will make up the difference for those who do the best that they can. As one writer

4 Lull, 49.

5 Ibid.

6 Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 81.

puts it, “the hallmark of a theology of glory is that it will always consider grace as something of a supplement to whatever is left of human will and power.”⁷ A theologian of glory suffers from a false optimism, thinking that a little boost from God’s grace, combined with our own ingenuity and efforts, will enable us to accomplish great things. He expects God’s work to be manifested in things that are powerful, successful, and attractive in the estimation of the world. This is why Luther used the term “glory” to summarize this theologian’s overall perspective.

The theologian of the cross differs from the theologian of glory in that he looks to what God has revealed in his Word about how he carries out his saving purpose in the lives of the elect. The theologian of the cross understands that in the economy of salvation, outward appearances often look contrary to the true spiritual realities. Instead of conceiving of God in ways that conform to prevailing human attitudes about what is good and powerful and wise, the theologian of the cross submits to God’s revelation and believes that the weak and foolish message of the cross is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. This mindset is encapsulated in the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:18–25:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who

are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The theologian of the cross interprets the world through what God says instead of through what man sees. This enables him to understand that God’s favor is not bestowed commensurately, or in response to our obedience. Instead, God’s favor is freely given to everyone who places his trust in Jesus Christ as he is offered in the gospel. In short, it is not the just whom God justifies, but the unjust. The theologian of the cross understands that the only way into the kingdom of God is to be born again, which entails death and resurrection through faith in the Christ who is publicly portrayed as crucified in the proclamation of the gospel. This truth is why Luther used the term “cross” to summarize this theologian’s overall perspective.

Near the end of the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther shows how the distinction between the two kinds of theologians stands in correlation to the distinction between human love and divine love. While human love is generated in response to things that man deems to be lovely, God’s love is entirely generated from within himself. In Luther’s words, “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it” (thesis 28).⁸ Here is how Carl Trueman explains the meaning of Luther’s beautiful statement:

God does not find that something is lovely and then move out in love toward it; something is made lovely by the fact that God first sets his love upon it. He does not look at sinful human beings and see among the mass of people some who are intrinsically more righteous or holy than others and thus find himself attracted to them. Rather, the lesson of the cross is that God chooses that which is unlovely and repulsive, unrighteous and with no redeeming quality, and lavishes his saving

7 Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 16.

8 Lull, 49.

love in Christ upon it.⁹

Another writer explains Luther's point this way:

God's love in Christ is a creative act that brings believers into being. When all our human possibilities have been exhausted and we have been reduced to nothing, the one who creates out of nothing does his "proper work."¹⁰

Human love is reactive. We love certain people and certain things because we are attracted to them. There is something in those people or things that we find to be pleasing or lovely. But God does not love his elect because we are lovely. Instead, he makes us lovely by setting his love upon us. God calls those beloved who have no loveliness in themselves. He bestows his favor upon those who deserve nothing but judgment.

How the Theology of the Cross Permeates and Informs Protestant Doctrine

In distinguishing the theologian of the cross from the theologian of glory, Luther formulated a biblical concept that would come to permeate many different aspects of Protestant doctrine and practice. One of the most obvious of these is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which Protestants after Luther would describe as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. This doctrine says that the basis of God's acceptance of us is not any inherent righteousness that we possess in ourselves, or even any righteousness that God infuses in us. Instead, God only accepts as righteous those to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed by faith alone. As Luther states in the Heidelberg Disputation, "He is not righteous who works much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ" (thesis 25).¹¹ This idea does not make sense to the theologian of glory, because it is not consistent with what he can see about how the

world works. Instead, he agrees with these words from Aristotle:

Anything that we have to do we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly, we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones.¹²

This observation makes sense to the mind of fallen man, but it is at odds with the Word of God when it says,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. . . . Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (Rom. 3:23–25; 4:4–5 ESV)

The Scriptures make it clear that if justification were based on anything meritorious that God sees in us, it could not be described as a gift.

Another area of Protestant doctrine in which the theology of the cross is operative is sanctification, which deals with the personal righteousness that God works within those whom he redeems. While it is true that justifying faith produces the fruit of good works in a believer's life (see Jas. 2:14–26), one can be tempted to think that in sanctification, God's continued or final acceptance is contingent upon a person's obedience and godly living. This makes sense to the theologian of glory, because it is consistent with how things work in the world. The way to stay in a person's favor is to keep on doing the things that please that person. But the problem with applying this principle to sanctification is that it overthrows the Word of God, making our sanctification the basis of our justification. The Scriptures declare that we can

9 Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 67.

10 Forde, 22.

11 Lull, 49.

12 Cited in Forde, 104–5.

never make ourselves pleasing to God by anything that we do. As the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “by works of the law no human being will be justified in (God’s) sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). This principle is just as true after conversion as it is before conversion, as Paul made clear in the string of rhetorical questions he directed to the Galatian Christians: “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal 3:2–3). Sin contaminates everything that we do, even after conversion. This means God will only accept our good works if he has first accepted us in Christ (see WCF 16.5–6). Robert Kolb and Charles Arand offer a helpful illustration of this when they write,

What makes a work good is not how well it is performed or the nature of the work. What makes it good in the eyes of God is that it is done because of a trust that acknowledges God as God and clings to him. When a mother declares her child’s finger painting to be priceless, she does so not on the basis of its intrinsic quality or because she had it appraised by experts. She praises it because of who painted it—her child! So it is with God regarding the works of a believer.¹³

In other words, the only people who can please God are those who are already at peace with God through Christ. Of course, it is true that the sins we commit as believers can bring us under God’s fatherly displeasure and subject us to his discipline (see WCF 11.5). However, if God has accepted us for Christ’s sake, then none of our failures or transgressions can cause us to lose our salvation. In the words of Edward Fisher,

for this is certain truth, that as no good either in you, or done by you, did move [God] to justify you, and give you eternal life, so no evil in you, or done by you, can move him to take it away from you, being once given.¹⁴

¹³ Kolb and Arand, 106.

¹⁴ Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2009), 237.

Furthermore, as Luther pointed out in his treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian*, we cannot even do good works until we are set free from trying to do them to secure or retain God’s favor. Those who do good works in hopes of putting God in their debt are acting out of self-interest, not out of love.

The theology of the cross also speaks to the question of what kind of ministry paradigm the church should employ. In many churches today, the paradigm often seems more reflective of the theology of glory than the theology of the cross. While there are numerous variations of the prevailing model, they can all be subsumed under the category of “culturally-shaped ministry.” In this paradigm, the church’s ministry and worship are shaped by a mostly positive engagement with culture and by an emphasis on core beliefs around which a sizable Christian consensus can be formed in hopes of having a significant cultural impact. The focus in this model tends to be upon human flourishing and cultural transformation, outcomes that are impressive to the human eye. By way of contrast, the theology of the cross finds expression in what can be described as “confessionally-shaped ministry.” In this paradigm, the church’s ministry and worship are shaped in a manner that reflects the structural integrity of its confessional standards and heritage. The focus in this model is on making mature, heavenly-minded disciples through clear instruction in the whole counsel of God and the diligent use of the ordinary means of grace. While this approach to ministry may seem unimpressive, inefficient, and irrelevant, it reflects a willingness to trust in the Lord to accomplish his purposes through the power of his Word. As Luther once noted while reflecting on how the Reformation had taken root in Germany:

I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses

upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.¹⁵

This Word-centered way of thinking stems from a conception of the Christian religion that is fundamentally dogmatic, a perspective that stands in sharp contrast to one that sees Christianity as essentially pragmatic.¹⁶ When the church's ministry is informed by the theology of the cross, the focus of ministry will remain upon "the open statement of the truth" (2 Cor. 4:2).

The theology of the cross brings a helpful perspective to many other areas of Protestant doctrine and practice. It tells us that the unity of the church is enigmatically manifested in those who profess the true religion rather than straightforwardly manifested in a purportedly infallible magisterium or in some kind of revived Christendom or in a religion that is so loosely defined that it tends towards universalism. The theology of the cross says that the Christian life is focused on faithfulness and self-denial in the ordinary aspects of life rather than on radical expressions of discipleship. The theology of the cross helps us to see that worship should be regulated by Scripture rather than by the desire to create an intense emotional, aesthetic, or culturally relevant experience. The theology of the cross teaches us to look to civil government as a preserver of order in this present evil age rather than an instrument for ushering in the age to come. And the theology of the cross calls us to persevere in humble, patient faith amid the afflictions that God ordains for us under the sun rather than expect uninterrupted material blessing in a world that has been subjected to futility.

Conclusion

It is a constant temptation for us to downplay the message of the cross, or at least take it for granted, so that we can focus on doing things that the world values and admires. The message of the cross can seem so negative and depressing. But

15 Cited in Trueman, 94–95.

16 Carl Trueman makes this helpful distinction in his article, "If Only Francis Were Luther!" the website of *First Things*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/05/if-only-francis-were-luther>.

that, Luther would have said, is exactly the point. The message of the cross will not let us forget the ruinous consequences of sin, or our inability to do anything to escape from our dreadful plight, or the terrible price that had to be paid to secure our redemption. Luther summed it up memorably in a statement that he jotted down two days before he died: "We are beggars! That is true."¹⁷ Not a glamorous or triumphant sentiment, to be sure. But it is true. And it is the perspective that we need to have if we are going to see the message of the cross as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. ©

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17 Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life*, (New York: Penguin, 2004), 185.

✦ Servant Classics

Healing for the Bruised Reed from the Heavenly Doctor Sibbes

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* October 2018¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

This month, I offer the first of a new series of brief reviews of classic Christian literature, covering the large territory from Augustine to J. I. Packer, titled Servant Classics. Classics are those books that have endured over many decades or centuries because of the outstanding quality of the thought and its articulation by the author; they are relevant beyond the time in which they were written. And they are often well known but not well read. I begin with a Puritan classic by the “heavenly doctor Sibbes,” *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (1630). In good Puritan fashion Richard Sibbes expounds the twentieth verse of Jesus’s quotation of Isaiah 42:1–4 in Matthew 12:18–21: “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory” (quoting Isaiah 42:3 where the kjv translates the last word “truth” instead of “victory”). As one who identified with the metaphors of bruised reed and smoking flax, my soul found just the right medicine in the heavenly doctor’s exposition. Reading it again this year in the *Scolar*

Press edition rekindled the old spark.

During the summer of 1974, I was in New Hampshire doing an internship and taking a course in world history in order to insure my graduation from Covenant College in 1975. While perusing old books in the Dimond library at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, I came across a facsimile of the first edition (1630) of Sibbes’s *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*. I had just begun collecting antiquarian religious books, so the challenge of the antique orthography and typography was pleasant. But the content was superlative. At the time I was struggling with assurance, especially under the pressure of preparing two sermons a week for most of the summer. The full title in the original is: *THE BRVISED REEDE AND SMOAKING FLAX. Some Sermons contracted out of the 12.of Matth.20. As the desire, and for the good of weaker Christians*. In Matthew 12:20 Jesus is quoting Isaiah 42:3.

Sibbes (1577–1635) was an English Puritan with a BA and MA from St. John’s College, Cambridge. In 1603 he was converted under the preaching of Paul Baynes at the Church of St. Andrews in Cambridge. He was ordained in 1608 and received the bachelor of divinity in 1610. Under his preaching at Holy Trinity Church and Gray’s Inn several eminent preachers were converted—among them was John Cotton. After receiving his doctor of divinity degree at Cambridge Sibbes became known as “the Heavenly Doctor Sibbes.”² Biographer Isaac Walton said of him, “Of this blessed man, let this just praise be given, Heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.”³ In 1633, Charles I gave Sibbes the pastorate of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, where he served until his death. His gentleness caused him to avoid controversy and to influence a wide range of Christians. “Where most holiness is, there is most moderation, where it may be without prejudice of piety to God and the good of others.”⁴ His brilliance was channeled through

2 Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 535. All of my biographical information came from this book, 534–41.

3 *Ibid.*, 535.

4 *Ibid.*, 536.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=707&issue_id=139.

his piety, so that when he preached he sought to “allure [his hearers] to the entertainment of Christ’s mild, safe, wise, victorious government.”⁵

Here is a sample of the pastoral comfort offered by Sibbes from the 1630 facsimile followed by a modernized version:

First therefore for the great consolation of poore and weake Christians, let them know, that a spark from heaven though kindled under green wood that sobbes and smoakes, yet it will consume all at last, *Love once kindled is strong as death, much water cannot quench it*, and therefore it is called *a vehement flame*, or flame of God, kindled in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

*The first use of this truth is for the great consolation of poor and weak Christians. Let them know that a spark from heaven, even though kindled under greenwood that pops and smokes, yet it will consume it all at last. Love once kindled is as strong as death. Many waters cannot quench it; therefore it is called a vehement flame, or the flame of God (Song of Sol. 8:6); it is kindled in the heart by the Holy Ghost.*⁶

Sibbes was skilled in unpacking metaphors like fire and sparks.

There is a special blessing in that little spark. “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, ‘do not destroy it for a blessing is in it’: so will I do for my servants’ sakes’ (Isa. 65:8). We see how our Savior Christ bore with Thomas in his doubting (John 20:27), and with the two disciples that went to Emmaus, who wavered as to whether he came to redeem Israel or not (Luke 24:21). He did not quench that little light in Peter which was smothered:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Bruised Reed* (1630), (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998); updated language, notes, additional verses, corrections, and formatting, <http://www.monergism.com/bruisedreed.html> © William H. Gross—www.onthewing.org 12/15/2007, 46. Pages 257–8 in the Scolar Press edition.

Peter denied him, but he did not deny Peter (Luke 22:61). “If you will, you can,” said one poor man in the Gospel (Matt. 8:2). “If you can do anything,” said another (Mark 9:22). Both were smoking flax. Neither of them was quenched.⁷

Sibbes hews the fine line between antinomianism and legalism, giving the believer, with a spark of grace, hope that the Lord will complete the work he has begun, while instilling a love of Jesus and holiness in the sinner’s life. Treat yourself to the remedy of assurance, and as officers in the church pass on the prescription to those in need. ©

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⁷ Ibid., 13.

✦ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

Reformed Catholicity

by Michael Allen and Scott R.
Swain

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2018¹

by **D. Scott Meadows**

Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation, by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, vii + 168 pages, \$19.99, paper.

The fiercest proponents of *sola Scriptura* must ever guard against disdain for the Church's fallible tradition, as well as the concomitant sin of neglecting it. Allen and Swain sound a clarion call to repent of historical isolationism and to work toward healing what ails us, both doctrinally and ecclesiastically, by self-critical engagement with the best of our forefathers' theological legacy.

It is ironic that the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* has been twisted beyond historical recognition by violating it as conceived and expressed in the Protestant Reformation. *Reformed Catholicity* provides the nuance concerning tradition, which we need to recover the vitality of this important slogan in our own time. This book is recommended espe-

cially for believers inclined to a "no creed but Christ" mentality, or, "all I need is the Bible and the Holy Spirit." No, we properly interpret Scripture in fellowship with Christ's Church of all ages. Even Reformed readers will find their appreciation intensified for the indispensable contribution of dogmatic theology to modern biblical interpretation and theological reflection.

Chapter one surveys recent attempts of renewal by retrieval, each with its own distinctive theological orientation and agenda, which is surveyed admirably. This book argues that Reformed principles, growing out of Scripture, require us to seek unity among Christians with the help of the things that have been most assuredly believed by Christ's Church through the centuries. Chapters two and three address the historic sense of *sola Scriptura* as it pertained to ecclesiastical fellowship and tradition going back to the apostles and Church Fathers. Chapter four very astutely defends a confessionally-informed reading and interpretation of Scripture. This chapter is the most excellent of all in my judgment. Chapter five argues for responsible "proof-texting" which has fallen into disrepute, demonstrating the venerable and sophisticated interplay of Scripture and theology in the examples of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, both careful exegetes and towering theological figures. J. Todd Billings wrote the Afterword which is an appeal for today's Christian teachers to implement these perspectives.

The authors are clearly informed and articulate in making their case. The tone is winsome and the arguments generally persuasive. The topic is rarely addressed to this degree of detail, and it is an important one. Readers may profit immensely from this well-argued plea. It is a welcome antidote to the prevalent "chronological snobbery" (C. S. Lewis) of today's evangelicalism. ☺

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Note: This review has been revised slightly since its initial publication online.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=670&issue_id=131.

The Vanishing American Adult

by Ben Sasse

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* January 2018¹

by John R. Muether

The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis—and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance, by Ben Sasse. New York: St. Martin's, 2017, 306 pages, \$27.99.

Benjamin Sasse may be a familiar name to some *Ordained Servant* readers from his days on the editorial staff of *Modern Reformation*, 1997–2004, during the time when CURE (Citizens United for Reformation) morphed into ACE (the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals). No doubt Sasse remains committed to recovering the Reformation, but as the junior Senator from Nebraska he devotes himself to recovering America in this bestselling book.

The Vanishing American Adult describes a generation of Americans who have not grown up. Victims of “soft parenting,” millennials are generally missing the coming-of-age opportunities that give shape to adult life. Addicted to technology and medicated for behavioral ailments, they are staying home and marrying less and later. The result is not merely families in crisis. The lost appreciation for hard work and failure to achieve economic independence are crippling the political order, because our fraying democracy represents these family dysfunctions writ large.

This argument is hardly new, so what is unique about Sasse’s approach? For one, despite the subtitle, this is not merely a “how to” instructional guide. Several chapters are sustained reflections on vocation, suffering, death and dying, me-

dia ecology, and the dangers of overconsumption. He urges countervailing practices such as greater intergenerational connectivity, and preparation for dying well, and observing the difference between the adventure of travel and the passive sightseeing of tourism. While each chapter ends with a list of “stepping stones”—a starter set of practices—Sasse avoids simple prescriptions. At times Sasse employs flyover-country means for reviving American adulthood, such as commending farm life. (Here he includes his teenage daughter’s hilarious dispatches on Nebraska farm life that rendered her an internet sensation.) But altogether this is less a nostalgic call for Thoreauian self-reliance than a commendation for simple and deliberate living.

“The purpose of this book,” Sasse makes clear, “is not to persuade you of any theological points” (28). Much of his argument focuses on the social effects of America’s increasingly irreligious age. (For example, we have lost the significance of religious rites of passages from childhood to adulthood, in first communions and bar mitzvahs.) This book is not about how Christians transform the culture. He seeks to avoid the “battlegrounds of the culture wars” (104), and true to that aim, neither abortion nor homosexuality finds an entry in the index. Sasse seeks to restore an American Creed—not a civil religion, but a reminder that America is still premised on a creed, a set of values enshrined in the Constitution. So there are reasons for Christians and non-Christians to unite to serve the common good, not to make America great again but to make America an idea again.

The last chapter, “Build a Bookshelf,” is a creatively constructed bibliographical essay where Sasse describes his sixty favorite books that he returns to again and again. He encourages readers to construct their own collections, urging care to cover several categories and genres. His own categories begin with God and continue to anthropology, markets, tyrants, a humanistic perspective on science, and fiction. He commends J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*, even for those “who hate the core argument” because it demonstrates “how polemics tackle something important head-on,” thus, encouraging thoughtful

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=671&issue_id=131.

intellectual engagement (231).

Reading this book prompted me to wonder: might this become Sasse's version of *Profiles in Courage*? John F. Kennedy published his bestseller three years before his successful 1960 presidential campaign. But there are at least two differences: there is strong reason to think that Sasse actually wrote this book, and Sasse's father, a retired high school wrestling coach, will not likely influence voters to grant his son a Pulitzer Prize. Still there is a sense of a manifesto to this book that at least suggests aspirations for the 2020 election season.

Beyond whatever political ambitions Sasse harbors, this book serves as a helpful primer on civic engagement for politically charged Christians. In a recent speech on Islamic terrorism on the floor of the Senate, Sasse described his dual citizenship in this way: "I am a Christian. . . . But I am also in this life an American, and I have taken an oath of office to the Constitution." *The Vanishing American Adult* is a tangible demonstration of a "two kingdom" approach to political discourse. Politics do not matter most. But Christians must strive with non-Christians to preserve conditions that will enable all Americans to devote themselves to (and even to debate peacefully about) things that do matter most. ©

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The Religious Life of Robert E. Lee

by R. David Cox

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2018¹

by Darryl G. Hart

The Religious Life of Robert E. Lee, by R. David Cox. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017, xxi + 336 pages, \$26.00, paper.

To say that this religious biography of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee is timely is an understatement. At the same time, to say that anything said about Lee is an understatement is potentially inflammatory. During the controversy surrounding monuments to Confederate leaders during the summer of 2017, Adam Serwer, a contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, debunked the myth that Lee was "a brilliant strategist and devoted Christian man who abhorred slavery and labored tirelessly after the war to bring the country back together."² Serwer writes little about Lee's faith, but the general's racism is sufficient to disqualify any claim that the Virginian was a good Christian. Not only was the Confederate officer a bad strategist, according to Serwer, but "White supremacy was one of Lee's most fundamental convictions."³

R. David Cox's biography was in the works well before debates about Confederate monuments reopened public debates about the Civil War and the South's aims in secession. Even so, his book will provide plenty of assistance to those still partial to the Lee "myth" as well as lots of evidence for revilers like Serwer. Cox does not sugar coat even

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=677&issue_id=133.

2 Adam Serwer, "The Myth of the Kindly General Lee," *The Atlantic* (June 4, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/the-myth-of-the-kindly-general-lee/529038/>.

3 *Ibid.*

as he handles his subject with empathy. The Lee of this biography is fully human with all the virtues and vices that go with the species.

Born on January 19, 1807, son of Revolutionary War hero Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee, Robert was a native of Stratford Hall, Virginia. An appointment to the US Military Academy at West Point set the course of Lee’s life. In 1829 he graduated from the Academy and served for seventeen years in the Corps of Engineers, chiefly responsible for securing the young nation’s coastal defenses. Lee’s first active combat duty was in the Mexican-American War, in which his service was sufficiently distinguished to merit the rank of colonel. After that war, Lee took a post at West Point as superintendent (1852–1855) and from there joined the cavalry, a post that required him to lead the effort in 1859 to subdue John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry. Lee’s wife, Mary Custis Lee, according to Cox, recalled that Brown’s insurrection “should have opened our eyes to the machinations of the . . . fanatical abolitionists” (162). Lee himself did not comment on the politics of the growing sectional crisis. He did believe that “secession would bode catastrophe” (163).

Lee’s ambivalence about the Confederacy would not last. In the same week that he declined President Lincoln’s offer to serve as head of the Union’s army, Lee accepted a position as general of Virginia’s army. Cox adds that Lee may be the “only soldier in history to be offered the command of two opposing armies” in the same week (170). The Virginian’s strategy during the war of taking the offense north proved surprisingly successful until Gettysburg in 1863 when Confederate soldiers lost in the most remembered battle of the war. Lee was, as all school children know, the Confederate general to accept the terms of surrender at Appomattox from Ulysses S. Grant. Soon after the war, Lee presided over Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, an institution that he helped to rebuild after the war’s devastation until 1870 when he died.

Cox’s biography is the latest entry in the Eerdmans’s Library of Religious Biography series, a forum that invites more exploration of Lee’s spiri-

tual life than other historians have produced. In Cox’s able hands, Lee is neither an enthusiast, who wore his piety on his sleeve, nor a nominal Anglican, who went through the motions of acceptable Christianity. The general grew up in an Anglican home that reflected his father’s enlightened understanding of Christianity and his mother’s evangelical experience. Lee himself was not obviously devout in the ways recommended by evangelicals who denounced polite Christianity. He attended church dutifully but did not seek confirmation until he was forty-six years old. When signs of High Church Anglicanism surfaced during the 1840s, an associate reported Lee as declaring, “Beware of *Pussyism* (sic)! *Pussyism* (sic) is always bad, and may lead to unchristian feeling; therefore beware of *Pussyism* (sic)” (85). Whether Lee understood the theological subtleties of the Oxford Movement or simply wanted to avoid ecclesiastical controversy is unclear. When he oversaw West Point and a Presbyterian pastor took over duties as chaplain, Lee reassured a cadet’s worried Episcopalian father that the services avoided “doctrinal questions” in favor of inculcating “principles of piety & morality” (106). Incidents like these, scattered throughout the book, underscore Cox’s general assessment:

Lee was not a religious thinker. He never formally studied theology, much less attended seminary. He was not a preacher, though he heard many a sermon and often commented on them and those who preached them. He was not a theologian but a soldier. His beliefs were far more practical than speculative. (xvi)

Cox departs from this evaluation, however, when discussing the doctrine of providence which informed the very practical and yet speculative nature of assigning meaning to combat, defeat, and death. At the heart of Lee’s Christian outlook was a trust in God’s control of all things. In what Cox describes as a summary of Lee’s theology, the general confessed that “I feel always as safe in the wilderness as in the crowded city” because “I know in whose powerful hands I am & in them rely.” According to Cox, this was no fatalism or stoicism for Lee added that “Providence requires us to use the

means he has put under our control.” Reliance on God’s providence did not encourage idleness, but rather to work for truth and justice “in this wicked world” (129). This outlook informed Lee’s understanding of the South’s defeat. The region had “actively offended the Almighty” who “afflict(s) us most deeply” (198). Whatever Lee absorbed from services, reciting the prayer book and reflecting on God’s ways, his faith sustained hope and perseverance throughout his pilgrimage.

For those readers who are incapable of forgiving the South, Cox’s biography will provide another occasion for offense. Those readers may simply write off Lee’s Christian beliefs as mere justification for his views on race and politics. Those who still harbor some attraction for the “Lost Cause” will likely receive Cox’s book as a vindication at least of Lee’s admirable character. For everyone else, Cox’s book provides a welcome study of Lee’s piety in the context of Virginia Episcopalianism. This biography will not bring back the monuments of Lee, but it does restore some of the luster so recently denied to Americans who fought for the Confederacy. ©

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They Say We Are Infidels

by *Mindy Belz*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
March 2018¹

by **Bryan D. Estelle**

They Say We Are Infidels: On the Run from ISIS with Persecuted Christians in the Middle East, by Mindy Belz. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016, xix + 321 pages, \$15.99, paper.

My father-in-law, Russell Lowell, MD, at the request of the American Medical Association for physicians to fill a need in South Vietnam, served as a civilian doctor there during the Vietnam War, since most of that country’s doctors were conscripted into service in the military. I remember him recounting to me that he would never read an American newspaper relating foreign wartime events again in quite the same way after experiencing that war zone firsthand. Reading this book by journalist Mindy Belz has left me with a similar conviction about events in the Middle East during the last couple of decades. Don’t assume that what you read in our newspapers and magazines or watch on television accurately reflects events on the ground in the Middle East.

This is a deeply personal narrative of a journalist who has been covering the situation of Christians in the Middle East for years. The book is well-written English prose with a pleasing cadence. Although it is mostly about events in Iraq and Syria in the last twenty years, it’s not merely about recent events. At times Belz easily segues into history as old as civilization, or as recent as the decades following World War I; nevertheless, her story is well constructed to demonstrate historical events that

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=681&issue_id=134.

had profound influence on current events. A map plotting all the important cities talked about in the book is found on page xi and proves helpful for those of us unfamiliar with the geography of this part of the world. Additionally, a time line of key events in Iraq and Syria from 1920–2015 will keep the reader from getting lost in this well-documented, detailed account (303–7). There is no glossary of important or foreign terms, something the publishers would have done well to include. Belz demonstrates just how hard life was under Saddam Hussein. However, despite his defeat, capture, and ultimate demise, she also showcases the complexities and hardships of what replaced Saddam and the former power of the Baath party. The situation, according to Belz, was not helped by the Americans' protracted de-Baathification policies either.

While the mainstream media has portrayed the narrative unfolding in Iraq as primarily a Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict, Belz relates through first-hand experience and many trips to the Middle East that the picture is much more complex than supposed. Her primary interest is the story about the persecuted Christian minority in Iraq. That story is important because it doesn't fit into the neat and tidy narrative most often told by the US government or the American news media. However, the evidence that Belz presents is overwhelming: many, many Christians between 2005–2011 and beyond were assassinated. Although her book unveils the vast suffering of many Christians (and others) in the Middle East, it also recounts tremendous courage and sacrificial charity that Christians offered to others (not just fellow Christians), often taking on great risks (e.g., see page 291). As Belz shared her stories with Christians in the states, they too began to show charity—even in the form of cash—to help relieve the suffering and thirst of so many refugees, especially in Northern Iraq.

This book recounts extreme suffering, persecution, and exile. It is particularly engaging because the stories are frequently told from the perspective of real people, friends whom Belz made through years of reporting in Iraq and Syria. For example, the story is told through the eyes of Insaf, a mother like Belz, who years previously had to leave the

country of Iraq and yet made many sacrificial trips back home to her Christian friends and relatives in order to deliver much-needed aid and money to those left behind. The story is also recounted from the perspective of many displaced refugees (over a million from Iraq in 2014 alone) who had to flee for safety, often without shoes and with only the clothes on their backs.

When ISIS began its invasion of Qaraqosh in 2014, the inhabitants had to flee for safety. The descriptions of the “crawl of humanity making its way east, south, and north from Nineveh” (247) is heartrending. The vivid descriptions of flight to cities of refuge and Kurdistan will jerk tears from your eyes, as will ISIS's well-documented slave trade of young girls and women, who in some cases committed suicide in order to escape their torment and their oppressors (269–74).

One of the greatest realizations of reading this book is that Americans have often been under-informed or just plain misinformed about the situation in the Middle East. No matter what your source of news is, this book will intelligently inform opinions about the political and religious realities that our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria have faced throughout history and especially in the last fifteen years. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to know more about the complex situation in the Middle East and for all Christians who want to learn how to pray more intelligently for persecuted Christians in that region of the world. ☺

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The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise

by Darío Fernández-Morera

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2018¹

by Bryan D. Estelle

The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain, by Darío Fernández-Morera. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2016, 358 pages, \$29.95.

In Germany, you must write two dissertations (not just one) before you are considered for an academic chair as a professor. I can remember the “research realization” that I came to when my own professor, Michael O’Connor, put me in touch with Walther Sallaberger, a professor of Akkadian in Munich, Germany. He had written his second dissertation on an analysis of Old Babylonian Akkadian everyday life letters with some special attention to how this Semitic culture construed politeness strategies in its everyday communication.² I realized the simple but profound truth at that point in my academic career that if one could engage the extant resources at an “everyday life level” (especially through everyday letters, which is not an easy task), then one may obtain a true picture of the ancient world despite the fact that a researcher may be separated by hundreds or even thousands of years of history. Such is the case in Fernández-Morera’s book.

Fernández-Morera’s primary goal is to debunk the myth that has arisen in the modern world that the Muslim world in Medieval Spain, which began with the Muslim invasion in the early eighth cen-

tury, was a space where Jews (mostly Sephardic), Christians, and Muslims lived in mutual tolerance and peaceful multiculturalism under Islamic rule. How does he accomplish this? By appealing to the extant sources, primary and secondary, especially everyday life letters and legal transcripts. Quoting Edward Gibbon (95), “the laws of a nation form the most instructive portion of its history.” Therefore, Fernández-Morera avoids the biased narrative about a tolerant Andalusian Paradise that has snowballed in modern times. In short, he proves, based on the extant evidence, that Muslims, Christians, and Jews had a precarious coexistence in Medieval Spain, not a tolerant one as is often alleged. The author is obviously passionate about his subject since he thinks that few “periods in history have been more misrepresented than that of Islamic Spain” (239).

This is a hard-hitting book with lots of citations, including over ninety-five pages of endnotes supporting the author’s claims and an eleven-page select bibliography. Nevertheless, you don’t have to be a specialist in order to understand this book; nor do you need to know any history about the Muslim conquest or Medieval Spain. Almost every single time Fernández-Morera introduces a technical term (which is frequent), he immediately translates and explains it (e.g., *jihad*, *jizya*, *dhimmi*, *sharia* law).

Rather than tolerant, the Muslim rulers were rapacious: there was rampant looting, wholesale ignorance among the conquerors (they really learned the treasures of Greece and Rome from Christian scholars), constant religious coercion, numerous beheadings, suppressive measures against women, and the list continues.

The Jews had suffered tremendously under the Catholic Visigoths before the Muslim invasion. So, it is not surprising in some respects that the Jews supported the Muslims, and such an attitude is visible in the sources. Even so, the sources also demonstrate that many pogroms and expulsions resulted in instability of Jewish life under Muslim rule, again, a notion that runs contrary to so much popularization of the myth of tolerance. However, the direction of intolerance was not unilateral.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=682&issue_id=134.

2 Walther Sallaberger, “Wenn Du mein Bruder bist, . . .” *Interaktion und Textgestaltung in altbabylonischen Alltagsbriefen*, Cuneiform Monographs 16 (Groningen: Styx, 1999).

Sephardic Jews were very strict during this alleged “golden age” of Jewish culture, and the legal views of the great Jewish philosopher Maimonides made everyday interaction with non-Jews very difficult.

The seismic problem in Islamic Medieval Spain was the relationship between religion and culture. Whereas in Western Christianity, there had always been a notion among jurists and theologians that church and state existed as different institutions with a special set of terms to designate this relationship (e.g., sacred and profane, religious and secular), in Islamic-ruled Spain all such distinctions were erased and a unity of the religious and the sacred carried the day. It was a theocracy, or more precisely, a hierocracy—a “government of clerics” (85–86). Distinctions between civic and religious law disappeared and Islamic *sharia* law pervaded all levels of society. As the author notes:

Sharia . . . strictly speaking means not the Islamic legal system but a religiously inspired view of the world, a path of right conduct that Allah has given to men through his messengers and through The Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad: *sharia* was divine law. (86)

This mindset, so clearly exposed in this book, which ignores the sources (primary and secondary), seems to be driven (ironically) by mostly elitist academics from hierarchically organized educational institutions. Quotes from their books and articles are peppered throughout Fernández-Morera’s book showing that he has not just set up a straw man but has become convinced of the need to overturn a false paradigm.

The book is recommended for many reasons. Although it seems as if there is an information overload because of the sheer quantity of evidence cited, it is a model of thorough and exhaustive research. This reviewer is convinced of the need to reevaluate the popular myth of an Andalusian Paradise. In an age when Islam, in its multifaceted expressions, is spreading throughout the globe, Fernández-Morera’s book will help one understand a very important period of history under Muslim rule. ©

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The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia

edited by Harry S. Stout

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2018¹

by Jeffrey C. Waddington

The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia, edited by Harry S. Stout. Foreword by George M. Marsden. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017, 647 pages, \$60.00.

The *Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia* has been anticipated by many Edwards scholars and aficionados as well as interested intelligent laypersons. It is a handsomely designed volume with an interesting back story that I will be happy to share with readers. This *Encyclopedia* may be among the first of its kind—an Edwards scholarly community-sourced production. A few years back the project was announced on the website of the Jonathan Edwards Center (JEC) of Yale University website

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=683&issue_id=134.

and a selection of relevant topics was posted. Members of the Edwards republic of letters were then encouraged to contact the JEC if they were interested in authoring entrees for the volume. The articles were vetted by the accomplished editorial staff connected with the JEC and the Yale University critical letterpress and online editions of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. In its published form, there are over 400 entrees in the *Encyclopedia* written by over 175 contributors. Perusing the names and institutions reflected in the list of contributors one will find names familiar to students of Edwards like Oliver Crisp, Sang Hyun Lee, and Kyle Strobel, as well as lesser known scholars. In fact, one of the impressive and encouraging facets of this volume is the evidence it offers of a thriving Edwards scholarship. In the interests of full disclosure, I should note that I am one of the lesser known (not to say unknown) contributors to this tome and I am personal friends or an acquaintance with many others. No serious scholarship is a solitary effort. Having said all this I should say, as the editors do say, that this is not an exhaustive work. As a dedicated student of Cornelius Van Til, as well as of Jonathan Edwards, I readily concede that no human project can be exhaustive of any facet of God's world. Only God himself has that kind of breadth and depth of knowledge. Nevertheless, this is as thorough a one-stop shopping experience of Edwards research as one can find.

The topics in the *Encyclopedia* cover a broad range of Edwardsean concerns. Of course, we have the expected theological topics such as union with Christ and justification, regeneration, and sanctification. Uniquely Edwardsean subjects include the sense of the heart, speculative and spiritual understanding/knowledge, and the nature of true virtue. Philosophical entrees focus on such topics as occasionalism and idealism and aspects of what now would be considered natural science. There are entrees on particular works of Edwards, as we might expect, such as "Original Sin," "Freedom of the Will," and the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God."

There is a plethora of articles on thinkers who influenced Edwards, including John Locke, Peter

van Mastricht, Nicholas Malebranche, John Calvin, and Francis Turretin. Edwards's relation to Puritanism is discussed as are individuals who could be said to be influenced by or have interacted with the ideas of Edwards. Charles Finney arguably stands in the latter category. Finney's connection to Edwards is real, but complex, and he himself fell under the influence of the New England theology movement rightly rejected by our Old School ancestors. I question whether Edwards would have recognized his so-called disciples among the proponents of the New Divinity. There are also entrees on historical events like Queen Anne's War and the Great Awakening, as well as movements like Quakerism, and religions such as Islam.

As with any book written by fallen, even if restored, human authors, this volume undoubtedly possesses entrees that will be less than pleasing. Perhaps some of these will be the result of skewed perspective. Others will be problematic because they raise issues of complexity and concern in Edwards's thought (his idealism/immaterialism comes to mind). Some problems arise because theological topics are handled by non-Reformed believing Christian scholars or by liberal scholars or even by non-Christian scholars. This is not to say that none of these scholars can contribute to the learned discussion about Edwards. It is simply to recognize that not all scholars read Edwards for spiritual or spiritually uplifting intellectual edification. Many scholars read Edwards with various self-conscious or unself-conscious axes to grind, such as Marxist or feminist lenses, to give but two (sometimes combined) examples. It is ironic that the theologian who stressed the distinction between speculative and spiritual understanding has been, and is currently, the subject of non-Christian scholarship.

Having said all this, I highly recommend *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*. You are not likely to find a better single source volume that covers so many of the issues related to Edwards. I envision this book providing the impetus for further Edwards research. That is a good thing. Even better would be that the Triune God of Edwards would be introduced to readers who might not otherwise come to learn of him. ©

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How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth

by Christopher J. H. Wright

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2018¹

by Stephen J. Tracey

How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth, by Christopher J. H. Wright. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016, 288 pages, \$18.99, paper.

The little phrase “for all its worth” in the title sets a high standard for this book. It draws one in, expecting to learn how to milk the Old Testament for all its worth in our preaching and teaching. And the book gets close—very close—to achieving this.

Christopher J. H. Wright has produced numerous helpful and insightful studies relating

to the Old Testament. This book is packed with sound instruction and practical advice. The checklists are very useful.

The book is divided into two sections. Section one answers the question, “Why should we preach and teach from the Old Testament?” Wright gives three reasons: 1) It is God’s Word, 2) It sets out the foundations of our faith, and 3) It was the Bible of Jesus. He then gives three thoughtful chapters on understanding the flow of Scriptures and how to connect them with Christ.

Section two answers the question, “How can we preach and teach from the Old Testament?” with detailed discussion on preaching narrative, law, prophets, Psalms, and wisdom literature. These are all beefy chapters, full of details and well informed in the issues of hermeneutics, with good homiletic pointers. This book would be profitable to seminary students, and also as a refresher to preachers who know these things, but amidst the pressure of pastoral commitments sometimes take shortcuts through the hermeneutical work.

There are four areas where I think Wright doesn’t reach the expected standard of “for all its worth.” To be fair, the book was first published in 2015 in the UK under the title, *Sweeter than Honey: Preaching from the Old Testament*. It seems that the American publisher pushed the book into a “for all its worth” series format.

First, the book does not discuss the issue of divine and human meaning in Scripture. With so much of the book dealing with hermeneutics, this is a surprising omission. By concentrating on human authorial intent, he seems at times to weaken divine authorial intent. Wright does recognize that the Old Testament is authoritative and relevant. He says that “breathed-out by God . . . means that, although they [the Scriptures] were spoken and written by ordinary human beings like us, what was said and written down was as if it had come from the mouth of God” (19). More discussion of the relationship between divine and human meaning would have been helpful.²

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=688&issue_id=135.

2 cf. Vern S. Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 48, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 241–79.

Second, and related to the first issue, is the question of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Wright devotes three chapters dealing explicitly with this subject: chapter 3, “Understanding Jesus Through the OT,” chapter 4, “Don’t Just Give Me Jesus,” and chapter 5, “Connecting with Christ.” His emphasis is that Christ is the destination of the Old Testament, that “the Old Testament is essential to understand the identity and mission of Jesus” (39). Consequently, he says the OT is not all about Christ, but it points to him. What he is against is “a simplistic method of interpretation in which every verse in the Old Testament somehow has to be ‘about Jesus’” (54, his italics).

His warnings in this section are to be heeded. However, since the death of Jesus was according to the “definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23), it is hard to escape the conclusion that every word God subsequently speaks in time is founded on and shaped by this decree. Perhaps more, every word God subsequently speaks is in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ was known in the mind of God before he created the world. Wright does not want to flatten the incarnation, but I wonder if he ends up flattening the eternal decree, or the eternal Sonship of Jesus. It is not as though Jesus had no ministry prior to the incarnation. Both John and Paul reveal that creation itself is through Christ, to Christ, and for Christ (John 1:2, Col. 1:15–20). Of course, we must not fall into a simplistic method of interpretation, but we must also not overlook the place of the Eternal Son in his eternal glory. In other words, it is too simplistic to see Jesus as merely the destination. He is more than the end. He is also the beginning. He is alpha and omega (Rev. 22:13). My real frustration here is that Wright does not consider Christ and the decree in the context of the metanarrative. His metanarrative is too small. The whole of Scripture must be read in the context of “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8 NKJV, KJV). I recognize that there are different translations of this verse, but even if the phrase “before the foundation of the world” applies to the writing in the Lamb’s book, it still

implies the pre-time knowledge of the cross.

Third, Wright’s work on understanding and preaching from Old Testament law is very helpful, emphasizing that Old Testament law was given to people who had experienced grace. It would have been more helpful had he also outlined the way law comes to us as creatures. It is wonderfully true that we do not earn our salvation by law keeping. But there is an obligation to keep the law simply by virtue of our being humans made in the image of God.

Fourth, I was surprised to find that in the section on poetry Wright sticks to the old threefold division of parallelism. Fokkelman, reflecting other scholars, is scathing in his view of this threefold division: “Poems wilt when subjected to this sort of boorish and wooden treatment.”³

Nevertheless, I highly commend this book. As part of the discussion of preaching and teaching from the Old Testament, it is readable, thoughtful, and helpful; I am just not sure he milks it “for all its worth.” ©

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3 J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox, 2001), 27.

John Gerstner and the Renewal of Presbyterian and Reformed Evangelicalism in Modern America

by Jeffrey S. McDonald

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
April 2018¹

by John R. Muether

John Gerstner and the Renewal of Presbyterian and Reformed Evangelicalism in Modern America, by Jeffrey S. McDonald. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017, x + 263 pages, \$44.00, paper.

In this life of John Gerstner (1914–1996), Jeffrey McDonald, Pastor of Avery Presbyterian Church (EPC) in Bellevue, Nebraska, presents his case for seeing Gerstner as a key voice for “theological continuity” among conservative Reformed evangelicalism in the late twentieth century (18).

Converted improbably through a conversation with a professor while visiting the dispensational Philadelphia College of the Bible, Gerstner was mentored in the Reformed faith by John Orr (1893–1983) as an undergraduate at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. After studies at Westminster Seminary and Harvard Divinity School (Ph.D.), he settled in the rich Presbyterian soil of Western Pennsylvania where he took on a brief pastorate before beginning a long and distinguished academic career, first at Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary (1950–1960) and then at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (1960–1980).

Gerstner championed the cause of Old Princeton Seminary, especially in the work of B. B. Warfield. Gerstner regarded the presuppositional approach of Westminster Seminary’s Cornelius Van Til, with whom Gerstner engaged as a colorful and respectful antagonist, as an abandonment of the classical approach of Warfield.

Idiosyncrasies abound in the character that McDonald portrays: he describes Gerstner as alternatively gregarious and brusque. He would often come across to strangers as strident and gruff, an impression partially owing to severe asthma. If his views came across to readers as wooden and narrow (143), he was demonstrating his persistent loyalty to the Reformed faith.

This put him in the thick of many of the major battles in American Presbyterianism, fighting on the losing side of all of them. These include the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA) union with the PCUSA in 1956. That merger created the redundancy of two denominational seminaries in the same city, which led to the 1960 consolidation of Pitt-Xenia Seminary with Western Seminary to form Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. This more liberal environment isolated Gerstner to the point where he became “pretty quiet at faculty meetings” (100).

Next, he led the opposition to the church’s adoption of the Confession of 1967. However, last minute cosmetic changes to some of the language of C-67 persuaded him that it contained “some unmistakably alien, orthodox elements superimposed on its basic structure” (100). To the surprise of friends, he reported that “I seem to favor continuing with the church” (100).

The theological controversies involving Walter Kenyon (who could not get ordained in 1974, because he would not participate in the ordination of women) and Mansfield Kaseman (who was received as a minister in the denomination in 1980, even though he would not affirm the deity of Christ), pushed Gerstner to the point of declaring the mainline Presbyterian church “apostate.” But Gerstner was later encouraged when Kaseman embraced more Christologically orthodox language, enough to retract the charge of apostasy

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=689&issue_id=135.

and to urge fellow conservatives to remain in the denomination.

Even while he was marginalized at Pittsburgh Seminary and the mainline church, Gerstner secured alternative platforms to gain an audience. He served a long tenure as a founding contributing editor for *Christianity Today* and in the 1970s as an adjunct professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Arguably, Gerstner's highest visibility among Reformed evangelicals came through a former student who eschewed the academic life, to his teacher's regret. In 1972, R. C. Sproul appointed him Professor at Large at Ligonier Valley Study Center in Pennsylvania (later Ligonier Ministries in Orlando). Ligonier's use of innovative media greatly expanded Gerstner's voice.

For these reasons, McDonald claims that Gerstner belongs on a short list of the major shapers of the intellectual life of American evangelicalism. He laments—rightly it seems—that since his death Gerstner has been “astonishingly overlooked” (11), as he “barely appears in the secondary literature on the history of American evangelicalism” (14).

At the same time, McDonald is candid in his assessment of Gerstner's scholarship. He published voluminously for many outlets, and several of his books met with favorable reviews and impressive sales. But it was a bitter disappointment when his twenty-four-year project of editing Jonathan Edwards's sermons for Yale University Press ended with Yale terminating his appointment, the editors frustrated over his failure to deliver material that met their expectations. Much of his research would be published in his three-volume magnum opus, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, which McDonald acknowledges was at times incoherent and disorganized.

McDonald compares Gerstner to W. Stanford Reid, the Canadian church historian whom Gerstner met during his Westminster Seminary student days. But Gerstner's career more closely resembles that of Richard Lovelace, retired professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Both Gerstner and Lovelace were WTS graduates but not true Macheenites, as they set out to serve mainline instead of sideline Presbyterianism. Both

loved Edwards, and each exercised significant influence on mainline evangelical students. Though Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (1979) remains in print, he too is a largely forgotten figure. Perhaps the lesson here is that maintaining an evangelical voice in the mainline, as plausible as that may have been a half-century ago, appears in retrospect to have been a misguided strategy.

Only when he reached his seventies, “worn out from the ecclesiastical skirmishes he had waged” (174), did Gerstner conclude that the PCUSA was “not the true church,” prompting his transfer to the Presbyterian Church in America six years before his death. McDonald asserts (though does not explain) that Gerstner's ecclesiology went through a “process of maturation” (198). But the life of John Gerstner might better suggest that he himself did not fully escape the “perils” of “evangelical accommodation” that he saw in others (108). His institutional loyalty did not always serve the cause of “theological continuity.” ©

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Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms

edited by Richard A. Muller

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2018¹

by Alan D. Strange

Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology, 2 ed., by Richard A. Muller. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, xxi + 408 pages, \$37.00, paper.

I was reading the dictionary,” Stephen Wright deadpanned, “I thought it was a poem about everything.” Richard A. Muller’s new edition of his *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* is a work about everything theological, at least as it pertains to Greek and Latin terms used by the Protestant Scholastics, reflecting his and their reading in the history of the church. How does one review such a work? Perhaps by noting its significance over the last few decades. In the last thirty-plus years, this work has helped countless theological students in their historical and theological work. More than one senior churchman has opined that a mastery of its contents (along with that of the Westminster Larger Catechism) would render anyone a first-rate disciple/teacher of Reformed theology.

Muller published the first edition of this seminal work in 1985, coming in at 340 pages. This second, long-awaited edition comes in at almost ninety pages more, though, alas, it is only printed in paperback this time. What is the justification for a second edition, one might ask? Muller admits that the first edition “charted my own introduc-

tion both to the intricacies and, underneath those intricacies, to the incredible clarity of Protestant scholastic thought” (viii). In his continuing study of such, Muller has discovered that the “language of this highly variegated, philosophically attuned, and sometimes highly technical theology was far richer than I had originally imagined” (viii). This second edition has afforded Muller opportunity to incorporate the learning of the intervening years by “adding over one hundred terms and phrases; by editing, refining, and expanding other definitions” (viii), and by correcting errors.

Richard Muller, after receiving the Ph.D. at Duke University, taught historical theology for a dozen years at Fuller Theological Seminary. He was, in fact, an associate professor there when he first published his *Dictionary*. He came to Calvin Theological Seminary in 1992 and is currently P. J. Zondervan Professor of Historical Theology Emeritus and is senior fellow of the Junius Institute for Digital Reformation Research. Dr. Muller has become a premier church historian, a recognized expert on Protestant Scholasticism, especially expressed in his four-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (also published in a second edition by Baker, 2003). Muller has worked extensively in these sources and is perhaps more qualified than anyone else to write, and now revise, such a dictionary.

Before the seminal work of Muller in the Protestant Scholastics, many scholars (chiefly, Karl Barth and his followers) had viewed John Calvin as opposed to his successors, the Calvinists that followed in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Muller was perhaps the chief architect of the paradigm shift of the 1970s and 1980s that came to view Calvin and the Calvinists as consonant, albeit with understandable developmental differences. Muller’s contribution in that regard is reflected in this volume, as he defines terms used not only by Calvin and John Owen, but also by the medieval scholastics that preceded them.

To be sure, Calvin and the Calvinists (even the Protestant Scholastics of the seventeenth century) differed in some important respects from the medieval scholastics, some of the latter teaching

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=692&issue_id=136.

things like congruent merit (235–36; the Franciscans especially) or *facere quod in se est* (118; “to do what is in oneself,” as Gabriel Biel taught, and Martin Luther rejected). The Reformation, in other words, rejected the semi-Pelagianism that had developed in the Roman Catholic Church, but ultimately, in the seventeenth century, did not reject the scholastic method altogether, ably employed by a number of Reformed theologians, perhaps most notably, Francis Turretin.

So from *accommodatio* (4; the ways in which a transcendent God condescends to “human ways of knowing in order to reveal himself”) to *communicatio idiomatum* (69–71; in Christology, the way in which “the properties . . . of each nature are communicated to or interchanged in the unity of the person”) to *lex naturalis* (197–98; “natural law”) to *voluntas Dei* (399–402; “the will of God,” with many important scholastic modifiers), Muller treats the researcher to a feast of (mostly) Latin and Greek theological terms. Many have been awaiting this expanded dictionary, and we are happy now to have it. This book is prominent on the shelf on which I keep my most frequently used reference books, and I highly recommend it to all theological students. ☺

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Enlisting Faith

by Ronit Y. Stahl

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2018¹

by Darryl G. Hart

Enlisting Faith: How the Military Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America, by Ronit Y. Stahl. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017, 384 pages, \$39.95.

Conservative Christians in the United States often lament the indifference of federal and state governments to religion. Whether the complaint takes the form of objecting to secularization or the loss more generally of shared moral standards based on Christian convictions, Protestants and Roman Catholics alike since the 1960s have faulted American government officials and institutions for excluding religion from public life. Rarely do these criticisms mention the US military’s chaplaincy program as one way that American government actually recognizes and encourages religion. One reason for overlooking the work of chaplains in all branches of the military may be that such religious service only compounds the problems that arise from religious freedom and the diversity it encourages.

Even when the government recognizes the importance of religion for those serving in the armed forces, the state winds up encouraging the sort of diversity and tolerance to which many conservative Christians object. Indeed, if anyone ever wanted to contemplate what an established religion might look like in the United States, and how government agencies might try to regulate the nation’s religious diversity, the military’s chaplaincy program should be the first item to consider. Here the government establishes criteria for which faiths to include, what kind of training

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=693&issue_id=136.

chaplains must have, and what sort of spiritual work they should perform. The chaplaincy is, no matter what the First Amendment says, an establishment of religion. Yet, the military's supervision of ministry hardly shows theological or spiritual discernment. It is, what religious establishments usually become, a pragmatic arrangement to use religion for national ends.

This is the implicit argument of Ronit Y. Stahl's *Enlisting Faith*, a fascinating account of the ways that US military officials tried to harness religion for national aims while also striving to serve the spiritual needs of soldiers. For the most part, the clergy who functioned as chaplains were glad to minister among the soldiers and generally supported the United States' twentieth-century war efforts as extensions of a generic faith and global brotherhood. During World War I, for instance, one manual instructed chaplains that, though they might be constrained by the communions that had ordained them, a chaplain "should preach such sermons as would be spiritually helpful to everyone, without discussing dogmatic or controversial doctrines" (23). During World War II, the nationalistic dimension of the chaplaincy became even more pronounced, for example, when another report claimed that military chaplains "give our democratic faith a very large measure of its strength" and implicitly demonstrated the weakness of totalitarian regimes that, because of their unbelief or ideology, spurned the Judeo-Christian tradition's "moral law and individual dignity" (144). Only with the Vietnam War did the chaplaincy begin to question the nation's military and foreign policy aims. When brutalities from that war surfaced, chaplains found it easier to recognize that "Jesus Christ knows no national boundaries" and to criticize America's civil religion (212).

If military chaplains echoed the American public's understanding of the nation's wars, they also, as Stahl shows, reflected the religious diversity of the United States. During World War I, the Protestant mainline churches dominated the chaplaincy even as the military included Roman Catholic priests and Jewish rabbis to honor the "tri-faith" character of the American people. During

World War II, the chaplaincy started to include in a deliberate way African-American clergy. Another spurt of inclusiveness came during the Vietnam War when the military approved policies to allow Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even atheists to occupy positions among the chaplaincy. The intent was to serve as many soldiers as possible, which meant recognizing clergy from as many religions as possible.

That effort to adapt the chaplaincy to the religious backgrounds of soldiers and officers was a challenge and not always successful. Stahl opens her narrative with the case of a Leonard Shapiro who died during World War II. Military officials had him buried as a Roman Catholic with appropriate services and a cross on his grave. Shapiro sounded like an Italian-American name and so the chaplain responsible for overseeing the burial ceremonies called for a Roman Catholic observance. But in point of fact, Shapiro was Jewish, and Leonard's mother was shocked to learn that her son had received last rites. Eventually, the military caught up to the diversity of American faiths and Stahl closes her account with the case of Captain Humayun Khan who died in Operation Iraqi Freedom and received a Muslim burial, complete with the star and crescent on his grave at Arlington National Cemetery.

Stahl resists the predictable judgments—either that chaplains violate the separation of church and state or give up religious integrity to gain the military's favor—that might give reasons for abolishing the chaplaincy. Her primary purpose is to examine military chaplains as one of those rare occasions where the American government interacted directly with and cultivated the services of religious institutions. She acknowledges that this was both a religious and political "project." In the end, the chaplaincy also gave legitimacy to the religious diversity of the United States and was an unwitting agent in the decline of Protestant hegemony in national life. That story has many lessons to consider about the inherent dangers to faith that come with the state's sponsorship and oversight. ©

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The Whole Christ

by Sinclair Ferguson

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2018¹

by Mark Paterson

The Whole Christ: Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters—Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance, by Sinclair Ferguson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016, 256 pages, \$24.99.

While it may sound like a cliché, this book is one that every Reformed and confessional pastor and elder should read, and then re-read at least biannually!

Why? Simply because Sinclair Ferguson has masterfully identified an area where we, as confessional Calvinists, can slip imperceptibly into a grievous deformation of God’s infinitely gracious character, and his equally gracious gospel. It is possible, too, that Ferguson’s thesis helps diagnose the often lackluster growth of our churches, which, of all expressions of the body of Christ, should have the most glorious, attractive, and winsome “camera

angle” on the grace of God in the gospel!

The Whole Christ employs the historical backdrop of the Marrow Controversy in eighteenth century Scotland to challenge twenty-first century Reformed Christians to consider, “Who is the God whom we come to know in Jesus Christ (John 17:3)? What is he really like, truly like—deep down, through and through?” (19). As Ferguson emphasizes, one’s often unstated thoughts and emotions about these matters can distort how a Reformed pastor conveys both the content and the tone of the gospel in his preaching.

The book, published in 2016, was born of a series of conference addresses in 1980 where Ferguson—then based in Scotland—was requested to draw “Pastoral Lessons from the Marrow Controversy.” While initially bemused that anyone in the United States would be the slightest bit interested in the controversy, he prepared the series to consider how legalism, antinomianism and gospel assurance interact with gospel ministry. In the transcript of the original addresses Ferguson exhorted:

My brethren it is vital—as many of us may have discovered in our ministries—that we turn over these matters in our minds because this is not a curiosity from some recondite source of Scottish Presbyterianism. It is as you may well know a perennial danger in the reformed churches. It is a danger that arises nowhere more than where there is a discovery over a period of years of what we call the doctrine of grace. And at the end of the day we may well find that these very issues of the Marrow Controversy are among the most vital pastoral issues at the deepest possible level that we will ever face.²

And, in a manner that still reverberates powerfully in 2018, Ferguson went on to say:

You see, what had happened among these men in the early decades of the 18th century

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=697&issue_id=137.

2 Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Marrow Controversy #01: Historical Details,” sermon preached at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, February 4, 2004, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=220484920>.

was this. They had mastered the pattern by which the grace works. There wasn't a comma in the *ordo salutis* (the 'order of salvation') with which they were not familiar. They knew their Confession of Faith forwards and backwards and upside down. And yet while they were familiar with the pattern by which grace works and had mastered it, they had never really been mastered by the grace of God in the gospel in their hearts. . . . They were masters of Calvinism who had never been mastered. They were Calvinists with the minds and hearts of natural men, at least as far as these truths were concerned.³

In the Foreword, Tim Keller helpfully observes that the “Marrow Men” were combatting an extraordinarily nuanced—but profound—deviation in Reformed preaching and ministry. All those involved had subscribed to the precisely worded statement of justification by faith alone through Christ alone contained in the Westminster standards. “How then,” he asks

could charges and counter-charges of antinomianism and legalism arise that would expose a fault line in the church and eventually lead to a split in the denomination? While such theological precision is crucial, evidently it does not finally solve this ongoing problem of the role of the law and of obedience in the Christian life. (12)

None of the parties in the Marrow Controversy were saying, “You can save yourself through works,” or, “Once you are saved, you don't have to obey the law of God” (12). However, with great contemporary application, Ferguson shows that both legalism and antinomianism are much more than just doctrinal positions or even simple opposites. Rather, he shows that they are perennial distortions of the truth about God and more “non-identical twins” than polar opposites. He notes that both legalism and antinomianism are born of the same womb of disbelief in the love and goodness

of God.

For us as Reformed Christians, who are often assured in our orthodoxy, Keller frighteningly observes:

Neither side subscribed to overt, explicit legalistic or antinomian doctrine. Nonetheless, legalism and antinomianism can be strongly present in a ministry. Each is a web of attitudes of heart, practices, character, and ways of reading Scripture. (12)

So, why specifically do the lessons of the Marrow Controversy have application for the twenty-first century Reformed and confessional preachers and churches? Many reflections are possible but two will suffice. First, we in the West live in an unusually lawless culture—one that has no respect for history, order, authority or even for God and his Law; even the most basic human courtesies are considered a joke. This can be a grievous trial for those who care deeply about such things. Second, we all have “a Pope” of self-righteousness in our own hearts (to mangle Luther's quip). Even the most sanctified heart harbors both unbelief in the love and goodness of God and a powerful tendency to trust self far too much.

This pride and unbelief have their roots back in a broken Eden and, despite the most robust commitments to the doctrines of grace, can metastasize undetected into a distortion of God and the gospel that accommodates increasing degrees of conditionality. Think for a moment: for us who hold the “*solas*” dear (and we do!), is it not possible to subtly begin expecting the unchurched to at least start learning our cultural forms or conceptual frames or basic vocabulary to demonstrate they are serious about finding Christ? While we may be too theologically astute to place full blown repentance before finding Christ, may we not be guilty of requiring degrees of outward sanctification from our culture's lawlessness before we freely and fully offer Christ the Saviour to needy sinners?

Where this is true, it is a diabolical and grotesque deformation of the character of God and the nature of the gospel itself. When gripped by such a spirit, the content and tone of our preaching can

3 Ibid.

quickly become more like that of a graceless Jonah than a winsome Isaiah offering fellow sinners to “buy wine and milk without money and without price” (55:1)! As Ferguson noted in his address: we can find ourselves sitting under our “tree with a heart that is shut up against sinners in need of grace.”⁴ With a thousand regrets, does this not describe at least some—if not many—of our Reformed and confessional churches in the West?

According to Calvin, not only are our hearts idol factories but they have “so many crannies where vanity hides, so many holes where falsehood lurks, is so decked out with deceiving hypocrisy, that it often dupes itself” (227). This is as true of the Reformed as it is of any other breed of Christians, or indeed any fallen son of Adam.

Ferguson’s *The Whole Christ* is a salient warning of perhaps a most natural form of subtle but destructive idolatry for those who follow Calvin and the Puritans, as worthy of emulation as they were. Speaking of Thomas Boston, one of the Marrow Men, let Ferguson have the final word:

At the end of the day, what was at stake for him in the Marrow Controversy was nothing less than the very character of God the Father. . . . A misshapen understanding of the gospel impacts the spirit of a minister and affects the style and atmosphere of his preaching and of all his pastoral ministry. What the Marrow Controversy actually unveiled was the possibility of acknowledging the truth of each discrete chapter of the Confession of Faith without those truths being animated by a grasp of the grace of God in the gospel. The metallic spirit this inevitably produced would then in turn run through one’s preaching and pastoral ministry. (71) ©

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Anthony Tuckney

by Jounghun Cho

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2018¹

by Ryan M. McGraw

Anthony Tuckney (1599–1670): Theologian of the Westminster Assembly, by Jounghun Cho. Studies on the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017, 164 pages, \$40.00.

The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms continue to be one of the most important sets of Reformed creeds and confessions to the present day. The series of books in which this volume appears aims to help readers explore historical contexts, texts, and key figures in the formulation of these standards. Doing so encourages readers to understand better the theology behind these standards, which has the potential to aid us in grappling with their continued use in the church today. This study of Anthony Tuckney, who was an important figure in the Westminster Assembly, draws our attention to a significant theologian who is largely forgotten in Reformed circles today. As such, this book contributes to a broader understanding of the Westminster Standards that will appeal primarily to ministers, scholars, and interested church members.

Cho treats Tuckney’s historical context and role in the Westminster Assembly as well as key themes of his theology, such as the relationship between reason and faith and especially the importance and implications of union with Christ. He includes several interesting facts in his analysis of Tuckney’s thought. For example, Tuckney defended the use of creeds and pressed their utility in promoting the unity of the church, but he strongly opposed requiring ministers to subscribe to such creeds (58). It is difficult to see

4 Ibid.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=698&issue_id=137.

the congruity between these two assertions, since it raises the question as to how creeds that no one subscribes to could serve as standards of unity. Seventeenth century views of creedal subscription, especially surrounding the Westminster Assembly, certainly merit further exploration.

Cho's passing comment that the Westminster Confession of Faith "as a whole" is thoroughly Trinitarian merits further attention as well in relation to the development of Reformed Trinitarian theology throughout every locus of theology (82). While other topics will doubtless grab the attention of other readers, the book traces the primary contours of Tuckney's thought in light of the international, cross-confessional, and catholic contexts of Reformed orthodoxy. The book's primary contribution to recent scholarship is that it singles out an important member of the Westminster Assembly. There is nothing earth shattering, however, in Cho's assessment of the various loci of Reformed theology, since most of his conclusions are already well-established in light of the broader trajectories of seventeenth-century theology.

While this book is a fair assessment of Tuckney's theology, drawing from both English and Latin primary sources, the author does not describe the context broadly enough. For example, he compares Tuckney to Francis Turretin alone in treating the interrelationship between reason and faith, and he compares Tuckney to no one in explaining the relationship between adoption and justification in the order of salvation. Regarding the latter case, he notes that Tuckney placed adoption prior to justification (79). In my estimation, this ordering appeared to be a minority position among Reformed authors, represented by Edward Leigh in particular. This observation about Tuckney is also hard to square with Cho's explanation that Tuckney regarded adoption as the positive side of justification and that justification was the legal right to adoption (119–20). Additionally, it is unclear how this study expands our understanding of Reformed orthodoxy beyond bringing a neglected member of the Westminster Assembly into scholarly discussion. However, Cho's explanations of the areas of Reformed thought remain clear and

helpful.

At some points, lack of broad contextualization detracts from the accuracy of Cho's analysis. For example, he writes that effectual calling is the first benefit flowing from union with Christ (110). However, the citation that he gives from Tuckney on page 112 contradicts this assertion, since Tuckney stated clearly (in line with the Westminster Standards) that believers are united to Christ through faith in their effectual calling. Cho's analysis requires greater nuance. While some Reformed authors, such as Thomas Goodwin, affirmed a "virtual union" with Christ prior to effectual calling and saving faith, all except the Antinomians and later hyper Calvinists denied that actual justification preceded effectual calling. This means that while every component of the order of salvation was rooted in Christ's person and work, not every benefit of redemption flowed directly from the believer's actual union with Christ (contra Cho's statement about the *ordo salutis* in the Larger Catechism on page 135). Again, a broader contextual study of English and Latin primary sources would add greater nuance to treating such questions.

Cho's study of Anthony Tuckney is clear and helpful, yet it is a bit incomplete. However, the book is easy to read and short, and readers can use it to clarify their understandings of the doctrine of divine revelation, the doctrine of God, and the order of salvation in Reformed thought. Though it lacks nuance at points and does not cover much new ground, it is nonetheless an important piece of the puzzle for everyone who desires to gain a better grasp of the historical background of the Westminster Standards. ☺

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Divine Will and Human Choice

by Richard A. Muller

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
June-July 2018¹

by David C. Noe

Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought, by Richard A. Muller. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, 336 pages, \$42.75. All quotations used by permission.

There is perhaps no scholar today who enjoys as much well deserved *auctoritas* in historical theology as Richard Muller. Any one of his numerous volumes by itself should earn him the gratitude of the church and academy alike, and this is without taking into consideration the magisterial four-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*.² Chapter 6 of *After Calvin*,³ for example, should be required reading for all students of theology. There one can see the compelling standard of “calling, character, piety, and learning” set by our Protestant forebears which it would behoove ordained men in the OPC, and students of theology more generally, to emulate.

The volume under review is no exception in terms of quality, but it does stand out among Muller’s other works for the difficulty and intricacy of its argument. The main brief of the book is to show that the majority of contemporary interpreters of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Scotus have erred fundamentally in their understanding of how these

thinkers were appropriated and used by Calvin and his successors on the topics in question. This thread is carefully followed through the book’s nine chapters, which are helpfully divided into three broad headings: (1) Freedom and Necessity in Reformed Thought: The Contemporary Debate; (2) Philosophical and Theological Backgrounds: Aristotle, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus; and (3) Early Modern Reformed Perspectives: Contingency, Necessity, and Freedom in the Real Order of Being.

The book’s epigram is a quotation from Westminster Confession of Faith 3.1, which Muller apparently takes to be the touchstone (or at least endpoint) for mature Reformed reflection on the titular concepts. This quotation establishes the superstructure of the book, as it seeks to explain the historical development of the relationship between the notion of real human freedom and the doctrine that “God from all eternity did . . . freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (WCF 3.1).

Before taking up the main thread of this argument, however, Muller establishes the boundaries of his method on pages 12 and 13. The first is that, unsurprisingly, he will take a historical approach. This means he does “not begin with *a priori* assumptions concerning what must be true either philosophically or theologically about necessity, contingency, and free choice” (12). Like so much of Muller’s work, this dogged persistence to follow the evidence wherever it may lead, combined with nearly unparalleled dexterity and precision in handling source material, pays important dividends throughout the course of the work.

Second, and worth quoting at length lest the reader be misled, is Muller’s caveat about what one may expect when cresting the summit:

It is also important to register what the present essay does not discuss, namely, the issue of grace and free choice in salvation. It does not touch on the perennial debate over monergism and synergism—and it ought to be clear that what can be called soteriological determinism does not presuppose either a physical

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=699&issue_id=137.

2 *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

3 *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

or a metaphysical determinism of all actions and effects, just as it ought to be clear that the assumption of free choice in general quotidian matters (such as choosing to eat or not to eat a pastrami sandwich for lunch) does not require an assumption of free choice in matters of salvation. (13)

This self-imposed limitation may disappoint many, since we may want to know precisely what the author thinks are the theological implications of the surgically precise historical work he has done. But, in fact, this is the strength of the work, that it hovers above the fray of theological polemic. Fervid and simplistic readings of the historical record on contentious issues like this are abundant.

But there is no shortage of scholarly polemic in this book, and chief Muller's opponents are Antonie Vos and his article "Always on Time: The Immutability of God,"⁴ as well as Vos's *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*.⁵ Other targets include the work of Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle's Theory of Modality*, and Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*,⁶ on whom Vos relies, and also Jacobus Martinus Bac, *Perfect Will Theology*,⁷ and Oliver Crisp *Deviant Calvinism*.⁸ Yet Muller does not spare praise when it is occasionally due.

No significant Reformed thinker who wrote on freedom, contingency, and necessity (with the odd exception of Theodore Beza) is not at least briefly assessed somewhere in the 324 pages. Especially canvassed are Calvin, Peter Vermigli, Franciscus Junius, Francis Turretin, Franciscus Gomarus, Amandus Polanus, and Gisbertus Voetius. Girola-

mo Zanchi, Zacharius Ursinus, John Davenant, William Perkins, John Owen, Richard Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards, as well as several lesser lights, are also discussed.

It may be helpful for the reader to have a sense of the book's complexity, to realize that this work is not well suited to the faint of heart or those easily distracted. For example, in his discussion of Turretin, Muller writes:

In the composite sense, it is not possible that the event occur and the event not occur—but it remains the case, for Turretin, that the decree ensures the certain futurity of the event without removing the contingent matter of its eventuation: "what, therefore, is impossible not to occur in the composite sense & on the supposition of the decree of God concerning futuration of the event, nonetheless in the divided sense & apart from the decree, was possible not to have taken place." By removing the "supposition of the decree" from consideration as the root of contingency in the divided sense, the syntax of the sentence thrust into the foreground the location of contingency in the created order. Turretin's argument places the possibility of the event taking place or not taking place primarily in terms of the potencies resident in finite or secondary causality. (251)

And this excerpt is one of the milder examples. Given the range of the argument and the inherent difficulty of the concepts, I did not find the volume easy to digest (it took many pastrami sandwiches to get through it), and so it may require multiple readings to appreciate fully the force of the argument.

A few niggling comments are in order before concluding. Although Muller's translations of his Latin sources are generally sound, there are instances (204) where a second set of eyes would have measurably improved the lucidity of his con- struals. In addition, as with other of his works, especially *The Unaccommodated Calvin*,⁹ Muller is not

4 Antonie Vos, "Always on Time: The Immutability of God," in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, ed. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot (Frankfurt: Lang, 1999).

5 Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

6 Jaakko Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle's Theory of Modality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973); Simo Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

7 Jacobus Martinus Bac, *Perfect Will Theology: Divine Agency in Reformed Scholasticism as Against Suárez, Episcopius, Descartes, and Spinoza* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

8 Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

9 *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Formation of a*

well served by his editors, who allowed a number of small errors to vitiate an otherwise exemplary effort. Instances of omission, misspellings of Latin words, and anacolutha are much too frequent for a work of this caliber and sophistication.

Muller's conclusion to this volume should be seen as part of the overall project to which his entire career has been devoted, namely to refute the specious claims of the "Calvin against the Calvinists camp," i.e., those who think that the salutary direction of the early Reformation was hijacked by the bogeyman of Aristotelian scholasticism. Though far more nuanced and focused than previous works, this volume runs in the same trajectory. We close with Muller himself:

Our study has shown, from a philosophical or philosophico-theological perspective, that the determinist readings of Aristotle and Aquinas endemic to the claim of a Scotistic revolution of thought and of its impact in early modern Reformed theology are not supported by the documents. As we have seen, a different narrative is required. The issue for the Western tradition was not to shed a purported Aristotelian determinism but, beginning quite clearly with Augustine, to coordinate an Aristotelian understanding of contingency, potency, and freedom with a Christian assumption of an overarching divine providence, resting on the non-Aristotelian assumption of a creation *ex nihilo*. (317) ©

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Theological Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Doctrine in Development: Johannes Piscator and Debates over Christ's Active Obedience

by Heber Carlos de Campos, Jr.

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2018¹

by Ryan M. McGraw

Doctrine in Development: Johannes Piscator and Debates over Christ's Active Obedience, by Heber Carlos de Campos, Jr., Reformed Historical-Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017, 304 pages, \$25.00, paper.

The imputation of Christ's active obedience to believers in their justification is an important contemporary theological issue. It was an important issue in historic Reformed theology as well, yet its development is somewhat complex. It is difficult, in writing historical theology, to set an adequate context and to avoid importing contemporary concerns into historical debates. In *Doctrine in Development*, Heber de Campos furnishes us with an exemplary model of contextual historical theology that illustrates the theological and exegetical development of what became a key issue in the Reformed doctrine of justification. His book is clearly argued and theologically nuanced enough to help readers understand why the imputation of Christ's active obedience was compatible with early Reformed theology and why it became so integral to later formulations. This review focuses

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=704&issue_id=138.

both on how de Campos pursues his historical task in order to demonstrate the value of this book as a model for doing history, as well as on the content of his findings.

This book stresses the reasons why Johannes Piscator openly opposed the imputation of Christ's active obedience in justification. However, the author argues persuasively that if Piscator was the first Reformed theologian to reject the imputation of active obedience to believers, then Theodore Beza was one of the first to promote it (257). This nuanced study demonstrates that earlier Reformed authors did not oppose active obedience and that they left room for it without the teaching being embedded in their theologies (especially ch. 3). In order to understand Piscator's views and their historical significance in context, de Campos surveys the views of early Reformed theologians on the significance of Christ's obedience in relation to his work on the cross (chs. 1–3), he explores medieval precedents, he outlines Lutheran and Roman Catholic teachings on the subject (both in ch. 4), and he shows the relation of Piscator's views to later trajectories in Reformed thought (chs. 7–8). It is striking that only chapters five and six directly treat Piscator's arguments against the imputation of Christ's active obedience directly. In my opinion, this is how historical theology should be done. If historians fail to situate Reformed authors in their contemporary historical contexts, with an eye to Protestant, Roman Catholic, and medieval precedents, and with an aim to subsequent theological trajectories, then they run the risk of misinterpreting their subjects. This is why de Campos is a model of sound and thorough historical theology.

De Campos's corrections to Chad Van Dixhoorn's evaluation of Christ's active obedience in relation to the Westminster Assembly highlight the importance of setting such a broad historical context. While Van Dixhoorn concludes that the explicit omission of "active obedience" or "whole obedience" in the Westminster Standards shows that these were consensus or compromise documents designed to encompass all parties present, de Campos shows the presence in these documents of language that was used for the preceding

fifty years (drawing from medieval precedents) to affirm the imputation of Christ's active obedience in opposition to Piscator. The fact that a historian of Van Dixhoorn's quality missed this point is not so much a critique of his scholarship as it is a demonstration of how hard it is to write contextually informed history. (Van Dixhoorn concedes the soundness of the correction in his endorsement of the book.) De Campos has achieved a rare level of scholarship that exemplifies the kind of questions that we need to ask of the development of historical ideas.

In addition to exemplifying sound historical method, this book helps readers understand how the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience came about and why it became so important in Reformed thought. In contrast to earlier evaluations of Piscator's denials of the doctrine, the author argues repeatedly that early Reformed and Lutheran authors were unclear on the question. However, being unclear neither meant that they taught active obedience by implication nor that they intended to oppose it. The real battle lines in this regard were drawn between Beza's and Piscator's views. Beza taught that believers need Christ's righteous habits by virtue of his incarnation, the imputation of his righteous life by his active obedience, and the removal of the curse of sin through the cross (e.g., 65, 77, 93). Piscator taught that Christ's obedient life merely qualified him for the cross and that removing the curse of sin was enough to constitute believers righteous in God's sight (112). He shifted the emphasis of acceptance with God from the legal category of justification to that of adoption as sons by the Father (157–58). While other Reformed authors did not deny the importance of adoption, they increasingly located our acceptance with God in the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the removal of God's wrath and curse, which correspond to Christ's righteous life and his cross respectively (240–47). Adoption then refers to the fact that we are heirs of God in Christ (246). While Piscator believed that Christ in his humanity owed obedience to God and that he could not obey in the place of others (146), most Reformed authors argued that Christ's

obedience was voluntary condescension on his part because his human nature had no distinct personal subsistence (247–55). De Campos shows masterfully that Reformed authors overwhelmingly affirmed the imputation of Christ’s active obedience to believers in their justification (ch. 8) based on: the stability of divine law coupled with a developing Reformed covenant theology, the nature of justification in relation to the righteous requirements of the law and its penalty, and Christological reflections. Piscator thus represents, in part, the growing pains involved in clarifying Reformed doctrine in the context of seventeenth-century theological developments (262).

Doctrine in Development is an important book. It clarifies a major component of the Reformed presentation of the gospel and it provides those writing and reading historical theology with a model for how things should be done. This book is academic in tone, but it is accessible to all who are interested in understanding this key doctrine better. ©

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Prayers of the Bible, 366 Devotionals to Encourage Your Prayer Life

by *Gordon J. Keddie*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
August-September 2018¹

by **Candyce D. Magee**

Prayers of the Bible: 366 Devotionals to Encourage Your Prayer Life, by Gordon J. Keddie. Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2017, xi + 764 pages, \$18.00, paper.

The Christian worshiper seeking a guide for daily prayer and study does not lack options. Excellent works are available everywhere, including historic classics and more modern alternatives. However, it is unusual to find one that combines great theological depth with true accessibility for the contemporary reader. Gordon Keddie has achieved this excellent mix in his new book, *Prayers of the Bible: 366 Devotionals to Encourage Your Prayer Life*.

Keddie lists three practical goals that he hopes to achieve in each of his daily entries. The first is that “they are designed to be an encouragement to commit to the consistent exercise and enjoyment of prayer as a ‘means of grace’” (x). The second is to present the actual prayers of God’s people throughout the entirety of Scripture, as well as “many of the passages that teach us about prayer” (xi). The final objective is the one which really caught this reader’s eye:

The third goal is to connect personal devotion and the prayers of the Bible with the Bible’s own manual of praise, the five books of what we call the Psalms. Each day includes, for

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=705&issue_id=138.

prayer and praise, a portion of a psalm from the *Book of Psalms for Worship*, also published by Crown and Covenant. Not every psalm is included, but most are represented, so that, in parallel with the prayers expounded here, you will find a fairly comprehensive presentation of the scope of biblical praise. (xi)

From the beginning pages of *Prayers of the Bible* until the final meditation for the year, Keddie brilliantly achieves his goals.

Each day begins with the scriptural prayer that is in focus (NKJV), ordered from Genesis to Revelation. Because context is so often crucial, there are always additional, and often substantial, numbers of verses to read before starting the actual reflections by Keddie. In addition to being theologically astute, the author weaves Scripture after Scripture within the body of his thoughts on each daily passage. Lastly, the reader is encouraged to read the Psalm that most exemplifies the essence of the actual prayer uttered by someone in the Bible. This framework is very effective in bringing the entirety of the biblical message to the reader. It should not surprise us that Scripture interprets Scripture, but when done well, it is lovely to behold.

Keddie also uses extensive references from other spheres of life: poetry (Robert Burns), fiction (Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott), theology (Samuel Rutherford, John Owen), and even politics and philosophy (Winston Churchill, Francis Bacon). This is just a very small sampling of the breadth of applied knowledge that Keddie shares with his audience. (There are 725 endnotes listed on the final pages of the book.)

Because Keddie expounds nearly all the prayers of the Bible, there is no shrinking back in terms of topics covered. The range is varied and even surprising at times. Trivia aficionados will also appreciate some of the details that are noted. There are the obvious facts (such as the shortest and longest prayers offered up to God), as well as the more unusual observations (for instance, the first prayer meeting and the only recorded prayer of the Holy Spirit).

Keddie's thoughts on the importance of each

prayer are succinct, yet thorough; simple, yet profound. After having pastored churches in Scotland, Pennsylvania, and Indiana, he has carefully studied the prayers of the Bible and listened to the heartfelt entreaties of his congregants. Trained at Westminster Theological Seminary, Keddie possesses the academic background and experience to bring the Reformed faith to bear on this essential Christian discipline. We would do well to reflect upon the inspired words of God's servants within Holy Scripture as we also cry out to the Almighty. Keddie aids us in this endeavor by showing us the incomparable benefit of contemplating the whole counsel of God as we do so. ©

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Choosing the Good Portion

edited by Patricia E. Clawson
and Diane L. Olinger

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2018¹

by Linda Porter Foh

Choosing the Good Portion: Women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, edited by Patricia E. Clawson and Diane L. Olinger. Committee for the Historian, OPC, 2016. Hardback, 470 pages, \$15.00.

Here are some thoughts following my third reading of *Choosing the Good Portion*.

Family history is my favorite hobby, and I could gladly devote all of my free time to this research. Finding old documents and photos helps me find out *what* happened and *when*. Not as easily answered are the questions *where* in Ireland did my ancestors come from and *why* did they all settle in Philadelphia? If they hadn't made certain choices, would I be here today?

My grandmother arrived from Ireland in 1912 and lived with her older brother and sister-in-law who worshiped at Grace Presbyterian Church in South Philadelphia. When my mother was growing up, her family sat under the preaching of David Freeman whose family were their neighbors and children her playmates. Mr. Freeman's bachelor friend John Murray was a frequent guest in his home and worshiper at Grace. Mom came to know Murray well and regarded both men as spiritual fathers since her own father didn't believe until his final illness under Mr. Murray's witnessing. On June 11, 1936, Mr. Freeman became a constituting member of the OPC, and the follow-

ing Sunday he walked out of Grace Church with my grandmother, her children, and a majority of the congregation following him.

In *Choosing the Good Portion* I found stories of my religious heritage that rounded out the memories my parents told me of the OPC's early years. It's a fuller picture of some of the fifty women whose names were recorded as constituting members of the new denomination and those who joined them over the decades, and how they worked beside the men whose names are more familiar in our church's history. Having grown up in the OPC, I knew several of the East Coast ladies well, others from around the country were known by reputation, but most were new to me. It stirred long-forgotten memories and denominational prayer requests from years ago: Debbie Dortzbach's kidnapping after Anna Strikwerda's murder; the lawsuit against the McIlhennys and First OPC in San Francisco; the Falks imprisonment in Eritrea; as well as thanksgiving for new churches being planted around the United States and the opening and closing of foreign mission fields.

As the idea for this book took off, a request for names of women who labored for the OPC through its eighty years was emailed to all the presbyteries and shared around the denomination. At that time I was updating the 2016 edition of the OPC Ministerial Register, which includes the names of wives and daughters of most of the 1,141 OPC ministers from those first eight decades. I knew little about these women who had followed their husbands and fathers from congregation to congregation. So the proposed book seemed an interesting concept that would make a good addition to the existing OPC history library, but I wondered how many women might be suggested and then who could they persuade to do all that writing? And would the writers find enough background—particularly about our earlier, lesser known “foremothers”?

Choosing the Good Portion became a true labor of love. Ninety-three women were researched and written about by fifty-five OPC-connected authors, some who never met their subjects, some

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=710&issue_id=139.

who were friends or family members, and two who wrote their own stories. I like footnotes and sources, and this book is full of them. Recent and older interviews of the subject or her family, old letters and self-published memoirs, materials and photos from the OPC archives, and articles from *The Presbyterian Guardian* and *New Horizons*, by and about these women, provided plenty of details to fill in the memory gaps. Since the *Guardian* is available online,² it is easy to look up and read the articles cited and learn even more about these women.

The book's purpose was not to extol each woman for her achievements but to recognize the struggles, sacrifices, and challenges she faced while serving her Lord and her church. How was her faith tried, and how did God sustain her in her labors? I found this aspect of the book most powerful, particularly in the lives of women who I remembered from my youth but who, unknown to me, had come through much before I met them. Such personal struggles rarely appeared as prayer requests in missionary letters which, to my young mind, made them seem like "super Christians" or plaster saints. In earlier decades, women didn't open up as readily as they do today, at least not publicly. But I'm sure each would sing heartily "Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me."³

Another theme that struck me was how God brought each woman into her place or places of service and how he prepared her for those good works she would do to his glory. Each woman's tale is different, but there are similarities. Perhaps a particular woman's original, admirable plans for serving the Lord took a different turn. Or she crossed paths with an OPC pastor or member, and her thinking was changed, or her appreciation of the Reformed faith was deepened. Her beliefs led her to search for a church where the whole counsel of God was faithfully preached and, if necessary, worked toward establishing such a

2 <http://www.opc.org/guardian.html>.

3 Hymn #444, original *Trinity Hymnal* (1961); #559, Revised *Trinity Hymnal* (1990); #500 *Trinity Psalter-Hymnal* (2018).

congregation in the town where God had placed her. She was instrumental in the nurturing of the next generation of the OPC including future officers and their wives, either her own children or her spiritual children, and so the denomination grew as she planted, others watered, and God gave the increase. Do we believe in God's sovereign purposes? Certainly, and sometimes he blesses us further by revealing how he worked and is working in the details.

My *third* reading? Oh, yes! After anticipating *Choosing's* publication for over a year, I quickly devoured my copy, reading first about the ladies I knew and then back and forth until I had read each story. Finishing the last chapter, afterword, and index, I turned back to the first page and began again, this time more slowly and thoughtfully. The history of the OPC unfolds as each of these women built her corner of the church. Then, this spring, hunting for a particular detail, I decided to read it all again.

Two suggestions as you read *Choosing the Good Portion*. Keep tissues handy. It is inspiring, convicting, and humbling—as the story of God's work always is. Don't use *Choosing* as bedtime reading. Each short story can stand by itself, but it's too tempting to read "just one more," and you'll be up all night. ☺

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For further reading about the book:

George Marsden's review: http://www.opc.org/review.html?review_id=621

Co-editors Clawson and Olinger's interview: http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=898

Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table

by J. Todd Billings

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2018¹

by Ryan M. McGraw

Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table, by J. Todd Billings, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018, xix + 217 pages, \$25.00, paper.

If the risen and ascended Christ is not present in our worship services, then our worship is empty. Believers look back to what Jesus did in his earthly ministry to save his people, to what he will do when he returns in glory, and to what he is doing now in the church as she looks to him in faith. Todd Billings challenges readers to renew their affections for the triune God when observing the Lord's Supper. The book is gripping and helpful, even while it raises some problematic questions. It will benefit Reformed pastors as they read it with discernment and draw from it to minister to their congregations.

This work presents a helpful re-evaluation of the Lord's Supper as affective and not merely cognitive. Billings proceeds on three premises. First, people have functional subconscious theologies of the Lord's Supper. Second, the Reformed tradition can help us re-evaluate these functional theologies by self-consciously looking to the presence and power of the triune God at work in the sacraments.

Third, the Lord's Supper keeps the gospel at the center of Christian experience through the themes of remembrance, communion, and hope. These three terms are adopted from the Lord's Supper liturgy of the Reformed Church in America (110). With regard to functional theologies, Billings shows that most people come to the Lord's Supper with the assumption that the only thing necessary to profit from the sacrament is catechesis or right thinking. This unintentionally shifts our attention in the Supper from the divine act of communicating grace to believers to the human act of remembrance. While arguing that we should not jettison remembrance (113), Billings notes that we need present communion with the ascended Christ in the sacrament and we need future hope in the Lord's return. This means that the Lord's Supper must be affective and experiential and not merely intellectual and cognitive (18). He makes his case that the Lord's Supper is the true "icon" of Christ in which we remember him who came, we commune with him who is present (by the Spirit), and we look to him who is absent (in body) by appealing to the Reformed confessional tradition and to Scripture (186). In chapter three, he describes nine aspects of the Lord's Supper drawn from many classic Reformed confessions (though, surprisingly, he devotes little attention to the mature statements of the Westminster Standards, which make most of his points even more clearly). He draws positive examples of the affective aspects of the Lord Supper from the Scottish "holy fairs" (45–65) and he seeks to illustrate principles with positive examples from modern worship services. In the third section of the book, Billings shows that we should understand the Lord's Supper in light of the contours of Scripture as a whole as they relate to Christ rather than merely focusing on a narrow set of texts treating the sacrament (though he examines these as well). This approach has the advantage of making the Lord's Supper a more integral part of Reformed worship by tying it to the acts of the triune God in the gospel. In addition to these features, almost the entire book is full of striking statements and profound insights that

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=711&issue_id=139.

make it gripping reading.

Though this book has few limitations overall, two of them are important to single out. First, Billings's aim is to promote catholic unity across denominational lines (63). Without seeking to persuade Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals to adopt a Reformed position on the sacraments, he seeks to show points of convergence that "can be a way of swimming in catholic waters that leads us to the waterfall of the triune God's love" (202–3). This is not necessarily a compromise of Reformed convictions (66), especially in light of the length to which he goes to establish them from Scripture and from Reformed confessions. The problem lies with his examples of what these convictions look like in practice. For example, he depicts a worship service in which a woman from Cameroon leads in the confession of sin (133), a boy from the youth group does the Old Testament reading, and a middle-aged woman reads the New Testament (134). Ironically, in a book that stresses the Reformed tradition, readers are left wondering whether Billings has any place for ordination and public ministry in relation to administering divine ordinances. This ambiguity not only militates against the Reformed tradition, but against the ecumenical overtones of the book. While his examples leave room for modern Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, they exclude historic Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox liturgical practices and views of office in relation to public worship. This partly undercuts the value of this book, both in terms of Billings's ecumenical aims and in terms of readers adopting his (otherwise solid) Reformed perspective on the Lord's Supper.

The other area of concern is the author's treatment of paedocommunion. While denying infant participation in the Lord's Supper without conscious faith in Christ (155), he also denies that children should profess their faith before the elders of the church before participating (156). He argues that the real issue in 1 Corinthians 11 was not personal self-examination, but corporate participation. While children must have an "age-appropriate" confession of faith, this does not entail self-

examination, in his view. He adds that excluding young children from the Supper represents failing to discern that the church is the body of Christ (157). While I agree that it is inappropriate to set a specific age at which covenant children should come to the Lord's Table, Billings's approach raises the question as to who determines whether a child has made an "age-appropriate" confession of faith. If ministers of the gospel dispense ordinances including the Lord's Supper, then should they not have a part in admitting people to such ordinances as well? This reflects the same ecclesiological problem raised with regard to who leads worship above. He admits that 1 Corinthians 11 has individual and corporate ramifications (149) while he undercuts the individual ones, to a large extent, in the case of children. Communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper is, as Billings notes repeatedly, an act of corporate worship for the whole church. However, he appears to leave little theological room for ordained officers as representing the church and ministering on Christ's behalf.

This is a great book for those desiring to grow in their affections for the triune God through the Lord's Supper. It drives readers to remember what Christ did even while they experience the presence of the One who is absent and coming again. While the faults noted above should not detract from these facts, they are substantial nonetheless. Recovering a robust Reformed sacramental theology cannot be divorced from Reformed ecclesiology. Like many good books, this one offers pure gold mixed with some dross. Nevertheless, the author issues a timely call to the church today in relation to the value of the Lord's Supper. ☉

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Theoretical-Practical Theology

by *Petrus van Mastricht*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2018¹

by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Theoretical-Practical Theology, by Petrus van Mastricht. Edited by Joel R. Beeke, translated by Todd M. Rester, vol. 1 of 7 vols. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018, xci + 238 pages, \$50.00.

Theology has changed and persisted over the centuries. While the creedal and doctrinal core of Christianity remains stable, other things shift and adapt to contemporary problems. Theological developments occur in response to the challenges of the times as well. However, while contemporary theological models often contribute much to our understanding of exegesis, they are sometimes less precise and frequently less devotional than their Reformed scholastic predecessors. Modern readers do not likely associate the words “scholastic” and “devotional,” and “precision” often takes on a pejorative meaning. The first translated volume of Petrus van Mastricht’s *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* challenges all of these assumptions.

Contemporary readers will find much in his work that has familiar Reformed content, but his combination of scholastic precision and fervent devotion in an academic system of theology is so different from most current theological models that it will seem novel to many. This first volume directs readers to rethink their approach to theology in light of the definitions and character of theology. This material not only leaves readers longing for the rest of the planned set to appear, but it will also add a needed voice to contemporary approaches

to the nature and study of theology. This review focuses on Mastricht’s definition of theology, his doctrine of Scripture, and his distribution of theology, which correspond to the three chapters comprising this volume.

Mastricht defined theology as “the doctrine of living for God through Christ” (64, 98–104). This highlights his place in the historical development of Reformed theology, reflecting a decidedly pre-Enlightenment bent. The historical introduction by Adriaan Neele shows excellently how and why this is the case. The funeral oration, on the other hand, while a relevant piece of history, is tedious and less helpful because the speaker spent most of his time digressing about the worthiness of other authors and his assessment of Dutch education and politics. Mastricht, like Jonathan Edwards who commended his work heartily, lived on the cusp of Enlightenment thought. He was famed in his day as one of the primary opponents of René Descartes. While most post-Enlightenment authors classified theology as a science and defined theology as a discourse concerning God, Mastricht perpetuated the earlier Reformed tradition by treating theology as encompassing all theological habits (especially wisdom; p. 100), and defining it as “the doctrine of living for God through Christ.” In his view, “doctrine” envelopes all philosophical habits and it stresses the objective, or theoretical, nature of theology. However, “living for God,” stresses the idea that the Bible is concerned primarily with the experimental rather than merely the intellectual knowledge of God. “Through Christ” reflects the fact that there is no saving knowledge of God apart from faith in Christ. The value of this definition of theology is that, even though it is partly couched in philosophical categories, it provides readers with a definition of theology that reflects the goals of Scripture. The Bible directs us to knowing God and obtaining true spiritual wisdom rather than merely teaching us a scientific system of doctrines. This is something that has resonated with believers in every generation. Mastricht directs us in a right path in this regard without sacrificing theological precision in favor of experimental piety.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=712&issue_id=139.

If faith in Christ is necessary for the true knowledge of God, then, as Mastricht's second chapter stresses, we cannot know Christ apart from divine revelation (84). Mastricht gives five reasons why the finalized canon of Scripture is superior to other forms of revelation and why it is necessary to know God by his Word and Spirit only (119). His treatment of the eight properties of Scripture is full and satisfying (126–31). While he upholds what we now call the full divine inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the original autographs of Scripture, his treatment is deeper and broader than these issues. This is important in our day when there is a tendency to highlight controverted attributes of Scripture to the neglect of a full doctrine of Scripture. Mastricht also includes useful pastoral points, such as the idea that those who do not know the original languages of Scripture may not have a grammatical certainty or certitude of knowledge, but they may have a spiritual certitude or certitude of faith (184–85). This illustrates Mastricht's use of scholastic distinctions by maintaining the priority of the original text of Scripture without denying the sufficiency of translations to produce saving faith in the non-specialist.

Mastricht's final chapter in this volume introduces briefly the distribution of the system of theology. Without rejecting organizing principles used by others, he argues that the simplest division of theology is into faith and love, or what one should believe and what one should do (205–6). This corresponds roughly to the earlier division of the system, used by the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms, into what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. This reflects Ramist-oriented theologians, such as Amandus Polanus and Johannes Wollebius, as well. In addition to this broad distribution, Mastricht stands out for dividing each chapter of his theology into exegetical, dogmatic, elenctic, and practical sections. This makes his treatment well organized, easy to follow, and particularly full. His method has the advantage of being well rounded theologically and pastorally, making his work particularly suited to helping pastors.

In many disciplines, experts either become ob-

essed with definitions and method, or they ignore them entirely and simply do the work. In theology, we should land somewhere in the middle. How we define theology and how we understand its purposes will affect our goals in teaching and studying it, as well as what we hope to do with what we learn. This first volume of seven of the *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* defines theology in a way that weds doctrine and experience, knowledge and wisdom, content and faith, and principles and holiness. It is a holistic approach to theology for whole people who are being wholly redeemed by Christ. Modern readers may prefer the exegetical depth of newer authors. No author can be everything to everyone. Yet Mastricht contributes something indispensable, and often forgotten, in contemporary theology. Theology is about knowing the right God, in the right way, for the right reasons. This neither negates the need for objective academic theology nor converts it into popular or practical theology. Instead, it creates an organic union between things that are often separated, but should not be. Reading Mastricht is important, both due to his content and because he gives us a different perspective from a different context. This is a perspective that we need to learn from, adopt, and adapt, until we speak its language fluently with our own accent. ©

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Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly

by Whitney G. Gamble

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
November 2018¹

by Ryan M. McGraw

Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly, by Whitney G. Gamble. Studies on the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018, 187 pages, \$40.00.

This series of books introduces readers to historical figures and backgrounds surrounding the assembly that produced the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. As the church approaches the four-hundredth anniversary of the production of these documents, it must grapple with the fact that it needs to understand the different world in which they arose in order to keep using them today. Whitney Gamble's contribution to this series is particularly important because she shows ably how the threat of antinomianism shaped the concerns of the Westminster divines and the documents that they produced at virtually every turn. Antinomianism did not necessarily mean the same thing in the seventeenth century as it does now. Yet Gamble's thorough contextual study of this issue will help readers both understand the theology behind the Westminster Standards and see parallels to contemporary issues that face the church today.

This book is well-written, thoroughly researched, and clearly argued. Gamble wisely begins the narrative of antinomianism well before the first meeting of the Westminster Assembly, which turned its attention heavily to this topic for

the first two months of its meetings. She appeals to how various authors used David's sin, repentance, and restoration to illustrate the different theological positions involved (cf. conclusion). This provides readers with a clear point of comparison that makes this study easy to follow. Antinomians, such as John Eaton, argued that God saw sin in David, but that he no longer does so in believers, because David belonged to the old age rather than to the new covenant (16). Antinomians also argued that faith was a means of realizing that one had already been justified rather than an instrument through which one receives justification (50–54). Gamble traces the initial effort of the Westminster divines to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles and their subsequent fresh formulation of issues such as justification, faith, repentance, and good works. She shows the thorny issues involved in the interrelationship among these doctrines and provides a faithful roadmap of the theological options available at the time. She concludes that the assembly's work was largely a failure in that the Westminster Standards did not become the confession of the English church; yet, on the other hand, the continuing influence of these standards on the church worldwide is staggering (157). If antinomianism is integral to the history of these documents, then this study provides essential background to understanding what they mean.

Many of Gamble's findings are important for historical and for contemporary theology. For example, her assertion that identifying the Sinai covenant as a covenant of works was a traditional antinomian move, while requiring some careful qualifications, is an important point in the historical development of Reformed covenant theology. She even challenges the valuable findings of Mark Jones on this point, arguing for a lesser degree of diversity within the assembly over the nature of the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace (139). Gamble's historical work will bring a fresh voice to the table in contemporary discussions of such issues. This is also true in relation to the question of whether faith is a condition of the covenant of grace. Antinomians regarded this as legalism, and they tended to relegate

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=717&issue_id=140.

scriptural imperatives to the task of promoting the conviction of sin (50).

What made the antinomian error so dangerous was that most of what the antinomians had to say was true. The covenant of grace depended wholly on Christ and not on believers or on their faith. The Holy Spirit did create an obedient disposition in Christians, making obedience natural and a matter of course. However, this did not remove the biblical realities that believers were united to Christ by faith and that they were “children of wrath” before they embraced him. Teaching that salvation does not depend on our faith is not the same thing as saying that Spirit-supplied faith is not a condition of entrance into the covenant of grace and of interest in Christ (144). Moreover, the fact that Christians are delivered from the law does not negate the fact that the Spirit writes the law on their hearts as they hear, study, and practice its teachings. This is a great benefit of union with Christ and one of the primary objects of redemption in Christ. Like most historical and contemporary errors, antinomianism was mostly right in what it asserted. Yet the places in which it was incomplete had, and continue to have, massive theological and practical implications. Gamble’s study has the potential for clarifying such discussions.

There is one significant weakness in this work. It is interesting that the author aimed initially to study debates between John Owen and Richard Baxter, yet, in the end, Baxter receives no mention and Owen only one passing reference. Gamble stresses the debates and writings of the Westminster Divines to the neglect of the broader theological context, both in England and on the continent. This makes it more difficult for readers to understand where theological debates at Westminster fit in the broader Reformed world. For example, when treating the imputation of Christ’s active obedience, her analysis of the assembly’s conclusions are sound, but it is surprising that she makes no reference to the background of this debate in the international controversy that started between Johannes Piscator and Theodore Beza. Gamble’s analysis of the Westminster Assembly’s minutes and related documents is superb, but the narrow focus

of her research limits the reach of her work.

Studies like this one can help readers better understand the meaning of the Westminster Standards. The relatively recent publication of the assembly’s *Minutes and Papers*² adds a new dimension to such studies. While delving into these documents is not a sufficient cause of creating a broad picture of the development of the thought standing behind these doctrinal standards, it is a necessary one. Gamble’s book takes us one step closer to doing so in relation to a vital issue that touches many areas of the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. ©

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2 Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1653*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Sanctification

by Michael Allen

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
November 2018¹

by Ryan M. McGraw

Sanctification, by Michael Allen. New Studies in Dogmatics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017, 302 pages, \$22.99, paper.

Christians have always given attention to the role of holy living in relation to the gospel. Whether they have stressed imitating Christ to the neglect of justification by faith or they have pressed justification by faith in ways that make personal holiness suspect, the question of how holiness relates to the gospel persists. This is largely because such questions arise within the pages of Scripture itself. The series of which this book is a part aims at theological “renewal through retrieval” (15). Far from simply regurgitating past ideas, retrieval involves “relearning a lost grammar of theological discourse” (16). In this vein, Michael Allen’s account of sanctification is systematically robust, historically informed, and biblically faithful. While it does not provide readers with the depth of practical detail that most will need to grow in godliness, it gives them the foundational gospel principles without which they cannot take even a step forward in the Christian life. This makes this book important for all believers, but especially for those entrusted with the task of teaching others how to live the Christian life.

Allen treats this theme in ten chapters relating sanctification to the gospel, God, creation, covenant, incarnation, union with Christ, justification, grace and nature, grace and responsibility, and grace and discipline. He argues that sanctification must be related to all these doctrines in order to remain grounded in the gospel (44). It is not really

until chapter eight that he begins to treat issues traditionally associated with sanctification directly (199). This is one of the greatest strengths of the work, as the author roots the holiness of believers in the character of the God who saves them in Christ. In a time when many Christians associate the gospel more with benefits than with the Christ who brings benefits with him, this emphasis is needed desperately. The character of the holy triune God and the nature of union with Christ are two of the primary reasons why the gospel must ultimately include sanctification. It is only this line of thinking that removes the question as to why we should obey God if we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. A man-centered gospel might be content with forgiveness without likeness to God. However, a God-centered gospel begins with forgiveness without being satisfied with anything less than perfection in holiness before the Lord in glory. While Allen draws from a wide range of authors throughout the centuries, John Calvin looms large in these pages, especially in chapters six and seven. He notes, as well, the powerful influences of John Owen, Edward Fischer, G. C. Berkouwer, Oliver O’Donovan, and John Webster on his thinking on this subject (45). The irenic spirit exemplified by the author, drawing valuable insights even from those with whom he has significant disagreements, is a needed model in the church today. We should avoid the extreme of treating all opinions as equal, as well as that of refusing to learn from those who stand on the other side of a debate. In doing so, Allen has developed a full and satisfying account of biblical sanctification.

In this reviewer’s estimation, Allen’s reflections on the relationship of justification and sanctification to each other and of both to union with Christ can open fruitful avenues in modern debates over these topics. He mediates between competing options related to the *ordo salutis* with two important observations. First, he writes,

Justification serves as the basis or ground for the transformative sanctification by the Spirit; syntactically, this is evident in that [Heb.] 8:10–11 describe a sanctifying work of the

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=718&issue_id=140.

law written upon the hearts, and 8:12 says this transformation occurs “for” or “because” there is a justifying work of forgiving their iniquities finally and fully. (182)

Secondly, he writes,

Sanctification is the final cause of double grace; in other words, God justifies us so that God can and will sanctify us. Justification is not meant to be a final or ultimate blessing, but it is an entryway blessing that brings one into a journey that terminates in a still greater benefit: the transforming presence of the glorious God of the gospel. (183)

This obviates the problem of forcing readers to choose between union with Christ without any causal or logical order to justification or, alternatively, rooting sanctification in justification rather than in union with Christ. One of the benefits of such theological retrieval is that it reveals the existence of more theological options than the terms set by contemporary debates want to give us. Perhaps adding more voices to the conversation will pave a forward path in such debates.

I have one minor quibble with this book in relation to the author’s appeal to John Owen on the habits of grace. While Allen rightly points to Owen’s insistence that the Spirit infuses habits of grace in believers through their union with Christ (250–51), he neglects Owen’s equal insistence that infused habits of grace are insufficient to produce actual holiness. Owen insisted that believers need continual acts of the Spirit in every act of obedience to God. This strengthens the relationship between sovereign grace and the human responsibility to pursue holiness. Later Allen adds that infused habits of grace do not detract from “ongoing acts” of grace (254), yet this still falls short of Owen’s robust emphasis on the continual and personal acts of the Spirit in the lives of believers. This minor adjustment would make a great book even better.

This book does not answer every vital question related to sanctification. It will not provide a pathway to personal holiness in light of a proper exposition of the Decalogue, for example. How-

ever, it places the pursuit of holiness on better theological footing than most modern treatments. Allen’s trinitarian, Christological, systematic, and exegetical approach to his subject gives readers the foundation that they need to take Christ’s call to holiness seriously and to build on this foundation solidly. Owen believed that falling short of such biblical meditation left us without the materials needed to foster faith, and that this was the primary reason why most Christians did not make greater progress in their sanctification. The fact that this is precisely the point at which Allen meets his readers shows how necessary this book is for the church today. While we need more than such theological reflection, we certainly do not need less, and if we bypass it entirely then we will cut off our progress in holiness at the knees. ☺

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I Shall Not Die, But Live

by Douglas Taylor

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
December 2018¹

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

I Shall Not Die, But Live: Facing Death with Gospel Hope, by Douglas Taylor. Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2016, xviii + 332 pages, \$22.00.

In our age of Twitter and YouTube, talking about death may be the last taboo. For many, apart from murder mysteries, death is a most uncomfortable and morbid topic, to be avoided if possible. The irony of this is that, because of the sin of our first parents, we are all dying. But thanks be to God, Christ Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has opened the way of eternal life for all who trust in him. Our standards remind us, “the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection” (WSC Q. 37). Thus Thomas Watson, in his *A Body of Divinity*, affirms that “those who can say ‘to me to live is Christ,’ may comfortably conclude that to die will be gain (Phil. 1:21)” (206).

In May 2011, Douglas Taylor, an assistant editor for Banner of Truth Trust, was diagnosed with inoperable liver cancer. In response, Taylor decided to spend his final energies writing “to glorify God and to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ” (xxvii). He developed a blog, “Words Worth Declaring,” to which he posted regularly. You can find this blog at worksworthdeclaring.blogspot.com. Banner of Truth has selected 248 of these blog posts, slightly edited, to include in the volume *I Shall Not Die, But Live: Facing Death with Gospel Hope*. This title, drawn from Psalm 118:17, came to Taylor’s mind after a night in which he thought he might die. They led

him to meaningful ministry as he sought to exalt the Lord in the midst of severe affliction.

Taylor’s posts drip with grace and with the Word of God. Written in devotional style, each post shows a deep acquaintance with the Scriptures, and with Reformed literature and hymnody. Taylor quotes from and discusses more than forty different writers, most from the Scottish covenanting and Puritan traditions. His favorite authors, other than the writers of Scripture, appear to be Thomas Watson, Samuel Rutherford, and Charles Spurgeon. He also includes lines from more than twenty-five hymn writers, favoring Augustus Toplady, Charles Wesley, and Isaac Watts. These writers from generations gone by were no strangers to suffering and death, and they provide mature and rich reflection on the subject, as well as undaunted hope in the glories that await those who rest in Christ. Indeed, Taylor takes his place among them as one who thoughtfully and reverently reflects upon his faith and the Holy Scriptures as he approaches the end of his own earthly pilgrimage. Yet in all these reflections, there is nothing morbid or discouraging, but consistently a positive anticipation of the glories that await those who sleep in the Lord.

Taylor’s posts do not focus on the ups and downs of his physical struggle with cancer. Nevertheless, at times those struggles do enter into the material, as when, just a month before his death he writes: “I never intended this blog to report on my health, but to glorify Christ; however, I would request your supportive prayers concerning the [symptoms] which have hindered me recently” (330). Perhaps it is the chaplain in me that finds the scattered allusions to his personal health to be most poignant reminders that these are not abstract theological reflections but rather a personal wrestling with God’s Word as it applies to all of life.

Taylor begins his first blog by quoting Dr. Samuel Johnson: “Depend upon it, Sir. When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” He then adds, “Something similar may be said of a man who is diagnosed with an incurable disease which normally carries a prognosis of about six months” (1). His posts consistently reflect this clarity of thought and

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=724&issue_id=141.

commitment to Christ.

Within Taylor's postings there is an ambivalence that is also reflected in the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:18–26. Taylor shares this by way of a story from the Great Awakening,

[George] Whitefield was emphasizing the comfort he felt that soon his labors would be over and he would be with Christ in glory. Those present generally agreed with Whitefield, but an older minister, William Tennent, Jr., dissented. "I have nothing to do with death," he declared. "My business is to live as long as I can—as well as I can—and to serve my Lord and Master as faithfully as I can, until he shall think proper to call me home." (30)

Both views are well reflected in Douglas Taylor's final days, and in the writings he has left as a testimony to God's grace during his journey.

On June 2, 2014, Douglas Taylor went home to be with his Lord and Savior. His final post, May 8, 2014 closes with the lines of one of Wesley's hymns:

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.

And he concludes with a final quotation from God's Word: "So he bringeth them unto their desired haven" (Ps. 107:30 KJV). Most certainly, our God has brought his servant home.

Taylor's own summary of his blog and his personal struggle comes from the lines of the hymn, "The Sands of Time Are Sinking," by Anne Cousin, reflecting the dying words of Samuel Ruth-erford (298).

I've wrestled on towards Heaven,
'Gainst storm, and wind, and tide:
Now, like a weary traveler,
That leaneth on his guide,
Amidst the shades of evening,
While sinks life's ling'ring stand,
I hail the glory dawning
From Immanuel's land.

This excellent devotional is well suited to any who, like Douglas Taylor, are facing a terminal

illness (and we all are), as well as to those who minister with such persons. But it is also a worthwhile devotional for anyone who desires to wrestle with the vicissitudes of living and dying with Christ. ©

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✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

(Dis)Engaging our Reformed Fathers (?): A Review of John Frame's *A History of West- ern Philosophy and Theology*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2018¹

by John V. Fesko

A History of Western Philosophy and Theology, by
John M. Frame. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015, xxix
+ 875 pages, \$59.99.

John Frame has been a popular fixture in Reformed and Evangelical theological discussions for the last forty years. He has concluded his formal academic career and has published a number of works. Among Frame's books is his recent *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, which he wrote over decades of teaching. Frame's work is a massive survey that spans from the peripatetic philosophers to the present day and thus covers roughly two thousand years of the interaction between philosophy and theol-

ogy. He explores philosophy and theology from his own peculiar triperspectivalism. While some may find this as a constraining feature, readers can still profit from his analysis even if they do not agree with his approach. Frame has thirteen chapters on the Greek philosophers, patristic, medieval, early modern, enlightenment, and modern periods. He writes for a seminary-level audience given that the book originated as his lectures for a course titled "History of Philosophy and Christian Thought" (xxv). I believe, however, that laymen who are willing to invest the time can profit from the book, as Frame's style is easy to follow, and he breaks most of his chapters into smaller sub-sections. This division of his subject matter facilitates briefly exploring the thought of an individual theologian or philosopher without being overwhelmed.

Strengths

Frame's book has a number of positive qualities. First, one of the biggest holes in a seminarian's education is his lack of philosophical knowledge. Many are unaware of the connections between philosophy and theology and thus come ill-prepared for the serious study of theology. Frame's book, therefore, helpfully identifies key figures, ideas, and texts that equip students with an overview so they can get their bearings when first introduced to various theological ideas. How important is Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas or Søren Kierkegaard to Karl Barth, for example? Frame's work addresses such questions in a useful manner.

Second, Frame's work has important pedagogical aids that assist the uninitiated reader. Each chapter has a running outline, which enables readers to know where they are in Frame's exposition. He also provides a list of key terms, study questions, and a bibliography of print and online primary and secondary sources. Professors who want to form discussion questions or exams will find these features useful, and students who want to learn more about a philosopher or theologian will benefit from the bibliographic information at the conclusion of each chapter.

A third positive aspect of the book is the

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=669&issue_id=131.

breadth of Frame's survey. Students have a resource where they can begin to investigate large periods of history or get their bearings for one particular theologian or philosopher.

Weaknesses

At the same time, a book's greatest strength can also carry weaknesses. In a book that covers such a large swath of history, theology, and philosophy, there are bound to be gaps and limitations.

Methodology

The first weakness pertains to methodology and the others relate to substantive historical-theological issues. On matters related to methodology, I question the routine use of Internet sources. Granted, with the advent of the information superhighway, a number of academic discussions and publications have migrated to the Internet. Many of the sources to which Frame points are therefore legitimate. Identifying websites, for example, that provide previously published books in pdf format are useful to budget-constrained seminarians. At the same time, there are citations to websites where one has to wonder exactly how long they will last. I discovered, for example, two links that no longer exist (517n18; 528n49). How many of Frame's cited sources will evaporate over the years and unnecessarily hobble the book's accuracy? Cambridge University Press, for example, places a disclaimer on the publication information page warning its readers that it does not guarantee the accuracy or permanency of cited URL's. What does this say about the long-term viability of a book that relies so heavily on Internet sources?

My greatest concern, however, pertains to how students will use Frame's cited Internet sources. When students see primary sources alongside websites like Wikiquote, which one will the student choose? Does the presentation of one beside the other legitimize both? My fear is that the frequent use of Internet sources unintentionally sets a bad example that students will follow, which will possibly harm the scholarship and knowledge of future seminarians. Why slog through Gadamer when

you can go to Wikiquote to get what you need for a research paper? In some cases, Frame cites Wikipedia as a source (e.g., 449n135). Since anyone can edit a Wikipedia page, how can students and the uninitiated ensure that the cited page is accurate and thus reliable? Why not cite a published version of the Auburn Affirmation, for example, rather than the Wikipedia summary of it (309–10)? The use of Wikipedia sources for an academic book is a deficiency that could have been easily avoided by citing reputedly published sources.

Historical Theology

The remaining weaknesses in Frame's book relate to his uncritical use of the concept of *worldview*, and his treatment of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology. Frame acknowledges that he writes from a Van Tilian perspective, and one of the hallmarks of Van Tilian thought is to subject to biblical critique the underlying presuppositions behind a system of thought. What unbiblical assumptions do theologians bring to their enterprise? Yet, on the very first page of his book, Frame immediately uses the concept of *worldview*: "I define *philosophy* as 'the disciplined attempt to articulate and defend a worldview.' A *worldview* is a general conception of the universe" (1). Frame then employs the concept and term throughout his book. What is problematic about employing the concept of *worldview* in his assessment of the history of philosophy and theology? Prior to the Enlightenment theologians and philosophers did not think in terms of systems and worldviews. James Orr (1844–1913) was one of the first, if not the first, theologian to use the term, and he noted its German Idealist origins.² Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) then picked it up from Orr and promoted the concept in his famous Stone Lectures (1898) at Princeton Seminary.³ But few have asked questions such as, What are the origins of the term? What does the concept entail?

2 James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (1893; Edinburgh, Andrew Elliot, 1907).

3 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 11n1.

And, if its origins lie in Kantian philosophy, would anyone prior to the eighteenth century approve of the application of the concept to their theological or philosophical claims?⁴ Worldviews are systems of thought, yet such a manner of evaluating the history of philosophy has been brought into question and subject to trenchant critique.⁵ One might employ the concept of worldview, but he should first subject it to careful examination to ensure that in his efforts to explain pre-Enlightenment philosophical or theological ideas he does not press them into a foreign mold.

The second historical-theological weakness in Frame's book pertains to elements of his treatment of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology. Frame makes a number of unsupported claims, such as the reason medieval theologians employed Greek philosophy was because they sought academic respectability, and that this quest for respect lead to the creation of scholasticism (140–41). Yet when one consults medieval works, Frame's claim does not match the evidence. Theologians like Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) did not employ Aristotelian philosophy out of a desire to seek academic respectability but because they sought a means by which they could dialogue with and evangelize Muslim philosophers.⁶ In his efforts to explain medieval and Protestant scholasticism, Frame does not cite or interact with established authorities in the field, such as Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, Richard Muller, and Willem Van Asselt. Frame writes as if these scholars never existed. Frame instead relies on the questionable analysis of Peter Leithart, who claims that medieval theologians such as Peter Abelard (1079–1142) organized their theology around topics rather than following the course of the biblical text (142–43). The implication of Leithart's claim

4 For the history of the origins of the concept, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

5 Leo Catana, *The Historiographical Concept 'System of Philosophy': Its Origin, Nature, Influence, and Legitimacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–10, 283–329.

6 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 5 vols., trans. Anton Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), I.ii.3 (vol. I, p. 62).

is that medieval theology was not truly biblical and imposed concepts on the text rather than directly engaged it. Mishandling the Bible might be true of some, but certainly not all medieval theologians. The overall structure of medieval theological works such as Aquinas's *Summa* or Peter Lombard's (1096–1160) *Sentences*, for example, follow a chronological pattern—they move from God, to man, Christ, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology.⁷ Frame also accuses Aquinas of developing his doctrine of God from natural reason because he supposedly followed Aristotle and was thus incapable of insulating his theology from autonomous thought (146). Such an opinion is common among contemporary Protestants, but there is a sea of literature that makes the opposite case based on a close primary-source reading of Thomas.⁸ All one has to do is consult Aquinas's opening arguments of his *Summa Theologica* and his numerous biblical commentaries to see that Frame's claim does not square with the evidence.⁹ Frame instead paints Aquinas as a rationalist (154). One may certainly make such claims, but not apart from evidence.

The same type of pattern unfolds in his analysis of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. Repeating the canard that the Reformation was a nearly total break with the medieval past, Frame claims that Calvin's epistemology was a "sharp departure from the patterns of medieval and Renaissance philosophy," and that he makes "no accommodation to Greek philosophical views, or to intellectual autonomy" (174). Frame ignores the rather large body of secondary literature that notes

7 Karl Rahner, ed., "Scholasticism," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, 6 vols. (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), VI:26.

8 See, e.g., Richard A. Muller, "The Dogmatic Function of St. Thomas' 'Proofs': A Protestant Appreciation," *Fides et Historia* 24 (1992): 15–29. W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas's Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 36–37; Lawrence Dewan, "Faith and Reason from St. Thomas Aquinas's Perspective," *Science et Esprit* 58/2 (2006): 113–23; Christopher T. Baglow, "Sacred Scripture and Sacred Doctrine in Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, John Yocum (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 1–24.

9 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (rep.; Allen: Christian Classics, 1948), Ia q. 1.

Calvin's use of Cicero's (106–143 BC) arguments from his *De Natura Deorum* in the opening pages of his *Institutes*, for example.¹⁰ How is Calvin's use of Cicero different than Aquinas's use of Aristotle? Moreover, scholars have noted the continuities (and discontinuities) between Aquinas and Calvin on a host of issues.¹¹ Calvin was more indebted to Thomism than Frame admits. Frame believes that Calvin and Luther completely broke with the medieval past and “admitted no obligation to Greek philosophy and were able to set forth in relative purity the biblical metaphysic, epistemology, and ethic” (206). Such a claim is very popular, but has little basis in fact. How does such a claim square with Calvin's explicit positive appeal to Plato (ca. 428–347 BC), for example?¹²

Frame's analysis is equally inadequate when he addresses post-Reformation developments. He acknowledges that the supposed discontinuities between Calvin and his successors have been extremely overblown, but he nevertheless makes three questionable claims. First, he describes the relationship between the Reformation and post-Reformation as one between Calvin and his successors (175). This is inaccurate because Calvin, unlike Luther, was never designated as the fountainhead of the Reformed tradition.¹³ Calvin was undoubtedly a bright star in the Reformed galaxy, but one brilliant light among a sparkling host.

Second, Frame makes the puzzling statement: “But the *feeling* one gets from the post-Reforma-

tion literature is very different from the atmosphere generated by the original Reformers” (175; emphasis original). He claims:

The writings of Luther and Calvin are highly personal, existential responses to the theological and ecclesiastical crises they faced. The post-Reformation theology is more academic, more detailed, more argumentative. It makes more use of philosophy and therefore is often described by the phrase *Protestant Scholasticism*. (175)

Frame's analysis is a mile wide and an inch deep. Calvin's *Institutes* is as argumentative as any Reformed scholastic work and even more bombastic at times. Nevertheless, Frame never raises the issue of genre in his assessment of the supposed felt discontinuities between Reformation and post-Reformation Reformed works. Assuming Calvin's normative status for the sake of argument, how do Calvin's sermons compare with Francis Turretin's (1623–87)? Turretin was a Reformed scholastic theologian and a pastor.¹⁴ Moreover, Calvin's *Institutes* is an introductory theological text whereas Turretin's *Institutes* is geared towards technical disputation with Roman Catholics, Arminian, and Socinian theologians. These two works were written towards different ends. One might say, for example, that Frame's book is overly technical and dry compared with the warm and personal sermons of John Piper. But is such a comparison useful or fair? Should a historian ignore audience and genre and evaluate works in terms of subjective feelings?

Third, Frame makes the unsubstantiated assertion that Protestant scholasticism was possibly to blame for the rise of liberalism: “The reader will have to decide whether the later declension of the churches into liberalism is to some extent the result of this academic movement” (175). From

10 See, e.g., Egil Grisliis, “Calvin's Use of Cicero in *Institutes* 1:1–5, A Case Study in Theological Method,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 62/1 (1971): 5–37; Peter J. Leithart, “That Eminent Pagan: Calvin's Use of Cicero in *Institutes* 1:1–5,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52, no.1 (1990): 1–12.

11 See, e.g., Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 363–64, 367–78; Stephen Grabill, *Rediscovering Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 70–97; David VanDrunen, “Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2006): 77–98, esp. 81–90.

12 E.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), I.iii.3. In general, consult Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1977).

13 Carl Trueman, “Calvin and Calvinism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 239.

14 See, e.g., Francis Turretin, *Sermons sur Divers Passages de L'Écriture Sainte Par Francois Turretin Ministre du Saint Évangile, & Professeur en Théologie* (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1676); cf. J. Mark Beach, “Preaching Predestination—an Examination of Francis Turretin's Sermon *De l'Affermissement de la Vocation et de l'Élection du Fidele*,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 21 (2010): 133–47.

the vantage point of historiography, to suggest that one movement created a complex theological movement hundreds of years later is exceedingly problematic. There are seldom silver-bullet theories that explain the rise of multifaceted historical phenomena. Liberalism arose from many different causes such as climate change, which produced famine, religious wars, economics, politics, theology, as well as unbelief. Frame does not explain how disputing a topic in a precise manner within the context of a university leads to the rejection of biblical authority. In four hundred years, will a Frame-minded historian claim the same about Frame's book? Will his academically oriented treatment of the history of philosophy and theology lead to the rise of a new form of liberalism? Such historiography is neither responsible nor helpful to theological students. If Frame wants to argue that Protestant scholasticism contributed to or was responsible for the rise of liberalism, then he should present objective evidence, not float uncorroborated opinions.

Frame is certainly within his rights to advocate his views regarding medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology, but in these areas, he sets a bad example for seminary students. He hardly cites any evidence to support his assertions regarding the aforementioned weaknesses. Moreover, when I reached the end of the chapter on early modern thought, I expected at least to find suggested primary and secondary-source readings so that students could investigate matters for themselves, but I found none. Among the scores of contemporary sources that Frame provides, Calvin is the only early modern name that appears. He also does not list a single secondary source that originates from the Oberman-Steinmetz revolution that produced a massive body of literature that has overturned much of the popular mythology that Frame continues to perpetuate. To that end, readers who want a fuller and evidence-based assessment of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology should consult key primary and secondary sources to form their own opinions. Why does Frame commend the works of Thomas Hobbes, Spinoza, or Descartes but ignores Francis

Junius, Turretin, John Owen, Wilhelmus à Brakel, Thomas Goodwin, and the like? Ignoring these theologians is troubling because, many of them speak to the very issues that Frame discusses in his book—the relationship between philosophy and theology. Junius and Turretin have excellent treatments on theological prolegomena, as does Richard Muller in his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*; his first volume on prolegomena and the Reformed scholastic use of philosophy is especially relevant.¹⁵ Theological students would greatly benefit from the wealth of primary-source research that Muller presents. The same is true about Willem Van Asselt's *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*.¹⁶ But more importantly, these works showcase the incredibly erudite early modern Reformed treatments of the relationship between philosophy and theology. If students ignore these works, they do so to their theological impoverishment.

Conclusion

John Frame has provided students with a good survey of the history of philosophy and theology, one that seminarians can undoubtedly use to great benefit, the aforementioned weaknesses notwithstanding. I am grateful for what this book represents—decades of teaching students to think critically about these weighty matters. But readers should be aware of Frame's uncritical use of modern categories such as *worldview* and that they will have to go elsewhere to find accurate coverage of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation philosophy and theology. The need to supplement Frame's engagement of medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology is not about an academic shortcoming but should be of vital interest to those who profess the Reformed faith.

15 Francis Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, trans. David Noe (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992–97), I.viii–xi; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

16 Willem Van Asselt, et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

Presbyterian and Reformed churches look to our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fathers in the faith for guidance. These fathers in the faith wrote our doctrinal confessions, the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. We should therefore carefully engage their theological works so we do not become sectarians and create a theology that becomes divorced from the catholic witness of the church. Scripture is always the first and last word in matters of faith and life, but we do not come to the Bible alone. We read the Bible within the context of the church from every age, and thus, when we carefully engage the past, we learn from Christ's gifts to the church (Eph. 4:11–13). We can definitely learn from John Frame's lifetime of labors, but we should do so with equal interest in medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology. ©

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Kids These Days

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* January 2018¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

iGen: Why Today's Super-connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood, by Jean M. Twenge. New York: Atria, 2017, 342 pages, \$27.00.

Here they come! Boomers think of ourselves as a dominant generation, but iGen'ers (born from 1995 to 2012) make up the largest percentage of the US population.

Dr. Jean M. Twenge's is a detailed sociological analysis of the youngest generation to enter early adulthood with the smartphone as a ubiquitous presence in their lives. This, her latest book: *iGen*, is an eye-opening read. While trying to refrain from value judgments—a staple conviction of her profession—she is troubled by some of the effects of the smart phone's unique dominance in the life of this latest generation.

Just as iGen'ers began to enter the adult world in 2012, Twenge “started seeing large, abrupt shifts in teens' behaviors and emotional states” (4). She reminds us that the first iGen'ers were born the year the Internet was born, and in 2006 Facebook opened its social network to anyone over age 13, so anyone born since 1993 has been able to spend their entire adolescence on social networking sites (5). Twenge uses “large, over-time surveys” to enable generational comparisons (8). Her explanations of the methods and assumptions of her research are very useful. She bases her research on her own extensive interviews and four important databases. The text is laced with charts, which lend credibility to her conclusions, but are not always easy to interpret.

Chapter 1 deals with the slower progress of

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=672&issue_id=131.

iGen'ers toward adulthood than any previous generation. Christine Rosen aptly titled her *Wall Street Journal* review of *iGen* "An Aversion to Adulthood."² Not much dating, not wanting their licenses as soon as they are eligible, not working summer jobs, and not socializing or studying, all prolong the adjustment to adulthood. On the other hand not having much sex, not drinking or smoking much due to the dangers of these activities are good on the surface but are often rooted in a more intense self-orientation (42). Most importantly, "iGen doesn't rebel against their parents' over-protection—instead, they embrace it." Thus, it is no surprise that this generation demands "trigger warnings" and "safe spaces" (47). Twenge segues into chapter 2: "If teens are working less, spending less time on homework, going out less, and drinking less, what *are* they doing? For a generation called iGen, the answer is obvious: look no further than the smartphones in their hands" (47).

"They talk about their phones the way an addict would talk about crack: 'I know I shouldn't, but I just can't help it,' one said about looking at her phone while in bed" (50). Since nearly all leisure hours are spent with new media, this is their main environment (51). Tremendous psychological pressure is put on teens to present a positive self on social media. Seeking affirmation is addictive and also unrealistic in terms of what is actually going on in the lives of teens (55–57). Absorption with new media also means that reading for pleasure is almost nonexistent among iGen'ers. Twenge astutely points out that statistics that show iGen'ers reading more than older people are skewed by the fact that the majority of the reading of iGen'ers is for school assignments (60). She may be too pessimistic about the demise of the book, but the trend is not encouraging. And the results of this decline with this particular generation are disturbing:

Apparently, texting and posting on social media instead of reading books, magazines, and

newspapers are not a boon for reading comprehension or academic writing. That might partially be due to the short attention span that new media seem to encourage. (64)

Consequently, SAT scores are dramatically declining (63).

Chapter 3 explores another negative effect of the new media on iGen'ers: a dramatic decline in personal presence. The subtitle to Twenge's chapter tells it all: "I'm with you, but only virtually" (69). She notes that the recent severe drop in teen socialization is coincident with the rise of the smartphone (72–73). One of the darkest consequences is that "teens who spend more time on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy" (77). This result coincides with an ironic reversal: "The astonishing, though tentative, possibility is that the rise of the smartphone has caused both the decline in homicide and the increase in suicide" (87).

The impossibility of eliminating value judgments by sociologists—something Peter Berger pointed out a generation ago in *A Rumor of Angels*³—reveals itself in Twenge's observation: "All in all, in-person social interaction is much better for mental health than electronic communication" (88). This is, of course, not a novel observation in light of the discipline of media ecology. Twenge mentions no media critics in her index. So, the value of her comments on electronic media lies in the empirical and statistical research that confirms what media ecologists like Marshal McLuhan and Neil Postman, among a host of others, have been saying for a generation.

In chapter 4 Twenge expands on the mental health effects of the lack of face-to-face communication among iGen'ers; but now she calls it a crisis (95). Loneliness and depression are on the rise. The deception of the online happy persona exacerbates the problem. Again, she links the sharp rise in mental health problems with the advent of smartphones: they "became ubiquitous and in-

2 Christine Rosen, "An Aversion to Adulthood," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 23, 2017.

3 Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

person interaction plummeted” (104). Depression is also a primary factor in suicide, which is on the rise among high school and college teens.

Between 2009 and 2015 the number of high school girls who seriously considered suicide in the past year increased 34%, and the number who attempted suicide increased 43%. The number of college students who seriously considered suicide jumped 60% between 2011 and 2016. (110)

While other causes may be part of this “heart-breaking” increase, Twenge is highly suspicious of the coincident appearance of the smartphone with the doubling of teenage suicide (110). New media screen time seems to be the “worm at the core of the apple” (112). Smartphones also appear to be harming sleep for iGen’ers (113–17).

Chapter 5 on the religion of iGen’ers is no more encouraging. Fewer young people are affiliating with any religion: “iGen’ers came of age in an era when disavowing religious beliefs became strikingly more socially acceptable” (122). Many more are now raised in nonreligious homes. By 2016 one in three 18- to 24-year-olds said they did not believe in God, and one in four said that they did not believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (126–27). “Overall, iGen is, with near certainty, the least religious generation in US history” (128). Even in non-institutional beliefs, like prayer or the existence of God, iGen is less religious (132).

Twenge correctly observes that the rise of individualism is in lock step with the decline in religion. She refers to Christian sociologist Christian Smith’s observation that even religious teens have a more individualistic conception of their faith (138). They often do not share their church’s views on science, pop culture, and sexuality (139). She notes that few youth pastors address these issues (139). She then recommends that:

Religious organizations should focus on active discussions with iGen’ers that address the “big questions” they have about life, love, God, and meaning. Kinnaman found that 36% of young adults from a Christian background said that they didn’t feel they could “ask my most pressing life questions in church.” (141)

Needless to say, this should never be a problem in Reformed churches with our rich theological heritage. Interestingly Twenge concludes this chapter:

Evangelical churches have not lost as many members over the last few decades as other Christian denominations have. That might be because they’ve recognized that iGen’ers and Millennials want religion to complete them—to strengthen their relationships and give them a sense of purpose. (142)

She believes that even these churches will loosen their views on premarital sex, same-sex marriage, and transgender individuals (142).

Chapter 6 is safety first. This is the first generation of teens who are not risk takers. Physical safety is just the beginning of the concern; reputation, intellectual, and emotional risks come a close second. It seems that their fragility warrants the name “Generation Snowflake” (154). They are the ultimate victim generation (159). As it turns out, this may not be good for their mental health (162). Extending childhood is not a good idea because the security of money may become more important than meaning (167). The high living of the advertising world becomes a goal.

Chapter 7 explores the importance of income security to iGen. Their work ethic is a high priority, not because of the intrinsic meaningfulness of the work, but because of the security of income. Money, not meaning, is the goal (196).

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with family, sex, gender, and race. For iGen’ers growing up more slowly means relationships come much later. Sexual activity is down. Commitment threatens safety. Pornography is stealing the importance of a lifelong relationship. Relationships are stressful. Digital is much easier (215). The new media make intimacy fearful. The individualism cultivated by the smartphone undermines traditional marriage and family in radical ways. So singleness has become a way of life for a large number of iGen’ers (221). Twenge concludes that with fewer young adults having sex or committed relationships, “The United States will increasingly resemble Europe” (226).

iGen'ers assume that all races and gender identities are created equal and are appalled when they encounter views to the contrary (227). The decision to be what you wish is deeply rooted in iGen'ers' individualism (230). "Even religious teens embrace same-sex marriage" (231). Psychology classes in the public system implant the idea that gender choices hurt no one (235). This, of course, is not true, when the larger picture of relationships is taken into account. Twenge assumes that gender equality and fluidity is a positive development, betraying her value-neutral position as a sociologist (238).

Racially iGen'ers think of integration as acceptable instead of desirable. She concludes, however, that this is due to their assumption of racial diversity, rather than opposition to it (245–46). This tolerance, however, has a downside: "40% of Millennials and iGen'ers agreed that the government should be able to prevent people from making offensive statements about minority groups" (250). Hence the trend toward disinviting campus speakers that offend the sensibilities of students. Twenge once again steps outside of the sociological neutral stance by disapproving of these speech restrictions.

Chapter 10 is a fascinating exploration of why iGen'ers voted for both socialist Bernie Sanders and nationalist Donald Trump: radical individualism. iGen'ers have stepped outside party lines. Government "should stay out of people's private business" (266). The iGen'ers "take the individualist mindset for granted" (275). But for all their Libertarian instincts they do not believe that political involvement, including voting, makes a difference (284).

In her conclusion, "Understanding and Saving—iGen," Twenge encourages more face-to-face interaction and less smartphone use. "Life is better offline, and even iGen'ers know it" (294). She counsels more parental involvement (297–98) and exercise (300). Facing adult realities before leaving home is an obvious piece of advice. Learning how to evaluate evidence is also sage counsel. In the end Twenge fails to point to transcendent reality to ground her advice, much of which is worthwhile.

The triune God and his revelation in Scripture is the ultimate grounding for navigating modernity.

Whatever iGen'ers think about gender, race, vocation, or religion, God is in control of history and they are made in his image; no amount of genetic engineering or propaganda can change that. Furthermore, I know many Christian and a few non-Christian iGen'ers, who simply do not fit the profile of Twenge's research conclusions.

While we need to be careful not to pigeon-hole iGen'ers with Twenge's conclusions, there is enough evidence to cause great concern for the rising generation of young people. Christian parents and church officers have a great responsibility to educate young people on the reasons why we believe certain things and reject other ideas, like evolution and same-sex marriage. Along with this, genuine love for our unbelieving neighbors needs to replace the often judgmental spirit with which we communicate our faith. Or as David Kinnaman says, "We have become famous for what we oppose rather than what we are for" (140). God's amazing grace in the true man Jesus Christ must, therefore, take center stage. ©

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The Drama of Preaching

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
April 2018¹

by Alan D. Strange

The Drama of Preaching: Participating with God in the History of Redemption, by Eric Brian Watkins. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016, xviii + 255 pages, \$33.00, paper.

Eric Watkins, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in St. Augustine, Florida, has written an eminently readable and useful book, *The Drama of Preaching: Participating with God in the History of Redemption*. It is a version of his doctoral dissertation from the Theological University in Kampen, The Netherlands; as such, it is well-researched and carefully reasoned. It does not have the drawback, however, of excessive academic and technical jargon that burdens so many theses. It is thus accessible to any thoughtful pastor or educated layman. We can be thankful that it is, because the subject matter and his treatment of it are of the greatest importance. If the faithful preaching of the Word of God is, as Reformed confessions teach, the Word of God to us here and now, a proper understanding of what it is and how it ought to be done is of great importance. Therefore, we are in the debt to Dr. Watkins for being such a sure guide in this most significant of enterprises.

Watkins introduces his work by simply declaring, “Preaching is dramatic” (xiii). My first thought was “it is if it’s any good,” not because the preacher makes it so by great oratorical skill, but simply because he expositis the greatest story ever told, the one that gives meaning to every other redemptive tale; and without which there is no meaning, purpose or love in the world; all is rather “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Since all things were created

by speaking, God, in a sense, “preached the world into existence” (xiii). The Bible records this story from creation to consummation, and it is this dramatic tale, having Christ and the redemption that we have in him at its center, that furnishes the preacher with his subject matter.

Before further examining the drama of preaching, it might be helpful to note that we often speak in our Reformed and Presbyterian circles of preaching as being “redemptive-historical.” One of the central themes of the book is that the drama of preaching and its redemptive-historical character are not in tension with each other but complement each other. The pedigree of the notion that proper proclamation ought to be redemptive-historical, rightly understood, is as ancient as the recapitulation theory (ca. AD 140–160), of Irenaeus not to mention many biblical antecedents (notably, the New Testament use of the Old). The more recent roots, however, stem from the debates in the 1930s in the Dutch church leading in no small measure to the formation of a new denomination in the Netherlands in 1944, the “Liberated” church, particularly indebted to the leadership of Klaas Schilder (2–8).

Schilder and company particularly objected to preaching that employed “exemplaristic” application, “which reduced biblical characters to moral examples in abstraction from the person and work of Christ” (xiv). In contrast, the redemptive-historical preachers of the Liberated church “pushed back strongly, arguing that . . . the intention of the biblical text . . . was to display the redemptive work of God in history” (xiv). However, many then and later perceived the redemptive-historical approach as overly objective in its reaction against other approaches as overly subjective, “perceived as flying high over the hearts and lives of God’s people without necessarily touching down upon the practical realities of daily life” (7). As Watkins notes, that was a charge levied not only at the time of World War II but more recently by critics like Henry Krabbendam and Terry Johnson (14).

While Watkins, and this reviewer, ardently support what the best of a redemptive-historical hermeneutical approach yields Watkins recognizes

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=687&issue_id=135.

that the Dutch redemptive-historical homiletical approach (which is related to, but distinguished from, the biblical-theological hermeneutics of Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, et al.) sometimes suffered an unintended consequence: it yielded preaching that ossified the religious life of its auditors by failing properly to engage their hearts.² Watkins wants to retain all the objectivity of setting forth Christ and his redemptive work, both prospectively in the Old Testament and retrospectively in the New Testament (certainly we want Christ central in our preaching). Yet, he also wants to discover a better way to connect with one's hearers and to elicit their participation in the text (something that he thinks superior to the older "application of the text" model).

Watkins believes that the more recent "drama of redemption" paradigm (as seen in Kevin Vanhoozer, Michael Horton, Dennis Johnson, et al.) may serve to advance the whole discussion and move us to a place in which the hearer in the pew can see "the Bible as a unified, redemptive drama in which God is not simply the author but the main actor." At the same time, the listener can see himself and his fellows as a participant in that drama (God has "granted the church a scripted role that she must learn faithfully to perform on the world stage"). Thus, the drama of redemptive history (to meld the phrases) is one that not only sets forth Christ's work for us in history objectively but subjectively draws us in so that our story is woven into his (xvi). Bringing the two together brings the historical and the existential together, making sure that *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* are properly integrated. This is the burden of the book, one that Watkins ably bears.

In chapter 1 Watkins sets forth the contours of the redemptive-historical preaching debates, treating first the debate in the Netherlands, particularly those surrounding the Liberated Church (1944), and then the debate outside the Netherlands, especially among the heirs of Vos. Before proceeding to acknowledge that the discussion continues (and

2 Full disclosure: I am deeply influenced by the biblical theology of Richard Gaffin and the preaching of Edmund P. Clowney.

can be seen in the approaches of contemporaries like Brian Chapell and Tim Keller), Watkins has sections discussing homiletics vis-à-vis other disciplines (exegetical theology, systematic theology, etc.; also the distinction between a redemptive-historical hermeneutic and homiletic) and one that deals with the contention that redemptive-historical preaching is rather new in the church (as compared, certainly, to other older methods).

Watkins explores and defines the drama of redemption paradigm further in chapter 2, noting the drama of Scripture itself (furnishing us with several examples of how Scripture can be viewed as acts, pages 4–7, with additional scenes, pages 31–34), including its striking imagery and typology. Watkins then explores the historical use of the drama metaphor, moving us from ancient times to contemporary ones, surveying a variety of partisans of such. Finally, he seeks, while offering appropriate cautions, to "connect the dots between the [drama of redemption] paradigm presented thus far and [redemptive-historical preaching]" (55–63). (While some push the drama of redemption metaphor too far; Watkins, anchored as he is by the Reformed confessions, never does.) He makes connections not to be missed, that must be read and pondered, that this review cannot capture, with payoffs like this observation: "A sermon is much more than a creative display of God's redemption as something merely to be believed; it is also a summons to active participation in the drama of redemption by the life giving Spirit through the preaching of the Word" (58).

Closely connected with this is the postmodern appropriation of the metaphor and how a fitting use of it can be made in preaching to the postmodern, which Watkins treats in chapter 7. If modernity champions the propositional and postmodern champions the personal, then properly preaching the gospel suits both. Preaching the Word is by its very nature propositional, since the Word, and all exposition of it, is in the form of propositions; it is also personal, since the truth that we preach is a person (John 14:6). Only the Christian faith and its proper proclamation overcomes the false dichotomy of propositional v. personal (modernism

v. postmodernism). Our times have not rendered preaching passé, as many have claimed in recent decades. Rather, preaching that understands the drama of redemptive history and seeks to bring the hearer, with his own narrative, and situate him in the grand meta-narrative seems quite appropriate for both the modernist (who lacks the personal) and the postmodernist (who lacks the truth, having only his own perspective).

Participation has been cited before as a necessary connection between objective redemptive history and the spiritual life of the congregant in the pew who hears the sermon. Watkins devotes an excellent chapter to that (chapter 5), entitled “Application or Imitation? Reconsidering the *Sine Qua Non* of Preaching” (114–34). All agree, or should, that preaching is more than exposition of the text employing a sound redemptive-historical hermeneutic (that by itself is a lecture); the distinctively homiletical move always involves some sort of application to the lives of the hearers. In other words, it is never enough to give a sound treatment to only the first horizon (a sound exegesis of the text in its context) but there must be a lively engagement of the second horizon (what does this mean to me as listener here and now?). So much application, however, appears contrived, an excuse for the preacher to say what he wants, whether riding a hobby horse or addressing current events. Watkins wants a more organic approach, one that lets the text and its context truly dictate the significance of this part of the Word of God for the hearers. His treatment of participation/application shows us a better way.

We have Watkins’s theses advisors to thank for the application of his work to even the postmodern context. This was their insistence and not his original intent. His original intent was to see how the two approaches (a drama of redemption one and a redemptive-historical one) might best work together, particularly in the service of sermonizing in a significant text like Hebrews 11. Chapter 3, 4, and 6 manifest Watkins’s interest in Hebrews 11, with chapter 3 setting the stage for the great “faith” chapter, chapter 4 dealing with the “theatre” of martyrs presented in the faith “hall of fame,” and

chapter 6 (picking up from chapter 5 on imitation) dealing with application as imitation of the saints (which differs from mere exemplarism). Watkins’s treatment of Hebrews 11, apart from all his theoretical engagement of this subject, already discussed, makes this worth the price of the book.

Watkins covers a good deal in this work. The following observations are not so much a criticism of his omissions but that which comes from thinking within and beyond his work. It’s interesting that a number of sound Reformed men, like Horton and Watkins (not only those of other traditions), have come to stress the drama that Scripture contains: Reformed Christians, as much as any, have been historically opposed to drama and the theatre. This was marked among the Westminster Divines, who not only opposed performances of William Shakespeare, but whose era gave us William Prynne and his inimitable *Histriomastix*, undoubtedly the most massive attack on the theatre ever penned. This is true in succeeding centuries: Charles Hodge, for instance, in his travels in Europe (1826–28) was proud that he never went to the theatre, though often invited, and as late as 1928 the Christian Reformed Church still dismissed the theatre and movies as “worldly amusements.”

It’s only comparatively recently that Reformed and Presbyterian folk have embraced the dramatic arts. How we’ve arrived at a point of embracing drama and seeing Scripture as presenting a drama of redemption seems worth exploring, particularly in light of the fact that more conservative homiletics may remain wary of the drama metaphor, suspicious that it hides some lurking liberal agenda. More work needs to be done here in exploring the historic allergy of Reformed and Presbyterian believers to drama and the claim that redemption itself is the grandest drama of all.

Watkins also advocates imitation (especially in keeping with Hebrews 11) over the kind of strained moralistic application that many texts have suffered at the contrivance of preachers. One might think that Watkins would mention the Brethren of the Common Life and Gerard Groote (since Watkins otherwise mines well the Dutch

context) as antecedents for such, since, at the heart of this *Devotio Moderna* was Thomas a Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. Others before Watkins, in other words, have emphasized imitation and participation and it would be interesting to know how this all might play or fit into what Watkins here recommends.

Watkins does cite the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in preaching, but I think that more could be made of the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching, both liturgically and historically. One thinks, for instance, not only of the real presence of the Spirit in the sacraments but in preaching, as some have particularly noted. Additionally, regarding application, or imitation (to stick to his preferred term/approach), one might fear that Watkins remains, as is often charged by critics of a redemptive-historical homiletic, rather underdeveloped here. For instance, in discussing Genesis 22 (God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac) as part of Hebrews 11, Watkins tells us several things that the preacher should not do by way of application (138–40). He does this frequently in this chapter, in fact. I generally agree with him, but am often left wondering what he thinks correct application/imitation of the passage would be. Genesis 22 has some especially rich lessons (teased out by Edmund Clowney, for example), but these are not produced by Watkins. Perhaps the volume would be improved by two or three sample sermons on Hebrews 11 (in appendices) in which a rich application could be shown to cohere with a drama of redemption and redemptive-historical approach.

Finally, when it comes to application/imitation I think that the spirituality of the church, rightly understood, might help (and, rightly understood, it's closely tied to a proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit). That we must preach the ethical imperatives of Scriptures is patent. Paul's teaching, for instance, is fraught with such. But how one does it properly, even prophetically (in challenging wickedness in both the church and the wider society), without doing it politically, and I mean by this without doing it in a way that divides persons of the same confession, is a challenge. We must not preach a political or social message. This is

not to say that preaching God's Word may never have political or social *implications*. It does mean, however, that we should be guided by a healthy spirituality of the church, one that understands the spiritual character and calling of the church as an institution. A proper spirituality of the church is one in which the church distinguishes itself from the world, while giving itself to the world, holding out our Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope of a needy and dying world.

These observations spring from Watkins's fecund theory of preaching. The book should be read by all who preach and who aspire to preach. It should also be read by well-informed laymen who wish to know more about the elements that comprise good preaching. I cannot recommend it highly enough. ☺

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How to Think Irenically

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
May 2018¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds, by Alan Jacobs. New York: Currency, 2017, 157 pages, \$23.00.

No, this is not a book about logic, although without the subtitle one might legitimately think that. Jacobs begins with the common question: What were you thinking? “It’s a question we ask when we find someone’s behavior inexplicable, when we can’t imagine what chain of reasoning could possibly lead to what they just said or did” (11). He relies heavily on Princeton professor of psychology Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (12).² Jacobs analyzes the ways in which our prejudices drive our decision-making and our arguments in controversy. Jacobs builds on a fundamental distinction made by Kahneman between slow and fast thinking. As Jacobs wittily titles one section of the first chapter: “Speed Kills.” Kahneman labels fast thinking, “System 1”; it is based on things we have already decided for whatever reason, hence *prejudice*. “System 2” is slow because it takes time to think carefully about anything, especially complex topics and ideas. Because this takes a great deal of effort we tend to live rather thoughtlessly in System 1 mode. Only when System 1 raises a problem do we stop to think with System 2 (16).

Jacobs unpacks the problem by referring to Marilynne Robinson’s essay “Puritans and Prigs,”³ in which she observes that our pejorative use of the term Puritan “is a great example of our collec-

tive eagerness to disparage without knowledge or information about the thing disparaged, when the reward is the pleasure of sharing an attitude one knows is socially approved” (20–21). As American philosopher and psychologist (1842–1910), William James opined: “A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.”

Even in academia ideas are often studied by professors and students alike to shore up prejudices, rather than engage in true inquiry, especially those that are required for club membership (24). Jacobs is especially fascinated by Megan Phelps-Roper a member of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, infamous for its rabid antigay rhetoric and protests. Her Stage 1 thinking was challenged when, through Twitter, where she was promoting the Westboro message, she encountered friendliness among the gay opposition. This slowed her down, and she began to think (31–34).

Jacobs raises the issue of the place of feelings in thinking: Do feelings undermine rational thought? (39–44). Although Jacobs doesn’t use the word affections in his plea for the place of feelings, he would have been better served had he done so. Feelings or emotion often seem so subjective as to interfere with healthy thinking; but when connected with deep seated loyalties and commitments, which I believe is Jacobs’s point, they become an essential ingredient in proper thinking. Jacobs uses poetry to bolster his point. Poetry appeals to sensibilities that combine reason with emotion or feeling, all of which play a part in the decisions and assessments we make. The biblical concept of the heart involves both loyalty and rational thought. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34). The heart senses the value of ultimate loyalties through thought and affection. These relational decisions cannot be reduced to reason alone. Jacobs puts it this way: “[A]n account of rational thinking, and a resulting set of judgments about irrational thinking, that can’t account for the power and the value of relational goods is a deeply impoverished model of rationality” (48). By “relational goods” Jacobs means the commitments and loyalties we value as good, either for good or

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=694&issue_id=136.

2 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

3 Marilynne Robinson, “Puritans and Prigs,” in *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999), 150–73.

ill.

Chapter 2 deals with attractions. “This suggests that the problem of belonging and not belonging, affiliation and separation, is central to the task of learning how to think” (54). Thus, to be accepted in a group to which we are attracted requires knowledge of the “moral matrix” which governs judgment of the members of the group. This does not necessarily require the rejection of conformity, but rather considering the effect this loyalty has on our thinking. Jacobs closes this chapter with a proverb, “The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge” (Prov. 14:18). He explains:

Prudence doesn’t mean being uncertain about what’s right; it means being scrupulous about finding the best means to get there, and it leads us to seek allies, however imperfect, in preference to making enemies. And all this matters if we want to think well. (70)

In “Repulsions” (Chapter 3), Jacobs addresses our basic desire to be rid of adversaries, whereas the best way to face adversaries is to recognize the best of them and carefully consider their position. One of the classic ways to recognize and overcome the power of animus “is to seek the best—the smartest, most sensible, most fair-minded—representatives of the positions you disagree with” (75).

Here, Jacobs introduces the role technology plays in inflating unthoughtful opposition and the logical fallacy of *ad hominem* (79–83). In place of face-to-face interaction, the printing press—and the underestimated European postal system—and now social media, move our judgments from the neighbor to the more distant other (82). But for all the bias that this System 1 (fast, unreflective) way of thinking accommodates, Jacobs reminds us that it also has a place, because it “reduces the decision-making load on our conscious brains” (86). As English essayist William Hazlitt observed: “Without the aid of prejudice and custom, I should not be able to find my way across the room, nor know how to conduct myself in any circumstances, nor what to feel in any relation of life” (86).

At this point Jacobs rejoins the discussion of

the place of feeling in right thinking, encouraging us to consider dispositions along with beliefs (87). At this point G. K. Chesterton deserves to be quoted in full:

If you argue with a madman, it is extremely probable that you will get the worst of it; for in many ways his mind works all the quicker for not being delayed by the things that go with good judgment. He is not hampered by a sense of humour or by charity, or by the dumb certainties of experience. He is the more logical for losing certain sane affections. Indeed, the common phrase for insanity is in this respect a misleading one. The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the one who has lost everything except his reason. (88)⁴

In Chapter 4, “The Money of Fools,” Jacobs makes a case that the intellectual currency of words may incline a person either to wisdom or foolishness. The keywords in our vocabularies may cultivate and reinforce our prejudices (89–91). While keywords have a place, as they sum up areas of meaning, they also “have a tendency to become parasitic: they enter the mind and displace thought” (95). When it comes to differing with others “we lose something of our humanity by militarizing discussion and debate; and we lose something of our humanity by dehumanizing our interlocutors” (98). By dichotomizing arguments, we distance ourselves from our opponents and dismiss complexities and nuances.

“The Age of Lumping” (Chapter 5) suggests that the modern world is especially prone to classify people and ideas into facile categories. Such simplification relieves the “cognitive load” (114). Jacobs reminds us that: “All are prone to these forces of consolidation and dissolution, assembly and disassembly, because, unlike biological taxonomies, they are all temporary and contingent—and are often created by opposition” (117). While we should be more charitable to those who inherit their taxonomies, we should be less so of those,

4 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 32.

like Margaret Sanger, who seek to impose their categories on their culture by force of law (121).

Chapter 6, “Open and Shut,” puts the lie to the conventional wisdom that open-mindedness is a virtue and closed-mindedness is a vice. Again G. K. Chesterton comes to our aid: “Whereas I am incurably convinced that the object of opening the mind, as opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid”⁵ (126). Of course, we all have positions that are unsettled when they should be settled and settled when they should be unsettled. And the more we have invested in our positions the more reluctant we will be to consider evidence against them (129). In the case of Megan Phelps-Roper “social media gave her a way out of her echo chamber” (137). “You can know whether your social environment is healthy for thinking by its attitude toward ideas from the outgroup” (138). At this point it would have been helpful to point out that orthodox Christianity at its most consistent has never been afraid to take on the tough questions and has always sought to understand its opponents fairly before critiquing them.

The final chapter, “A Person Thinking,” considers a David Foster Wallace essay, “Authority and American Usage.”⁶ His point is that the democratic spirit “is best manifested in the ability to persuade without dictating” (142). The failure to do so is

the failure to recognize other dialects, other contexts, other *people*, as having value that needs to be respected—especially, it’s tempting to say, if you want those people to respect *your* dialects and contexts and friends and family members, but perhaps what really matters is the damage this inability to code switch does to the social fabric. It rends it. (144)

This requires willingness “to inquire into someone else’s dialect . . .” (145). Jacobs concludes:

I just want to emphasize, here at the end, that

⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1936), 228–29.

⁶ David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2006).

you won’t profit from this book if you treat it as offering only a set of techniques. You have to be a certain *kind of person* to make this book work for you: the kind of person, who, at least some of the time, cares more about *working toward the truth* than about one’s current social position. (150)

My only quarrel with this excellent book is that Jacobs doesn’t refer enough to Scripture. This is perhaps because his audience is broader than the church. Currency is an imprint of a division of Penguin Random House. That being said, to demonstrate that Christians possess an epistemological and motivational foundation in the grace of God, found in the wisdom of the Bible to think the way he recommends, has tremendous value in the public square. Christianity is the profound source of the thinking framework that Jacobs so eloquently articulates. ☺

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Karl Barth: Friend or Foe?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
June-July 2018¹

by Ryan Glomsrud

Karl Barth: An Introductory Biography for Evangelicals, by Mark Galli. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017, xvi + 176 pages, \$18.00, paper.

This new volume on Karl Barth serves two purposes as indicated by the title. First, it is an introduction to the life and thought of a towering figure in modern theology, pitched for those new to (or not-so-familiar-with) Barth. Second, it is specifically “for evangelicals,” in that the author gives both a diagnosis, as well as a suggested remedy for what ails American evangelicalism. The book’s author, Mark Galli, is the editor in chief of *Christianity Today* magazine. Galli has been sympathetic to the so-called “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement. However, in his role as editor, he is well positioned to offer insider criticisms of evangelicalism as a whole, prosecuting the charges of shallowness and man-centeredness of even some more conservative wings of the movement. In this book, Galli introduces the Basel theologian to a group already familiar with the “God-centered” theology of Jonathan Edwards. The result is a very readable primer to Karl Barth, although it is difficult to imagine “Karl Barth is My Homeboy” t-shirts on sale at a Gospel Coalition conference any time soon. In what follows, I will consider the book first as an introductory biography and then, much more briefly, as an engagement with American evangelicalism.

Barth’s Life

As a biography, the book doesn’t break any new ground. It presents a summary of the only

substantive work of this sort in existence that was published in 1976 by Barth’s former assistant, Eberhard Busch.² Galli readily acknowledges his dependence on Busch, but readers may not know (and possibly Galli and many Barth students are similarly unaware of the fact) that the Busch text was not just based on autobiographical writings but was in reality an *autobiography*. Barth himself organized much of the material, chose the letters, and composed many of the transitional sections. This is mentioned merely to point out the rather surprising fact that there is no in-depth biography of Karl Barth in existence, to say nothing of a critical biography like Joseph Frank’s monumental work on Fyodor Dostoevsky, or Joachim Garff’s impressive study of Søren Kierkegaard. Galli’s contribution doesn’t intend to fill that gap, however, but amounts to a *Reader’s Digest* of the semi-autobiographical Busch volume.

The book consists of fourteen, manageable chapters after the introduction. The introduction and chapters 1 and 14 engage American evangelicalism. Albeit briefly, Galli explores the history of Barth’s relationship to the movement from the 1940s and 50s (with tidbits on Billy Graham, Carl Henry, and Cornelius Van Til), through the 1960s and 70s (mentioning Fuller Seminary luminaries such as Geoffrey Bromiley and Paul Jewett among others), all the way to the present (citing appreciative if critical engagements with Barth by the likes of Allister McGrath, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Michael Horton). Further, Galli prosecutes his critique of evangelicalism in these sections (to which we will return in conclusion), where he observes the striking similarities between the Protestant liberalism of Barth’s age and contemporary evangelicalism of our own day.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are biographical in nature dealing with the early years of the theologian’s life. Barth’s upbringing in a family that tended towards pietism, and the “positive” theology of his father, which Galli describes as a “moderately conservative and warm” version of Protestantism,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=700&issue_id=137.

2 Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976).

is set against the tradition of Protestant liberalism in which Barth was largely immersed and which won him over during university training in Berlin and Marburg. Galli also explores Barth's early pastorate, his involvement with socialism, and his movement away from liberalism at the outset of the First World War.

Galli's treatments of these early periods of Barth's life are standard, none of which are likely to raise a specialist's eyebrows. Still, one could nitpick, though only after acknowledging that the shortcomings aren't unique to Galli but represent something like the received wisdom in evangelical circles concerning the history of modern theology. Four issues in particular come to mind, which in the end are connected and further highlight the need for a scholarly and critical biography of Barth.

First, throughout the book and in Barth scholarship generally, it is often difficult to assign meaningful definitions to the terms "pietism," "liberalism," "Reformed," or even "evangelical." Fuzzy categories and vague descriptions then make it difficult to sustain a coherent narrative. Readers are therefore advised to abandon all preconceptions of such labels and simply try to determine from context how authors define their terms. More often than not, how an individual self-identifies becomes the determining factor, apart from theological or historical analysis. For his part, Galli's book doesn't attempt to resolve these terminological difficulties, and he can hardly be faulted for that. Nonetheless, his attempt to describe Barth's development is open to critique. Frequently, the ambiguity of theological designations obscures the connections between movements and figures.³

3 For example, on a common understanding, universities are often assumed to have been liberal while preachers' colleges (or homiletical seminaries) more conservative; liberal theologians, meanwhile, are supposed to be predictably liberal and "positive" theologians relatively more conservative. "Pietism," a term that Galli capitalizes throughout, is virtually undefinable other than with some reference to an experiential, heart-centered approach to religion that is, presumably, semi- if not fully-Pelagian. And yet, history complicates all this and records that Barth's father, a supposed "positive," in actual fact denied the virgin birth and was for this reason occasionally rejected for teaching in a university

Second and along similar lines, Galli seems to regard Barth's involvement with socialism as a young pastor as a mere short-term episode of primarily social-political importance, rather than the abiding and theologically-inspiring catalyst that it was. In truth, the tradition of Swiss pietism (known in Barth's day and context as "Swiss Religious Socialism") fed Barth's critique of other streams of Protestant thought. In an alternative narrative of Barth's early development to the one Galli inherits, one could argue more accurately that Barth moved from one branch of pietism (i.e., his father's "positive" theology) to another, namely Wilhelm Herrmann's liberal pietism, all before returning to a modified version of his father's theology as inspired and glossed by Swiss Religious Socialism (yet another branch of pietism). Of course, Barth developed numerous creative, inventive positions over the course of his life, but the arc of his story began and ended within the pietist tradition. Other classifications, such as "Reformed," "orthodox" or "neo-orthodox," can only be understood in a strictly post-confessional sense.

Third, Galli offers a genealogy of Protestant Liberalism that, while it is well worn in evangelical circles, over-emphasizes the history of philosophy (i.e., Protestant liberalism as an outcome of the epistemological progression from Descartes to Kant and Schleiermacher). To criticize this potted history, passed down in seminary classrooms from generation to generation, may be perceived as wading into the weeds of historical theology. And yet, the story is deficient in some respects. At the very least, it misses the broader context of what is after all called "Cultural Protestantism." In other words, the narrowly philosophical narrative misses the way in which Protestant liberalism emerged from the comingling of pietism (as a church ethos), romanticism (as a cultural movement), and conservative politics (as the indispensable background for the religious awakenings in German-speaking lands). A richer account of the

context; instead, he taught at the Basel Preachers' College. Examples like this expose assumptions about categories of modern theology as misconceptions.

history of modern theology would actually help Galli highlight the myriad connections between the liberalism of Barth's day and evangelicalism today.

The fourth quibble concerns Galli's boilerplate account of Barth's early protest against liberalism, which is often described, misleadingly I think, as a sudden "break" or "conversion." Typically, Barth's disillusionment with Protestantism in 1914–15 is explained as the result of the publication of a manifesto signed by leading intellectuals in support of German war policy at that time. This event is highlighted because most scholars rely on Barth's own comments to this effect, in the Busch "biography" and elsewhere. Barth claimed that the "ethical failure" on the part of his theological teachers (for signing such a document) led him to the subsequent conclusion that these men were also *theologically* bankrupt. "I suddenly realized," Barth recalled, "that I could not any longer follow . . . their ethics and dogmatics. . . . For me, at least, nineteenth-century theology no longer held any future."⁴ Neat and tidy as this may sound, the historical record is far more complicated. In fact, Barth was somewhat selective in whom he dismissed for supporting the war effort. Adolf von Harnack, his former teacher, for example, was roundly criticized. Meanwhile other signatories, such as Adolf Schlatter, also one of Barth's teachers, escaped criticism, and in fact Barth grew in appreciation of the latter both during and after the war. At the very least, then, it must be said that not all of Barth's teachers were theologically bankrupt, nor did he dismiss "an entire world of theological exegesis" (33–34) as he once claimed. Furthermore, and this is a more delicate point to raise with loyal Barthians, one wonders if the maintaining of a strict calculus of moral failure and theological bankruptcy doesn't in fact open Barth himself to the charge of applying a double standard. I, for example, have always wondered with some perplexity how Barth's own marital infidelity and long-term adulterous relationship

4 Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. Thomas Wieser (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 14.

with his secretary, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, is rarely considered as a comparable incident of moral failure indicative of theological bankruptcy. It seems inconsistent to condemn some German theologians for supporting a war policy in 1914, a policy which, on the surface of it, might plausibly have generated a number of interpretations and responses, while not asking the same question about moral failures all along the line.⁵ Regarding the "plan with the secretary," as Barth's mother called it, refusing for a time to mention the woman by name, Galli does an adequate job of flagging the ethical disaster the situation entailed and fully acknowledges that the relationship, in Barth's words, caused the family, not least Barth's wife, "unspeakable suffering" (68). And yet, the war manifesto story is passed on from one generation to the next, and is frequently used to prop up the narrative of a radical turn from liberalism to some new, *sui generis* theological position. While Barth may have experienced 1914–15 as a world-changing moment, a dispassionate account would identify a gradual progression of shifting loyalties within Barth's theological context. In the end, I suspect that Barth's own account of 1914 was deeply, and I suppose understandably, influenced by subsequent history, namely the kind of nationalism that Barth witnessed in Nazi Germany from 1933 on.

Regarding the middle years of Barth's life, chapter 7 rehearses the theologian's rising reputation in Europe in the 1920s, including his appointment to teach Reformed theology at Göttingen. Here, Galli recounts Barth's discovery of John Calvin and the post-Reformation tradition of Protestant orthodoxy. Engaging these sources, Barth came to believe that the object of theology must be God as he has revealed himself in his Word, and not faith itself, nor any other religious

5 The document in question, "Appeal to the World of Culture," included six "It is not true..." assertions, such as: "Germany is not at fault for the war and did not violate the neutrality of Belgium"; "German troops did not infringe on the rights of civilians, were not brutal, and did not violate international law;" and so on; see George Rupp, *Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Missoula, MT: Scholars' Press, 1977), 11.

experience, as in Friedrich Schleiermacher, the founder of Protestant liberalism (64). Chapters 8 and 9 then offer a very concise treatment of Barth's role in the Confessing Church movement, which opposed the Nazification of the German Protestant churches. This is perhaps the best part of the book, as Galli elegantly simplifies a complicated narrative. Barth's actions at this time are described as bold and theologically motivated, which they were. He is rightly remembered for seeing clearly the threat that Adolf Hitler posed to the church and the world. In chapter 10, the Swiss theologian is returned to Basel and Galli concludes his account of Barth's political theology while setting the stage for a brief exploration of Barth's magnum opus, the monumental *Church Dogmatics*. Almost as an appendix, chapter 13 describes Barth's physical appearance and late life, including his relationships to his children and former friends, his enjoyment of preaching in the Basel prison, and how he occupied his time in retirement (Mozart!).

It should be noted that although the book is not intended as an intellectual biography, a reader who is new to Barth will nonetheless become familiar with the broad strokes of his theology from all the chapters. Providing more focus, however, chapters 5 and 6 explore Barth's ground-breaking commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, wherein the famous "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man is explored, along with Barth's insistence on the priority of the divine initiative in revelation and salvation. Chapters 11 and 12 then explore two themes from the *Church Dogmatics*, namely the Word of God and Barth's concept of universal reconciliation. In none of these sections does Galli champion Barth on controversial points. In fact, he is appropriately descriptive and cautious. As such, I would recommend the book to church laypeople who may be curious to read something non-academic on this important figure.

Barth and Evangelicalism

In bookend sections, Galli attempts to "use

Barth to help evangelicals think about our life together as evangelicals" (xv). Galli is surely on target when he argues that "in many evangelical circles, we have begun to equate *our experience* of Christ with *the gospel*, and not something that comes as a result of the gospel" (144, original emphasis). Following in the liberal tradition (consciously or not), Galli suggests that many evangelicals "give more authority to what happens inside us than to the clear, objective teaching of God's Word in Scripture" (144). In this way, "many of us have become . . . disciples of Schleiermacher, the great apostle of religious feeling. Schleiermacher has been born again in evangelicalism" (144). Galli's intention, as he states carefully, "is not to look to Barth as our theological savior" (145). Rather, the point is to be willing to learn from Barth's insightful critique of liberalism and apply it to our own context.

But do we need Barth for this critique of liberalism as evangelicalism? Have we really understood Barth's theological development and his place in theological history? What ought officers in NAPARC churches to think about Barth and his legacy? These are good questions to ask, and I don't propose to answer them here. Doubtless there is much to be learned from Barth on a variety of fronts, and this introduction may help towards that end. However, the book did leave me with one lingering thought. Ironically, Galli's attempt to appropriate Barth for a critique of evangelicalism can't avoid bringing us face-to-face with the Achilles' heel of Barth's own theology, namely his understanding of revelation and the Bible. As other scholars have noted, Barth's "dynamic concept of revelation . . . tends to locate the Word, not any longer in the Bible, but in man's experience of faith." The view is of course "worded in terms of an act of God's self-disclosure, not of religious self-consciousness, but the end result is not very different." Pressing the point, "Not much is gained by putting the Word at the center [of one's theology] if the 'Word' turns out to be an elusive and mystically present 'something' behind and

beyond the words of a book.”⁶ And therein lies the difficulty of using Barth to fix what ails American evangelicalism; in the end, it isn’t quite so clear that Barth escaped pietistic liberalism after all. ©

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Vos the Systematician

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August–September 2018¹

by **Danny E. Olinger**

Reformed Dogmatics, by Geerhardus Vos, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., et al., 5 vols. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014–2016, 1,269 pages, \$39.99 per volume, Kindle \$5.99 per volume. Also available through Logos Bible Software.

When Louis Berkhof was born on October 13, 1893, in Emmen, the Netherlands, Geerhardus Vos was an eleven-year-old living with his parents twenty miles west in the city of Lutten. Living twenty miles to the southwest of Vos in the city of Zwolle was eighteen-year-old Herman Bavinck. All were sons of families devoted to the small and disenfranchised Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*) in the Netherlands. As adults, each would end up teaching at Reformed institutions connected with the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands and in North America. Bavinck taught at Kampen (1883–1902) in the Netherlands, and Vos (1888–93) and Berkhof (1906–44) at the Theological School (renamed Calvin Seminary) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Each would also publish a dogmatic or systematic theology. Bavinck’s four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* (1895–1901) and Vos’s five-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* (hand-written, 1896; transcribed, 1910) were published in Dutch. It is likely that, when Bavinck and Vos were together for the summers of 1886 and 1887, they shared with each other their views of dogmatics. Bavinck had already been teaching dogmatics at Kampen, and Vos was scheduled to teach the same subject at the Theological School. After Bavinck published his *Dogmatics*, Vos, by then at Princeton Seminary, wrote two glowing reviews in the *Presbyterian and*

⁶ Colin Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1995), 66–68.

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=703&issue_id=138.

Reformed Review.²

Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* was published in English in 1932. In his introduction to the volume, Berkhof voices his gratitude and indebtedness to Bavinck and Vos and the teaching of their dogmatics. Little did he know at the time that it would not be until the twenty-first century that both Bavinck and Vos were translated into English. A complete English version of Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, edited by John Bolt and translated by John Vriend, appeared from 2003–2008.

Now, through the editorial and translating efforts of Richard B. Gaffin Jr., and the financial backing of Logos Bible Software and Lexham Press, Vos's *Reformed Dogmatics* in English has finally appeared online and in print. Together, Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vos's *Reformed Dogmatics*, and Cornelius Van Til's *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (1936)—another theologian born in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century with Christian Reformed sympathies—put forth a treasure trove of Reformed systematics. On a cursory reading, the common thread running through each is a commitment to Reformed confessionalism combined with piety built upon sound biblical exegesis. A stimulating question for Reformed scholars going forward will be to investigate the similarities and contrasts in Bavinck's and Vos's dogmatics, and their influence on Berkhof and Van Til.

Van Til's high esteem for Vos and his *Reformed Dogmatics* was seen in a 1941 letter. A friend, probably H. Evan Runner or John DeWaard, had shared an observation about Vos and Turretin on the doctrine of the covenant. Van Til replied:

What you say about Vos and Turretin is interesting. Vos once told me that he had studied the covenant question at that early period because of the sick ideas on the subject prevailing at the time in Grand Rapids. But

whether he depended on Turretin I do not know and am inclined to doubt. Turretin does not impress me very favorably, and at any rate if there is any trait that stands out in Vos it is the originality of statement and boldness of position. To think that he was able and dared to take the position he did that is revealed in his notes on Dogmatics is nothing short of amazing. Incidentally, I hope someone will give his life and labors a worthy write-up. But I do not know anyone who has the sweep of interest that he had. I know of no one who combined linguistic, philosophic and systematic interpretation as he did. *Hy komt misschien niet tot aan de eerst drie*, but he runs close after them, I feel.³

The Dutch phrase that Van Til used to communicate his exalted opinion of Vos as a theologian is from 2 Samuel 23:19 and 23, a text about David's mighty men.

Van Til often shared his appreciation of Vos with Gaffin, his Westminster Seminary colleague, who in turn has spent the last half century promoting Vos and his theological contributions. Still, Gaffin states that had he known that the translation project for Vos's *Dogmatics* would take as long as it did (five years), he might have hesitated to take on the job. But, he quickly adds, "There is no question that it was a project well worth doing and for me personally, for all that I learned from Vos over the years about Scripture and devotion to the God of Scripture, a labor of love."⁴

According to Gaffin, his editorial goal for Vos's *Reformed Dogmatics* was to prepare a careful translation. Since the origin of the material was Vos's lectures, the oral aspects, such as an occasional elliptical style or Vos's brief referrals to authors and titles, have been retained. Vos used a question and answer approach and followed the outline of the traditional *loci*.

Vos cites John Calvin more than any other

2 Geerhardus Vos, review of *Gereformeerde Domatiek*, vol. 1, by Herman Bavinck in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7, no. 26 (1896): 356–63, and review of *Gereformeerde Domatiek*, vol. 2 by Herman Bavinck in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 10, no. 40 (1899): 694–700.

3 Cornelius Van Til to unknown friend, December 25, 1941, in Archives of Westminster Theological Seminary.

4 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "The Reformed Dogmatics of Geerhardus Vos," *Unio Cum Christo* 4, no. 1 (April 2018).

theologian. He references Augustine the second most, and, among English speaking theologians, John Owen receives the most citations. Interestingly, Vos rarely mentions Abraham Kuyper, despite maintaining a regular correspondence with him during the period that he was teaching at the Theological School and writing the *Reformed Dogmatics*.

In the opening volume, *Theology Proper*, Vos covers the knowability, names, being, and attributes of God, and the Trinity. He also treats the decrees of God, predestination and providence. Lane Tipton in his review, “Vos’s Reformed Dogmatics,” in the April 2018 issue of *New Horizons*, provides a penetrating analysis of the contributions Vos made in *Theology Proper*.⁵ Tipton notes that Vos put forth the proper relation between the triune God, who is absolute and unchanging, and an eschatologically oriented creation where man is made in the image of God. The absolute God remains immutably absolute and triune in the new relation that results from the act of creating his image bearers.

Tipton then moves to the second volume, *Anthropology*, to show Vos’s brilliance in arguing that the proper understanding of the new relation leads to a deeper Protestant conception. Vos maintains that God created man in his image so that men are “disposed for communion with God” and “can act in a way that corresponds to their destiny only if they rest in God” (2:13). The destiny is communion with God in full in glory, a movement from communion with God in the first estate of innocence in the garden to consummate communion with God in the final estate of heaven.

Tipton rightly understands what Vos is driving at from the opening of the *Reformed Dogmatics* in laying out the Bible’s teaching on the nature and destiny of man. Vos believes that the Reformed faith puts forth the “deeper Protestant conception” (2:13) because it affirms the nature of man pre- and post-Fall and the destiny of man pre- and

post-Fall.⁶

In laying out his contention that Rome’s theological commitments renders it incapable of arriving at the eschatological goal set before Adam, Vos asks, “Why is this doctrine of the image of God of such great importance for theology?” He answers:

It is self-evident that by “image of God” is expressed what is characteristic of man and his relation to God. That he is God’s image distinguishes him from animals and all other creatures. In the idea that one forms of the image is reflected one’s idea of the religious state of man and of the essence of religion itself. (2:18)

Roman Catholicism, however, has no conception at creation of a personal relationship between God and man. It teaches that man was created with the image, a metaphysical correspondence of the human spirit with God, not the likeness of the image. In other words, Roman Catholicism believes that man is God’s image bearer by nature, but he needs God to supply an additional gift (*donum superadditum*) after creation to make him a religious being. That is, God must raise man above his created state—irrespective of the Fall—to that of a religious being capable of communion. God gives original righteousness (*justitia originalis*) as a gift so that man might be able to love and enjoy God. The result is that Roman Catholicism is externalist in its view of creation and denies the totality of the corruption of man when the Fall into sin occurs.

The Reformed believe that man was created upright, not deficient. But, coinciding immediately with the first sin was the total corruption of human nature. Related closely to this was the loss of the gift of fellowship with God through the Spirit.

This radical change for man was reflected in

5 Lane G. Tipton, “Vos’s Reformed Dogmatics,” in *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 39, no. 4 (April 2018): 9–11.

6 Vos asserts elsewhere that Lutheranism’s system of doctrine, while to be praised for affirming justification by faith alone over against Roman Catholicism, fails to understand the religious destiny of man as communion with God in the confirmed estate of glory. See, Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980) 241–47.

his accusing conscience that brought a fear of God and a sense of shame. In casting Adam and Eve out of the garden, God showed how the relationship between man and God had changed. “Because paradise and the tree of life had been images and seals of the blessings promised in the covenant of works, man must be deprived of the sight of them” (2:54). Vos continued, “Hence banishment from paradise, the cherubim with the burning blade of a sword, and the declaration that ‘he may not reach out his hand and take of the tree of life.’” (2:54).

Vos’s mention of the covenant of works in regard to the promised eternal blessings foreshadows his later work on eschatology. In fact, when Vos reviewed the first volume of Bavinck’s *Dogmatics for the Presbyterian and Reformed Review* in 1896, he drew attention to Bavinck’s insight on this point. The Reformed believe that the translational hope from innocence to communion with God in full in glory—what Vos had labelled the “deeper Protestant” conception—was put before Adam in the covenant of works. Bavinck realized that there was no place for a covenant of works in Roman Catholic theology with its view of the creation of man, its denial that Adam was upright in the estate of innocence, and its commitment to the *donum superadditum*.

Vos immediately grasped the implications. If there is no covenant of works, then Christianity becomes a religion that aims at the elevation of man’s nature, and that through the cooperative work of God and man. If there is a covenant of works, which has been broken by Adam’s sin, then Christianity is a religion of grace in which God alone saves sinners.

In *Anthropology*, Vos spells out how the covenant of works and the covenant of grace coincide and differ. They coincide in that the author of each is God; that the covenanting parties are God and man; that the purpose of each is glorifying God; and that the promise of both is heavenly, eternal blessedness.

They differ in the way in which God appears. In the covenant of works, God appears as Creator and Lord. In the covenant of grace, he appears as

Redeemer and Father. God established the covenant of works to show his love and benevolence toward unfallen man. In the covenant of grace, God shows his mercy and particular grace to fallen humanity. In the covenant of works, there is no mediator; in the covenant of grace, there is one, Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace rests upon the obedience of Christ, the mediator, and is firm and certain. The covenant of works rested on the obedience of mutable man, which is uncertain. “Do this and live” marked the covenant of works, but the way of faith marks the covenant of grace.

Gaffin in the preface to the third volume of *Reformed Dogmatics, Christology*, rightly observes that at the heart of any sound dogmatics is its treatment of Christology. He observes, “Christ as the center of the entire saving self-revelation of the triune God finds full and rich expression in this present volume” (vii). Vos’s treatment of the offices of prophet, priest, and king, that Christ fulfills as mediator, supports that conclusion. When the Apostle Paul speaks of how Christ has become to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption in 1 Corinthians 1:30, he is expressing Christ’s fulfillment of the prophetic (wisdom), priestly (righteousness), and kingly (sanctification and redemption) offices. As prophet, Christ serves as God’s authoritative representative to reveal by his Word and Spirit the counsel of God for the salvation of his people. As priest, Christ is appointed by God to represent men in bringing satisfaction to God through sacrifice and intercession. As King, Christ acts on behalf of God to rule and protect his church.

In volume 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics, Soteriology*, Vos examines the application of the merits of Christ by the Spirit in light of Christ’s fulfillment of the covenant of grace. Vos asks, “Why does grace work from now on in the sinner from Christ and only in union with Christ?” (4:21). The legal basis for grace lies in being reckoned in Christ by the judgment of God, a relationship that is reflected in the consciousness of the believer when he believes. This is because by faith he acknowledges that there is no righteousness in himself, but that his standing before God is only because the

righteousness of Christ is imputed to him.

All that the sinner receives flows from the living Christ. The result is that the sinner not only knows as an idea that he will receive everything for Christ's sake but also *experiences in life* how everything comes from Christ. He is regenerated, justified, sanctified, glorified, but all this is in the closest bond with the Mediator. (4:23)

In volume 5, Vos addresses ecclesiology with comments on the importance of the Word of God and the nature of church power. According to Vos, believers are reckoned in Christ, regenerated by the Spirit of Christ, and implanted into Christ to form one body. The kingdom of God expresses the invisible spiritual principle of the church. "It is the lordship Christ exercises over our souls if we truly belong to Him, our submission to His sovereign authority, our being conformed and joined by living faith to His body with its many members" (5:8).

He continues, "The true church is a teaching church, a confessing church. Whoever comes in contact with its word also comes in contact with the root of its life, its holy walk" (5:26). Churches that abandon the Word of God or dispense with their confession are in a process of dissolution. These churches are no longer performing their main function, which is to carry out and to apply the Word of God. "Thus, insofar as the church itself is concerned, it is entirely a ministerial and not a ruling power" (5:37).

No authority may be exercised by the church unless it is derived from the kingship of Christ. The relationship of Christ's kingship and the church carries with it the understanding that the church is more than a free association. Believers stand under the command of Christ, the King. Vos writes:

(The) kingly structure of Christ over the church is connected to the kingly word of Christ. Christ is in the church, and he rules over the church through his word. Therefore, no one can do anything in the church that would be right and conflict with that word. All believers owe unconditional obedience to the word of their king, and that obligation takes precedence before all other things.

(5:37)

In answering the question, "What is contained in the term 'eschatology?'" Vos presents the basis for the philosophy of history that would mark his later biblical theological writings. He answers that the history in which humans are situated will have a conclusion.

It is not an endless process but a genuine history that ends in a definite goal and so has a bounding and limits. As it had a beginning, it will have an ending. That ending will come as a crisis, and everything that has to do with this crisis belongs to the 'doctrine of the last things.' (5:251)

Vos closes the *Reformed Dogmatics* with what would become his biblical theological focus at Princeton, communion with God in heaven. "The enjoyment of heaven in fellowship with God is eternal life in all its fullness." (5:310).

In the last paragraph, Vos states, "Heaven will not be a world of uniformity; diversity will rule there" (5:310). Referencing 1 Corinthians 15:41, he says that not all receive the same portion ("the one who has sowed much receives a rich harvest"), but diversity will not function in heaven as a cause of distress. This is because Christ is the head of a glorified humanity, which constitutes the body under him, and in the body, there are always different parts. ©

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Roman Catholicism, Marriage, and the Sexual Revolution

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2018¹

by Darryl G. Hart

To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism by Ross Douhat. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018, 256 pages, \$26.00.

Ross Douhat has done it again. The young, conservative, Roman Catholic op-ed writer who has the unlikely perch of writing for the *New York Times*, created a mini-controversy three years ago with one of his columns. A writer who regularly tries to explain political conservatism and Roman Catholic faith and practice—and why they matter—to the *Times*' overwhelmingly secular, liberal readers, Douhat had the chutzpah to opine in the fall of 2015, only a month after Pope Francis's positively reported visit to the United States, that the Roman pontiff had hatched a plot to “change the church.” The centerpiece of this switch in Vatican policy is a lenient path for divorced and remarried Roman Catholics to return to full communion. But the relatively simple point of either changing doctrine or reforming pastoral practice also involves, as such points always do with Roman Catholicism, papal authority. Although Francis has promoted themes of conciliarism and devolving some matters to local bishops, the pope also has the authority to make changes by papal fiat. “If Francis decided tomorrow to endorse communion for the remarried,” Douhat wrote in his column, “there is no Catholic Supreme Court that could strike his ruling down.” And yet, popes are not supposed to change doctrine. Their duty is to defend, explain, and pass it on. “Custom, modesty, fear

of God, and fear of schism all restrain popes who might find a doctrinal rewrite tempting.” Those restraints explain Douhat's resort to the language of “plot.” He argued that by various means of subterfuge, Pope Francis is changing Roman Catholicism.²

Douhat may recoil at the comparison, but his criticism of Francis is reminiscent of Ignaz von Döllinger's to Pius IX during the run up to the First Vatican Council, well recounted in Thomas Albert Howard's 2017 book, *The Pope and the Professor*.³ Döllinger was a German historical theologian whose scholarship made Pius's assertion of papal infallibility dubious. From the democratic revolutions of 1848 to the unification of Italy in 1871, Pius was looking for ways to shore up his authority since the liberalization of European politics was threatening the papacy's own civil authority in the Papal States. Döllinger's argument attracted international attention thanks in part to political liberals in Europe and North America who desired to see the papacy's feudal powers overturned. But Pius won (partly). Vatican I gave dogmatic status to papal infallibility and Döllinger eventually received the condemnation of excommunication even as the Papal States became part of the Kingdom of Italy and the pope's political power vanished. Douhat's opposition to Francis is not on the order of Döllinger's complaints about Pius. But the *Times*' columnist is raising serious questions not only about Francis's power but also his intentions. The irony is that Douhat, the layman who might naturally want more room for non-clergy in the church, is at odds with Francis's apparent scheme to liberalize Roman Catholicism through devolving papal power to regional and local settings. Douhat, in other words, would likely be more comfortable with Pius IX than Francis (though John Paul II is his model pope). Still, his open dissent and its high visibility in the *Times*

2 Ross Douhat, “The Plot to Change Catholicism,” *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/18/opinion/sunday/the-plot-to-change-catholicism.html>?

3 Thomas Albert Howard, *The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Dollinger, and the Quandary of the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=709&issue_id=139.

invites the comparison to Döllinger.

Even more, Douthat has provoked the ire of clergy and theologians in the United States. Soon after his 2015 editorial, a group of theologians and priests took out a one-page advertisement in the *Times* to challenge Douthat. Part of their missive asserted the following:

Aside from the fact that Mr. Douthat has no professional qualifications for writing on the subject, the problem with his article and other recent statements is his view of Catholicism as unapologetically subject to a politically partisan narrative that has very little to do with what Catholicism really is.⁴

They also charged Douthat with “accusing other members of the Catholic church of heresy, sometimes subtly, sometimes openly,” which was “serious business.”⁵ That Douthat’s critics did not bring up dissent from the papacy may have revealed their own reservations about papal supremacy. Even so, those responsible for the letter had a point when they concluded that Douthat’s views were “not what we expect of the *New York Times*.”⁶

Those who wrote that letter might be tempted to buy another advertisement since Douthat’s new book is an expansion of his column about Francis’s methods and intentions. *To Change the Church* is narrowly about the substance of the debates over divorce and remarriage that have transpired since 2014. It is also a play-by-play account of the ecclesiastical politics that have prompted conservatives and liberals to use the mechanisms of church power to advance their views; Francis is by no means an innocent bystander but has, according to Douthat, played ecclesiastical rivals against each other while also signaling implicitly and sometimes acting directly to advance a position that amounts to liberalizing Rome’s teaching on marriage. For anyone unfamiliar with recent Roman Catholicism and the ambiguity that Vatican II

introduced, Douthat’s writing is as good a place as any to get up to speed.

As much as he writes for general audiences (in ways that are actually remarkable), Douthat also intends to alert Roman Catholics who are either uninformed or complacent about the Francis papacy. The book is especially helpful for laying out the sequence of events that began (sort of) in 2014, a year after Francis’s inauguration, at a convocation when newly appointed cardinals gather to receive their red hats and discuss church life with the pope. Francis asked Walter Kasper, a cardinal from Germany, to give the keynote address. The talk wound up setting the agenda for the next two years of synods and factional maneuvering. Kasper proposed, in the name of mercy, a penitential model for remarried and divorced Roman Catholics to receive communion. He also argued in the name of Vatican II. If the church could adapt to the modern world as the 1960s council had, why not do so again on the challenges of marriage? From there ensued a series of synods on the family, with formal preparations for the gatherings of bishops, as well as behind the scenes bickering, lobbying, and papal massaging. The process revealed two wings in the church, liberals who wanted to use the deliberative process of church assemblies to make the changes look like the seamless emergence of a consensus. Conservatives, in contrast, not only had to challenge the Vatican’s machinery by finding legitimate ways of dissent, such as a *dubium*,⁷ but they also had to reaffirm and defend the church’s teaching and explain, in effect, why the sin of divorce, remarriage, and adultery mattered. Meanwhile, Francis produced an apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (“The Joy of Love”), a brief on marriage and the family, and the longest papal document in history. Although *Amoris* reaffirmed church traditions, it also provided wiggle room for bishops to pursue their own course for restoring wayward Roman Catholics to communion. The result of these two years of meetings,

4 The October 26, 2015 letter is reprinted at *Daily Theology* (blog), <https://dailytheology.org/2015/10/26/to-the-editor-of-the-new-york-times/>.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 This is a formal way to ask the pope to answer a question about church law or teaching. The *dubia* that conservatives sent to Francis, four questions, he never answered.

ecclesiastical intrigue, and papal vacillation is great uncertainty within Roman Catholicism (with some bishops in parts of the world using the proceedings as a green light to admit those in violation of church teaching to full communion). Douthat deserves credit for calling attention to this situation, if only because the world of Roman Catholic social media is filled with apologists and church regulars who barely mention the faults and flaws of their communion and bishops.

Douthat also deserves praise for explaining why divorce and adultery are sinful. His simple answer is one that sounds very Protestant: Jesus said so. The church's teaching on marriage began, he writes, with Jesus's answers to the Pharisees, recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Instead of lightening the burden of Jewish law, in the Gospels Jesus "makes the law more demanding, more radical, more transcendent" (84). This truth has informed the church throughout its history and comes with a cost. "It made missionary work more challenging in practically every cultural context" (86). It gummed up the works of ecumenism. It placed the church in conflict with European monarchs (think England's Henry VIII). Douthat's challenge to liberal Roman Catholics is particularly poignant. For all of the church's history, the standard for morality was not aspirational but obligatory. But now liberals propose to tell ordinary people that Christian morality is "too hard" and the church has a duty to help folks manage the angst that results from the gap between their own lives and Christian duty. When Douthat compares changing teaching on marriage to what has occurred on usury, his argument weakens a bit. He concedes that the medieval church regarded charging interest on loans a grave sin, but the church was able to accommodate the beginning of modern finance without letting those concessions seep in to "issues more central to the faith" (163). That reassurance seems a tad glib for an institution that is supposed to know and be able to explain the nature of sin. Not only is it the apparent inconsistency of adapting on one sin but not another. It is also the problem of whether an ordinary church member can have confidence in church officials who change

their minds about sin and its penalties. (Did those guilty of the mortal sin of usury receive less time in purgatory after the church changed its understanding?)

That somewhat easy elision of the church's teaching on usury is indicative arguably of the book's most serious flaw. As much as Douthat deserves credit for looking honestly and critically at his communion, he cannot seem to fathom Christianity apart from Rome. Despite all the evidence that Douthat gives of Roman Catholicism's errors, missteps, folly, and back room episcopal politics, from sex scandals to poor judgments in international diplomacy, he still believes, as he writes in the preface, that Roman Catholicism has

the most compelling claim to being the true church founded by Jesus of Nazareth, whose radical message and strange story offers the likeliest reason in all of recorded human history to believe that God loves us, that *He so loved the world* that our sins will be redeemed and our suffering will make sense in the end." (xvii)

The proposals for tolerance for mortal sin from liberal theologians and cardinals, with some apparent blessing by the pope, is one indication that, as was clear in the sixteenth century, the Vatican is not very reliable at preserving Christian teaching and morality. That seems all the more apparent after Vatican II, which has provoked a steady stream of bickering and maneuvering between conservatives and liberals about "real" Roman Catholicism. In fact, Douthat, someone who believed John Paul II had put up the barricades to progressive change after the experimentation of the 1970s, now thinks even popes cannot steady the ship. One consequence of Francis's tenure is for conservatives to "take a darker view of the post-Vatican II era" and to see that council as compromising the church. If Francis could be the successor to John Paul II and Benedict XVI, perhaps those conservative popes "didn't conserve enough" (198). Benedict himself may have confirmed this verdict in the eulogy he sent for the funeral of a deceased German archbishop: "he learned to let go and to live out of a

deep conviction that the Lord does not abandon His Church, even if the boat has taken on so much water as to be on the verge of capsizing” (187).

At the same time, Douthat reiterates a view common among Roman Catholic apologists that this is the church Jesus founded. If you read John Henry Newman, Aquinas, Augustine, Dante, or even Evelyn Waugh, you understand, Douthat asserts, that as a Roman Catholic you belong to “the same tradition, the same story.” In fact, when you step into the “worlds of Catholic past,” you can “think *with* the letter writers of the New Testament and the church fathers scribbling in late antiquity” (160). Douthat writes that you cannot do this with the church’s contemporary reformers like Francis and Kasper, and by implication, neither can you do that with Protestant reformers. In which case, if you enter a Protestant church you are not inhabiting the same tradition that stretches back from John Paul II to the apostle Peter. Can Douthat really imagine that the Sistine Chapel comes anywhere near the sort of space in which the apostles worshiped, or that the traditions and aura surrounding the papacy resemble in any way the standing that even the apostles enjoyed in the early church? What sixteenth-century Reformers were trying to do (at least in part) was to restore the church to the simplicity and meaningful pastoral work of the early church. But for Roman Catholics, even those like the gimlet-eyed Douthat, imagining a Christianity that inhabits store fronts or elementary school cafeterias seems inconceivable (not to mention that he doesn’t make much room for the folk piety on which Roman Catholicism thrives and in which apparitions of Mary and miraculous healings at Lourdes abound).

Why can’t Douthat take the step that Luther and Calvin did when the contemporary writer has even more evidence that the bishops are prone to error and to use their offices to inflict their blameworthy judgments on church goers? The book suggests an answer in the section where Douthat compares the contemporary controversy to the seventeenth-century dispute between Jansenists and Jesuits. He quotes Leszek Kolakowski on why Jansenists could not succeed at reforming the

church: “Christianity had to make itself, if not ‘easy,’ at least much easier, in order to survive” (168). Kolakowski adds, “One could not resurrect as a universal norm the ethos of the apostolic time when the faithful really lived in the shadow of imminent apocalypse” (168). That is what Jansenists tried to do but “to their doom” (168). Douthat seems to sense that what he is doing in this book, by criticizing proposals for making the church more lenient, is more on the side of Jansenism than the Jesuits. But he also takes comfort from his church’s size. The very first line of the preface speaks of “the most important religious story of our time” because it concerns the “fate of the world’s largest religious institution” (xi). In other words, Douthat seems to know that the church has always had a hard time insisting on rigor, from prohibiting indulgences in Luther’s day to accommodating usury in the modern era. That is how the church has remained so large and inclusive. *To Change the Church*’s major weakness, then, is wanting a big church that makes demands. Douthat’s awareness of his communion’s history and laxness indicates that he should know better. ©

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Are You Woke?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
November 2018¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age, by Alan Noble. Grand Rapids: IVP, 2018, 192 pages, \$16.00, paper.

“Woke” is the new byword for social awareness. Noble’s book on Christian witness is a quest to awaken a world numbed by the immanent frame of the contemporary mindset. Noble includes Christians in his critique of modernity showing that we are not immune to the cultural smog we breathe. He is also aware of the important influence of electronic media in cultivating this way of thinking, which locks us into the lie that what you see is what you get. This is the buffered self of sociologist Charles Taylor,² whose thinking has deeply influenced Noble. The Internet spreads us over a thin surface of reality and tends to block out transcendent realities, especially the immanent presence of the true and living God. Metanarratives are out since everything has a natural explanation (3). Back in 1968, Francis Schaeffer was one of the first to alert thoughtful twentieth century Christians to this danger. In his influential book *The God Who Is There*, he warned that secular people “have already accepted with an implicit faith the presupposition of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system.”³

This should not surprise us since we are born in our first parents, “who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). This, of course, is not unique to modernity—although enhanced by

the electronic matrix—as Puritan Richard Sibbes eloquently reminds us:

The souls of most men are drowned in their senses, and carried away with weak opinions rising from vulgar mistakes and shadows of things. Satan is ready to enlarge our imaginings of what is outwardly good and evil, and to make them greater than they are; he is ready to make spiritual things less than they are, and to present them through false glasses. And so men, trusting in vanity, vanquish themselves in their own apprehension of things. It is a woeful condition when both we and what we highly esteem vanish together. And this will happen, as truly as Christ’s judgment will come to victory. To the extent that the *vain heart* of man is enlarged to conceive a greater good in the things of this world than there actually is, so the soul is enlarged to be more aware of misery when it sees its error. This is the difference between a godly, wise man and a deluded worldling: what the one now judges to be vain, the other will hereafter judge, when it is too late. But the vanity of our natures is that, although we avoid above all else being deceived and mistaken in present things, yet in the greatest matters of all, we are willingly ignorant and misled.⁴

Noble has also been deeply influenced by the philosopher James K. A. Smith,⁵ who has, in turn, been influenced by Charles Taylor and written about Taylor’s sociology.⁶ Thus, Noble acknowledges a measure of agreement with the secularization theory of the mid-twentieth century, but believes that it was essentially wrong because Christianity remains popular in the United States. However, Noble adds a caution: “But while Americans haven’t lost faith, the space that faith

4 Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (repr. 1630, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 112–13; *The Bruised Reede and Smoking Flax 1630* (Menston, Yorkshire, England: The Scolar Press, 1973), 302.

5 James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016); *How (Not) to Be Secular* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

6 *How (Not) to Be Secular*.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=715&issue_id=140.

2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1991); *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1989).

3 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1968), 111.

fills in our lives and our ability to effectively communicate what the Christian tradition means has changed” (175). Noble’s numerous citations of these two authors whet the reader’s appetite for more.

One of the great strengths of Noble’s book is that both his critique and the application of his critique are of equal length. This is refreshing since most books on this topic are long on critique and short on what to do about it, or they may have lots of practical advice with no analytical foundation.

Noble also flavors the narrative with many personal examples of his own shortcomings. While some of us older Christians would not be comfortable doing this, at least to the extent that Noble does—especially older New Englanders like myself—he will certainly appeal to his generation that thirsts for authenticity. His honesty should be applauded.

In his introduction, Noble shows that Christians have unwittingly succumbed to the idea that Christian faith is simply a preference (1). One barrier to comprehending the gospel is “the practice of continuous engagement in immediately gratifying activities that resist reflection and meditation” (2). Another is “the growth of secularism, defined as a state in which theism is seen as one of many viable choices for human fullness and satisfaction, and in which the transcendent feels less and less plausible” (2). The challenge is to break through the protective, defensive bubble of the modern person with the gospel. It is incumbent upon Christians to consider the ways that their lives have compromised with the ways of the buffered self (7). The following two parts of the book unpack these concerns.

In Part One, “A Distracted Secular Age,” Noble analyses the barriers that endless distraction and the buffered self present to disruptive witness. His final chapter describes the human quest for fullness as a chief motivational factor in human life, one that needs to be addressed in Christian witness.

In his first chapter, Noble focuses primarily on the electronic distractions that consume our attention. The boundary between work and leisure

is blurred, so that people are constantly available for “communication” (13). The “electronic buzz” has fostered a whole new industry of mindfulness techniques and institutions. In some ways this seems to me, as a former member of the 1960s counterculture, to be a revival of our rebellion against the “military industrial complex,” or what seemed to us the inauthenticity of modern culture. But the contemporary mindfulness movement is not a back to nature rejection of modernity as much as a means of dealing with the electronic environment—a kind of *détente* (15–18).

The electronic world seeks to capture our attention in order to gather our data through a relentless bombardment (18). I have always warned people that by joining Facebook they are engaging in the largest focus group in history. Consequently, much of our privacy is disappearing, but like fish in water we remain largely unaware of how all-absorbing this environment is. All of this unsuits us for concentration and thoughtfulness, thus undermining the kind of reflective discussion necessary for sound Christian witness. We are adrift in a sea of triviality (22) that enables people to ignore the logical flaws in arguments, to resist introspection, and to assume that “conversations about faith can be easily perceived as just another exercise in superficial identity formation” (25). In this context the gospel seems like “just another image vying for our time” (29). Thus, evangelical witness often naively clothes its evangelism in pop culture, unaware of how the medium is an integral part of the message (30).

In chapter 2, Noble investigates the buffered self. The modern quest for fullness is subjective, looking within for meaning (36). We have moved from faith to feeling, assuming that there is no transcendent source for fullness and meaning. “We are buffered selves, protected behind a barrier of individual choice, rationalism, and a disenchanted world” (37). In this way, Christianity becomes just another lifestyle choice (38). The everchanging inner life is always aware of numerous alternatives (42–43).

Noble counsels humility through proper self-assessment in resistance to what he calls “the

immanent frame” (55). This means becoming aware of our being seduced by the ways in which the modern world advertises itself as being the product of human ingenuity and achievement (57). Noble insists, “Our witness must work to disrupt the normative experience of life in a closed frame” (58).

The last chapter in Part One deals with the human quest for fullness. “[A] culture of technological distraction inclines us to look for meaning in preoccupation, novelty, consumer choices, and stimulation” (62). Moderns are not disposed to seek fullness from a transcendent source. Identity formation through self-expression is believed to be the only path to fulfillment (62). Noble believes that the urge to justify one’s existence is essential to our being human (64–65). But the wonder of being alive in this world is suppressed by the buffered self. “To live a life of meaning is to have an interpretive framework for explaining how our significance relates to the rest of existence” (67). But a kind of popular existentialism moves people to believe that there is no inherent meaning in anything. We must create meaning from within (68). Citing Calvin, Noble asserts that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self are inextricably related, thus emphasizing the human need for God, for becoming like Christ by his grace rather than through seeking self-actualization (71). Taylor observes that “a total and fully consistent subjectivism would tend toward emptiness: nothing would count as a fulfillment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfillment” (74). The inherent futility of this quest points to the need for something beyond the self. Noble concludes Part One: “A disruptive witness denies the entire contemporary project of treating faith as a preference” (81).

In Part Two, “Bearing a Disruptive Witness,” Noble offers excellent prescriptions for disruptive witness in our personal habits, church practices, and cultural participation. He invites us to challenge the assumptions of unbelievers with countercultural thoughts, words, and deeds, meant to purposely disrupt the assumptions of moderns.

Noble reminds us that secularism is not so

much a rejection of Christianity as a “deeply ingrained cultural assumption” (85). Thus, we “simply can’t reorder society or argue our way out of this societal condition” (87). In discussing some of the dangerous liabilities of the electronic environment, I have often said the same, encouraging wise navigation of our situation, while building the kingdom, not through cultural transformation, but through discipling the nations one convert at a time. Noble describes our task as a disruptive witness in every part of life. This is similar to McLuhan’s idea of a counter environment, which I have co-opted and applied to the church.⁷

This means “we must abandon practices adopted from the secular marketplace that trivialize our faith, and instead return to traditional church practices that encourage contemplation and awe before a transcendent God” (88). In other words, we must ourselves be disrupted by God as our creator and redeemer before we can be disruptive witnesses. Noble describes this as a “*double movement* in which the goodness of being produces gratitude in us that glorifies and acknowledges a loving, transcendent, good, and beautiful God” (92). Noble goes on to demonstrate this double movement in Scripture from passages like 2 Peter 3:4, Matthew 5:16, and 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (95). So, our lives must allude to something beyond ourselves, to God (97), “unsettling our notions of a containable universe and a self-defined individual” (101). Noble quotes a lengthy passage from Calvin’s *Institutes*: “our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone. . . . [W]e cannot aspire to Him in earnest until we have begun to be displeased with ourselves” (107–8).

Noble speaks honestly of his own struggles with his smart phone and his embarrassment at saying grace in restaurants, but recommends it as a type of disruptive witness (114). He goes on in a surprisingly traditional way to recommend sabbath keeping as a radically disruptive testimony that

⁷ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 298–308.

there is something more important than this present world (115–18). Noble does tell us that he is part of a Presbyterian church.⁸

In the penultimate chapter, Noble calls the church back to means-of-grace ministry instead of imitating the latest cultural fad. Noble really understands the relationship between form and substance, medium and message. He raises four penetrating questions to be asked of all media used in the church (125). It is refreshing to read a millennial who understands that tradition, good tradition based on Scripture, can be normative and should always be explored to find out why generations have practiced in such ways. Noble agrees with Smith that historic liturgies embody the presence of both God and his worshiping people (137).

Noble concludes this chapter by valorizing prayer and the Lord's Supper as two aspects of the liturgy that “most strongly challenge life in a closed, immanent frame” (141). This is the most important and useful chapter in the book.

The final chapter addresses disruptive witness in cultural participation. As an English professor, Noble has seen how the reading of twentieth-century literature can assist a disruptive witness. Books like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun also Rises*, which describe the world as a bleak place, can puncture the buffer and reveal the cross pressure between belief in a meaningless world and longing for meaning and hope (149).

Noble goes on to explore the three points of contact described by Taylor as points where “the cross pressure is most keenly felt: our human agency, our moral obligations, and our aesthetic experiences” (151). “The test of our beliefs is whether they can account for existence as we know it” (152). Although we know that the truth suppressing activity of the unbeliever's thinking distorts the way things actually are, nonetheless the givenness of our own natures and God's world are always impinging on the fallen human consciousness through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Noble makes a strong plea for the importance of stories because of their power to “portray worlds, not just ideas” (155). Of course, the entire Bible proves this value. But not all stories are helpful and some are dangerous. The best stories instill in us what C. S. Lewis described in *Mere Christianity*: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (159). I think Van Til would modify this to say that this is the only explanation, but Lewis's point is well taken. Noble explores the value of stories by looking at examples from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, and the W. H. Auden poem “Funeral Blues,” recited in the 1994 movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (161–65).

I wish Noble had used the doctrine of original sin more in his analysis of the buffered self. He seems to assume it, but could have been more explicit. Thus, a more explicitly presuppositional approach to the human condition would be helpful.⁹ Certainly the idea of unsettling people (60) reminds us of aspects of the presuppositional method.

This leads us to recognize that, while the environment of modernity adds unique challenges to our understanding of the human condition and to witness, human nature has not essentially changed; only the means of buffering the self have changed. Whether Paul was evangelizing in Jerusalem or Athens his basic approach assumed a natural resistance to the truth, a presentation of the gospel that calls people to reckon with God, and a deep dependence upon the internal work of the Holy Spirit to convict sinners of the truth of the gospel. Only the effectual work of the Spirit can burst the bubble of rebellion and suppression of the truth.

While Noble's sociological analysis and prescription for witness may not be completely satisfying for the presuppositionalist, his book offers an intriguing analysis of the contemporary situation

8 Noble attends a Presbyterian Church in America church plant in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

9 Noble has told me that he is familiar with Van Til through Covenant Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary lectures, which have dealt extensively with presuppositionalism.

and some thoughtful and stimulating proposals for improving our witness.

Unencumbered by clichés or facile solutions, Noble’s book is a valuable contribution to the conversation about how to reach our lost world. ©

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Frankenstein at 200 and Our Creations: A Cautionary Tale

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2018¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley, annotated for scientists, engineers, and creators of all kinds, edited by David H. Guston, Ed Finn, and Jason Scott Robert. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017, xxxv + 277 pages, \$20.00, paper.

It may seem a strange thing to review a book about Mary Shelley’s famous horror story, or perhaps the first science fiction novel, in a journal for church officers; but, if we are to minister in a world of extraordinary technological inventions, we must be aware of the dangers, the unintended consequences, of our creations. The difference between friend and fiend is slight in print, but dramatic in reality.

The title, *Frankenstein*, usually makes us think of the monster, but the monster is never named by Mary Shelley, thus the annotators and essayists in this present volume refer to the monster as “the creature.” Thus, the focus is on scientist Victor Frankenstein. Shelley’s cautionary tale is a profound exploration of human nature and of the nature of the scientific enterprise. The potential hubris of those involved in the sciences is a theme of enormous importance to our contemporary situation. As James Gidley points out in his article in this issue, “The Theology of Frankenstein: Deism and Biblical Theism,” a theology of creation is everywhere assumed in Shelley’s work. The same is true of Shelley’s assumptions about human nature. The subtitle of Shelley’s book is revealing: “*the*

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=726&issue_id=141.

Modern Prometheus.”

In the Western classical tradition, Prometheus became a figure who represented human striving, particularly the quest for scientific knowledge, and the risk of overreaching or unintended consequences. In particular, he was regarded in the Romantic era as embodying the lone genius whose efforts to improve human existence could also result in tragedy.²

I toyed with including this review under the rubric, *Servant Classics*, because *Frankenstein* is a rich literary work that transcends the genres of horror story or science fiction. Although Mary Shelley in her 1831 introduction to a new edition of *Frankenstein* calls her tale a “ghost story” (191), written in response to the challenge of neighbor Lord Byron to write a ghost story during a period of gloomy Swiss weather, she notes that the story was written in the context of philosophical conversations with two notable nineteenth-century men of letters, Lord Byron and her husband, Percy Shelley.

The horror and drama in the story stand in stark contrast to the sensationalism of modern horror stories and the special effects of modern horror movies. Instead, *Frankenstein* presents us with a thoughtful series of reflections on the nature of the ethical responsibilities of scientists, especially when experimenting with human life (xiii).

The book, published on January 1, 1818, reminds us that serious critical analysis of the effects of the Industrial Revolution were present, especially with participants in the Romantic movement, early in the nineteenth century. Several decades later Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) also used fiction as a vehicle to stimulate thoughtful criticism of the abilities of scientists to manipulate humanity and culture. Several years ago, *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society* published a profound series of articles, along with eight of Hawthorne’s stories, in a series entitled

“Hawthorne: Science, Progress, and Human Nature” (2009–2012). Like Shelley, Hawthorne wrote stories exploring the moral meaning of modern science. Together they were exercising their moral imaginations to question the goals of science and explore the effects of seeking to alter the unalterable, or the givenness of creation, especially humankind.

Concentrating on the most obvious theme of the unintended consequences of our inventions, I underestimated the value of Shelley’s exploration of the human in the creature’s intelligent, moral, and aesthetic sensibilities. While the assumptions of the Romantic movement are largely Deistic, there are still strong strands of a biblical anthropology throughout this literary tale. It is this dimension of the work to which I will now turn.

Often unappreciated is the high literary quality of *Frankenstein*. The first volume begins with the mention of Homer’s *The Iliad*, William Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1). There are beautiful descriptions of natural scenery, and towns and cities, a staple of Romantic literature and art. Large sections read like a travelogue. Mary Shelley, of course, was married to Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, so it is not surprising that she quotes William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” (132). She describes Victor’s arrival in Oxford after mentioning some historical facts:

The spirit of elder days found a dwelling here, and we delighted to trace its footsteps. If these feelings had not found an imaginary gratification, the appearance of the city had yet in itself sufficient beauty to obtain our admiration. The colleges are ancient and picturesque; the streets are almost magnificent; and the lovely Isis, which flows beside it through meadows of exquisite verdure, is spread forth into a placid expanse of waters, which reflects its majestic assemblage of towers, and spires, and domes, embosomed among ancient trees. (135)

It is in the context of these Romantic sensibilities that the creature struggles with his own identity, but by secretly observing human beings and

² Wikipedia contributors, “Prometheus,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Prometheus&oldid=870735499> (accessed November 28, 2018).

reading literature he enjoys the perception of natural beauty, human kindness and gentleness, reason, justice; and is pained by injustice and ultimately by being rejected by the humans around him, especially his creator, Victor Frankenstein. There is a supreme irony in the comparison of Frankenstein with his creature. The creature is more humane, at least at the beginning, than Frankenstein, who turns out to be a monster.

Victor Frankenstein has all of the benefits of high European culture. And yet, despite appearances, he behaves like a monster. Hints of this can be seen in the beginning of the story.

My life had hitherto been remarkably secluded and domestic; and this had given me invincible repugnance to new countenances. I loved my brothers, Elizabeth, and Clerval; these were “old familiar faces”; but I believed myself totally unfitted for the company of strangers. (28)

Then scientific hubris, with its god-like pretensions, takes over and provides a cloak for Frankenstein’s selfishness. “After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life . . . What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world, was now within my grasp” (34). Too late Frankenstein reflects on the lesson he should have learned from his father: “If a study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not fitting the human mind” (40). Upon being revulsed by the sight of the newly animated creature, Frankenstein selfishly abandons him—exactly the opposite of the biblical account of creation. Victor Frankenstein refuses to take responsibility for the death of his youngest brother William; the death of Justine, who is falsely accused of killing William; then the death of Victor’s best friend, Clerval; and finally Victor’s fiancée, Elizabeth. But guilt haunts him, while he continues to cover up his evil deeds. “I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt” (71). Shelley

explores this theme throughout the three volumes.

Frankenstein’s discourse on friendship, frequent in Romantic literature, rings hollow in light of his own monstrous disregard not only for the creature, but also for his dearest friends and family (132–33).

The creature, on the other hand, despite appearances, behaves like a highly civilized human being, until his rejection and isolation turn him into the monster he looks like. As Joey Eschrich observes regarding the “investments of time, wit, and emotional energy” in the correspondence that begins the story: “They contrast with the creature’s life and reveal precisely what he is missing. He has no one with whom to share his experiences and frustrations, so his life becomes unbearable, and he lashes out violently.”³

After the first two murders, Frankenstein encounters the creature in the Alps. The creature pleads with him to create a wife so that he will have a companion:

I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy and I shall again be virtuous. (80)

Then the creature tells Frankenstein his story.⁴ It is a truly touching tale. After his creation and abandonment, he finds a hut that is adjacent to a cottage, thus allowing him to observe the lives of the inhabitants without himself being seen.

The creature witnesses the struggles of the young couple, the old man, and a beautiful friend who visits the cottage; they are consigned to poverty from great wealth and a high position in society. As he observes their human virtues he concludes: “The gentle manners and beauty of the cottagers greatly endeared them to me” (91). He masters

3 9–10n9, citing Eschrich, editor and program manager for the Center for Science and the Imagination at Arizona State University.

4 Vol. 2, ch. 3, 83–120.

their language and reads their literature, including *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and Goethe's *Sorrows of Werter* (105). *Paradise Lost* affects him most deeply, as he feels like Adam, created at first without a companion, yet he relates more to Satan in his bitter rebellion (107). "I longed to discover the motives and feelings of these lovely creatures" (94). But, finally, rejection by the cottagers, whom he had so admired, is the turning point in the creature's sad tale as he declares war on humanity (113–20).

The importance of human friendship and the perils of its neglect form a central theme in *Frankenstein*. In our world the irony is that our growing use of mediating technologies undermines our ability to establish and maintain human relationships, thus enchanting us with social networks and robots. *Frankenstein* warns us against the tendency of those in positions of power to ignore the consequences of their actions.⁵ The company's bottom line or, as in the case of Frankenstein, the fame accruing from scientific breakthroughs, tends to blind leaders to their larger human responsibilities.

This is increasingly leading to a central problem for the elderly. My own state of New Hampshire is developing a "State Plan on Aging" to address this problem. Proverbs 18:1–2 warns us of the folly of isolation: "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion." For those who end up isolated through no fault of their own, we must exercise compassion. The church is well situated to lend a hand.

On the related topic of human compassion, MIT Sociologist Sherry Turkle's latest book *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*⁶ laments the increasing lack of empathy among those who are addicted to their digital devices. The combination of loneliness, caused at least in part by the increase in mediated

relationships, that is electronic communication supplanting face-to-face conversation, and a lack of empathy do not bode well for this and future generations of the elderly.

Of course, the greatest human need is not human friendship, but rather divine friendship. This is absent in Shelley's work. Shelley's dependence on the writings of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau leads to a dangerous conclusion about the origin of sin. Rousseau believed that society corrupts humans, who are otherwise good in their natural state.⁷ This question-begging idea can be seen in the creature's story.

The annotations by various scientists and writers, which are extensive, and printed as footnotes in small sans serif type, are often very helpful in providing context and explanations of the text, however tedious they may be at times.

The seven essays at the end of the volume provide a fascinating window into the thinking of contemporary academics and writers on the topic of bioethics.

Josephine Johnston,⁸ in "Traumatic Responsibility: Victor Frankenstein as Creator and Casualty," explores the nature of human responsibility.

Cory Doctorow,⁹ in "I've Created a Monster! (And So Can You)," argues that the best science fiction both predicts and influences the future. This is a witty essay offering astute observations such as "*Frankenstein* [is] . . . a story about technology mastering humans rather than serving them" (210). And this:

A service like Facebook was inevitable, but how Facebook works was not. Facebook is designed like a casino game, where the jackpots are attention from other people (likes and messages) and the playing surface is a vast board whose parts can't be seen most of the

5 16n13, citing Mary Margaret Fonow, professor of women and gender studies at Arizona State University.

6 Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

7 98n22, citing Ron Broglio, professor of literature and culture at Arizona State University.

8 Johnston is an expert on the ethical, legal, and policy implications of biomedical technologies, particularly as used in human reproduction, psychiatry, genetics, and neuroscience.

9 Doctorow is a Canadian-British blogger, journalist, and science fiction author who serves as co-editor of the blog *Boing Boing*.

time. You place bets on what kind of personal revelation will ring the cherries, . . . As in all casino games, in the Facebook game there's one universal rule: the house always wins. (212)

"Changing Conceptions of Human Nature" by Jane Maienschein and Kate MacCord¹⁰ is an uninspiring account of the relationship of Aristotle's fourfold causation to the scientific enterprise and the definition of the human. They conclude by pleading for a definition that demands viability, or the ability to live independently. The creature is seen as an example of this unsustainable argument. Because the creature cannot live independently, he is less than fully human.

Alfred Nordmann's¹¹ essay, "Undisturbed Reality: Victor Frankenstein's Technoscientific Dream of Reason," asserts that the science of *Frankenstein* is not modern science, but warns of the danger of using true science to ignore reality by creating monsters and animating material with artificial intelligence and electronics, what he calls technoscience. This essay requires pondering.

Sarah Wishnevsky's¹² essay, "*Frankenstein* Reframed; Or The Trouble with Prometheus," argues that "Victor's crime is not pursuing science but in failing to consider the well-being of others and the consequences of his actions." Shelley's "vener of Christianity" nonetheless portrays the need for compassion, an essential ingredient in Christian religious ethics, rooted in the passion of Christ (232).

10 Jane Maienschein is a Regent's professor in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University, specializing in the history and philosophy of biology and the way biology, bioethics, and bio-policy play out in society. Kate MacCord is program administrator and McDonnell Fellow at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, MA. The goal of the McDonnell Initiative is to bring historians and philosophers of science into collaboration with life scientists in order to transform the research of both fields.

11 Nordmann is professor of philosophy and history of science and technoscience at Darmstadt Technical University and visiting professor at the University of South Carolina.

12 Wishnevsky is an American author who works primarily in speculative fiction genres, writing under the name Elizabeth Bear.

Anne K. Mellor's¹³ essay, "*Frankenstein*, Gender, and Mother Nature," is a feminist analysis of Victor Frankenstein. This has value because Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wolstonecraft was a strong and groundbreaking advocate for women's rights. Thus, Victor is portrayed as seeking to "control and even eliminate female sexuality." This ends up "not only as horrifying and finally unattainable but also as self-destructive" (243). Mellor concludes her essay with an appreciation for the givenness of nature, albeit not in language that Christians could entirely endorse: "The novel implicitly endorses . . . a science that seeks to understand rather than to change the workings of Mother Nature" (244).

Finally, "The Bitter Aftertaste of Technical Sweetness" by Heather E. Douglas¹⁴ explores the ethics of creating the atomic bomb. Despite the brilliance of the title, the essay leaves many unanswered questions.

A very useful set of discussion questions (263–73) is given for each of the chapters in the three volumes of *Frankenstein* and for each of the seven essays.

The Romantic Deism assumed in Shelley's fiction offers a poignant caution, but sadly offers no substantial solution to the incipient problems of modernity. Because of her mother's early death, death was an irreparable evil for Mary Shelley. As a child she spent hours reading beside her mother's grave. So, Frankenstein's effort to create life is driven by his hatred of the evil of death.¹⁵ But there is no resurrection. The creature experiences an inner life that cannot be accounted for by the mere animation of material human parts. Only a biblical account of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation will offer the foundation for solutions.

13 Mellor is a distinguished professor of English literature and women's studies at UCLA; she specializes in Romantic literature, British cultural history, feminist theory, philosophy, art history, and gender studies.

14 Douglas is a philosopher of science best known for her work on the role of values in science, science policy, the importance of science for policymaking, and the history of philosophy of science. Douglas is associate professor in the department of philosophy at Michigan State University.

15 26n25, citing Joel Gereboff, professor in the religious studies department of Arizona State University.

I am reminded of Francisco Goya's etching, "The Dream of Reason Produces Monsters," in which the artist depicts a nightmare of his being attacked by bats and owls. This is an apt image of the dream of the Enlightenment. The guidance of God's special revelation in the Bible is jettisoned for the reason of fallen man, becoming a nightmare. ©

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A New Multi-Volume Pastoral Theology

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
December 2018¹

by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Pastoral Theology: The Man of God, His Calling and Godly Life, vol. 1, Albert N. Martin. Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2018, lvi + 456 pages, \$42.95.

Commending Al Martin's work on pastoral theology is like commending Richard Muller's work in historical theology. In either case, readers find themselves sitting at the feet of a master in his field whose work is its own best commendation. This set of books promises to be one of the most extensive, and likely most useful, pastoral theologies written to date. This material represents twenty years of teaching future ministers about this topic for two hours a week on a four-year cycle. What would the Spirit do in the church if more ministers had this kind of training?

Reviewing a volume like this one is difficult because all of the material is pure gold. While it aims primarily at ministers and men preparing for ministry, the content can benefit the church more broadly as it seeks to be faithful in calling ministers, in pursuing godliness, and in establishing realistic expectations for who ministers are and what God calls them to do. After summarizing the content of the book, I will highlight a few of its outstanding features.

The epigraph heading the opening pages of this book summarizes its content well: "The life of the minister is the life of his ministry." The book's subtitle indicates its two large-scale divisions. In the first section, Martin takes his readers from the nature of a pastoral call, through qualifications of gifts and character related to the ministry, to

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=723&issue_id=141.

the process by which the church recognizes these things in a man. The second section shifts from calling to living by treating the man's spiritual and intellectual relation to God, his physical and emotional relation to God, how he relates to God's people, and how he manages himself, including his time and his family. The last four of these areas are likely as important as they are neglected in considering the call to the ministry today. Physical and emotional balance, coupled with time management and household management, speak volumes about a man's character. In a day when Reformed ministry can tend to exalt, as well as attract, men with an intellectual bent and love for doctrine alone, Martin reminds us that we really need more men who use their doctrine as a means of showing their love for Christ. He rightly places the graces of the Spirit above the gifts of the Spirit without neglecting either one. We need men who are godly rather than great and we need seminaries that are just as concerned with the character of the men whom they are training as they are with cultivating their minds and their gifts.

Four examples illustrate amply how this book addresses the needs of our times. First, as Martin writes, "Pastoral theology should be taught by pastors. The exclusive pursuit of academic theological degrees, while a good thing in itself, is not sufficient for understanding or teaching on this subject" (10). I cannot echo this point strongly enough, adding that this counsel should apply to more than the pastoral theology departments of our seminaries. If pastoral theology is an entry-level teaching position in a seminary rather than a vital part of the curriculum, and if every area of the curriculum is not ordinarily taught by men with pastoral experience, then we run the risk of becoming theological degree mills rather than seminaries training future pastors. Far too many men desire to teach men to be pastors but have no desire to serve as pastors themselves. I have often been the first one to discourage such a course in the lives of many young men. If we applied this practice to the medical profession, then the results would be disastrous. It is past time that we realize pastors should train future pastors just like doctors should

train future doctors.

Second, evangelistic zeal needs to characterize ministry in Reformed churches once again. Martin observes,

I find it disturbing, when attending evangelical and even Reformed churches where there is a robust commitment to confessional and biblical orthodoxy and expository preaching, and yet preachers find no avenue out of the text or subject to address the unconverted passionately and plead with them to be reconciled to God. . . . One has to question why men like that are in the ministry. Did they ever have a desire to be used in calling out God's elect? (61)

It is all too common in Reformed churches to treat the means of grace as machines through which the Holy Spirit effectually calls sinners to Christ as long as the right elect materials go into the machine. Faithful exegesis is enough to help us explain words and grammar, but it is ordinarily insufficient to be the Spirit's instrument to win souls to Christ. This usually comes through the Spirit working in the affections of the preacher as well as in the affections of those who hear him preach. We need to hear Martin on this point as we seek the sovereign Spirit's anointing on our ministries.

Third, ministers must preach Christ. Yet preaching Christ cannot be a technique; it must flow from devotion to Christ. Martin notes,

If Christ does not fill our hearts in our times alone with Him, in our walking with Him, so that for us to live is Christ, speaking about Him with glowing hearts will not be natural for us. We dare not attempt to artificially and insincerely insert Him into our sermons in an effort to hide our loveless hearts. (100)

Have our approaches to preaching become too technique driven? Is that one of the reasons why modern debates over preaching often oscillate between exegetical precision with application or retelling redemptive history while trying to steer clear of moralism? Whether expounding Scripture,

unfolding the historical development of the gospel, applying biblical principles, or exhorting people to worship, preachers should preach Christ inescapably because they love Christ pervasively. A minister should not need to be told to extol the virtues of his Savior any more than an engaged couple should need to be told to look forward to their wedding day. This characterized Paul and the other apostles, as well as virtually every manual of pastoral theology that has stood the test of time in the history of the Christian church.

Fourth, ministers must prioritize their families above their ministries if they hope not to be disqualified from their ministries. The following citation illustrates his counsel on this important theme:

When an ordinary Christian chooses between an evening with his family and an evening at the local pub, the issues are quite clear, and his conscience should scream at him if he chooses the pub. On the other hand, when a servant of Christ makes the choice between an evening of fun and games with his children or visiting a distressed saint, the issue is blurred. He can very easily justify neglecting the promised evening with the children because “the work of the ministry demands that I minister to this distressed sheep.” In this scenario, domestic competence is often sacrificed upon the altar of official ministerial duties. “I sacrificed that time with my family for the sake of the gospel ministry.” No, you did not. You set one duty against another, and you caused a ministerial duty to kill a domestic duty. God is not in the business of killing duty with duty. (424)

The church is still reeling from the fruits of nineteenth-century calls to abandon wives and children in the name of foreign and domestic missions. Martin’s exhortations can go a long way to setting ministers back on the right path with regard to making their families their first ministries.

I am a Presbyterian, while Martin is a Baptist. This means that Presbyterians will expect me to say that I do not agree with everything in this book. While this is true, especially in relation to some

aspects of church polity, his book strikes a nerve with me. Martin teaches rightly that men called to the ministry need both to wade through their sense of calling and to cultivate personal godliness with zeal and vigor. Ultimately, the man of God’s character is not special but common. God requires men holding office to show ordinary Christians what ordinary Christian living looks like in an office that not all ordinary Christians hold. Yet it is ultimately love for Christ, experiential piety, and spiritual balance that must envelop, and even consume, every true gospel minister. This is the case because the Spirit is painting the copy of Christ’s character in the lives of God’s people through the Christian ministry. Consequently, we need to be as interested in Martin’s pastoral theology as many of us are in Muller’s historical theology, and likely even more so. ©

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EDITORIAL POLICIES

1. *Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.
2. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.
3. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stance, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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Cover and layout designed by Christopher Tobias, Tobias' Outerwear for Books, Inc.
Printed and bound by D. S. Graphics, Lowell, Massachusetts.

Composed in Requiem, Helvetica Neue, and Electra.
Printed on 70# Husky Offset Text.
Bound in 80# Velvet Unisource.