

# REFORMED FAITH & PRACTICE

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## **Augustine, Virtue, and the Moral Field**

*Mark Ian McDowell / 3-11*

## **Theology as Catechism and Criticism**

*Michael Allen / 12-15*

## **Meredith G. Kline and the Not-Marriage of Hosea 3:1-5**

*Peter Y. Lee / 16-28*

## **Honoring Older Women as Spiritual Mentors in the Church**

*Eunike C. Indrawan / 29-39*

## **The Old School Sage: Charles Hodge on Confessional Subscription**

*S. Donald Fortson III / 40-58*

## **Short Studies / 59-77**

## **What is Biblical Critical Theory? A Review Article**

*Jay Harvey / 78-85*

## **Book Reviews / 86-98**



**REFORMED FAITH & PRACTICE**  
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## **In This Issue**

A few things to note about the contents of this issue:

Mark McDowell's study of Augustine and virtue was a paper originally delivered at the 2022 Conference of the Paideia Center for Theological Discipleship at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando.

Michael Allen's essay was a convocation address delivered at RTS Orlando on August 24, 2022.

Peter Lee's reflection on Hosea 3 honors his former professor, Meredith G. Kline, on the centennial of Dr. Kline's birth.

Eunike Indrawan's study of "spiritual mothers" offers fresh insights into the relationship of men and women in the church. Ms. Indrawan earned her Master of Divinity from Reformed Theological Seminary in May 2022.

Finally, we are delighted to publish E. J. Hutchinson's recent translation of a sixteenth-century sermon by Danish Lutheran pastor Niels Hemmingsen, a student of Philipp Melanchthon.

The Editors

## AUGUSTINE, VIRTUE, AND THE MORAL FIELD

MARK IAN MCDOWELL  
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Any account of ethics worth its salt considers three important aspects: the location of ethics, the goal of ethics and the agent of ethics. Christians are tempted to think of ethics in terms of following the right rules in a particular situation to produce the right action. While framed with a high degree of oversimplification the point is that we can tend to focus on our own actions in isolation from internal motives as well as overlooking the communities in which we live that exert a strong level of influence on us. The primary aim of our time together is to consider the three-fold cord of the setting, end and agency of ethics as they are expressed in two broadly construed viewpoints of ethics, namely, ancient and modern, and then turning to draw Augustine into the conversation to provide a more theologically satisfactory account.

When we think broadly about the character of the ethics of Aristotle, we can readily identify this set of core emphases. To oversimplify matters enormously (and here I take my lead from Julia Annas in *The Morality of Happiness*), we can say that for Aristotle the city is the location for pursuing the common good, that happiness or *eudaimonia* (temporal happiness or human flourishing) is the end of ethics, and the life of virtue addresses the agent's morality. Our purpose is to think together about the contrast that exists between an ancient account of ethics and a modern one and to explore the themes that Augustine picks up from the ancient model while attending to the way he extends and alters them in biblical and theological directions. We look in particular at his *City of God*.

From the outset, I want to be clear that although the discussion spends a good deal of time looking at social, political and ethical elements, the primary themes we are addressing end up bearing theological weight. As it concerns our focus here, the burden will be to look in brief detail at the visible and tangible identity of ancient and modern contexts and the way we end up living because of our place in the world. Theologically speaking, we have to insist that the world is a definite place (opposed to the modern myth that it is an arbitrary area formed by our industry and will), that it is determined and governed by God and, as such, is theologically basic, and finally that it has theological ends written into the very core of its reality that affect our understanding and practice of ethical action. To summarize matters here, I hope to provide a theological interpretation of the moral field, the end of moral action, and agent of moral action for the goal of making sense of the pattern of moral activity and to offer a vision of human sociality that speaks to our ultimate purpose.

For Plato, the community was drawn by a form of the good that transcended the community, but whose form, when contemplated, supplied the content of politics and ethics to the philosopher-king who led the city. In similar fashion, Aristotle sees the ethical setting in the city, but he differs in his conception of the good, which for him is not a transcendental predicate that Plato has in mind, but his account of the good is both less speculative and is located in the concrete and material reality of everyday life. Both philosophers view this good as an end that draws individuals

within public life to their ultimate goal, to the experience of *eudaimonia* (temporal happiness or human flourishing). One achieves *eudaimonia* through a moral life, which is characterized by the virtues, and yields an ethics that involves shaping of one's natural desires away from deficiencies and excesses towards the complete picture of goodness and justice. To draw the threads together, this ancient account of ethics emphasizes the social setting of the city as the context of the moral field, in which a moral agent pursues the good through a life of virtue.

This account looks very different to what we see in the modern era. The social setting of the city shifts to that of the democratic nation state, at least for those of us who hail from the US or the UK. Moral agency shifts from an individual shaped and formed through the virtues to an account of right actions and proper consequences. There is also a shift away from an understanding of the good that draws individuals towards their created end through a life of cultivated virtue to a marketplace arena in which the good is that which is chosen by private individuals based on their own unobstructed preferences. If we look at these three transitions in a little more detail, we can begin to see just how far we have traveled from the picture we see in the Plato and Aristotle.

First, in terms of the social setting of the democratic nation state, the context that many Westerners inhabit is one that isolates individuals and then presents them with a surplus of options. Informed by an ideology that understands humans as independent centers of rational autonomy, we are presented with an inundation of material possibilities that appeal to every conceivable interest; and it is this wealth of choices that promises the most fulfilling existence.

Long before many contemporary sociological analysts lamented the dangers of cultural consumerism, an earlier sociologist, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), worried that a democratic culture built on the foundations of an equality of conditions inevitably leads to radical individualism, social atomism and political privatization. He observed that "... not only does democracy make men forget their ancestors, [it] also clouds their view of their descendants and isolates them from their contemporaries. Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart."<sup>1</sup> While Tocqueville's analysis was intended to convey a warning that an isolated and socially disconnected population is more susceptible to the onset of tyranny, we can appreciate how his observation both addresses a theological point inherent in modern accounts of liberalism, and how it anticipates a particular social landscape.

It does this, first, by identifying the idea that history can be discarded, which is not only an offence to pneumatology and providence, but it undermines the formative power of community and tradition. Stanley Hauerwas speaks directly to this when he writes, "Our assumption [as Americans] has been that, unlike other societies, we are not creatures of history, but that we have the possibility of a new beginning. We are thus able to form our government on the basis of principle rather than the arbitrary

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 507-8.

elements of a tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Shorn of a shared history that speaks into, and helps shape, our present context, society now finds itself in the fragile situation of being held together by self-interest and self-expression.

The second transition anticipates a social landscape in which the common good has disappeared and been replaced by a good determined and pursued by a collection of individuals who are recognized as autonomous, self-legislative, rational, and free agents. The moral foundations of this context are now built on individual preferences and privacy. In the modern Western context where liberalism shapes the social order, people must be free to pursue their own preferences unhindered, and it is the job of the government to distribute rights to enable people to fulfil their selected destiny without limit or intrusion.<sup>3</sup> The outcome is the loss of any shared sense of what the common good is which inevitably leads to the erosion of any account of public morality. By collapsing ultimate ends into the satisfaction of personal desires, the moral field is now occupied by people detached from an ethical horizon intended to draw them beyond themselves to something other, or rather, to someone other who can truly and finally give contentment.

This shift in social context also produces a shift in the character of moral agency. The historical portrayal, broadly considered in the ancient Greek setting, recognizes the priority of the city to the person – of the whole to the part – to the degree that a life lived without a deep participation in, and dependence upon, the local community is an impossibility. In fact, as Alasdair MacIntyre maintains, “the classical view begins with the community of the *polis* and with the individual viewed as having no moral identity apart from the communities of kinship and citizenship....”<sup>4</sup> In fact, in another place, MacIntyre will say that “the *polis* is the Aristotelian counterpart to *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* [outside of the church there is no salvation]”.<sup>5</sup> Aristotle explains at the beginning of *Politics* the reason why the city is so important for the cultivation of morality: “We see that every city is some sort of community, and that every community is constituted for the sake of some good, since everyone does everything for the sake of what seems good.”<sup>6</sup> For Aristotle, the community has a shared understanding of the good, and this good is an object that generates desires

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, ‘The Church and Liberal Democracy: The Moral Limits of a Secular Polity’ in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 78.

<sup>3</sup> The consequences for political action and involvement are obvious, which are articulated incisively by Sheldon Wolin: ‘The citizen is shrunk to the voter: periodically courted, warned, and confused but otherwise kept at a distance from actual decision-making and allowed to emerge only ephemerally in a cameo appearance according to a script composed by the opinion takers/makers. See Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 565.

<sup>4</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, “How to Identify Ethical Principles,” 22 in Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 216. In a similar vein, MacIntyre says that a morality always presupposes a sociology. See *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre, *Whole Justice, Whose Rationality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 141.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.1.1252a.

within its citizens and draws them towards the good. The good for Aristotle is happiness (or *eudaimonia* [the idea of living well and doing well]), which he explains is our final end.<sup>7</sup> With happiness as our final end, all of our moral actions are directed towards the attainment of happiness, and are given a rationality by happiness. In other words, our moral actions do not make sense if we do not have a clear, comprehensive and singular end in view.<sup>8</sup>

It is also important to recognize that while *eudaimonia* is something for which we strive it also something that we experience in our present moral activity. Aristotle has closed the loop on the final end and the activity of the moral agent. If happiness is one's end, then one's life must actively embody the end that is being pursued. It's not enough to have wealth as a potential final end without also using wealth in a particular way. It becomes a question of whether wealth is used well or poorly by the moral agent. This is where virtues come into the discussion. Aristotle defines virtue as "a state that decides... by reference to reason... [that it] is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency."<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that Aristotle does not think that the virtuous life is merely a negotiation between two vices, but rather the moral life consists in virtue steering our given nature from what is to what it should be, to our *telos*.

It is a common modern assumption – one held even by theologically-minded evangelicals – that ethics is about the business of helping us to rationally deliberate over doing the right actions, and that it should "help us to resolve moral dilemmas and difficult moral cases."<sup>10</sup> Without rejecting the necessity and role of rules and outcomes, Aristotle urges us to focus our attention on the *kinds* of people we are. Instead of merely addressing the external situation, and looking at the kinds of actions and results of these actions, Aristotle is deeply concerned with the internal character of the moral agent.

Before we turn our attention to Augustine, it is important to see how Aristotle's conception of the moral life is one that sits closer to the Christian account than it does to the modern, not only in terms of historical reference but also in terms of character. In our democratic liberal context, the true ends of human life are obscured which results in widespread confusion about ethical agency. Ethics in this frame rests upon obedience to "a system of rules that will constitute procedures for resolving disputes as [people] pursue their various interests."<sup>11</sup> On this reading,

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle's discussion on *eudaimonia*: 'Most people are pretty much agreed about the name [of the final good]; bot both the many and the refined call it happiness [*eudaimonia*], and suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy. But as to what happiness is, they disagree, and the many do not characterize it as something evident and clear, like pleasure or wealth or honour, some saying one and others another – and often even the same person says something different, saying after falling ill that it is health, and when in poverty that it is wealth. And when they are aware of their own ignorance they admire people who say something lofty and beyond them.'

<sup>8</sup> On this description, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 1995), 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* trans, J.A.K. Thompson (London: Penguin, 1953), 1107a 1-5.

<sup>10</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 6

<sup>11</sup> Hauerwas, 'The Church and Liberal Democracy', 78.

questions about character, internal motives, and formation are neither asked, investigated or expected. The message is: follow the rules, uphold the social consensus that we are content to be ruled this way, don't hurt anyone and pursue your dreams unfettered. By separating individuals from a common social history, blinding them from a shared common good, and reducing them to consumers who pursue their own interests in a maximal manner, liberalism has given us a social reality (or moral field) that sees personhood, morality and citizenship very much at odds with the ancient vision.

While the contrast between ancient and modern ethics is intended to cast a light that shows the distance that exists between both accounts, I also want to show how the ancient account, Aristotle's in particular, is far more companionable to Augustine's vision, with the hope of suggesting that it is Augustine who, while building off an ancient account, offers us a more potent corrective to our present situation and faithful guide forward. Before we turn to Augustine, it is important that I don't give a romanticized picture of Aristotle's position, or one that does not require a theological correction.

One obstacle that confronts the believer concerning any possibility of embracing Aristotle's ethics relates to what he sees as the paragon of the virtuous life, namely, the magnanimous man (*megalopsychos*). The magnanimous man is one who pursues a life of "godlike self-sufficiency."<sup>12</sup> This individual knows his own worth, understands that he deserves the public recognition that comes with his own value, and refuses to receive help from others.<sup>13</sup> To become a person of magnanimity requires privilege, wealth, power, prestige, and a vast array of resources. It is a life of the elite and upper-class. Aristotle says, "The highborn and those who are powerful or wealthy are esteemed worthy of honour, because they are superior to their fellows, and what is superior in something good is always held in higher honour."<sup>14</sup> Significantly, the magnanimous man inhabits a context in which natural slaves, women and children are excluded from citizenship in the city and subsequently cut off from ever obtaining and experiencing *eudaimonia*. In Aristotle's view, to be excluded from ever reaching the end of morality meant that one is also excluded from ever participating in the virtuous life.<sup>15</sup>

As we turn to Augustine, we see how he shares the three elements of classical morality: he focuses on the social setting of moral action, he treats the end of moral

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<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 24.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, the magnanimous man 'is ashamed to receive benefits, because it is a mark of a superior to confer benefits, of an inferior to receive them' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, IV 1124b 9-10), and the magnanimous man wants to be superior (*Nicomachean Ethics*, IV 1124b 12).

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV 1124a 22-26.

<sup>15</sup> Another obstacle to Aristotle's account concerns the unique position the moral hero holds within the city. Not only is he a man of means but he is also not concerned with mundane moral matters – only the spectacular and morally heroic appeal to him. Aristotle's magnanimous man presents a significant difficulty for an ethic of virtue, because even if we did want to emulate him, he "turns out," Annas tells us, 'to be a bad guide for us, since he turns out to lack just what is relevant for our condition' See Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 119-20.

action, and he outlines the character of the moral agent. How he articulates these three elements, however, shows the distance he is prepared to venture from an ancient model for the sake of bringing to bear the richness of his theological vision as it is informed by Scripture.

Augustine shares Aristotle's belief that all ethical action presupposes a sociology, and while the image of the city figures centrally in both, one would be mistaken to think that the two accounts are identical. A closer analysis demonstrates that substantial differences between the two are apparent. To start with, the social setting for Augustine is less straightforward than Aristotle, who views the city as a singular literal geographical entity comprised of real people. Augustine finds much purchase in appealing to the idea of city, primarily because it is a sociological entity filled with citizens. But in his hands, Augustine fashions a conception of the city in which boundary lines are redrawn and the identity is reimagined in a rich theological way. Instead of one city, Augustine gives us two cities, and imbues them with a spiritual and transcendent character that is tethered to, and determined by, our loves. Famously stated, "Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord; the one seeks glory from men, the other finds its highest glory in God."<sup>16</sup> The distinction Augustine draws between the city of God and the earthly city (Augustine never uses the phrase, "city of man") takes its rise from a theological anthropological affirmation, namely, that at our core, we are made to worship God. Augustine doesn't think about both cities as geographical territories or regions, but as two distinct societies identified by two distinct loves: they either love and worship God or they love and worship self.

From this insistence arises the claim that two moral communities form two kinds of moralities. The heavenly city forms its citizens in charity and humility and the earthly deforms its citizens by pride, that leads to a lust for power and self-indulgence. For Augustine, the social reality of the heavenly city shapes the moral lives of its citizens. The moral field of the heavenly city includes those inhabitants who love God and is, therefore, structured primarily by worship of God. Three things emerge from this account: first, the social setting contains a common end that is inextricably bound to Jesus Christ, and it is this end that addresses our deepest needs. Worship of God brings about enjoyment of God, and there is no higher end than this. It is here that Augustine shares with Aristotle a teleological approach to life in the city, and is understandably classified as a eudaimonist. Yet, *eudaimonia* is retranslated by Augustine as blessedness that only God can give, the kind that lovers of God experience in God's presence. While Aristotle has an immanent and temporal teleology that views the good as human happiness and flourishing, Augustine's account of the good is directed towards God. It is for this reason that while Augustine can be described as a eudaimonist, he nevertheless evades the charge that his ethics is egoistic, that personal fulfillment is an ultimate end. The end for Augustine is blessedness in God and the way to God is paved with humility and charity.

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<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (hereafter *civ. Dei*), 14.28.

The second theme that emerges sees citizens of both cities coexisting and sharing the same space in this present age. What distinguishes the citizens of both societies are their loves and their destinies. There is no sacred and secular split, no public and private precinct. This is a significant move because it forbids any thought that might suggest that one becomes morally refined by retreating from a public setting. There is no private space for the Christian because Christian citizenship is dual citizenship. The citizen doesn't live in two physical cities but occupies a singular physical space while ensuring that love for God is prioritized over all other loves. This recognition of who we are as God's people helps us to see and to oppose the state's expectation that it has a monopoly on our loves and allegiances. Positively, this recognition challenges us to be a community that perceives the gift of God's goodness to us, and urges us to worship the triune God faithfully. By doing so, the church can, secondarily, display a visible history of love and humility in the world as it makes its pilgrim way towards the heavenly city in its full and final expression, avoiding the entanglements of the limited and oftentimes wrongheaded projects of the world.

The third and final theme that emerges concerns the genuinely public character of the heavenly city. Those that sojourn in the church live in a context in which the virtues of charity and humility are cultivated, and it is this that not only enables us to fulfil our Master's two chief precepts of loving of God and loving of neighbor,<sup>17</sup> but it also leads to the possibility of a truly just society. This last point requires a little bit more of our time and attention. Like Aristotle, Augustine underscores the social nature of the cultivation of virtue. Unlike Aristotle, however, Augustine judges Aristotle's ideal city to be deficient in the same way that he judges Rome to be deficient, which serves as a joint claim made on the basis that both fall short of being just societies, and as such, both communities are inadequate contexts for the formation of virtue<sup>18</sup>. The only site that can provide true virtue formation is the just society in which proper worship is ascribed to Christ. "True justice," Augustine declares, "does not exist other than in that commonwealth whose Founder and Ruler is Christ."<sup>19</sup>

The sharpness of contrast between Augustine and Aristotle (and Rome) reveals a profoundly different approach to the subject of virtue, and we will conclude this study by looking at two key points that Augustine's account advances. First, in terms of the embodiment of virtue, Augustine does resemble Aristotle in that the *telos* guides the virtuous life and that the content of the agent is important to moral formation. Where we see him depart from Aristotle is in the source that empowers, and the enactment of, the virtuous life. For Aristotle, the process of virtue formation in the city is that of habituation. The moral life begins by practicing virtue poorly, and as you get better at practicing virtue, you become more virtuous. Through a process of habituation, you eventually become a virtuous person. Anyone familiar with Augustine's engagement with the Pelagians will know that this is not where he stands

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *civ. Dei*. 19.14 [941].

<sup>18</sup> It is important to remember that women and slaves do not have the moral capacity to be included in the citizenship of the *polis*. Morality in the *polis* was more narrowly defined and just as equally exclusive. For Augustine, all are permitted into the just society on condition that their loves be ordered to God.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *civ. Dei*. 2.21.

on the matter. The traditional interpretation of Augustine's thought on this point should not surprise us: "Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which one lives rightly, which no one uses badly, which God works in us without us."<sup>20</sup> For Augustine, the source of virtue and the moral life is God. "For he himself is the source of our [blessedness], and He is the goal of all our desires."<sup>21</sup> He tells us, that "we find our fulfilment in him" and as we cleave to him in "whose spiritual embrace" we are enfolded, our moral life is rendered "fertile with true virtues."<sup>22</sup> The moral life is graciously given by God and is decisively oriented by God to God, and yet it doesn't abandon genuine human agency, but the agency that we have is what it is only as it is evoked by God and sustained by God.

If the shape of the moral life is determined first of all as a work of God, and we receive it as a gift of grace that draws us into fellowship with the body of Christ, then, finally, we can only speak of the moral life with reference to Christ. The intimate bond that obtains between Christ and his people is expressed by Augustine by way of the biblical idea that Christ is the head of the church which is the body (*totus-Christus*).<sup>23</sup> In this way, talk of virtues cannot be invoked without at the same time invoking Christ who is not only the ground of our moral action as well as its end, but significantly, also its model.<sup>24</sup> While Aristotle's magnanimous man models a life of self-sufficiency and pride, Augustine's "Just Man" models humility for us to see and to follow. Furthermore, Christ isn't only a model for our moral action but he also inscribes the virtue of humility into the very being of the heavenly city's citizens. Virtue formation (or ethical mimesis), we have to say, is not episodic, that is, occurring in discrete moments. Without a constant reference to Christ, virtues can come to function as ends in themselves, which as Augustine warns, turns out to be vices and not virtues at all.<sup>25</sup> Christian existence flows out of a new identity. There must be a change in status before there can be a change in our conduct, or put another way: the theological must determine the ethical.

If the picture of the moral field that I've just sketched has any merit to it, then what we have in Augustine is a picture of the moral life that addresses the location of ethics, the goal of ethics and the agent of ethics. While his account resembles an ancient model, Augustine is far more preoccupied with distinctly theological convictions. When these are taken into consideration, they suggest helpful directives in thinking about our public witness, which is beyond the scope of this study. These

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<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *ST* 1.II 55. This is Peter Lombard's interpretation of Augustine which is drawn from a collection of remarks in *On Free Choice of the Will*.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *civ. Dei* 10.3 [395].

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *civ. Dei* 10.3 [395].

<sup>23</sup> This is seen in Augustine, *civ. Dei*. X.6: "... it surely follows that the whole of the redeemed city - that is, the congregation and fellowship of the saints - is offered to God as a universal sacrifice for us through the great High Priest Who, in His Passion, offered even Himself for us in the form of a servant, so that we might be the body of so great a Head" [400].

<sup>24</sup> On this, see the significant work of Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *civ. Dei*. XIX. 26 [961].

directives encourage us to reflect on the burden of the church as she is charged and blessed to display the peace that is hers in communion with the risen Lord who orders her desires and directs her hope to a city that is enduring and is in her midst.

Clearly, further exploration into how Augustine construes the mediation of virtues is needed. From a Protestant perspective, concerns over the proximity of virtue to participation in God needs a greater deal of clarification so that we understand the relation and value of our ethical action to justification (to use Simeon Zahl's terminology). More specifically, and from a distinctively Reformed viewpoint, we would want to describe the character of a sanctified moral existence in which the virtues are not habituated after an Aristotelian fashion, but are foregrounded in an account of divine agency. God redeems us, and his Spirit indwells us. This order produces within us a deep delight of, and obedience to, the moral law. The upshot of this would tie together the presence and order of the virtues with a distinctive picture of the moral life. To ponder these things is to reflect on the God who redeems us and who refuses to leave us as we are, but desires to renew and remake us in the image of his beautiful and glorious Son.

## Theology as Catechism and Criticism

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Inflation hits in more areas than your bank account. Recent months and years have made life far more expensive. Just as surely, recent events and crises have seemed to make the work of theological education seem far more costly. Pandemics. Wars. Injustices. Polarization. Scandals. A whole host of challenges beg for attention, each upping the ante on what's involved when we step back and look up, when we slow down and ponder, when we turn off the screen and turn again to God's Word. I can't promise fewer crises or point to deflationary forces, so I want to take these few brief moments at the beginning of this year to attend again to the purpose and principles of what we are doing here. Other scriptural texts and themes could and should be considered, but this morning we will attend to the words of this prophetic summons as one crucial lens for understanding our calling to engage in theological education. We are called to the context where God's prophetic Word has its way, and that's a space that involves repentantly being put to death and faithfully made alive. It's a Word that itself offers criticism even and as it invites us to the task of catechism.

### Theological Education as Dying

The same God who speaks truth also defines the goal or aim of our ministry of that Word. We know from the prophets that this word does not return void, but we must ask what it aims to accomplish. Here the prophet Jeremiah is given six infinitives to depict and constrain its end, to norm and limit its purpose. This word comes "to tear down and pluck up, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant" (1:10). These infinitives come in two sorts. Four aim to kill followed by two that make alive.

We should begin with that deconstructive or mortifying aim of theological education. Studying theology involves being put to death (and having your falsehood continually crucified). We dare not assume that religious rhythms guarantee covenant fealty. Jeremiah later conveys: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD'" (Jer. 7:3-4). The *status quo* is never simply acceptable and to be assumed, and so the Word has to call it - to call *us* - to account. And I emphasize that word *us*; Jeremiah is called to address nations and empires and *them*, but his word begins with the house of the LORD.

Note that the Word of God delivers this ministry of death. Now there are moments where the church may have grown calloused. There are episodes where a Pharaoh or an Abimelech has a better sense of husbandly duty than does Father Abraham (Gen. 12:18; 20:3-7). There are times where a Jonah's alertness to good sense only follows the prior impulse of pagan sailors (Jonah 1:6). And Jeremiah itself conveys how God may employ Nebuchadnezzar to convey judgment and cultivate good, repentant sense in Israel (Jer. 21). Such moments are to our shame, but they may also be gifts whereby we are pin-pricked by the moral moments of non-Christians

and inspired by their commitments to return to true and good paths. Non-Christian philosophy or politics can sometimes attest elements that are worthy and wise, and there we are wise to plunder the Egyptians where treasure may be found. But we are also always in exile in this life, and it is God's Word that intervenes to tear down and pluck up, it is God Word that speaks to destroy and overthrow. Theology is critical and does not need supplementation from elsewhere to attain that kind of prompt. "To the extent that the Christian community is possessed by its Gospel, it will be protected against social conformity."<sup>26</sup>

Theology has a critical task, though it dare not drift into cynicism. It is premised on the hope that God will discipline and transform us. Theology has an inquisitive end, but that cannot be confused with an ironic posture or valorization of curiosity for its own sake. Its searching, bruising method takes its momentum from the life-giving provocation of God's own Word. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12), and so theology alerts us to the ongoing challenge of the gospel which kills that which embodies the old Adam and enslaves us.<sup>27</sup> Theology begins and ends always with the axiomatic first commandment that God alone is the living and true Lord, and all else remains captive to his lordship and called to repentance by his Word.

### **Theological Education as Rising**

Theology's purposive path does not stop with the critical moment. Other images like cultivation and maturation vividly portray the notion of a flowering and a furthering of the Christian and the church. And here Jeremiah's prophetic call also speaks of building and planting.

Building plays a foundational role in placing together parts where they belong. In one sense, the structure is as strong and appealing as ever when move-in ready, before anything has busted or broken. Planting, however, suggests an investment in that which will slowly accumulate size and strength and only eventually reap benefits. The Word not only brings us to new life as marked by baptism; the Word continues to grow us so that, just as we are called to God's table again and again to receive his body and blood, so we would also gain nutrients and strength from his Word day by day.

We learn from Jeremiah's prophecy that this building and planting occurs not only by saying the Word but also by obeying the Word. In Jeremiah 29, we see that the exiles addressed by Jeremiah are called to build and to plant (29:5). We plant roots and build up future generations formed by the faith once for all delivered to the saints. In so doing we pursue theology's second great task, that of catechetically passing along the Word of God, removing neither jot nor tittle. God's Word is read and is proclaimed – *has been* and *will continue* to be proclaimed – and we are to receive that proclamation gratefully and to pass it along expectantly.

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<sup>26</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 226.

<sup>27</sup> See especially John Webster, "Reading Theology" *Toronto Journal of Theology* 13 (1995), 59.

Theology has a catechetical task, though it dare not drift into assuming we have yet arrived. God's presence and proclamation have arrived, however, and revealed himself with power and grace. God's Word has caused ripples which have spread through the ages and around the globe. So we aim to prepare "every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt. 13:52), and theology awakens in each new generation a devotion to that good deposit and deepens in us a commitment to the fifth commandment: an appreciation for honoring our spiritual fathers and mothers by being faithful to the Word they have passed along.<sup>28</sup> "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8); therefore, we will "remember our leaders, those who taught us the Word of God, considering the outcome of their way of life, and imitating their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

### **Theological Education as God's Prophetic Activity**

Tearing down and building up are high callings. To practice crucifixion and resurrection is a lofty summons. To honor the first commandment which leads away from idolatry and to keep the fifth commandment which leads toward taking up and passing on the faith once for all delivered to the saints are weighty challenges. The final thing to perceive about prophecy is that it is not self-generated. Formation and instruction. Cultivation and maturation. Other educational terms can each speak of self-prompted protocols. Cultivating a new skill, forming a new habit. Each of those images is crucial, but they can be easily (mis)perceived as something we do on our own. That said, prophecy is obviously and emphatically a gift from beyond. The call to Jeremiah signals this emphasis with the enacted parable of the hand putting God's own word in the prophet's mouth (1:9). The litany of loving provision appears in our passage: from "I am with you" (1:8; also 1:19) to "I have put my words in your mouth" (1:9) to "I am watching over my word to perform it" (1:11).

Prophecy comes from above. Prophecy involves God placing his life-giving Word to human lips. At the end of the day, that's what makes crucifixion and resurrection words of hope and not of judgment. The God who can touch the mouth is the God who can also call the dead child out of the lifeless abyss: "*Talitha cum*" (Mk. 5:41). Theology that follows God's prophetic Word can follow the warning that "God is not summoned into the presence of reason; reason is summoned before the presence of God."<sup>29</sup>

### **Faith and Repentance in the Classroom**

Simone Weil spoke of our modern need for roots amid a terrain that seems to be superficial and changing. She went further to address our constant call also to astonishment, lest rootedness be purchased at the expense of restlessness (see her book, *The Need for Roots*). We are called to instill the shape of the faith and to guard the good deposit, and yet we dare not ever find solace in the *status quo*. We are to seek the

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<sup>28</sup> See Webster, "Reading Theology," 56.

<sup>29</sup> John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 17.

sanctification not only of that world out there but also of our insufficiencies in here. In our studies just as much as in our sanctuaries or out on the streets, God's Word is enough. As the first of the Ten Theses of Berne (1528) calls us to confess: "The holy Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger."

Costly as it is, may what we do here be one more instance in the way of faith and repentance, of laying down not only our life but our ideals, imagination, and ideas and finding that in that surrender God gives us new life, new hope, new knowledge. May we find too that not only in our churches and in our communities but also here in these classrooms that Christ's Word is enough, enough to kill and enough to make alive, enough to begin and enough to grow, enough to give grace and enough to bring us to glory. May not only our selves but also our studies find his gracious Word and his glorious works always to be enough. Amen.

## Meredith G. Kline and the Not-Marriage of Hosea 3:1–5

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Dr. Meredith G. Kline (1922-2007) was a gifted biblical scholar in numerous areas. Two in particular were outstanding. First, he was a master exegete of the Holy Scriptures in both the Greek of the New Testament and the Hebrew of the Old. In addition to his exegetical abilities, second, he also was able to envision the grand drama of Scripture and the contribution each text makes to that redemptive panorama. His insights into Hosea 3:1–5 is a demonstration of both these skills. Sadly, his thoughts on this passage were only passed on to his students in his course lectures,<sup>1</sup> meaning his comments were never made available in any written or published work. The purpose of this article is to present the exegetical, biblical, and systematic theological thoughts of Dr. Kline on Hosea 3:1–5 to honor his centennial birthday<sup>2</sup> and to make readily available to the academic and ecclesiastical communities his thoughts on this passage of Scripture. We will begin by examining the fundamental task of the prophets, specifically their function as divinely appointed emissaries of the Lord. Second, we will present the literary structure of Hosea 1–3 so that we can observe the literary context of the third chapter. Finally, we will summarize Dr. Kline’s comments on Hosea 3:1–5, which will demonstrate that the remarriage motif found within it does not actually represent what it may initially appear to represent.

### The Prophet as Divine-Royal Emissary

Simply stated, the prophets were divinely appointed covenantal representatives who spoke on behalf of the Lord as the great Suzerain to the vassal people of Israel. Dr. Kline called them “plentipotentiary emissaries for the Lord of Hosts” (2 Chr 36:15–16; Deut 18:18–19).<sup>3</sup> As these divinely appointed spokesmen, the prophets had a two-fold mission to Israel: first, they were prosecuting attorneys who brought a lawsuit against Israel for violating the Mosaic Covenant, specifically Deuteronomy; second, they were heralds who proclaimed the kingdom blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.

#### *Prophetic Lawsuit*

Regarding their lawsuit ministry, this was not an uncommon phenomenon in the ancient world outside of Israel. Regularly, a great king (suzerain) enforces a loyal oath (i.e. covenant) upon a conquered vassal king, where the vassal is required to

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<sup>1</sup> His lectures on the book of Hosea were part of class on the Old Testament Prophets during my seminary years at Westminster Seminary in California.

<sup>2</sup> December 15, 2022 would mark the one hundredth birthday for Dr. Kline.

<sup>3</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999; originally self-published, 1980), 58.

swear his allegiance to the great suzerain. Dr. Kline is well known for his recognition that specific biblical texts conform to this literary genre (e.g. Ex 20,<sup>4</sup> the entire book of Deuteronomy,<sup>5</sup> even the canon of the Old Testament<sup>6</sup>). Within this contractual agreement, communication between the two covenanted parties were frequently needed—often due to the fact that the vassal was discovered violating the agreed upon stipulations. To represent the great suzerain to his vassal, a royal messenger would be sent with the authority to speak on his behalf. Their task was to give correctives to the vassal for covenantal waywardness. This lawsuit did not enforce the curse sanctions of the loyal oath immediately. Rather, the vassal was given a warning and, thus, an opportunity to change their rebellious ways and conform to the stipulations they agreed to follow. If, however, they continued to violate the terms of the loyal oath, the great suzerain would have no other option but to role in his army and decimate the vassal and his city.

This was similar to the unhappy task of the Old Testament prophets. Just as royal messengers of secular kings were sent with delegated authority to speak on behalf of their monarchical overlord, so the Old Testament prophets did the same for the Lord of Israel. This is, in part, one reason why the formation of the prophet required that they receive a divine call, an admission and session in the angelic council, and a Holy Spirit empowerment—so that they can speak the very words of the Lord to His vassal people (Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9).<sup>7</sup>

Just as the secular messengers of the ancient world prosecuted this lawsuit in two stages, so the prophets did the same against both the Northern and Southern kingdoms.<sup>8</sup> Israel and Judah, unfortunately, did not heed the warning, but rather persecuted these prophetic messengers, often to the point of death. Yet, the Lord persisted to send one prophet after another, all of whom were given the same mission—call Israel to repentance for violating the law-code of Deuteronomy. As persistent as the Lord sent such prophetic messengers, so Israel with the same persistence rejected this message and continued to despise this warning and mocked the prophets. This continued “until there was no remedy” (2 Chr 36:15–16). Every covenantal mechanism was utilized and exhausted: the Lord gave them a sacrificial system to atone for their sins, He established a priesthood to administrate ritual practices to show them their need for the grace of God, He provided kings to remind them of their covenantal oath to the Lord, and He sent his prophets as His divinely commissioned emissaries. Despite all this, they persisted in sin. There was nothing left

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<sup>4</sup> See his “Intrusion Ethics and the Decalogue,” *WTJ* 16 (1953/54), 1–22.

<sup>5</sup> See his *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> See his *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Kline has a thorough and helpful description on this process of the formation of an Old Testament prophet. For details of this, see his *Images of the Spirit*, 57–64.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of the lawsuit genre and the way in which the prophets conducted this lawsuit, see Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 58–62.

for the Lord but to exercise the curse sanction of the covenant—exile (Lev 26:16–46; Deut 28:15–68; 2 Chr 36:17–21).

All the prophets administered this lawsuit in one of these two stages. This can be mapped out accordingly:<sup>9</sup>

| <i>Historical Period</i> | <i>Northern Kingdom of Israel</i>                    | <i>Southern Kingdom of Judah</i>  |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| 9 <sup>th</sup> c. BC    | <b>Stage 1 Warning of Exile</b><br>Elijah and Elisha | No lawsuit  |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> c. BC    | <b>Stage 2 Judgment of Exile</b><br>Hosea, Amos      | <b>Stage 1 Warning of Exile</b><br>Isaiah, Micah                              |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> c. BC    | Exile  | <b>Stage 2 Judgment of Exile</b><br>Jeremiah, Joel,<br>Habakkuk,<br>Zephaniah |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> c. BC    |  | <b>Exile</b><br>Ezekiel (Daniel)  |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> c. BC    |  | <b>Post-exile</b><br>Zechariah, Haggai,<br>Malachi                            |
| New Testament            |  | Jesus<br>John the Baptist   |

*Proclaimers of the Abrahamic Covenant*

As they served their role as prosecutors of the Mosaic Covenant, the Old Testament prophets were coterminously fulfilling their second and more pleasant mission as heralds, proclaiming the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, which is a continuation of the covenant of grace. This line of grace progresses throughout the history of redemption from the fall, and it is given a distinctively final realization in the New Covenant in Christ. These Abrahamic promises hold the key to the entirety of the history of salvation. Regarding the Abrahamic/New Covenant, Dr. Kline says:

“Resumed from Genesis 3:15 and 9:25-27 were the essential promise of restoration of covenant with the Lord for a people identified with his name (cf. the seed of the woman corporately and the line of Shem); their warfare against Satan and an accursed people (cf. the seed of the serpent and Canaan); the climactic triumph of the messianic champion (cf. the seed of the woman as

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<sup>9</sup> The prophets Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum are not included in this list because their prophetic ministry was to various gentile nations. Dr. Kline suggests that they still conducted a lawsuit, however, the covenantal foundations of this was not the Mosaic Covenant, but rather the original covenant of works with the First Adam.

individual); and the universal extension of the covenant blessings (cf. the line of Japheth). All these features, it will be found, have their clear continuing counterparts in the promissory blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.”<sup>10</sup>

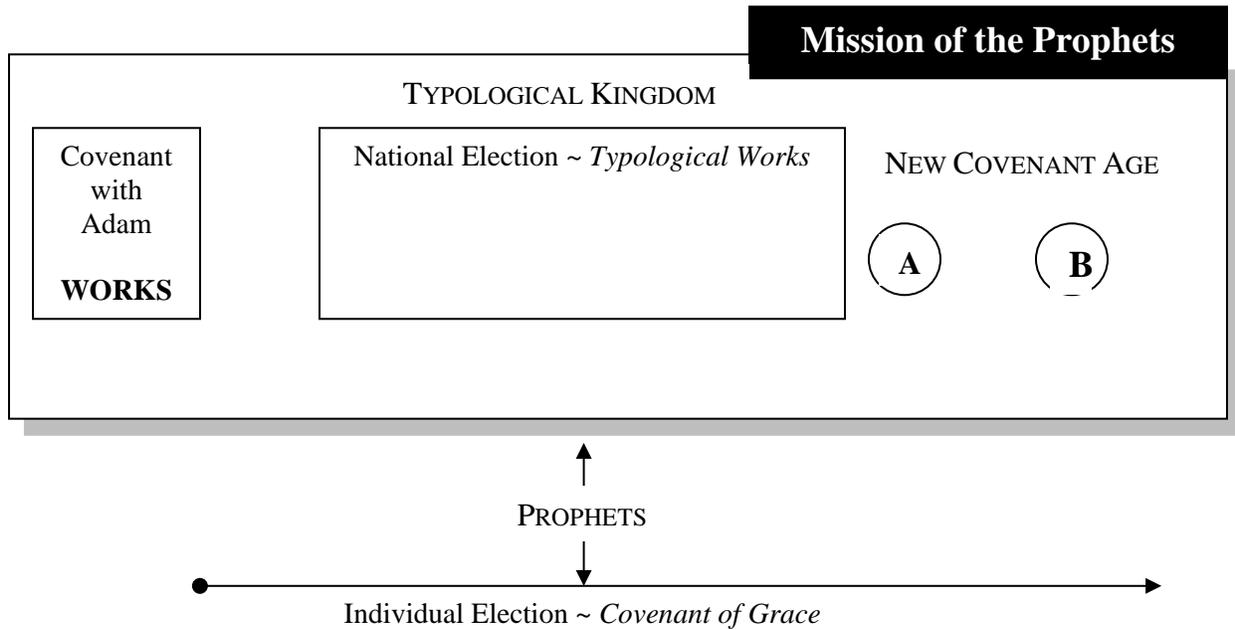
For Dr. Kline, this covenant differed from the Mosaic Covenant that comes four hundred years afterwards (Gal 3:15). He says the *reception* of the Mosaic Covenant was a gracious gift from the Lord. Once it was inaugurated and ratified, however, it instituted a principle of works that was in contrast to the principle of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant. During the period of the Israelite theocracy (i.e. from the time of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai until the coming of Christ), Dr. Kline suggested the Lord administered those two covenants simultaneously (Gal 3:15–18). The law of the Mosaic Covenant was not intended to offer a means of salvation, but to force Israel to look to the grace of the Abrahamic Covenant. For Dr. Kline, therefore, there is a covenantal discontinuity between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant during the history of Israel (Rom 10:3–7; 2 Cor 3:7–11; Gal 3:15–18; 4:4–7). He coordinated the works-principle of the Mosaic Covenant with national Israel as determining their position in the typological kingdom (i.e. the land of Canaan). This differs, according to Dr. Kline, with the Abrahamic Covenant that offers the promise of the true, consummated Eternal Kingdom to the individual elect by sovereign grace. Therefore, he packaged certain covenantal themes together: regarding the Old Covenant, it is 1) the works-principle with 2) national Israel in relation to 3) the typological kingdom. Regarding the Abrahamic Covenant, it is 1) the grace-principle with 2) individual elect in relation to 3) the consummated Eternal Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

This distinction between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenant was the covenantal foundation for the two-fold mission of the prophets (see the chart below).

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<sup>10</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 328.

<sup>11</sup> For his comments on this, see *Kingdom Prologue*, 320–323. For further defense of this view, see the essays in *The Law is not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*; eds. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing, 2009). For a response to both Dr. Kline and *The Law is not of Faith*, see Andrew M. Elam, Robert C. Van Kooten, Randall A. Bergquist, *Merit and Moses: A Critique of the Klinean Doctrine of Republication* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).



### Three-fold Literary Organization of Hosea 1–3

The description of the mission of the prophets above applies to the prophet Hosea. A summary of his message can be seen in the first three chapters (Hos 1–3), where he conducts the legal lawsuit against the Northern Kingdom of Israel in its final stage of judgment while also proclaiming the fullness of the New Covenant promises in Christ.<sup>12</sup> Although relatively brief, this portion of the prophetic text has drawn much more interest and attention than any other section of the book. Without a doubt, this is due to the description of the tragic familial relations of the prophet, which metaphorically represents Yahweh’s relationship with Israel. In particular, it was Hosea’s marriage that became a living declaration of the prophetic “lawsuit” (Hebrew רִיב *riḇ*; cf. Hosea 2:2 [MT 4]<sup>13</sup>; 4:1) that the prophet was called to prosecute against his fellow Israelites.

Dr. Kline often had the extraordinary ability to observe the literary organization of specific sections of Scripture and how it aids exegetical matters.<sup>14</sup> His

<sup>12</sup> Chapters 4–14 is an anthology of prophetic speeches that has the same message as chapters 1–3 without the use of the same marital images.

<sup>13</sup> The versification in certain portions of the Masoretic Text (MT) version of the book of Hosea (e.g. chapters one and two) does not parallel English translations. The MT verses are provided with the abbreviation “MT.”

<sup>14</sup> As an example of this, it would be impossible to not mention his student paper at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia on the overall chiasmic structure of the Book of Revelation. Sadly, it is difficult to get a copy of this. For more accessible examples of Dr. Kline’s utilization of literary structure, see his proposed structure of the Book of Zechariah in his article “The Structure of Zechariah,” *JETS* 34 (1991), 179–193. His

analysis on Hosea 1–3 is a prime illustration of this. He observes that each of the first three chapters can be subdivided into three sections which rotates through three themes (see diagram below).<sup>15</sup>

*Diagram of the Thematic Rotation in Hosea 1–3*

|   | <b>Cycle 1</b><br>Hos. 1:2–2:1<br>[MT 2:3] <sup>16</sup> | <b>Cycle 2</b><br>Hos. 2:2–23<br>[MT 2:4–25] | <b>Cycle 4</b><br>Hos. 3:1–5 |
|---|--|--|------------------------------|
| <b>A-section</b><br>Old Covenant<br>Indictment          | 1:2–3  | 2:2–5 [MT 4–7]                               | 3:1                          |
| <b>B-section</b><br>Old Covenant<br>Judgment<br>(Exile) | 1:4–6, 8–9   | 2:6–13 [MT 8–15]                             | 3:2–4                        |
| <b>C-section</b><br>New Covenant<br>Proclamation        | 1:7, 1:10–2:1<br>[MT 2:1–3]                              | 2:14–34 [MT<br>16–25]                        | 3:5                          |

#### *A-Section (Indictment)*

The first section (A-section) records the indictment against Israel for covenantal violation, specifically their idolatry and rejection of Yahweh as their true God. In all three chapters, this indictment is expressed figuratively in the historical marriage of Hosea to an adulteress woman (1:2–3; 2:2–5 [MT 4–7]; 3:1–2; see 1:2 where the theological reality of the marital metaphor is explicitly stated as Hosea was told to marry a “wife of whoredom” because Israel “commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD”). Both chapters one and two include the “children of whoredom,” a term that infers some of them were the tragic byproduct of the infidelity of Hosea’s wife. Chapter two is compelling in that Hosea instructs these children to bring a “lawsuit” against their own mother (אִשָּׁה in 2:2 [MT 4]). The indictment in chapter two also has a strong warning to Israel to “put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was

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literary analysis of Daniel 9:26–27 is a tour-de-force argument in support of Amillennialism, over against Dispensational Premillennialism; for details of this, see his article “The Covenant of the Seventieth Week” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Oswald T. Allis* (ed. John Skilton; Nutley, NJ; P&R Publishing, 1974), 452–469.

<sup>15</sup> The parameter for each “chapter” is as follows: chapter one covers Hosea 1:2–2:1 [MT 3], chapter two Hosea 2:2–23 [MT 4–25], and chapter three Hosea 3:1–5.

<sup>16</sup> The versification in the English Bibles differ from the Masoretic Text (MT) in a few areas of Hosea 1–3. The reason for this is unknown.

born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst” (2:2–5 [MT 4–7]). This warning, however, seems more of a formal act since the judgment of exile is inevitable.

*B-section (Declaration of Judgment)*

The second section in each chapter (B-section) describes the divine judgment of exile that will fall upon Israel—this is the final stage of the covenant lawsuit. The warning was given by previous prophets from a former generation, but the people did not heed it and repent of their iniquities (cf. 2 Chr 36:15–16; Matt 21:33–36). A declaration of coming judgment, therefore, is the only remaining step in the lawsuit. In chapter one, this judgment is seen in the unconventional names of the three children. The first son, Jezreel, is named after the valley in which King Jehu committed mass murder of the household of Ahab, thus ending the wicked line of Omri (2 Kgs 10:11). Because of this, the house of Jehu will be brought to an end. Jeroboam II, who is the only northern Israelite king mentioned in the historical superscript to the book (1:1), was the last king in the line of Jehu and his reign ended during the ministry of Hosea.

The names of the second and third children (Lo-ruhammah “No mercy” and Lo-ammi “Not my people”) begin to reveal the heart of the Lord towards His adulteress bride.<sup>17</sup> The name of the second child shows that God will have “no mercy” upon the people of Israel. The name of the third child in verse 9 is truly striking. He was to be named “Lo-ammi” (“Not my people”) because “you are not my people, *and I am not your God.*” This is the most common translation found in English Bibles, but it is based on an emendation of the Hebrew text, which actually says “you are not my people *and I am not for you.*” The proposed emendation is plausible, but it undercuts a devastating reality. The first half of verse 9 lacks a finite verb and the verb “are” is implied in the syntax, “you (are) not my people.”<sup>18</sup> The second half does have what appears to be a finite verb, the first person form of the verb “to be” אָהֵי *’ehyeh*, meaning “I am.” This verb, “I am,” is identical to the name of the Lord given to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 3:14. According to Exodus 6:3, the forefathers of the Exodus generation (i.e. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) called God by the title, “El-Shaddai,” but Israel can now call Him by His name, “I Am.” Given that the name “Lo-ammi” occurs in the context of the giving of names, it seems that what the Lord is doing is taking away from His bride the privilege to call Him by His personal and covenanted name. The effect of this exegetical analysis leads to the conclusion that the two clauses in verse 9 be understood as verbless, “you (are) not my people” and “I (am) not ‘I Am’ to you.” Thus, in summary, the Lord is saying, “Hosea, your son’s name will be ‘Lo-ammi [Not my people]’ because you [O Israel] are [named] ‘Lo-ammi’ [due to your

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<sup>17</sup> There is a brief interlude in Hos 1:7, where the prophet affirms the Southern kingdom of Judah as continued recipients of the Lord’s mercy.

<sup>18</sup> This is what Hebraists refer to as a “verbless clause.”

idolatry] and thus I (am) no longer ‘I Am’ to you.”<sup>19</sup> This is a tragic reversal of the well known covenantal axiom, “You will be my people and I will be your God” (Ex 6:6–7).<sup>20</sup>

According to Dr. Kline, the judgment section (B-section) in chapter two covers verses 6–13 [MT 8–15], which is further subdivided into two parts, verses 6–8 [MT 8–10] and verses 9–13 [MT 11–15] respectively. Verses 6–8 [MT 8–10] depicts the ways in which the adulteress wife (Israel/Gomer) will attempt to seek out her illicit lovers but will be unable to find them. She will grow increasingly frustrated since the Lord is constantly preventing her from reaching those who had given her hedonistic pleasures. Where verses 6–8 [MT 8–10] describes the removal of her *lovers*, so verses 9–13 [MT 11–15] describes the removal of her *prosperity*. The Lord/Hosea faithfully provided provisions for her (grain, wine, oil in verse 8 [MT 10]). Instead of acknowledging her husband as the provider of her material goods, she crudely credits this to her lovers (Baal?). Therefore, the Lord will remove these provisions and leave her naked and ashamed.

Given this literary cycle in chapters one and two, it follows that chapter three also has a section describing the coming exile (see below).

### *C-Section (Proclamation of the New Covenant)*

The final section (C-section) takes the reader in an entirely new direction. No longer is the prophet subsumed with the message of the lawsuit; now his interest is the blessed hope of the realized promises of God. What we find in each of the third sections (1:10–2:1 [MT 2:1–3]; 2:14–23 [MT 2:16–25]; 3:5) are images of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant in their final stage of fulfillment in the New Covenant. When all the C-sections are combined, Hosea has essentially rehearsed the whole history of Israel—from the exodus, the wilderness experience, the settlement/conquest of the land, the united monarchy, and restoration from exile. The blessings of the New Covenant are described using images from Israel’s past to represent the final, glorified, and consummated “great nation” of Abraham (Genesis 12:2–3). This is what Dr. Kline called prophetic idiom. Surprisingly, marriage images are absent in this final section. They seem to be used by the Lord exclusively to represent the failure and sin of Israel.

### **The “Not-Marriage” of Hosea 3**

<sup>19</sup> For a similar interpretation, see Duane Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 33; J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 99–100. Cf. Deut. 32:20–21 for the similar names “No-God” and “Not-People.”

<sup>20</sup> In the providence of God, a large cache of ancient marriage contracts has been discovered by archeologists. For an example of such contracts (that includes a divorce clause), see Bruno Meissner, *Beiträge zum Altbabylonischen Privatrecht* (J. C. Hinrichs, 1893), 71–72, no. 90; Moses Schorr, *Urkunden des Altbabylonischen Zivil- und Prozessrechts*; Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 5 (J. C. Hinrichs, 1913), 7, no. 2; for further examples and additional details on these contracts, see also Hugenberger, *Marriage*, 219–222; Dearman, *Hosea*, 56–58. In these contracts when a man “takes” a woman to be his wife, he is to explicitly state to her “you are my wife,” and the woman is to respond by saying to the man “you are my husband.” In a divorce, these phrases are negated (“you are not my wife” and “you are not my husband.”) This similarity with Hosea 1–3 demonstrates that the name “Not-my-people” expresses the annulling of the Lord’s relationship with Israel.

With a literary pattern established from chapters one and two, it follows to expect the same organization in chapter three. This is the observation made by Dr. Kline. It is the most difficult of the three chapters by the fact that the remarriage imagery found here is not representative of the restoration after exile, but rather the exile itself.

*A-section: Indictment (3:1)*

Dr. Kline begins in verse 1 by identifying the woman whom Hosea is commanded to marry as the same Gomer from chapter one. This parallels the A-section of 3:1 with its counterpart in 1:2-3, both of which is a call to Hosea to marry an “adulteress.” The reason for this unusual marriage is similar in both chapters: this marriage is a metaphor of the Lord’s relationship with Israel, specifically Israel’s unfaithfulness to her divine husband. As we had seen in both chapters one and two, this marital relationship is used to indict Israel for her covenantal unfaithfulness to the Lord. In spite of His divine care and provisions for His bride, Israel repaid this by turning “to other gods” and pursuing after “raisin cakes” (a reference to pagan, cultic practices).

The initial command must have been heartbreaking for Hosea; whatever dreams he may have had about the idyllic traits of his future wife were burnt up in smoke in chapter one. If that was not difficult enough, Hosea is now commanded to pursue after Gomer in her infidelity, even taking upon himself all debt that she incurred (v.2).

Many commentators have suggested this is a different woman from Gomer, but Dr. Kline disagrees. He says that if this is a different woman, then Hosea is commanded to marry the wife of a אַחֵר “another man” (ESV), which is sin. To avoid this enforced indiscretion, Dr. Kline interprets the Hebrew אַחֵר, not as “another man,” but rather as a reference to Hosea himself.<sup>21</sup> The inclusion of the adjective “another” is, therefore, an interpretation by the ESV (NIV also adds “another”). In fact, Hosea is the אַחֵר.

*B-Section: Judgment (3:2-4)*

The judgment scene in verses 2-4 is the most peculiar of all the B-sections of Hosea 1-3; it is also the most difficult to interpret. Verse 1 (A-section) ends with Hosea remarried to Gomer. The next section (verses 2-4) goes on to describe this renewed marital relationship. Due to the nature of a remarriage, the reader is expected to interpret this as representing the blissful time after exile when God’s people will be restored back to their homeland of Canaan and in a renewed covenantal union with the Lord. This conclusion seems to be affirmed in verse 2 that depicts Hosea, a loving and faithful husband, going to great lengths to restore his marital relationship by

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<sup>21</sup> Stuart emends the Hebrew אַחֵר to אָרָם (“evil”) and translates as follows: “Go again and love a woman, a *lover of evil*.” See his comments in *Hosea*, 62-63, 65.

taking on the debt owed by his wife Gomer.<sup>22</sup> Verses 3 and 4 continues by describing this remarriage.

Numerous English translations also seem to interpret verses 2–4 as a blessed time of reunion and renewed commitment. After clearing Gomer’s debt (v.2), she will no longer continue in her adulterous ways; nor shall she be physically intimate with another man. Just as she is faithful to Hosea, so Hosea will return the favor by remaining steadfast to her (v.3). Provided below is the ESV translation of verse 3, as representative of this predominant view:

“You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”

The NIV is more explicit in its commitment to the nature of this remarriage:

“You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”

The difficulty of this view is found in verse 4, which describes the same historical period as verse 3. Dr. Kline observes this coterminous period by noting the repetition of the phrase “many days” (יָמִים רַבִּים) and the verb “dwell” (יָשַׁב) in both verses. In other words, the “many days” (יָמִים רַבִּים) in which Gomer will “dwell” (יָשַׁב) with Hosea in verse 3 is the same “many days” (יָמִים רַבִּים) that describes God’s people “dwelling” (יָשַׁב) in verse 4. This correspondence between these two verses is further strengthened by the fact that they both begin with the phrase “many years” followed by the verb “dwell.” Verse 4, however, does not depict a happy life of marital bliss. This is a time when the people of God will be “without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods” (v.4). Dr. Kline understands this as the absence of all the outward trappings of life in Canaan—cultic or cultural elements, genuine or false worship, royal or priestly leadership. In a word, this is the *exile*. If this interpretation is correct, then the remarriage of Hosea/Gomer in verse 3 is not used to describe a covenantal restoration. Instead, it represents the covenant curse of exile. It is a remarriage that is not a genuine remarriage. Marriage equals exile.

In light of this interpretation, Dr. Kline proposed the following adjustment to the translation of verse 3: “For many years, you must dwell as mine. You will not play the whore, but you will not be for (your) husband, nor will I be for you.” He comments as follows for each phrase:

| Biblical text            | Commentary   |
|--------------------------|--|
| “You must dwell as mine” | This represents the remarriage between Hosea and Gomer. Dr. Kline offers no challenge to the |

<sup>22</sup> The verb כָּרָה, which is traditionally translated as “bought,” actually has the sense of “taking on another’s debt.” Cf. Deut 2:6; Job 6:27.

|  |   |
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|  | traditional transition or interpretation at this point.   |
| “You will not play the whore”            | This will be a time when Gomer will not continue in her previous life of promiscuity and adultery. Again, Dr. Kline agrees with the traditional view here.  |
| “But you will not be for (your) husband” | This is where Dr. Kline begins to break from traditional interpretation. He rejects the ESV inclusion of “another” (it is absent in the Hebrew text) in “another man,” as if this phrase continues to describe Gomer’s fidelity from the previous clause. In fact, he rejects the translation of the Hebrew $\Psi\aleph$ as “man,” which he believes still could be taken as an implicit reference to “another man.” Instead, he says the “man” is Hosea himself, where the Hebrew $\Psi\aleph$ should be translated as “husband.” So, although Gomer will no longer be an adulteress, their remarriage will not be consummated with physical intimacy. |
| “Nor will I be for you”                  | Dr. Kline also differs here by suggesting the negative $\aleph\aleph$ from the previous clause is gapped here, thus the translation “nor.” This final clause is stating that “I [Hosea] will also <i>not</i> be for you,” meaning there will be no physical union in this remarital relationship.   |

It should be noted that Dr. Kline does not offer any emendations of the Hebrew text; he simply offers a different (his mind, more consistent) analysis of the Hebrew. According to Dr. Kline, therefore, verses 2–4 gives a very different sense than what is found in traditional treatments. For “many days,” Gomer will “dwell” with Hosea. This will be an official and legal remarriage, within which Gomer will not have the opportunity to act unfaithfully. However, this marriage will not be a normal marriage. It will not be consummated in physical intimacy; Gomer will not be intimate with her “husband,” nor will Hosea be physically intimate with her. Verse 4 goes on to say that this marriage is not a metaphor for restoration. Instead, it ironically represents the coming exile Israel must suffer, a time when Israel will be absent of all the outward manifestations of life in the land of Canaan “for many days.” This will be a marriage that is not really a marriage, a reunion that is not a reunion.<sup>23</sup> It is a “Not-Marriage.”

How can this be so? According to Dr. Kline, the reason for this highly unusual marriage is due to the covenantal foundation of the prophet’s mission. As described earlier, Dr. Kline saw two different covenantal administrations functioning simultaneously. This continued during the time of the exile. One was the Abrahamic

<sup>23</sup> See Dearman who interprets similarly, *Hosea*, 136–37.

Covenant (Gen 15:18–21; 17:1–27; cf. Gen 12:1–3). The blessings of this covenant were guaranteed and the Lord took a self-maledictory oath to assure Abraham of this (Gen 15:9–17). In that sense, there was still a marriage between the Lord and Israel—not even the exile can nullify this. However, there was also the Mosaic Covenant, which Israel violated. In that sense, the covenantal union between the Lord and Israel was severed and there was no longer a marriage. Therefore, it seems that Israel as a corporate community was “Lo-ammi” (“Not my people”), but there was a smaller remnant within that community through whom the Lord continued to work out the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.<sup>24</sup> Exile is this mixed situation in which Israel is in a Not-Marriage regarding the Mosaic Covenant, but yet still in a Marriage regarding the Abrahamic Covenant.

*C-Section: New Covenant Proclamation (3:5)*

Dr. Kline sees verse 5 as a description of the New Covenant realities. This will be a time when Israel will be restored to their true homeland, something greater than the mere earthen land of Canaan. Instead, they will receive the heavenly homeland that their ancient forefather Abraham envisioned—the heavenly Jerusalem whose “designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). Israel herself will seek the Lord with all their heart and no longer pursue after false deities. Their hearts will be circumcised (Deut 30:6), so that they can now love the Lord, worship Him with a full heart of joy, conform in total obedience to His covenantal stipulations, and fear Him in awe-inspired reverence (cf. Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:24–28). This will also be a time when the eschatological Messiah of David will reign and reunify Israel and Judah under His divine and sovereign kingship and usher in the eschatological Kingdom of God. All this will take place in the “last days,” not in the days of the earthly restoration, which was only a shadowy type of the true restoration the eschatological David will bring.

## **Conclusion**

The comments of Dr. Kline concerning Hosea 3:1–5 demonstrate his interpretative insights as a biblical scholar and also as a systematic theologian. It shows his ability to do detailed exegetical analysis into the text of Scripture while also placing that text within its proper place in the overarching drama of redemption. He also discerns the sound systematic theological (i.e. covenantal) foundations to properly understand the mission of Hosea, indeed, the overall prophetic mission as a whole. In that regard, his understanding of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenantal background for the prophetic mission provides a solid theological foundation to understanding how the prophets were both proclaiming the *Fall of Israel* (covenant lawsuit) and the *Fullness of Israel* (New Covenant). While other commentators have made similar exegetical conclusions as Dr. Kline regarding Hosea 3, they lack the systematic theological grounds to apply those conclusions to the

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<sup>24</sup> Both the continuity and discontinuity among the biblical covenants are a reality that must be observed. Dr. Kline believed that Paul often placed more significance to the discontinuity (Gal 3:15–22; Rom 10:3–7) without surrendering the continuity (2 Cor 3:7–18).

prophetic task as a whole. That is the contribution Dr. Kline provides. Although Old Testament scholarship has been critical of the parameters of systematic theology in exegetical and literary analyses, Dr. Kline shows that theology is not only a benefit but also a necessity.

The hope of this article was to not only to acknowledge the biblical and theological contributions of Meredith Kline, but to also honor the Lord of Scripture that he spent a lifetime teaching and the way He orchestrated the history of redemptive through the administration of His covenants. The words of 1 Peter 2:10 truly encapsulates Dr. Kline's view of Hosea 3: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." As we remember Dr. Kline and celebrate his centennial birthday, we would do well to know that Dr. Kline now rejoices in a glorified and consummated fellowship with his blessed Creator-Redeemer-King.

## Honoring Older Women as Spiritual Mothers in the Church

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The relationship between men and women at home, in the church, and in society remains a subject of debate in contemporary evangelical churches. Most of the discussions focus on texts such as Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19 (for defining relationships between husbands and wives) or 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (for defining relationships between men and women in the church). These four texts are also often discussed in relation to each other, resulting in a widespread tendency to define biblical manhood and womanhood through the lens of marriage relationship. However, as Scott Swain rightly points out in his blog post on theological anthropology, “taking the husband-wife relation as *paradigmatic* for what it means to be a man or a woman more generally is potentially reductionistic” (emphasis original).<sup>1</sup> Drawing from 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Swain argues that in discussing the gender-specific roles that God has given us, we must talk about human beings in *two sexes* (i.e., male and female) and *four roles* (i.e., husband/wife, father/mother, son/daughter, and brother/sister).

In this paper, following Swain’s footsteps, I will also look into 1 Timothy 5:1-2 more closely. But more specifically, I will focus on one of the four different relationships mentioned in these two verses, namely, the relationship between *adult men* and *older women* in the church (1 Tim. 5:2a). Why did I choose to do so? From my observation, the relationship between spiritual sons and their spiritual mothers in the church is the least discussed in contemporary evangelical circles.<sup>2</sup> Christians generally agree that an older man should be a spiritual father to a younger man (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4) and an older woman should be a spiritual mother to a younger woman (Titus 2:3-5). However, because of the scriptural command in 1 Timothy 2:12 that a woman is not to teach or exercise authority over a man, there is a tendency among evangelical Christians—especially those who identify themselves as complementarians—not to cultivate mother-and-son relationships in the church, fearing that they will violate God’s command in 1 Timothy 2:12. But in the very same letter where Paul commands women not to exercise authority over men, Paul also commands Timothy—an adult man—to encourage and treat older women respectfully as spiritual mothers (1 Tim. 5:2a). Although Timothy was a minister of the gospel who held a position of authority at the church of Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 1:6; 4:1-2), Paul also commanded him to honor the older women in the church.

<sup>1</sup> Scott R. Swain, “More Thoughts on Theological Anthropology: Man as Male and Female,” Reformed Blogmatics, last updated May 14, 2020, accessed May 11, 2022. <https://www.scottswain.com/2020/05/14/more-thoughts-on-theological-anthropology-man-as-male-and-female>.

<sup>2</sup> Even evangelical commentators such as Mounce and Knight do not *expound* on the mother-and-son relationship in their commentaries of 1 Tim. 5:1-2. Their only comment on the word *πρεσβυτέρως* is that this word does not mean “women elders,” but rather, “older women.” See William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 269-70; George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 214.

Drawing from 1 Timothy 5:2a, in this paper, I will argue that an elder-member relationship is *not* the only type of relationship that a male elder has with the female members of the church. When a man is ordained as an elder, his new status as a church leader does not nullify his status as a spiritual son of the older women in the church. Thus, a male elder who is in a position of spiritual authority over the female members of the church is at the same time a spiritual son who should learn from the wisdom of his spiritual mothers in the church. More specifically, I will argue that although the church should not ordain women to the *office* of elders, the church should let her older female members be spiritual mothers to both her spiritual sons and daughters in the church.

In what follows, I will develop my argument in five stages. First, I will point out that the charge to honor older women is given in the context of the broader use of the term “elder” (ἡλικίαν /πρεσβύτερος) to refer to a *class* of people, not the more specific use of the term to refer to the *office* of elder. Second, I will exegete 1 Timothy 5:1-2 in context, highlighting how these two verses are part of the overarching theme of God’s household in 1 Timothy. Third, I will survey the theme of honoring mothers in the Pastoral Epistles and the rest of Scripture. Fourth, I will give some specific examples of mother-and-son relationships in our contemporary churches. Lastly, I will zoom out and reflect on how we can apply what we have learned about mother-and-son relationship to other relationships mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:1-2.

### **Elder as a *Class* of People and Elder as an *Office***

In our day and age, we are more familiar with the word “elder” as a technical term, that is, someone who is officially appointed as a *leader* in a local church (Acts 14:23; 15:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:5; cf. Exod. 18:13-27; 24:1; Num 11:16-25; Deut.1:9-18; Matt. 15:2; 21:23). However, when we look at both the Old and New Testaments, we see that the word “elder” (ἡλικίαν /πρεσβύτερος) is also used in a broader sense. Besides the more technical use to refer to an appointed leader in a community, more generally, an elder refers to an *aged/bearded person*, whose age/beard represents his maturity, accumulated wisdom, and experience (Gen. 18:11; 25:8; 35:29; 44:20; Exod. 10:9; Lev. 19:32; 1 Kgs. 12:6-15; Job 32:4; Prov. 20:29; Joel 2:28; Zech. 8:4; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Titus 2:2-3).<sup>3</sup>

It is worth noting that there is an organic relationship between “elder” as a class of people and “elder” as an office. The men who are appointed to the office of elders are taken from the class of elders. We see this principle mentioned explicitly in Numbers 11:16. The LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men from the elders of Israel (לְשִׁבְעִים זְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – MT, ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων Ἰσραὴλ – LXX), whom you know that they are elders of the people (ἐγγὺν ἡλικίαν – MT, πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ

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<sup>3</sup> In Titus 2:2-3, the words used are πρεσβύτερος (masculine) and πρεσβυτις (feminine), cognates of πρεσβύτερος. Although these two words are used less frequently in the NT, in the LXX, πρεσβύτερος is used interchangeably with πρεσβυτις to translate ἡλικίαν. To read more on ἡλικίαν and its use in the OT and ANE world, see Paul D. Wegner, “זקן (2416),” Kenneth T. Aitken, “זקן (2418),” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol.1, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1134-39. To read more on various uses of πρεσβύτερος in the NT, see BDAG 862; TDNT 931-933.

– LXX) and officers over them...” (my translation).<sup>4</sup> In this verse, the first “elders” refers to the class of elders, that is, older people in Israel. The LORD told Moses to gather seventy men from these older people and then clarified further that these seventy men are those who are known to Moses as elders and officers over Israel. Here, the word elders refers to those exercising leadership over the Israelites.<sup>5</sup>

Other Scripture texts give specific descriptions of the qualifications for the office of elders. In Deuteronomy 1:13, Moses recounted how the LORD had commanded him to choose wise, understanding, and experienced men and appoint them as elders. Likewise, in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, we read that an elder or overseer must be above reproach, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, upright, holy, and disciplined. While these two New Testament texts limit the office of elders to godly *men* only, the broader class of elders (i.e., older people) includes both *men* and *women* (Gen. 18:11; Exod. 10:9; Zech. 8:4; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Titus 2:2-4). Respected older men and women mentioned in the biblical literature include Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:11), Isaac (Gen. 35:29), Jacob (Gen. 43:27), Naomi (Ruth 4:15), Job (Job 42:17), Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-7), Simeon (Luke 2:25-26), and Anna (Luke 2:36-37).

In the Pastoral Epistles, there are two texts (1 Tim. 5:1-2; Titus 2:2-3) that mention both old men and old women, and thus, are pertinent to the discussion on elders as a class of people. In this paper, I choose to focus on 1 Timothy 5:1-2 for two main reasons. First, Titus 2:2-3 focuses more on the characteristics that each group of people (old men, old women, young women, young men) must possess, while 1 Timothy 5:1-2 focuses more on how Timothy should relate to each group of people (encouraging older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters). Since the topic that I want to explore is the relationships between adult men and older women in the church, 1 Timothy 5:1-2 is a more relevant text that speaks specifically on this issue. Second, the theme of the church as God’s household is prominent in Paul’s first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:15). Understanding the church’s nature as God’s family is crucial to understanding God’s command to honor, encourage, and care for older women as mothers. In the next section, we shall turn to this overarching theme in 1 Timothy.

### God’s Household in 1 Timothy

In his article, “The Church as Family,” Vern Poythress surveys how the theme of family relationships is prominent in 1 Timothy.<sup>6</sup> Paul calls Timothy his child (1:2,

<sup>4</sup> A similar language is also found in Exod. 18:21: “look for able men **from** all the people...” (מִכָּל־הָעָם - MT; ἅπὸ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ - LXX). See also Exod. 18: 25; Num. 11:24; Jer. 19:1.

<sup>5</sup> NIV translators seem to agree with my interpretation of the passage. They translate the verse as such: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders [זְקֵנִי] who are known to you as leaders [זָרִי] and officials among the people.” They translate the first זָרִי as elders (i.e., older people), but translate the second זָרִי as leaders, emphasizing that the second זָרִי refers to the *office* of elders.

<sup>6</sup> Vern S. Poythress, “The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 235-36.

18). His love for Timothy and the discipling relationship between them are evident throughout the letter (3:14-15; 4:6-16; 6:20). In 5:1-2, Paul commands Timothy to treat different people in the church in a manner that respects their genders and ages: as fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters. In 5:3, 9-10, 16, Paul exhorts the larger Christian family to care for those who are truly widows. In talking about the qualifications for elders, Paul specifies that an elder must manage his own household well, for the same wisdom and skills necessary for good family management will also apply to the management of God's family (3:4-5). Finally, in 3:14-15, Paul says that he is writing these things (i.e., the letter) so that Timothy may know how to conduct himself in the household of God (οἶκος θεοῦ),<sup>7</sup> which is the church of the living God (ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος). Here, Paul is explicitly describing the church as God's family. Why does he do so? Is it merely a metaphor, or is there something more intrinsic to the idea of the church as a family?

Poythress points out that the idea of the church as God's family is based on our relationship with Christ. Those who are in Christ are God's children and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17). Because of Christ's atoning work on the cross, we are reconciled to God (Rom. 5:6-11), adopted as his children, and enabled to call him Father (Rom. 8:15; cf. Matt. 6:9).<sup>8</sup> We must treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters "because [we] are part of the very same spiritual household."<sup>9</sup> As Poythress profoundly says, "Each person in God's household is not an abstract, faceless mask to be treated according to an invariant recipe, but a *full person who is to be recognized as such—as a man or a woman, an older person or younger, an adult or child*" (emphasis mine).<sup>10</sup> Paul exhorts Timothy not "to treat each person in a manner mechanically identical with every other person,"<sup>11</sup> but rather, "in a manner that respects differences of age, sex, and personality."<sup>12</sup>

In the rest of the article, Poythress expounds on two specific things. First, he argues that just as *husbands* and *fathers* ought to exercise godly leadership in their families (Eph. 5:22-6:4; Col. 3:18-21), so wise and mature *men*—not women—ought to exercise godly leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).<sup>13</sup> Second, he argues that a church's management should reflect the characteristics of a household's management. A wise husband and father will encourage his wife and children to use

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<sup>7</sup> Οἶκος θεοῦ can either mean "the *house/temple* of God" (BDAG 698.1) or "the *household* of God" (BDAG 699.2). Since the idea of household order and arrangement is the most prominent in 1 Timothy, οἶκος in 3:15 most likely refers to God's household/family.

<sup>8</sup> Poythress, "The Church as Family," 233-34.

<sup>9</sup> Poythress, "The Church as Family," 236.

<sup>10</sup> Poythress, "The Church as Family," 238-39.

<sup>11</sup> Poythress, "The Church as Family," 238.

<sup>12</sup> Poythress, "The Church as Family," 241.

<sup>13</sup> Poythress, "The Church as Family," 237-39.

their varied skills, abilities, and gifts. His leadership is not threatened, but rather, enhanced by the full flourishing of the family as a whole.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, although there are divisions of labor and management within a family, there are also some clear boundary lines. Children must submit to their parents, and parents are responsible to manage their children. Wives must submit to their husbands, and husbands are responsible to manage their wives and the entire household. Thus, he argues that the role of men and women—both in the family and in the church—is “irreversible, not interchangeable.”<sup>15</sup>

While I agree with Poythress’ two points, I also need to point out that we cannot compare the relationship dynamic in the family and the relationship dynamic in the church *in a strictly one-to-one manner*. Why not? Let me spell it out. In a human family, a man cannot be a father and a son to the same woman. Of course, a man can be a father and a son at the same time, but he will have those two different roles in relation to two different people. He is a father to his daughter and a son to his mother. A godly Christian man should love both his daughter and his mother, but the way he shows his love to each of them will be different. As a father, he shows his love by protecting his daughter and bringing her up in the instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). As a son, he shows his love by obeying and honoring his mother (Eph. 6:1-2; Exod. 20:12).

In contrast, when we talk about relationship dynamics in the church, an adult male can have two different roles in relation to the same woman. Why so? Because in the church, we have *both* the concepts of “elder” as a *class* of people and “elder” as an *office*. The former is the one that resembles a human family in terms of age differences. For an adult male like Timothy, an older man at the church would be his spiritual father and an older woman would be his spiritual mother. But when we talk about “elder” as a church office, then a younger man like Timothy can hold a position of authority over people who are older than he is, both men and women (1 Tim. 4:11-13). A thirty-five-year-old ruling elder is in a position of authority over a seventy-year-old lady who is a member of the church. But at the same time, this older lady is also his spiritual mother. She is both one of his flock whom he should shepherd faithfully and his spiritual mother to whom he should listen attentively. He is both her elder to whom she should submit reverently and her spiritual son whom she should nurture lovingly.

In summary, because the church is God’s family, godly older women in the church should have a space to mentor and care for their spiritual sons just as they mentor and care for their spiritual daughters. Now, the way spiritual mothers do this will be different from the way spiritual fathers—including, but not limited to those holding the office of elders—do it. Later in this paper, I will give some specific examples of how this might look in our contemporary churches. But before we go there, let us first dive deeper into the idea of honoring mothers in the Pastoral Epistles and the rest of Scripture.

<sup>14</sup> Poythress, “The Church as Family,” 243.

<sup>15</sup> Poythress, “The Church as Family,” 244.

## Honoring Mothers in the Pastoral Epistles and the Rest of Scripture

In the previous section, we have seen how the theme of family relationships is prominent in 1 Timothy. Now let us look more specifically at *mother-and-son* relationships in 1-2 Timothy. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he charged him to continue in what he had learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom (τῶν, plural) he had learned it (2 Tim. 3:14). The use of the plural pronoun τῶν indicates that Paul was reminding Timothy of the various teachers and mentors who had taught him, including Lois and Eunice, Timothy's own grandmother and mother. These two ladies had been faithfully training Timothy in the sacred writings since his childhood (2 Tim. 3:15) and passed on their faith to him (2 Tim. 1:5). Lois and Eunice's faiths were well known to Paul, and Paul reminded Timothy to be thankful for these motherly figures in his life and honor them (cf. Exod. 20:12).

Now, let us go back to 1 Timothy 5:1-2. Since Paul commands Timothy to encourage and treat older women in the church as mothers, then the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother also applies to Timothy's relationship with his spiritual mothers in the church. Although the fifth commandment is often wrongly restricted to apply *only* to children (i.e., those who are young and still in their parents' household), Patrick Miller rightly points out that the commandment was originally "directed toward *mature adults*, especially the *male members* of the community" (emphasis mine), which is evident by the use of the masculine singular verb כָּבֵד ("honor").<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the elaboration of the fifth commandment in the rest of Scripture further clarifies that this commandment applies to everyone in the community, including male and female adults, who are commanded to honor, listen to, obey, and care for their elderly parents.<sup>17</sup> Joseph provided for his brothers and elderly father when they were hit by a famine (Gen. 47:12). Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law Naomi and cared for her, giving her a son in her old age (Ruth 1:14, 16-17; 4:14-17). Jesus condemned the Pharisees for not caring for their father and mother for the sake of their tradition, making it clear that the commandment to honor one's father and mother applies to the adult members of the society (Matt. 15:3-6; Mark 7:9-13). Proverbs 23:22 tells us that we should listen to our father and not despise our mother when she is old.

While the Scripture texts that I cited above refer more specifically to biological parents, it is worth noting that in 1 Timothy, the command to care for those who are truly widows (1 Tim. 5:3, 9-10, 16) comes right after the command to encourage older women in the church as mothers (1 Tim. 5:2a). While it is true that God commands us to care for widows because he himself cares for widows and the vulnerable (1 Kgs. 17:8-24; 2 Kgs. 4:1-7; Pss. 68:5; 94:6; 146:9; Zech. 7:10; Luke 7:11-17; Acts 6:1-6; Jas. 1:27), the placement of the instructions for caring for widows in 1 Timothy underscores the principle that the church is called to care for those who are truly widows *because they are our spiritual mothers*.<sup>18</sup> The instructions to honor (τίμω) those

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<sup>16</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 174.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *The Ten Commandments*, 181-98.

who are truly widows (1 Tim. 5:3) echoes the fifth commandment to honor (τίμα) our father and mother (Exod. 20:12 LXX). The fact that τίμα is a *present-active-imperative* verb implies that Timothy—and by extension, the church (1 Tim. 5:16)—is called to *continually* honor and care for those who are truly widows.<sup>19</sup>

Having looked at the theme of honoring mothers and spiritual mothers in 1-2 Timothy, let us now look even more broadly at the witnesses of the whole New Testament. Anna, the prophetess, is a clear example of a widow who has set her hope in God and continues in supplications night and day (Luke 2:36-38; 1 Tim. 5:5). In the Synoptic Gospels, we read that Jesus identifies those who do the will of his Father in heaven as *his brothers and sisters and mothers*, showing that those whom he identifies as his family is much broader than merely his biological mother and brothers (Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21). When Jesus was about to die on the cross, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son," and to the disciple whom he loved (i.e., the apostle John), "Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27). Jesus charged John—his disciple and a member of God's household—to care for Mary as his own mother. In Romans 16:13, Paul sends his greetings to Rufus and his mother, whom he describes as someone "who has been a mother to me as well" (ESV; lit. "his mother and mine", τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐμοῦ). This shows that Paul honors Rufus' mother as his own mother.

In summary, the whole New Testament testifies to how adult members of the church should honor and care for their biological mothers and spiritual mothers. As the Westminster Larger Catechism states in its exposition of the fifth commandment, "The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections..." (WLC 127).<sup>20</sup> What they describe here also applies to the mother-and-son relationship in the church. Adult males in the congregation should revere their spiritual mothers, pray for them, imitate their virtues, listen to their counsel, and submit to their corrections. But what does this look like in our contemporary evangelical churches? Let us turn to this in the next section.

### **Mother-and-Son Relationships in Contemporary Evangelical Churches**

Before giving specific examples of what mother-and-son relationships could look like in contemporary churches, I first want to highlight that the same principle can be applied in different churches in various ways. I believe that the command to honor and care for older women in our church as spiritual mothers is *normative*, that is, it applies to God's people in every place at all times. That is why I spent the bulk of my paper fleshing out this principle. But what will follow below, namely, how it

<sup>18</sup> Towner articulates a similar observation in his commentary on 1 Tim 5:1-2. See Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 330.

<sup>19</sup> For more elaborate discussions on this, see Bruce W. Winter, "Providentia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988): 92, 94, 98; Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 215-16; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 278-79.

<sup>20</sup> See also WLC 124, 125, 129.

applies in our contemporary churches, will be *descriptive*. How this looks like in a church in the United States in 2022 might be different from how it looked like in a church in Germany in 1990 or how it will look like in a church in China in 2030. I do not mean for any of what will follow to be prescriptive, but rather, to be examples that will hopefully encourage other members of God's household in different times and places to apply the same principle in ways that fit their local contexts.

So, what are some examples of mother-and-son relationships in a local church? How does it look like for an older woman in the church to nurture and mentor her spiritual sons? What kind of situations will be fitting for an adult man to listen to the counsel of older women and to submit to their corrections? Here are some practical examples from my own experience and from others who have kindly shared their thoughts and experiences with me.

First, although in my denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the office of elders is limited to godly men only (1 Tim. 2:8-3:7; Titus 1:5-9), this does not mean that the elders should not seek advice from older and spiritually mature women. On the contrary, I believe that the elders should include the spiritual mothers in the church in some of their pastoral conversations and listen to their perspectives. It might be wise to invite older and spiritually mature women to attend the church's session meetings from time to time, especially when the session is discussing a specific issue where a woman's perspective is needed. For example, imagine that a female member of a local church is a victim of sexual assault. When the elders are giving pastoral care to this woman, it might be wise to have a couple of older and spiritually mature women of the church to be present. First of all, this will make the woman who was sexually assaulted feel safer. But more than that, the presence and perspectives of these spiritual mothers will also help the elders to better understand the position of the assaulted woman, and thus, to pastorally care for her in more fitting ways.

Second, a pastor's wife who has been serving alongside her husband for decades should have a space to share her experience with both younger men and women of the church. As a woman, I have been in various meetings where older pastors' wives shared their experiences with younger Christian women. Coming out of these meetings, one thing that always came to my mind was, "I wish my brothers in Christ were there too. They would have learned so much from what this lady just shared." Younger pastors, elders, and Christian men who listen attentively to older Christian women will also be better listeners to their wives, daughters, sisters, and sisters in Christ. Learning from their spiritual mothers in the church is invaluable for the spiritual growth of pastors, elders, and other adult male church members.

Along the same line, older women who have served as missionaries or Bible translators and have come back to the United States should be given a space to share their experiences and expertise with their spiritual sons and daughters in the church. Some of these older female missionaries served as single women or widows, so their perspective and mentorship will be invaluable for younger men and women who are preparing themselves to be missionaries. A former female Bible translator who has translated the Bible into another language for decades will have insights in biblical exegesis that will benefit the pastors, the elders, and the whole church. What would be

an appropriate time and space for this older lady to share her knowledge and expertise in the Bible with her spiritual sons and daughters in the local church?

Some of us might ask, aren't we prone to violating God's command in 1 Timothy 2:12 if we are looking for ways for these older women to share their knowledge and expertise, and therefore, to *teach* adult men? I don't believe so. Why not? I believe that *sharing one's expertise through teaching and mentoring* is not the same as *teaching in the context of exercising spiritual authority*. The latter is what pastors do in preaching in Sunday worship. They are proclaiming God's Word to God's people with authority (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2). The former, by contrast, can be done in various ways, such as Sunday School classes, Bible studies, community groups, one-on-one mentoring, etc. I believe that there are ways for older and spiritually mature women to teach, mentor, and share their expertise that are not violating male leadership and spiritual authority in a local church. Spiritual mothers in the church should have a place to mentor and nurture their spiritual sons and daughters without violating the spiritual fathers' headship. Just as a wise husband and father will encourage his family members to use their varied skills, abilities, and gifts, the elders of a local church should also encourage their spiritual mothers to exercise their gifts for the benefit of the local church. Their leadership is not threatened, but rather, enhanced by the full flourishing of God's family as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

Others of us might ask different kinds of questions. How about those older Christian women who are less mature? Or those older ladies whose theology is a bit shaky and whose Bible knowledge is pretty poor? Aren't the pastors and elders—despite their young age—responsible for teaching them sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 4:2-5)? Yes, they are. But they need to do that with honor and respect, as a son relates to his mother (1 Tim. 5:2a). An older Christian lady once gave wise advice to me and other young female seminarians on how to relate to older ladies in our local churches. I believe that her advice applies to mother-and-son relationships too. In my paraphrase, this lady said, “You might be theologically more equipped than these older ladies at your church. But these ladies probably have read the Bible many more times than you do, have wrestled with it more than you do, have prayed to God more than you do, have been in sufferings and trials more than you do, and have walked with God longer than you do. So, honor these ladies as your spiritual mothers. Listen to their counsels, submit to their corrections, and ask them to pray for you. You'll be surprised to see how much you'll learn from them.”

### **Concluding Thoughts – How About the Other Relationships in God's Family?**

Throughout this paper, I have expounded on the relationships between *adult men* and *older women* at the church, looking specifically at 1 Timothy 5:2a and more generally at the concepts of elders as a class of people and elders as an office, the overarching theme of God's household in 1 Timothy, and the idea of honoring

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<sup>21</sup> See Poythress, “The Church as Family,” 243-45. Schreiner also articulates a similar argument: “[t]here are...some ways in which women can instruct both men and women...if the function of authoritative teaching to men is not involved.” See Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 223.

mothers in the whole Scripture. My choice to focus on the relationship between spiritual sons and their spiritual mothers is by no means an attempt to be reductionistic. Instead, I hope that after seeing how the Scripture talks about mother-and-son relationships in the church, the readers will be encouraged to think in a similar fashion about the other relationships in God's family, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:1-2.

A key principle that I want the readers to take home is this: As we, as adult Christians, relate to other adult Christians in our local church—whether they are of the same gender or the opposite gender, older or younger—we need to remember that our relationships with them might be more multifaceted than what we usually think. As a young woman at the church, I relate to different male church members differently. Some of them are my elders who have spiritual authority over me. Some of them do not hold the office of elders, but they are still significantly older than I am, and therefore, I need to treat them with respect like I honor my own father.<sup>22</sup> Some of them are my spiritual older brothers, who mentor and care for me as they care for their younger sisters. And some of them are my spiritual younger brothers, who look up to me as a big sister, ask me questions about the Bible, and are eager to hear my advice on spiritual matters.

Moreover, as I have laid out earlier in this paper, a person can have *multiple roles* in relation to another person. An older woman should submit reverently to the spiritual authority of a younger pastor, but at the same time, this pastor is also her spiritual son whom she should nurture lovingly (1 Tim. 5:2a). A younger woman might be a supervisor of an older man at a workplace, but at the church, she should respect this man as she respects her own father (1 Tim. 5:1a). Two men who are the same age might be a professor and a student at a university, but as Christians, they are brothers who are commanded to teach and admonish one another lovingly (Col. 3:16). A middle-aged woman should submit to the spiritual authority of a middle-aged pastor, but at the same time, they are also brother and sister who should encourage each other and be patient with one another (1 Thess. 5:14).<sup>23</sup>

Above all, we must remember that whether we are young or old, as Christians, we all are brothers and sisters in Christ with Jesus Christ as our oldest brother (Rom. 8:15-17, 29; Eph. 1:5; Gal. 3:28-29). As Scott Swain profoundly highlights in the conclusion of his blog post on theological anthropology, *our sex identity is teleological*. Although our gender roles here on earth include husband/wife, father/mother, son/daughter, and brother/sister, in the resurrection, we will no longer marry or be given in marriage (Matt. 22:30). "In that day, there will be *no more husbands and wives* and therefore there will be *no more fathering and no more mothering*. In that day, all will be sons of God (Rev. 21:7) and *all will be brothers and sisters* to the one appointed to be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29)" (emphasis mine).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Köstenberger articulates a similar idea in his commentary on 1 Timothy 5:1-2: "Humility demands that older men in the church, even if not in leadership positions, be treated with respect in keeping with their age." See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy & Titus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2017), 158.

<sup>23</sup> See also 1 Tim. 6:2 (ESV): "Those who have believing *masters must not be disrespectful* on the ground that they are *brothers*; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved."

Therefore, as we relate to other Christians in our lives, and especially, in our local churches, we need to remember what God has redeemed us to be: *the sons and daughters of the living God* and *brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ*. An older man whom you respect as a spiritual father is also your brother in Christ who needs your encouragement. An older woman to whom you listen attentively is also your sister in Christ who needs you to care for her. A younger man whom you mentor as a spiritual son is also your brother in Christ who might need to rebuke you when you do something wrong. A younger woman whom you nurture as a spiritual daughter might need to teach and admonish you in some areas of your life. The more we are aware of these multifaceted roles that exist in God's family, the better we will be equipped to reflect on this principle as we are relating to other Christians in manners that best fit the context and are pleasing to God.

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<sup>24</sup> Swain, "More Thoughts on Theological Anthropology."

## The Old School Sage: Charles Hodge on Confessional Subscription

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One of the perennial issues that troubles conservative Presbyterians is tension over what it means to subscribe to the Westminster Standards. The practice of confessional subscription to the confession and catechisms falls under the authority of presbyteries, but given the connectionalism of Presbyterianism in Synods/General Assemblies, the responsibility of examining candidates and disciplining errant ministers is also a concern for the larger church. And, as a matter of fact, no two presbyteries (even within the same denomination) are going to practice confessional subscription in precisely the same manner. This potentially produces suspicion among brethren if the perception exists that a given presbytery is not being as faithful as other presbyteries in this sacred duty. Thus, the question again emerges: What does it mean to subscribe to the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms? This question is as old as the colonial period, and there is great wisdom to be found in remembering how American Presbyterians historically answered this question.

The period in our Presbyterian past where this question reached a crisis point stretching over a number of decades was the Old School / New School period of the nineteenth century. The prolific spokesmen on this question for the Old School was Professor Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary. His years at Princeton (1820-1878) spanned the entire era of Old School / New School debates, schisms and reunions. Hodge was a very vocal participant in all the ecclesiastical matters of this period and wrote extensively on the topic of confessional subscription. For Hodge, the debates between the two major parties of the Presbyterian family always came back to the question concerning the extent to which ministers should be expected to hold the doctrines of the Westminster Standards. In the midst of this on-going struggle among Presbyterians, Charles Hodge consistently articulated the “old moderate plan”<sup>1</sup> of the Princeton men.

Hodge and his Princeton colleagues, the “peace men,” were generous towards the New School party and resisted the division of the Old School and New School Presbyterian into separate ecclesiastical bodies right up until the schism in 1837. However, when reunion discussions surfaced in the 1860’s, one banner of northern Old School resistance to reunite with the northern New School church was the voice of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* of which Hodge was an editor.<sup>2</sup> His objections to reunion would always return ultimately to his doubts about New School resolve to exercise discipline.

Even though Hodge resisted reunion with the New School in the 1860s, his consistent elucidation of the historic American Presbyterian practice of confessional subscription met the approbation of both the Old School and New School during the

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Alexander, *Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1854), 474.

<sup>2</sup> This was the perspective of the New School men. See J. F. Stearns, “Historical Sketch of Reunion,” *American Presbyterian Review* New Series, I (July 1869): 583.

reunion discussions. There was an increasing realization of more common commitment to the Confession in the two branches than previous perceptions had indicated. It was Hodge's explanation of what it means to subscribe to the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms that stood the test of time. It appears to this author, that some contemporary discussions around confessional subscription would do well to recall the keen insights of the Old School sage.

### Reply to Dr. Cox

Hodge's earliest essay on subscription came in connection with an 1831 article he had written in response to a published sermon by Dr. Samuel Cox.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Samuel Cox had responded to Hodge's essay and Hodge printed this communication from Cox in the *Review*. In his reply to Dr. Cox's letter, Hodge expressed his views on the meaning of the subscription formula. The question was, ". . . with what degree of strictness is the phrase 'system of doctrine' as it occurs in the ordination service, to be explained?" Hodge said two extreme answers "equally to be lamented" argued for either a too loose or too strict of an interpretation of the phrase. After explaining how the two extremes fall short, he offered what he considered the historic view of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>4</sup>

He first reproached the overly strict stance which made the ordination vow, ". . . not only involve the adoption of all the doctrines contained in the Confession, but to preclude all diversity in the manner of conceiving and explaining them." Several factors demonstrated the danger of this extreme. First, this position "is making the terms of subscription imply more than they literally import." There are different modes of understanding or explaining a doctrine.

Secondly, a strict viewpoint implied a "degree of uniformity" that never has existed in the church. The Westminster Divines produced a Confession that was a compromise. "When adopted by the Presbyterian Church in this country, it was with the distinct understanding that the mode of subscription did not imply strict

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, "Review of 'Regeneration'" *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* II (April 1830). Cox had preached the sermon "Regeneration" at the 1829 opening session of the Synod on New York. The sermon had emphasized the role of man in regeneration and attacked the idea of human inability.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, "Remarks on Dr. Cox's Communication" in *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* III (1831): 520.

uniformity of views. And from that time to this, there has been an open and avowed diversity of opinion on many points. . .”<sup>5</sup>

The third problem with strict subscription was the practical difficulty of such a tenet. This “unauthorized strictness would ruin any church on earth” and be impossible to enforce “in the present state of human nature.”<sup>6</sup> Hodge said, “It is clearly impossible, that any considerable number of men can be brought to conform so exactly in their views, as to be able to adopt such an extended formula of doctrine precisely in the same sense.”<sup>7</sup>

Latitudinarian views will likewise produce “disastrous results” according to Hodge. The words “system of doctrine” clearly mean the Calvinistic system and any other construction of these words was dishonest. Those who would interpret “system of doctrine” to mean “the great fundamental doctrines of the gospel” distort the meaning of the words. It would be better to modify the church’s creed and remain honorable men than to endorse lax subscription that violates integrity. “There seems to be no more obvious principle, than that while a body professes to hold certain doctrines, it should really hold them.” Hodge believed the lax view, “opens the door to all manner of heresies, and takes from the Church the power of discipline for matters of opinion.”<sup>8</sup>

Hodge was dismayed by the abuse countenanced in both extremist camps. “While some may be disposed to resort to the discipline of the Church to correct mere diversity of explanation; others seem disposed to wink at the rejection of acknowledged constituent doctrines of the Calvinistic system.”<sup>9</sup> Hodge was

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<sup>5</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 520, 521. This comment appears to contradict what he will say in the *Constitutional History* which is written 7 years later. This interpretation of 1729 is consistent, however, with what Hodge would write in the 1850’s and 1860’s. In the later years, when Hodge is attacked by his conservative Old School colleagues for his lax views on subscription, he pointed out that he had said the same things 30 years previously. The polemic atmosphere surrounding the *Constitutional History*, written immediately after the schism, may account for Hodge’s stress on eighteenth-century uniformity in his *Constitutional History*. It should be noted, however, that even in the *Constitutional History*, Hodge acknowledged that the actual practice of church discipline had been based upon the broader “Calvinistic system” interpretation. Hodge admitted: “And by system of doctrine, according to the lowest standard of interpretation, has been understood the Calvinistic system as distinguished from all others. There are indeed many, whose views of subscription are such, that they could not adopt the Confession of Faith, unless they were able to receive every distinct proposition which it contains. This may be right; but it is believed that no attempt has ever been made to enforce the discipline of the church against any individual who was not believed to reject some of the distinctive features of the Calvinistic system as contained in our Confession.” *Constitutional History*, 11,12. See the discussion of *The Constitutional History* in the following pages of this essay.

<sup>6</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 523.

<sup>7</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 521. The large number of Presbyterian ministers by 1831 could not be expected to have unanimity of views as was the case one hundred years before; Hodge was making a very practical observation as he now argued Blair’s position as the answer to the subscription dilemma of his own day.

<sup>8</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 523, 524.

<sup>9</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 525.

convinced that the majority of nineteenth-century Presbyterians held neither position, rather they were disposed to understanding the ordination vow as a commitment to the Calvinist system of the Confession, albeit, allowing for diversity in the expression of the Reformed system of the Standards.

Ninety percent of Presbyterian clergy would acknowledge that diversity is permissible, yet, the difficulty remains as to where the line should be drawn. This is a “delicate and difficult question.” The phrase, “system of doctrine” entails a definite idea of “a regular series of connected opinions, having a mutual relation and constituting one whole.” Adopting the system of the Confession involves belief in the series of doctrines that make up that system. And it is that system in opposition to other systems of belief. Hodge offered several illustrations of diversity in explaining certain doctrines in the system. For instance, he points to the various explanations given to the “vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ.” Hodge observed that, “. . . some may adopt the strict *quid pro quo* system; others the infinite value theory; others that of its universal applicability; and yet all hold the doctrine itself.”<sup>10</sup>

Given the appropriate diversity in expression, the central question remained as to the extent of that latitude. Hodge answered that the “essentials” of a doctrine must remain intact. How then can it be determined whether or not one’s explanation exceeded the allowable boundary? This must be determined by both the individual in his conscience before God and the Presbytery that must judge these matters. This was the purpose of Presbytery examinations. “It is their business to decide this very point, whether the candidate believes or not the doctrines of our standards, and they are under the solemn engagements to God and their brethren, to do this honestly.” Hodge added, “And, here the matter must be left.” As long as Presbyteries are conscientious about “admitting no one who rejects or explains away any of the doctrines constituting the system contained in the Confession” there should be no serious problem.<sup>11</sup>

## The Constitutional History

About a decade later Hodge’s addressed the subscription issue in his *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* written between 1838-1840. The catalyst for the *Constitutional History* was the recent Presbyterian schism (1837-38) and the questions it raised about the origin and constitution of the Presbyterian Church. Which branch followed in the train of their Presbyterian forefathers? What is the historic understanding among Presbyterians of the terms of ministerial communion? Was the traditional condition of ministerial communion “assent to the essential doctrines of the Gospel” as some in the New School had suggested? The *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church* was written

<sup>10</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 522.

<sup>11</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 523.

in part to demonstrate that the historical evidence disavowed this assertion. The core of the matter was interpreting the true intent of the original Adopting Act of 1729.<sup>12</sup>

The *Constitutional History* was an attempt to establish by documentary evidence that the first generations of American Presbyterians practiced full subscription to the Confession of Faith. Repeatedly Hodge highlighted this issue. His contention was that the original Adopting Act affirmed a strict subscriptionist stance and subsequent Synodical statements in 1730 and 1736 unequivocally strengthen this position.<sup>13</sup>

No man who was not a Calvinist should be admitted to the ministry according to the intent of the original 1729 Synod. The Adopting Act was introduced out of concern to protect the Presbyterians from Arminianism and Socinianism. Since this was its design, it should be clear that the ideal was to affirm not only the “essentials” of Christianity but the Reformed expression of Christianity in particular. Therefore, it was self-evident that the allowance for scruples with “articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government” referred to “any essential feature of Presbyterianism.”<sup>14</sup>

Hodge admitted that there are several possible motives behind the Adopting Act. Some argued that the wording of the 1729 Act was a compromise, each giving a little, in order to avoid schism. Others suggested that the working outcome was language that each one could fully support as his own position. Hodge favored the latter perspective, yet, he indicated that whatever may have been the case, it was never the purpose of the framers to make ministerial communion solely rely on the “necessary doctrines of Christianity.” The historical record of the acts of the 1729 Synod indicate that after working through their scruples together, the Synod unanimously agreed to adopt the whole Confession with the allowed exceptions in chapters twenty and twenty three. “Such was the latitudinarianism of those days,” concluded Hodge.<sup>15</sup>

In his overview of the period up until the first General Assembly, Hodge dealt with the issues related to the separation and reunion of the Synods of New York and Philadelphia (1741-1758). Article one of the 1758 Plan of Union reiterated the American Presbyterian commitment to the Westminster Standards with these words:

Both Synods having always approved and received the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as an orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine, founded on the word of God, we do still receive the same as the confession of our faith and also adhere to the plan of worship,

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851), Part I, 10. Hodge’s dominant objective in the *Constitutional History* was to demonstrate that confessional subscription had never meant assent to the “essential doctrines of the gospel” only. He reiterated this point repeatedly throughout his *History* and appeared to believe this was the common view of the New School. In the Introduction, Hodge cited several examples from New School authors which he believed indicated this position.

<sup>13</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 142.

<sup>14</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 150, 151.

<sup>15</sup> Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” 154.

government and discipline, contained in the Westminster Directory, strictly enjoining it on all our members and probationers for the ministry, that they preach and teach according to the form of sound words in said Confession and Catechism, and avoid and oppose all errors contrary thereto.<sup>16</sup>

Hodge argued that this was nothing less than the wholesale adoption of the Standards. And subscription was certainly understood in the Calvinistic sense. He explained:

Both bodies declare that they always have received, and do still receive the Westminster Confession as the confession of their faith . . . Every minister and probationer is strictly enjoined to avoid all errors contrary to the standards thus assumed. There must be an end of all confidence among men if such language can be used by those who make assent to the essential and necessary doctrines of the gospel, the term of ministerial communion; if an Arminian, Pelagian, Roman Catholic, or Quaker, can say that he receives a strictly Calvinistic creed as the confession of his faith!<sup>17</sup>

An enlightening incident that bears on the subscription question, according to Hodge, was the case of Samuel Harker, a member of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. Harker was eventually suspended for Arminian opinions by the Synod in 1763. Rev. Harker complained that the action of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia against him violated his rights to private judgment and scruples over articles non-essential. Harker appealed to the Adopting Act of 1729 as proof of his stance. In 1764 John Blair offered a written rebuttal on behalf of the Synod. Blair attempted to clarify the meaning of "essential and necessary" as understood by the Synod. Blair replied to Harker: "But the Synod say essential in doctrine, worship, or government, *i.e.* essential to the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, considered as a system . . . That, therefore, is an essential error in the Synod's sense, which is of such malignity as to subvert or greatly injure the system of doctrine . . ."<sup>18</sup>

Several things are worthy of note here. First, Blair appeared to be offering a different understanding of subscription with his emphasis on the phrase "system of doctrine." The implication was that "system of doctrine" may not necessarily be inclusive of every article (with the exceptions of chapters 20 and 23, of course). This suggested a broader interpretation of the Adopting Act than was implied in the declarations of 1730 and 1736. Secondly, Hodge's commentary on Blair's statement was noteworthy for its admission that Blair's perspective was a legitimate position on adherence to the standards. Hodge observed: "This interpretation of the act is of

<sup>16</sup> *Digest of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1850), 184. (Old School).

<sup>17</sup> Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part I, 178.

<sup>18</sup> *The Synod of New York and Philadelphia Vindicated*, 10,11; quoted in Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part I, 170; Part II, 274.

course not official, and is below that given by the Synod itself in 1730, which allowed of no dissent except from the clauses so often referred to. Mr. Blair's interpretation is the most liberal for which there is any sanction in the declarations or practice of the church."<sup>19</sup>

Blair's interpretation is supported by the Synod's basis for excluding Harker: "The Synod judged that these principles are of a hurtful dangerous tendency, giving a false view of the covenant of grace, perverting it into a new-modeled covenant of works, and misrepresenting the doctrine of the divine decrees as held by the best reformed churches; and, in fine, contrary to the word of God, and our approved standards of doctrine."<sup>20</sup> Harker's teaching, in the Synod's judgment, subverted the Reformed system of the Confession. The highlighted doctrines contested by the Synod (covenant of grace, divine decrees) were deemed to be "essentials" of that system.

Hodge claimed that the Harker affair was the only case of discipline for doctrinal error on the minutes of the reunited Synod up until the first General Assembly in 1789. In fact, the unanimity of the church at this time was quite amazing considering the fact that there were 177 American Presbyterian clergy by 1788. Hodge said, "It is probable there never was a period of equal length in the history of our church, in which there was such a general and cordial agreement among our ministers on all doctrinal subjects."<sup>21</sup>

In 1787 the Synod adopted changes in chapters 20 and 23 of the Westminster Confession and ordered that the altered Confession be printed along with the Form of Government and Discipline; these together making up the constitution of the church. When the General Assembly was formed in 1789 this revised version of the Confession was adopted as the constitution of the Presbyterian Church. Hodge argued:

If then the Westminster Confession is a part of our constitution, we are bound to abide by it, or rightfully to get it altered. Ever since the solemn enactment under consideration, every new member or candidate for the ministry had been required to give his assent to this confession, as containing the system of doctrines taught in the word of God. He assents not merely to absolutely essential and necessary articles of the gospel, but to the whole concatenated statement of doctrines contained in the Confession. This, whether right or

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<sup>19</sup> Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part I, 170. According to Hodge, the Harker incident indicated that there were three perspectives represented in the Presbyterian Church by the 1760's - the Synod's official strict subscriptionist stance, Harker's loose subscriptionist interpretation and Blair's median position which interpreted subscription as the affirmation of the Calvinist 'system of doctrine' found in the Confession. The action of Synod to remove Harker clearly refuted the extreme loose position. Full subscription or system subscription was tolerated as a valid interpretation of the Synod's commitment to the Standards at this point in time.

<sup>20</sup> Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part II, 309.

<sup>21</sup> Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part II, 309, 310. This point helps explain Hodge's perspective on the practice of strict subscription during this era. Early Presbyterians, who shared unanimity in doctrinal views, found that their personal convictions lined up exactly with the totality of the Confession. Hodge also implied here that this had not been the case since the colonial era.

wrong, liberal or illiberal, is the constitutional and fundamental principle of our ecclesiastical compact.<sup>22</sup>

For Hodge, the early documents from American Presbyterianism displayed consensus on the meaning of subscription. Some of the broad New School interpretations were in error, for there 'is not a line upon our records' which suggested that ministers were only required to assent to the "essential and necessary doctrines of the gospel." On the contrary, ministers were expected to embrace the Reformed system of doctrine contained in the standards. Hodge concluded: "If then, explicit official declarations and the actual administration of discipline can decide the question, it is clear that our Church has always required adherence to the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith as a condition of ministerial communion."<sup>23</sup>

### **"Adoption of the Confession"**

Hodge offered his most extensive essay on the subscription issue in the pages of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* in 1858. Here he reiterated some of his points made vs. Dr. Cox and incorporates much of his research from the *Constitutional History*. One of the reasons for the essay was an outcry from a few Old School men over a comment by Hodge in an issue of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. Hodge was giving his annual review of the General Assembly and he offered his perspective on Dr. Breckinridge's proposal that the General Assembly authorize the writing of a biblical commentary that "shall be in accordance with the Westminster doctrines of this church." Hodge opposed this concept and indicated the inherent difficulty of achieving agreement on such a commentary. He wondered: "If it is not only difficult but impossible to frame a creed as extended as the Westminster Confession, which can be adopted in all its details by the ministry of any large body of Christians, what shall we say to giving the sanction of the church to a given interpretation of every passage of Scripture?"<sup>24</sup> It would be impossible to require Presbyterian ministers to profess full subscription to the Confession: "We could not hold together a week, if we made the adoption of all its propositions a condition of ministerial communion."<sup>25</sup>

Based upon the negative reaction to these statements, Hodge concluded that apparently there was still confusion in the Old School camp about the meaning of adopting the doctrinal standards. He was astonished at the uproar in the "Old-school press" over his advocacy of what he considered the historic understanding of subscription. Indeed, that which he had rather matter of factly stated in the review article on the General Assembly, is the identical position he had held for 30 years.

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<sup>22</sup> Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part II, 183.

<sup>23</sup> Hodge, *Constitutional History*, Part II, 185.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Hodge, "The General Assembly," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* XXX (July 1858): 561.

<sup>25</sup> Hodge, "The General Assembly," 561.

What are these new objections to the Old School view? Why have these voices been silent for 30 years if his views were deemed to be in error?<sup>26</sup>

Hodge responded to these criticisms in no uncertain terms. He began his rebuttal by suggesting two principles by which one may interpret the meaning of oaths and professions of faith: “the plain historical meaning of the words” and “the intention of the party imposing the oath or requiring the profession.” Hodge asked the question: “What is the true sense of the phrase, ‘system of doctrine,’ in our ordination service?” There are three answers that have been offered to this question. Hodge took up each one in turn and offers a forceful defense for his viewpoint.<sup>27</sup>

Some said the ordination vow asked the candidate to adopt the Confession for “substance of doctrine.” Hodge’s first objection to this position was that the definition is vague and equivocal. Two potential meanings may be attached to this understanding:

By substance of doctrine may be meant the substantial doctrines of the Confession; that is, those doctrines which give character to it as a distinctive confession of faith, and which therefore constitute the system of belief therein contained. Or it may mean the substance of the several doctrines taught in the Confession, as distinguished from the form in which they are therein presented.<sup>28</sup>

If one referred to the substance or essence of a *system of doctrines* [italics mine] then the substance of that system is the system. If however, one spoke of the substance of a particular doctrine then it must have a particular form to have meaning. The substance or general truth of a doctrine is not the doctrine itself. One cannot separate the substance from the form of a doctrine. Hodge illustrated his point with the doctrine of original sin: “The different forms in which this general truth is presented, make all the difference, as to this point, between Pelagianism, Augustinianism, Romanism, and Arminianism.”<sup>29</sup>

The second objection Hodge raised to the “substance of doctrine” position was its being “contrary to the mind of the church.” He argued that the constitutional acts of the church prove beyond the shadow of a doubt the intended meaning of the ordination vow. He quoted in full the Adopting Act of 1729, including both the

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<sup>26</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* XXX (October 1858): 669.

<sup>27</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 671.

<sup>28</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 673. The phrase “substance of doctrine” was a major source of confusion between Old School and New School. Different persons attached different ideas to this terminology as Hodge indicated. Some who used the phrase agreed with Hodge’s views on subscription, others, used these words to justify significant departures from traditional Calvinism.

<sup>29</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 673.

morning “preliminary act” and the afternoon minute. He cited them both as a record of the “fundamental act” which the church has “never repealed or altered.”<sup>30</sup>

As far as Christian communion is concerned, the 1729 Synod declared that all whom Christ welcomes into his kingdom are welcome in the Presbyterian Church. Ministerial communion is established on a higher condition requiring adoption of “the system of doctrine” contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Hodge understood adopting the “system of doctrine” to be the meaning of the 1729 phrases: “adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith” and “agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary articles of said Confession;” and the two phrases are “an equivalent form of expression.” Concerning exceptions to the confession, Hodge commented, “the only exceptions allowed to be taken were such as related to matters outside that system of doctrine, and the rejection of which left the system in its integrity.”<sup>31</sup>

Hodge further objected that the phrase “substance of doctrine” has “no definite assignable meaning.” He stated: “No one knows what a man professes who professes to receive only the substance of a doctrine, and, therefore, this mode of subscription vitiates the whole intent and value of a confession.” The concept of doctrine is a truth in specific form. One who does not hold the doctrines of the Confession in the form in which they are presented, cannot be said to hold the said doctrines. If one professed this mode of adopting the Confession of Faith, it would be dishonest for it is no real adoption of the doctrines at all.<sup>32</sup>

The final objection to the “substance of doctrine” view is that this concept does nothing but produce “the greatest disorder and contention.” It was this viewpoint, “more than all other causes,” that produced the 1837 division in the Presbyterian Church. There are ministers, who professing to adopt the Confession under this understanding of subscription, have “rejected almost every doctrine which gives that system its distinctive character.” Hodge listed as illustrations of distinctive doctrines of the system - original sin, inability, efficacious grace and definite atonement. These are essential tenets of the Augustinian/Calvinist system that distinguish it from Pelagian or Arminian schemes of explaining these doctrines. If the latitudinarian principle of adopting the confession is again embraced, it will “produce like disasters” as the schism of 1837.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 673-674.

<sup>31</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 673-674. This was a broader perspective on allowable exceptions than what Hodge had suggested in the *Constitutional History*. The old Synod of Philadelphia, according to Hodge, had only permitted scruples to chapters 20 and 23 of the Confession. In order to free Dr. Hodge from the charge of inconsistency, it might be possible to argue that the *Constitutional History* simply tells the eighteenth-century story as it was; later, Hodge gave a fuller explanation of his own views on 1729 and how it could validly be interpreted by nineteenth-century Presbyterians. In 1858, Hodge seemed to be interpreting the Adopting Act through the lens of actual ecclesiastical practice during his lifetime. Compare his views as expressed to Dr. Cox above.

<sup>32</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 678-679.

<sup>33</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 678-679.

Just as Hodge protested that the substance of doctrine position would destroy Presbyterian unity, he likewise believed that an “every proposition” understanding, “cannot be carried out without working the certain and immediate ruin of the church.” This new scheme of *ipsissima verba*, Hodge called an “impracticable theory.” He candidly remarked that he could not name more than a dozen ministers who would affirm all the propositions in the Confession. If this “new rule of subscription” were enforced there would be a mass exodus from the Old School Assembly.<sup>34</sup> He added: “As we have no desire to sit thus solitary on the ruins of our noble church, we enter a solemn protest against a principle which would work such desolation.” He continued, “To adopt every proposition contained in the Westminster Confession and Catechism, is more than the vast majority of our ministers either do, or can do.”<sup>35</sup>

Hodge believed strict subscription, at this juncture of the church's history (late 1850's), was the self-righteous “mingled spirit of the Pharisee and Dominican.” He added, “God forbid that such a spirit should ever gain the ascendancy in our church.” Mandating all-inclusive adoption of the Standards would be asking the majority to abandon their Christian conscience and commit sin.<sup>36</sup> This stance would put persons in the position of “overwhelming temptations” to profess what they do not believe.<sup>37</sup> Hodge observed:

It is a perfectly notorious fact, that there are hundreds of ministers in our church, and that there always have been such ministers, who do not receive all the propositions contained in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms. To start now, at this late day, a new rule of subscription, which would either brand these men with infamy, or exclude them from the church, is simply absurd and intolerable.<sup>38</sup>

To adopt the system of doctrine in the Standards and to adopt every proposition are “two very different things.” The words “system of doctrine” are definite and “serve to define and limit the extent to which the Confession is adopted.” A candidate for the ministry professed to adopt the Reformed system of doctrine contained in the Confession and “no one can rightfully demand of him either more or less.” Hodge believed there were many propositions in the Confession “which lie entirely outside

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<sup>34</sup> Hodge apparently did not identify *ipsissima verba* with the eighteenth-century understanding of subscription since he refers to this as a “new rule.” The New School unfairly caricatured the Old School view as *ipsissima verba* which was here vehemently repudiated by the Old School master. There were a few Old School voices that seemed to advocate this ultra-strict interpretation but it was rejected by both Hodge and the Old School majority as well as the entire New School.

<sup>35</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 685-688.

<sup>36</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 688.

<sup>37</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 688.

<sup>38</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 685.

the system, and which may be omitted, and yet leave the system in its integrity.”<sup>39</sup> Hodge insisted that the “every proposition” perspective was contrary to “the mind of the church.” There are a number of ways that the mind of the church has been made manifest. Hodge made an obvious observation:

If the church intended that the candidate should adopt every proposition contained in the Confession of Faith, why did she not say so? It was very easy to express that idea. The words actually used do not, in their plain, established meaning, express it. The simple fact that no such demand is made, is evidence enough that none such was intended.<sup>40</sup>

Again, Hodge argued his median position utilizing the official explanations given by the original Synod of 1729. The Synod of Philadelphia had explicitly excluded certain clauses relating to the civil magistrate in chapters 20 and 23. Yet, the ministers received the Confession as “the confession of their faith.” The formula of adoption does not include the exception of clauses in the two chapters. “It was not considered necessary to make that exception, because the language was not intended to extend to every proposition, but only to ‘the system of doctrine.’ This was the church’s own official explanation of the sense of the words in question.”<sup>41</sup>

Testimony from the men of that first Synod offered an important glimpse of the mind of the church. Among the original ministers in the Synod there were three groups. The first group, represented by Dickinson, were opposed to all creeds as a test of one’s orthodoxy. A second group, represented by Creaghead, wished for unqualified adherence to all that the Confession contained. A third group, “containing the great body of the Synod” urged that the sense of adoption be to “the system of doctrine” in the Confession. In the words of the preamble to the Adopting Act, the Synod decided to receive the Confession “in all the essential and necessary articles” which, says Hodge, was synonymous with “system of doctrine” as elsewhere expressed.

Differences soon arose as to the exact meaning of the formula. The phrase “in all essential and necessary articles” was interpreted by Samuel Harker to mean the essential doctrines of the gospel. On the other side, Mr. Creaghead seceded from the Synod because he believed the Synod never truly adopted the Confession in all its

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<sup>39</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 680, 681. Nine years later during Old School negotiations with the New School Hodge reiterated this notion that certain statements in the Confession lie outside the Reformed “system.” For example, he wrote: “A man may be a true Augustinian or Calvinist, and not believe that the Pope is the Antichrist predicted by St. Paul or that the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Leviticus is still binding.” See “The General Assembly,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* XXXIX (July 1867): 506.

<sup>40</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 681.

<sup>41</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 682. This was Hodge’s clearest intimation of how he harmonized the *Constitutional History* with his other writings. In essence, he was stating that the permissible exceptions in 1729, 1736 (chapters 20, 23) demonstrated the principle that exceptions to the Confession are indeed allowed and considered consistent with adopting the Confession as a whole at ordination. These exceptions were understood as non-essential to the “system of doctrine.” Because of this constitutional principle handed-down from colonial Presbyterians, Hodge could justify his arguments against the two extreme positions.

articles. These difficulties called for further explanation. In the later clarifications, we have the true mind of the framers of the formula. As definitive evidence, Hodge cited both the reply of Samuel Blair to Mr. Creaghead and the reply of John Blair to Mr. Harker. Samuel Blair tells Creaghead that the Synod did indeed adopt all the articles of the Confession excepting only certain clauses. John Blair relies to Harker that what the Synod meant by “essential in doctrine,” was the “system of doctrine” taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Hodge declared: “Such is the explanation of the adoption of the Confession of Faith, given by the original framers of the act, and by their contemporaries. They did not merely receive it for ‘substance of doctrine,’ nor did they adopt all the propositions which it contains, but they received ‘the system of doctrine’ therein taught in its integrity.”<sup>42</sup>

The final indicator of the mind of the church on this subject was the uniform action of church courts. Hodge argued that the records of the church indicated that no one has ever been denied entrance into the Presbyterian ministry “simply because there are propositions in the book to which he could not assent.” Neither are there records of one being suspended or deposed on such grounds. As long as one could honestly affirm the Calvinist system of the Standards he was not expected to affirm every detail of the Confession.<sup>43</sup>

### **Reunion with the New School?**

When reunion negotiations between the Old School and New School churches in the North were initiated in 1866, a primary goal was to arrive at a consensus on the question of subscription to the standards. Both parties were suspicious and hesitant to fully trust the other party’s intentions. Each perceived the other to hold a rigid position and both branches believed the other had compromised Presbyterian principles. Nevertheless, candid interaction began to reveal more of a consensus on this potentially divisive issue than either side had anticipated. Meetings of the Joint Committee had produced declarations attempting to define the intended meaning of subscription. The spirit of distrust, however, still prevailed in much of the church. Given the historical doctrinal tensions between the two schools, some suspected that the reunion deliberations had been disingenuous. Had confessional integrity been compromised and reunion become an end in itself no matter what the cost?

It was inconceivable to some Old School men that the New School could seriously and honestly affirm the standards as the confession of their faith. It was equally incredulous to New School men that the Old School would actually countenance liberty by allowing exceptions to parts of the doctrinal standards. Despite this underlying skepticism, progress was made in understanding one another.

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<sup>42</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 683-685.

<sup>43</sup> Hodge, “Adoption of the Confession of Faith,” 685.

New School clarification of its position was most ably articulated by Professor Henry Boyton Smith of Union Seminary in New York.<sup>44</sup>

At the New School Assembly of 1864, Dr. Henry B. Smith, the retiring moderator, had preached the opening sermon entitled, “Christian Union and Ecclesiastical Reunion” based on Ephesians 4:13. Smith urged his New School brethren to earnestly pursue union with their Old School counterparts. There are three prime conditions for reunion – a spirit of mutual concession, acceptance of the integrity of the Presbyterian system of church order and an affirmation of the Presbyterian doctrinal standards. On the third point, Smith suggested that, “the reunion be simply on the basis of the Standards, which we equally accept without private interpretation – interpreted in their legitimate grammatical and historic sense in the spirit of the Adopting Act, and as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. My liberty here is not to be judge of another man’s conscience. Any other view not only puts the Confession above the Scriptures, but also puts somebody’s theological system above the Confession.”<sup>45</sup>

Smith would play a vital role in the reunion negotiations because of the respect for him in both parties and his consistent voice for maintaining historic Presbyterianism as the bedrock for reunion. When Charles Hodge attacked the reunion plan in 1867, it was Smith that defended the New School position. Hodge indicted the New School with holding to a latitudinarian principle of subscription.<sup>46</sup> Professor Smith countered that this was an unjust accusation against New School Presbyterians. The New School had been accused of embracing heresy, false doctrine and “evasive subscription,” and all of these charges were unproven.<sup>47</sup> On the contrary, the New School had “uniformly repudiated the principle” with which she was being charged. The whole plan of reunion was staked on this vital point of uniformity in interpreting the form of assent to the Standards. According to Smith, there is no ground of difference between the two schools on the question of subscription.<sup>48</sup>

Smith concurred with Hodge’s perspective that the form of assent was properly understood as including adoption of the “system of doctrine” in the Confession. The Calvinistic or Reformed system was adopted and this meant more than mere

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<sup>44</sup> Henry B. Smith (1815-1877) was the leading theologian of the New School during the period of reunion negotiations. Ordained as a Congregational pastor in 1847, he transferred his ministerial credentials to the New School Presbyterian Church. He was editor of the *American Theological Review*, later renamed the *American Presbyterian Theological Review*, from 1859-1874. See Lewis F. Stearns, *Henry Boynton Smith* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892); Henry Boynton Smith (Mrs.), ed., *Henry Boynton Smith: His Life and Work* (New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son, 1881).

<sup>45</sup> Henry B. Smith quoted in J.F. Stearns, “Historical Sketch of the Reunion,” *American Presbyterian Review* New Series, I (July 1869): 576.

<sup>46</sup> Henry B. Smith, “Presbyterian Reunion” in *American Presbyterian and Theological Review* V (October 1867): 624-665. Smith was responding to an essay on “Reunion” by Charles Hodge in the July 1867 issue of the *Princeton Review*. Hodge’s article had been reprinted and circulated in pamphlet form.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, “Presbyterian Reunion,” 658.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, “Presbyterian Reunion,” 640, 641.

affirmation of the “essential doctrines of Christianity.” Likewise, an “every proposition” position was an improper interpretation of the form of assent to the Confession. Smith cited favorably Hodge’s article of 1831 which opposed the two extremes of either latitude or strictness in interpreting the form of subscription. As one example of New School concurrence with Hodge’s position, Smith pointed out that Albert Barnes, in his defense before the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1835, directly referred to Hodge’s 1831 article as expressing his own views.<sup>49</sup>

A significant disparity with his Old School brethren had been disagreement over the proper grounds of ecclesiastical discipline. Hodge believed that there was room for honest doctrinal diversity the Presbyterian Church which did not impair the integrity of the system of doctrine in the Confession. Hodge declared, “It is not enough that a doctrine be erroneous, or that it be dangerous in its tendency; if it be not subversive of one or more of the constituent elements of the Reformed faith, it is not incompatible with the honest adoption of our Confession.”<sup>50</sup>

Hodge described two classes of doctrines which illustrate the discord over allowable diversity among Old School men. There is one class of doctrines which though not unimportant have been tolerated in the “purest Calvinistic churches.” This class of doctrines involves the permitted breadth in explaining the Reformed faith. Hodge cited differences in defining the imputation of Adam’s sin, the atonement and regeneration. The key element was that one affirm the essentials of the doctrines integral to the system. On Christ’s work of atonement, the critical question concerned a real substitutionary atonement and one should not be brought under discipline who can affirm this, though he may differ on the extent of that atonement. “If he taught that the work of Christ was a real satisfaction to the justice of God, it was not made a breaking point, whether he said it was designed exclusively for the elect, or for all mankind.”<sup>51</sup>

A second class of doctrines however are “entirely inconsistent with the ‘system of doctrine’ taught in our Confession of Faith.” Hodge enumerated several doctrines he placed in this category:

Men came to teach that mankind are not born in a state of sin and condemnation; that no man is chargeable with either guilt or sin until he deliberately violates the known law of God; that sinners have plenary ability to do all that God requires of them; that regeneration is the sinner’s own act; that God cannot certainly control the acts of free agents so as to prevent all sin, or the present amount of sin in a moral system; that the work of Christ is no proper satisfaction to Divine justice, but simply symbolical or didactic, designed to produce a moral impression on intelligent agents; that

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<sup>49</sup> Smith, “Presbyterian Reunion,” 641, 642. See Charles Hodge, “Remarks on Dr. Cox’s Communication,” *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* III (October 1831): 520-525. Barnes was a Princeton graduate, and no doubt was very familiar with Dr. Hodge’s perspective on confessional subscription.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Hodge, “Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review,” in *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Index Volume (Philadelphia: Peter Walker, 1871), 22.

<sup>51</sup> Hodge, “Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review,” 23.

justification is not judicial, but involves a setting aside of the law, as when the Executive remits the penalty incurred by a criminal.<sup>52</sup>

The strain between Old School men arose because some in the strict Old School party desired to invoke discipline against not only men holding the second class of doctrines that subvert the Reformed system but also against those who merely differed in expressions of the same Calvinist faith. This censoriousness was divisive according to Hodge. He described Princeton's resistance to follow the extremists: "It was considered unreasonable and unfair to condemn one man for errors which had been, and continued to be, tolerated in others . . . It was impossible that they could be brought with unanimity to concur in sustaining charges so heterogeneous, embracing doctrinal statements with which only a small minority of the church could agree."<sup>53</sup>

Before any formal discussions between the two branches of Presbyterians in the North began, Hodge publicly asked the question: "is it the present duty of these bodies to unite and become one church, as they were before the division?" He believed that this union was desirable if it could occur without the "sacrifice of principle" and if it could be a "real and harmonious" union. Do the original grounds that separated Presbyterians continue? Two issues, from his perspective, were the root of the split - the presence of Congregationalists in the Presbyterian body who never adopted the Presbyterian standards (for faith or order) and discord over doctrine. The major problem with the Congregationalists was not polity but that they were "almost without exception found among either the abettors or protectors of false doctrine."<sup>54</sup> For Hodge, the causes of the Presbyterian division in 1837 culminated in a disagreement over the rightful exercise of discipline. He explained:

As to doctrine, the difference was not that all the Old-school were orthodox and all the New-school heterodox; not that errors which a large part of the New-school party rejected did in fact more or less prevail among our ministers and churches; but the great and vital difference was, whether these errors should be a bar to ministerial communion.<sup>55</sup>

This diversity over discipline in doctrinal matters stemmed from distinct perspectives on the sense in which subscription to the Confession was to be understood. Discipline and admission to ministerial office in the New School (at least in some quarters) was governed by a perspective that viewed subscription as only binding one to the "essential and necessary doctrines" of Christianity not Calvinism *per se*. This

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<sup>52</sup> Hodge, "Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review," 23, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Hodge, "Retrospect of the History of the Princeton Review," 25.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Hodge, "Principles of Church Union, and the Reunion of the Old and New School Presbyterians," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* XXXVII (April 1865): 288, 296.

<sup>55</sup> Hodge, "Principles of Church Union," 296.

interpretation, the Old School had implicitly disavowed by its condemnation of errors in 1837.<sup>56</sup>

Hodge's conviction was that the New School separated from the Old School, therefore, it was a question of whether or not the New School wanted to return to the Presbyterian Church and "whether they are willing to endeavor to secure, by the proper exercise of discipline, that the candidates for ordination and ordained ministers shall embrace the Calvinistic system of doctrine, as presented in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, in its integrity. If they are willing to do this, we can see no conscientious objection to their return."<sup>57</sup> When reunion discussions officially commenced in 1866, Hodge fully immersed himself in these issues and in several instances found himself in the eye of the storm. In his annual reports on the General Assembly during the reunion negotiation years (1866-1870), he consistently questioned New School authenticity in subscribing the Confession because of what he considered the New School historic practice of "broad church" principles.

For Hodge, the safeguard was to require that "the doctrines constituting that system should be adopted in the form in which they are stated in the standards of the church." This is not asking for *ipsissima verba* for the whole Confession but a use of the confessional language itself to affirm adoption of the essentials of the system that makes up the Confession. A practical solution that Hodge offers was to view the Shorter Catechism as containing the essentials of the Calvinist system of the Confession. "Let the basis of doctrine be the Confession and Catechisms without note or comment; and require that the doctrines should be adopted in the form therein stated. For ourselves we should be willing to license, or ordain any candidate for the ministry, (so far as his orthodoxy is concerned,) who would intelligently and cordially answer in the affirmative the several questions in the Shorter Catechism. As much as this we believe the Church is bound in conscience and good faith to demand. More than this it were unreasonable to require."<sup>58</sup>

Hodge's thorough study of the historical sources and his own ecclesiastical experience had taught him that there was but one conclusion to the nineteenth-century question of subscription to the Westminster Confession. For American Presbyterians, confessional subscription had meant neither adherence to every jot and tittle of the Confession nor a minimalist "essentials of the gospel" position. Hodge emphatically stated:

There never was a period in our history in which all our ministers agreed in adopting every proposition contained in the Confession and Catechisms. It is notorious that such agreement does not now exist. On the other hand, to

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<sup>56</sup> Hodge, "Principles of Church Union," 289.

<sup>57</sup> Hodge, "Principles of Church Union," 299, 300.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Hodge, "Protest and Answer," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* XL (July 1868): 476. This is an intriguing suggestion. What makes it interesting is the number of doctrinal points (in the Confession of Faith) which the Shorter Catechism does not include. This was certainly the most far-reaching proposal Hodge ever made on the subject of confessional subscription.

demand less than the adoption of the Calvinistic system in its integrity, would destroy the purity and harmony of the church.<sup>59</sup>

Presbyterians in the eighteenth century, according to Hodge's analysis had practiced a strict subscription imbedded in the original Adopting Act itself. This conservatism was promoted by an amazing unanimity of views among ministers of this era. By the early nineteenth century, however, Hodge observed more diversity of views among the clergy which was both expressed publicly and openly tolerated in a much larger Presbyterian Church. Nonetheless, these differences among orthodox Calvinists were considered allowable within the historic Presbyterian mode of adopting the Confession. According to Hodge, the criterion for acceptable diversity was the consideration of whether or not one's exceptions to the standards undermined the Reformed "system of doctrine" in the Confession. This was understood as the original intent of the Adopting Act which had allowed exceptions to certain portions of the Confession.

While Hodge advocated that the examination of ministers must be left in the hands of presbyteries, he was skeptical about some of the New School presbyteries carrying out this responsibility prudently. His objections to reunion would always return ultimately to his doubts about New School resolve to exercise discipline. Hodge believed that some of the New School men, who had habitually practiced extreme toleration, would continue to countenance a degree of laxity beyond that demanded by an honest use of the ordination vow.

## **Conclusion**

In the midst of the heated controversies of the Old School/New School era, Charles Hodge and his Princeton colleagues were the voice of reason. Hodge resisted the extremist camps within the New School and Old School alike. Though an Old School advocate, he realized that the majority of the New School was conservative and the guilt by association foisted upon them by Old School "ultras" was unjust. Hodge consistently defended the 1729 principles of subscription, challenging strict subscription as impractical and lax subscription as dishonest. The old pattern of allowing exceptions, yet, affirming the essential Calvinism of the Confession, was the only fair way to handle confessional subscription. This method was the historic practice of the American Presbyterian Church and any other approach destroyed unity.

Hodge towers above the Old School/New School period. Few churchmen wrote as much as he did about the spectrum of issues that emerged during this volatile period for church and nation, and confessional subscription was a topic he addressed repeatedly in his writings. He ultimately concurred with the terms of confessional subscription in the 1869 Plan of Union, however, he remained skeptical about the reunion itself. Hodge's chief concern was that the New School would not have the will to exercise discipline against doctrinal aberrations. Here Hodge

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<sup>59</sup> Hodge, "Principles of Church Union," 304.

anticipated the great challenge that Presbyterians would face in the twentieth century. Hodge's suspicions were sound – solving the subscription dilemma would not safeguard the church from theological error. Combating unacceptable doctrinal innovation is won and lost in the trenches of church courts.

This author is convinced the Old School sage provides us a prudent path for peace on the subscription question if we will have ears to hear. The lesson for contemporary Presbyterians is the necessity of vigilant care for the sacred middle ground of the historic practice of confessional subscription in American Presbyterianism committed to both the purity and the peace of the church. The key to maintaining that *via media* is a charitable spirit between brethren who fellowship with integrity around the essential Calvinistic doctrines of the Westminster Standards and mutually respect each other in differences over non-essential points of doctrine. And that charitable spirit must be united with a firm commitment to exercise church discipline when it is genuinely warranted. This means that on occasion ministerial candidates will not be acceptable, and errant ministers must be disciplined, because guarding the historic boundaries of confessional subscription is imperative for the honor of Christ and the health of the church.

## Pulpit Notes: The Syro-Phoenician Woman in Mark 5:21-43

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The aim of the expository sermon is to preach the meaning of a particular passage of scripture and apply it legitimately to the contemporary listener in such a way that the listener can see the source and authority of the application. One approach to expository preaching invokes the language of Isaiah 28:10 by advocating “line-by-line, precept-by-precept” preaching in which one preaches sequentially through the text providing explanation and application as one goes.

“For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept,  
line upon line, line upon line,  
here a little, there a little.” (Isaiah 28:10, ESV)

Ironically, this verse expresses hard-hearted Israel’s burdensome perception of the prophet’s preaching. As E. J. Young explains:

“Such was the impression which Isaiah’s teaching made. The nation received no coherent picture, did not understand his proclamation in its fullness, but merely regarded it as incoherent, disparate bits of instruction cast here and there. Wherever one turned he encountered the prophet’s instruction, but he had no clear idea of the meaning and force of that instruction. What he heard seemed to him to be only broken bits.”<sup>1</sup>

While the fault may have lain primarily with Isaiah’s hard-hearted listeners, the description itself was hardly commendable. Similar to the charge laid against Isaiah, the line-by-line approach, in an attempt to give attention to the individual trees, can easily fail to preach the forest. If the forest does come into the preacher’s view, it’s usually the result of his intuition rather than his method. Line-by-line may seem to work in the more prosaic genres of scripture than narrative and poetic genres of scripture, but only because the passage itself employs a linear form of meaning development.

There are two elements of meaning beyond the definitions of words and grammar of sentences which require the preacher’s self-conscious attention in order to faithfully proclaim the full meaning of a scripture text. The first is the text’s context, including immediately preceding, immediately following, and whole-book context. Just as a word’s context is determinative of that word’s meaning, so the context of a pericope as a whole constitutes a significant element of the pericope meaning. For example, the second feeding miracle in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 8:1-10) occurred before Jesus return to Judah, signifying that it would have been a Gentile crowd that he fed. Far more than just a repetition of the first miracle (6:30-44), the second reveals that Israel’s Messiah has also come to feed those outside Israel (as

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<sup>1</sup> E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:276.

signified by the seven basket of leftovers in contrast to the twelve baskets of the first feeding).

The second element requiring awareness is text form. Since the form of the text (e.g. genre, structure) constitutes a vital component of meaning, Greidanus argues that sermon form should reflect the text form.<sup>2</sup> Insisting that sermon form follow text form may be more likely to result in novelty than clarity, attention to text form is still incumbent on the preacher who wants to represent faithfully the meaning of the text. This includes explaining and showing how the text form contributes to the meaning of a pericope especially when listeners are unfamiliar with the form and genre. Attention to text form should also inform the preacher's goal or *telos* for the sermon by making it the same as the text's *telos*.

Neither passage context nor text form lend themselves easily to insertion into a running commentary type of sermon and in fact may seem disruptive according to the stated approach of line-by-line, but both elements are necessary for a full understanding and explanation of the text. How then can an expository sermon incorporate contextual and formal aspects of a scripture text's meaning and still maintain the proclamation form of a sermon and not be reduced to a sheer didactic form?

While not a template, the ensuing study provides an example of constructing just such a sermon. It illustrates a way of looking at sermon structure which is both committed to a passage's contextual meaning and open-minded about how sermon structure can creatively and proactively adapt to both text context and form.

The text is Mark 5:21-43, the twin healings of the woman with the discharge of blood and Jairus's daughter. This pericope is the most explicit in form of what Mark's "interpolation" or "sandwich" technique. Interpolations occurs when Mark,

“[F]requently interrupts a story or pericope by inserting a second, seemingly unrelated, story into it... Each sandwich unit consists of an A<sup>1</sup>-B-A<sup>2</sup> sequence, with the B-component functioning as the theological key to the flanking halves. There may have been rudiments of the sandwich technique in the traditions that Mark received, but a comparison of Mark with the other Synoptics reveals that he employs the sandwich technique in a unique and pronounced manner to underscore the major themes of the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>”

For clarity's sake, the Mark 5:21-43 contains a sequence of three scenes.

A<sup>1</sup> Jairus's urgent request and Jesus's initial response, vv 21-24a

B Jesus's distraction and diversion by the woman, vv 24b-34

A<sup>2</sup> The resumption of the girl's rescue, report of the girl's death, and the girl's resurrection, vv 35-43

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<sup>2</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989) 16-20.

<sup>3</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 11.

Once we understand that the interrupting narrative of the ailing woman is the “theological key” to the interrupted story of Jairus and his daughter, we are precluded from preaching two different sermons on the two different stories as is sometimes done. Awareness of form will prevent the preacher from disassembling the text, and therefore its larger meaning. Rather, we are compelled to preach the two stories as one unit of meaning.

Besides the fact that the inner story occurs in the midst of the outer story, there are several key terms that overtly connect the two stories.

- The woman is ceremonially unclean due to her condition; the daughter due to her death.
- Jairus appealed to Jesus to heal his daughter by touching her; the woman is healed by touching Jesus; and the daughter is raised by Jesus’s touch, all of which would have made Jesus unclean under the law.
- Jairus and the woman fell at Jesus’s feet.
- The woman fell at Jesus’s feet in fear and Jesus exhorted Jairus’s household not to fear.
- The woman is commended for her faith (*pistis*); Jesus exhorted Jairus’s household to believe (*pisteuo*). This connection is obscured by English translation, but is clear from the shared Greek root.
- The little girl was Jairus’s daughter; Jesus called the woman “daughter.”
- The woman had been afflicted for twelve years; the little girl was twelve years old.

These explicit elements serve as literary “stitches” binding the two stories together into a single cloth. However, these “stitches” might go unnoticed until we are told, only at the very end of the pericope, the daughter’s age. This seemingly unnecessary fact, to the perceptive reader, evokes the twelve years of the woman’s illness and invites a full-scale comparison of the two stories which turns the middle story from a seeming interruption into the interpretive key for the enveloping story.

Herein lies the problem with insisting upon a line-by-line or even a section-by-section approach to sermon structure. Once the key fact of the daughter’s age registers in section A<sup>2</sup>, sections A<sup>1</sup> and B must now be reread in that light. Mark requires us to read Jairus’s assertive plea and the woman’s humble plea side-by-side for comparison and contrast. The demand that an expository sermon consecutively explain a text must yield to this text’s demand to be reread. To return to a point previously made, the form of the text, not just the sum of its parts, must be accounted for in exposition.

Since the normal sequential sermon structure can’t give a full account of the meaning of Mark 5:21–43, how might full explanation be accomplished? The following sermon main points offer a solution. Brief commentary elucidates the aim of each point.

I. The petition: a summons based on status, vv 21–24a

*Explanation: Word of Jesus's works has spread such that desperate Jairus commendably "fell at his feet" and implored Jesus for help. This is a worthy appeal, though the details of the "great crowd" and Jairus's title as "one of the rulers of the synagogue" clearly imply that his status has something to do with gaining access to Jesus.*

*Application: Jesus's wonderful works make him a worthy object of faith. Desperate circumstances are often those moments when we decide to put our faith in him. We must turn to God in Christ in times of trouble.*

II. The interruption: a diversion due to desperation, vv 24b–34

*Explanation: Jesus's response to the unnamed woman's desperate appeal show that Jesus is full of compassion for those most in need. Christ not only healed her affliction, but ended her social and religious alienation caused by her uncleanness. In doing so he pronounced her "daughter" and commended her humble, whole-hearted, desperate appeal. While important Jarius is mentioned by name, this woman's name is not mentioned. Jesus's unnecessary acknowledgement of the woman both a) drew attention to her exemplary faith and b) raised tension regarding Jarius's dying daughter.*

*Application: Our unclean condition before God should be the reason, not a barrier, for appealing to God in Christ for mercy. God commends unfettered, unashamed appeal to Christ. We must appeal to God for mercy no matter how unworthy we might seem.*

III. The resolution: God in Christ is not slow to save, vv 35-43

*Explanation: Though too late in the view of all observers, Jesus's delay serves to show his power and authority in an even greater way. He didn't simply heal a disease, but raised the dead. He did so by touching the unclean body of the dead girl just as the unclean woman had been healed by touching Jesus.*

*Application: God in Christ does all things well in his time, both for our good and his glory. While our circumstances may at times be severe and our faith tested by God's seeming delays, we must not begrudge God his timing but instead trust in his wisdom. We must trust Christ to have power even over death.*

IV. The juxtaposition: a contrast of faiths.

*Explanation: At this point the curious mention of the girl's age provides the opportunity to point out the parallels, the "stitches" mentioned above. To have done so earlier would have required looking back and leaping forward and would have precluded making the previous three points clearly on their own terms. The summary of this comparison is that, while all faith in Christ is commendable, Christ particularly commends desperate dependence over privileged presumption. While he provided healing for both needy parties, the nature of the woman's faith was more commendable.*

*Application: We are to emulate the humble faith of the woman by recognizing the desperate need we have for God's mercy in Christ and we are avoid privileged presumption in thinking that God is at our beck and call.*

In this example, the addition of the non-sequential fourth point which points out the total effect of the “sandwich” narrative brings out the extra layer of meaning that the text’s form conveys. Insistence upon a strict sequential definition of expository preaching doesn’t allow or possibly perceive the fourth main point because such an approach treats meaning as the sum of word definitions and sentences rather than seeing text meaning as more organic, drawing upon context as well as text form. Such was the wisdom of the Westminster divines in the Westminster Directory for Public Worship as they wrote concerning preaching:

Let the introduction to [the preacher’s] text be brief and perspicuous, drawn from the text itself, or context, or some parallel place, or general sentence of scripture. If the text be long, (as in histories or parables it sometimes must be,) let him give a brief sum of it; if short, a paraphrase thereof, if need be: in both, looking diligently to the scope of the text, and pointing at the chief heads and grounds of doctrine which he is to raise from it. *In analysing and dividing his text, he is to regard more the order of matter than of words; and neither to burden the memory of the hearers in the beginning with too many members of division, nor to trouble their minds with obscure terms of art.*<sup>4</sup>

Relatedly, in Geerhardus Vos’s list of the practical uses of biblical theology he states that “Biblical Theology relieves to some extent the unfortunate situation that even the fundamental doctrines of the faith should seem to depend mainly on the testimony of isolated proof-texts.”<sup>5</sup> Though addressing larger doctrinal matters in this practical use, Vos is reflecting the same general principle as that expressed above which is the meaning of scripture is not constrained to the words only, but to the sense of a passage.

One issue not developed explicitly in this example is how the theme of clean and unclean is reflected in and elaborated upon in this text. This is a broader theme in Mark 1–9, mentioned eight times explicitly and implicitly in this text. A future study will offer an example of how a broader contextual theme can be integrated into a particular sermon’s structure.

Even though no single sermon can exhaust the richness of a passage of scripture, to be expository, preachers must preach the meaning of scripture holistically, including accounting for the context and form of a sermon text. The necessity and responsibility of doing so will not allow limiting the sermon’s main points to strict linear development. Therefore, the “line-by-line, precept-by-precept” criterion is insufficient for judging whether sermons are faithful expository sermons. The proper criteria must be whether a sermon preaches the “order of matter.” This is

<sup>4</sup> Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>5</sup> *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1948), 17.

not to say that an expository sermon cannot self-consciously focus on a particular aspect of a text's meaning. A future study will consider what the relationship of a sermon's subject should be to the principal subject of the scripture text.

## The Pharisee and the Tax Collector by Niels Hemmingsen

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### Translator's Introduction

Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600), an irenic Danish Lutheran theologian, philosopher, and humanist, is one of the sixteenth century's best kept secrets. But, unlike the secret of a favorite restaurant you want to remain under the radar so that you never have to wait for a table, Hemmingsen's obscurity is almost uniformly tragic. For Hemmingsen has much to teach Protestant Christendom in many different fields.

Hemmingsen, for a long time a professor at the University of Copenhagen, after having been trained by Philip Melanchthon and others at the University of Wittenberg, wrote voluminously. Among his works are biblical commentaries, systematic theology, and works on method and natural law, catechesis, Christology, and homiletics, among others.

It is from the last category, homiletics, that the following sermon comes. Hemmingsen's *Postilla seu Enarratio Evangeliorum, quae in dominicis diebus, et in festis sanctorum, usitate in Ecclesiis Dei proponuntur, in gratiam piorum ministrorum Evangelii conscripta* (*Postil or Exposition of the the Gospel Texts That Are Customarily Prescribed on the Lord's Days and Feasts of the Saints in the Churches of God, Written for the Sake of Godly Ministers of the Gospel*) first appeared in 1562 and went through several printings. In it, one will find model sermons for all the Sundays and major feasts of the Christian year, sermons that were intended—as the title indicates—to aid other ministers of the Gospel in their preparation for preaching.

They can still do so now, almost 500 years later. The sermon below, appointed for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, provides a wonderful example of how they can do so. Taking Luke 18:9-14 as his text, Hemmingsen gives a concise and powerful lesson on how to draw out the essential truths of a pericope, explain them clearly and logically, and apply them to his hearers like a thunderbolt. Because Christ's parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector deals with the chief article of justification, it is an appropriate place to begin in any *ressourcement* of early modern preaching.

A number of features stand out in this fine example of the genre. The chief one, perhaps, is the form. Hemmingsen's sermons are not verse-by-verse expositions, but instead use the *loci* or topical method: after summarizing the passage, Hemmingsen states what the primary "topics" treated are, and proceeds to a discussion of them in order. In this way, application is interwoven seamlessly with explanation and elucidation. The needs of his hearers' hearts are never far from his eye.

In this text, Hemmingsen finds three "topics," as you will see below. As he expounds them, note the way he uses Scripture to interpret Scripture. Such an employment of the *analogia Scripturae* is particularly manifest in his use of Romans 7 in his explanation of the first topic, "[t]he righteousness of the law and pharisaical vanity."

The themes of the passage in Luke and in the sermon itself are brilliantly epitomized in a short poem by the seventeenth century English poet Richard Crashaw, with which I close this introduction.

**“Two went up into the Temple to pray”**

Two went to pray? O rather say  
One went to brag, th’ other to pray:

One stands up close and treads on high,  
Where th’ other dares not send his ey.

One nearer to God’s altar trod,  
The other to the altar’s God.

*Addendum*

Hemmingsen’s *Postilla* was rendered into English already in 1569 by the important translator Arthur Golding. I have not consulted his version in making my own, the first in English (to my knowledge) since Golding’s day.

**The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity**

**The Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18**

*Jesus told the following parable to certain people who trusted in themselves as being righteous, and scorned others. “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed the following to himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, thieves, the unrighteous, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice on the sabbath; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing far off, did not even want to lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying: ‘God, be propitious to me, a sinner.’ I say to you, the latter man went down to his house justified rather than the former, because everyone who lifts himself up will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be lifted up.”*

**Summary Exposition of the Text**

The occasion of this gospel text was that Christ, after he had taught about the efficacy of prayer and the form to be used when we pray, also wished to put forward clear examples, in order to depict in them the nature both of efficacious prayer and of mere hypocritical show. For, although no one is able to pray the way he should unless he is first righteous by faith in Christ, it regularly happens that many *think* themselves to be righteous, and for that reason judge that they pray rightly. It was therefore necessary to distinguish between those who are truly righteous and those who have a show of righteousness. For those who wish to seem righteous, and nevertheless are not, call on God in vain. But those who, having acknowledged their sins, repent of them in earnest are made righteous by faith, and they alone are able to pray

efficaciously and truly. For this reason, then, the Lord here puts forward two pictures for us. One of them is of hypocritical prayer; the other is of a true and godly invocation of God. The Pharisee, who thought himself to be godly and righteous, and was not, offers us a way of being able to recognize hypocritical prayer. The wretched tax collector, on the other hand, throwing himself to the ground before God and acknowledging his filthiness, and nevertheless fleeing to God's mercy, offers by his example the form of true and saving prayer.

Three topics are treated in this passage:

1. The righteousness of the law and pharisaical vanity.
2. Christian righteousness and true repentance.
3. Christ's judgment about the Pharisee and the tax collector.

### **On the First Topic**

"He said to some who trusted in themselves as being righteous," etc. Here it is necessary to speak about the righteousness of the law: what it is, and what its use, end, and authoritative rigor are. For from these considerations we will understand how far the Pharisees went astray from true righteousness.

What is the righteousness of the law? It is the perfect obedience of all our members, internal and external, to the law of God: the obedience of the heart, the affections, the will, the mouth—briefly, of all our capacities and strength of body and soul. This obedience should not be momentary, but perpetual; not empty, but perfect and complete; not defiled, but pure and chaste—the kind that Adam was able to perform before the Fall, and that the holy angels perform in heaven. Both Moses and Christ teach such righteousness of the law in the following words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might and all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself." Next, because he himself is pure, holy, and chaste, nothing is able to please him unless it is pure, holy, and chaste. And only those who perform this righteousness have the promise of the law. For so says Moses: "The man who does these things will live by them." No man except Christ alone has ever performed the kind of perfect and perpetual obedience that the law requires. Therefore all those who think themselves righteous by the righteousness of the law are not only blind and arrogant, but are also blasphemers against the law of God, which they measure by their own small standard and not by the Word of God.

I have just said that no one is able to satisfy the law of God; and now I shall briefly call the same thing to mind for us again. First, our internal and external members, with which we ought to have carried out obedience to the law, are mutilated and marred by horrific disorder, so that they cannot carry out anything rightly. Next, the law of sin lays siege to our members like a most mighty giant, even when we have been born again, so that we are unable to perform what we will. For this reason, the divine Paul cries out, "O unhappy man, who will free me from the body subject to death?" Again, in another passage: "To will is indeed possible for me, but I find no way to bring it to completion." Again: "Not the good that I will do I do, but the evil that I do not will, this I do." Thus the regenerate do indeed have a ready will, but they are bereft of the strength of carrying out what they will, so deeply entrenched is our

ruthless enemy; and this enemy drags us back from the good. What shall we say, then, about those whose will has not yet been changed, as is the case with all who have not yet been regenerated?

To this is added the fact that the law of God is spiritual, but we are carnal. For so Paul said when he was already a believer: “The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” For this reason, it is easy to see that it is impossible for us to perform the obedience owed to the law. For how can the flesh perform spiritual righteousness?

I have just drawn your attention to a great variety of reasons that show that no one can perform perfect obedience to the law in this life. What will happen, then? Here, first hear the voice of the law. What does it say? “Cursed is everyone who does not abide in all that has been written in the book of the law.” Here, you hear the law’s judgment. This word of the law should humble you before God and utterly throw you to the ground, so that you acknowledge both the hideousness of your sin and your just condemnation. What is to be done here? Can we avoid this curse of the law? You cannot by your own strength. You must therefore either perish or seek a remedy against this condemnation of the law. And this assuredly is nothing other than Jesus Christ alone, who came into the world to take upon himself the curse of the law and to free all those who believe in him from the law’s authoritative rigor, that is, from the condemnation that the law threatens against those who transgress it. Consequently, this curse extends to all men who do not hear Christ and are not clothed with his righteousness so that, adorned with it, they may appear in the sight of God. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” I have said these things about the righteousness of the law in order to show how vain those Pharisees were who trusted in themselves as righteous and scorned everyone else as profane and unrighteous.

But what was the reason that this Pharisee and his crowd trusted in themselves as righteous? The reason was blindness. For he was so blind that he did not see the intention of the law. Indeed, he only saw the law’s outer veil and did not look into the law’s inner sanctum, as the text of this gospel passage indicates well enough. For the Pharisee says, “I thank you that I am not like other men, thieves, the unrighteous, adulterers—or like this tax collector.” He therefore saw the letter of the law, not its spirit, that is, he clung only to the externals of the law and did not consider the spiritual meaning entailed in the requirements of the law.

But in order for these things to be placed more clearly before our eyes, let us look to the following train of thought: first, let us see what kind of works he did. Second, let us compare them with the law of God. Third, let us conclude from that comparison what he lacked. Fourth, let us realize how many sins shackled him as a guilty prisoner, although he boasted of himself as righteous before men.

The works of this Pharisee were without faith, proceeding from unadulterated unbelief and arrogance. Now, since Scripture plainly says that “without faith it is impossible to please God,” who is so out of his mind that he calls this external mask “righteousness”?

Let us compare the works he boasts of with the law of God. The law requires pure obedience; this man heaps abuse on God and neighbor from a most impure heart. The law commands love of neighbor; this man accuses his neighbor, and does

so before God's tribunal. What need is there to say more? He had done nothing according to the prescription of God's law.

But is it not a great thing not to be a thief? Not to be unrighteous? Not to be an adulterer? To fast and give tithes? To be sure, such things are not to be scorned. But this Pharisee defiled the good things that he had done with self-love and pride.

What did he lack, then? The source of good works: faith in Christ, which works by love. But where this is not present, no work, however beautiful it seems, is able to please God. Indeed, it is rather an abomination before God, especially because the self-satisfied opinion concerning one's own righteousness is added to it, as we see in the case of this Pharisee.

We have seen where the works of this Pharisee proceed from, how far they are from the righteousness of the law, and what he lacked; now let us see how gravely he sinned and how unrighteous he was.

First, he dared to approach God and to accost him without the fear of God, without faith, without repentance, and without Christ as Mediator, through whom alone the approach to the Father lies open. Isn't this a grave act of wickedness? Indeed, he violates the entire first table of the law and tramples it, as it were, with his feet. Next, he dared—though he was dust and ashes—to boast before God, although it is written, “The innocent is not innocent before you.” I ask you, how great an act of pride is this? Does he not pretend—although he despises both God and men—that he is righteous? Third, he abused the temple of God, which had been appointed for praying for mercy for public and private sins. But what does he make of the temple? A place of judgment in which he accuses others. Fourth, he attacks the entire second table of the law and violates it contrary to the nature of charity, which is accustomed either to caring for or covering up the sins of one's neighbor. What does he do? “I am not,” he says, “like other men, thieves, the unrighteous, adulterers.” In fact, it seems that this was too little for him. And so, when he had gone forward in the temple, he looked behind him and saw the wretched tax collector praying, and as soon as he saw him he accused him before the tribunal of God. “Nor am I,” he says, “like this tax collector.” If he had been truly godly, he would have given thanks with the angels of God for the tax collector, who rejoice in heaven over one sinner who repents. But when he accuses the penitent, he shows well enough from what spirit he spoke. He ought to have remembered the statement of Jesus the son of Sirach: “Do not despise the man who turns away from sin.” For we are all in a state of corruption, that is, we are all exposed to various failings. “Let the one who stands take heed lest he fall,” says the apostle.

About the fasting and tithing of this hypocrite I say only the following. Fasting, by which the ferocity of the flesh is tamed, is not evil in itself. But if you fast in order to merit something from God, your fasting becomes an abomination. For God does not want to be worshiped by human traditions, but according to the rule of his own law. About tithing I say this: God ordered matters in his own commonwealth so that the priests (that is, the tribe of Levi) would have means to live on. And Christ says, “The hired man is worthy of his pay”; and “Do not muzzle the ox's mouth when he is treading out the grain.”

## On the Second Topic

As we have seen in the Pharisee's case what sort of a thing pharisaical righteousness is, and have shown its vanity from a comparison with the righteousness of the law, so now we proceed to the second doctrine, concerning Christian righteousness, which is represented for us in this tax collector as in a living picture. But because Scripture uses two ways to teach about the virtues, namely rule and example, I want to see first what Scripture teaches about Christian righteousness. Next, I shall show the same thing in the example of the tax collector, so that in this way the rule may be confirmed by the example.

As far as the rule of Christian righteousness is concerned, the following statements are clear. Paul says in Romans 3, "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation through faith in his blood." Shortly afterwards in the same chapter, he says, "We judge that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." In 2 Corinthians 5, he says, "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." In Romans 5, he says, "Just as by the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so, in turn, by the obedience of one the many will be made righteous." And about Abraham he says, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness." And David says, "Blessed are those whose iniquities have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered." Scripture contains innumerable statements of this kind about Christian righteousness. But I have set out these few in order to deduce from them Scripture's general teaching about Christian righteousness.

First, then, we conclude that Christian righteousness does not come from works, although once a person is justified he begins to do good works. The first thing that must be maintained, then, is the following: works are excluded so as not to be the *causes* of this righteousness, but rather its effects and fruits, as I shall speak about later. Second, we conclude from these statements that Christian righteousness is not obedience in *them* (that is, in Christians), but in Christ. Third, this obedience of Christ is given to man so that he may be righteous by it, and not by his own obedience. Fourth, whoever believes is made a partaker of this righteousness of Christ in such a way that it is imputed to him as his own. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Fifth, because we are sinners, we are reconciled to the Father through Christ, whom the Father put forward as our propitiator. Sixth, the blood of Christ was poured out for the sins of those who believe, in such a way that the righteousness of God or of the law was satisfied. Seventh, from all of these conclusions it is proved that this Christian righteousness consists of absolution from sin, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and admission to eternal life freely on account of Christ. This is the sum of the teaching of the church of Christ about Christian righteousness. From this, it is proven that Christian justification is absolution from sin, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and admission to eternal life freely on account of Christ. But the following, too, must be maintained: the very faith by which we are justified is efficacious and produces fruits that are most pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. And where this fruit is not seen, scarcely any faith is found there. For when we believe,

we are at the same time born again as new men, in order to perform new obedience to God.

Now let us see this teaching about Christian righteousness in the example of the tax collector. First, as the text says, “he stood far off.” For, terrified by his own unworthiness, he did not dare to go forward with the Pharisee into the sight of the divine majesty. So also Peter, falling at Christ’s knees, says, “Depart from me, because I am a sinful man.” In a similar way, the centurion says, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.” This alarm in man’s conscience arises from the knowledge of the law. When a man examines his deeds according to its standard, he is compelled to cry out, “I am a sinful man.” Next, the tax collector does not dare to lift his eyes. Here attention is drawn to the tax collector’s shame on account of the ugliness of his sin. Third, he beats his breast, by which is signified his struggle with lack of faith and despair. Fourth, when he says, “God,” etc., it is signified that one must flee to God alone for destroying sins. Thus far he has struggled with sin, with the condemnation of the law, and with lack of faith. By this struggle his true contrition is declared. Now follows how he struggled his way out as if from hell. For when he says, “God, be propitious to me, a sinner,” he raises himself up by faith against despair. For here he recalls in his mind the promises about Christ, namely, that God wishes to be propitious to sinners who, repenting, flee to Christ with true trust. For he is the propitiation for our sins. When he raises himself up in such a way, he attributes sin to himself and mercy to God; he acknowledges that he is sick and that God is the physician; he opposes mercy to sin; and thus determining that God is propitious to him, he is justified by faith alone. Daniel acted in the same way: “To you, Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us the blushing of the face.”

And thus the first thing we can learn from this tax collector is the way of true repentance and of Christian righteousness. For as true repentance is true grief on account of sin, so Christian righteousness is to be absolved of sin when we approach God with true trust, as I said above. Second, we can learn from him what true prayer ought to be like. For it ought to proceed from our inmost soul in the fear of God, and to rely on the propitiation that is in Christ Jesus. Third, we ought to learn from the tax collector to conduct ourselves in lowliness both before God and before men.

Should people then live like the tax collectors? Yes, they absolutely should, in so far as they repent like this tax collector in the parable did. For as that Pharisee was not scorned on account of the honorable external works that he did, but because he was *trusting* in his works, so this tax collector should not be praised on account of the sins he had committed, but on account of his repentance that followed. Indeed, we have from each of them something we can usefully learn. With each, we should go into the temple; with each, we should give thanks to God; with each, we should pray. From the Pharisee we should learn to do honorable external works; from the tax collector we should learn to add to them godliness of soul and true faith.

### **On the Third Topic**

“I say to you, this one went down to his house justified, and that one did not.” Here we have the judgment of Christ about the Pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector, he says, going down from the temple, returned to his house justified by

faith. The Pharisee, however, did not return home righteous, but rather condemned. Christ confirms this by the general pronouncement, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted." The Pharisee exalted himself as righteous by the works of the law, which he did not have. For that reason, he was humbled by the pronouncement of condemnation. The tax collector humbled himself by the confession of his sin, his humble invocation of God, and trust in God's mercy through Christ. For that reason, he was exalted by the grace of absolution and the glory of beatitude.

By his example, may we, too, be made to be humbled by Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen.

## **“Written for Children”: The Westminster Shorter Catechism's Unhelpful Reputation**

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### **A Hidden Lamp**

As a young twenty-something Christian warming up to a Reformed faith I had once rejected, I was introduced to the Westminster Shorter Catechism in J. I. Packer's book *Knowing God*. That book ushered me into an understanding of God as one “infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”<sup>1</sup> That majestic vision was transformative and provided for me a foundation on which the rest of my life was built. The Catechism which articulates that vision is a clear and timeless unfolding of the Christian gospel by which the church can introduce the lost to life and the unsettled to security, as it did for me.

I'm concerned though that we have unhappily prejudiced its use by embracing uncritically the assumption that the Catechism was written primarily for children. We have churches full of hungry adults, twenty-somethings like I once was, in need of a useable framework such as the Catechism provides upon which to build their core theological commitments. Resources aimed at bringing adults and the Catechism into healthy engagement, however, are rare. Instead we relegate the Catechism to the children's curriculum of our churches and by so doing we put it psychologically and practically out of reach of the hungry adult. We have so stigmatized the Catechism that we hide this lamp, so needed by adults, under a basket labeled “for children.”

The conviction that the Shorter Catechism exists now and was created primarily for children not only denies to adults a valuable theological diet, it as well causes many of us to look with unnecessary dismay upon our own children. We observe the complexity and language of the Catechism and conclude that if *this* were written for children, what children they must have been! It may be harmless for us to puzzle over what must be wrong with our children. It may not be harmless if this leads us to impose a catechism upon children for which they are developmentally not ready.

Certainly the Catechism was written with an eye on that twelve year old<sup>2</sup> in the back pew. But it was also written for rootless and untrained twenty-somethings and others new to the faith. It is critical that we who teach make a concerted effort to change its public perception. My concern is that our uncritical acceptance and perpetuation of the idea that it is a child's artifact puts it out of sight of the hungry adult.

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<sup>1</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 4, quoted by J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 16.

<sup>2</sup> I personally doubt that even the divines of the seventeenth century would have defined the audience of the catechism as a child as young as six or seven, as I find some do today.

## An Elusive Goal

I. M. Green, Honorary Professorial Fellow in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh, in his comprehensive work on Reformation era catechesis, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c.1530-1740*, gives us some helpful background on the Catechism’s origin. He notes the difficulty writers of catechisms had in striking a balance between depth and simplicity. When a published catechism seemed to sacrifice depth on the altar of brevity, dozens of follow-up catechisms would be produced in its wake to address points where the original was deemed deficient. When the published catechism was judged to be too complex, the follow-up works would aim at helping ordinary readers, including younger catechumens, to comprehend it. Writers of catechisms wanted students to understand truth, not just commit incomprehensible language to memory. Theological complexity introduces abstractions that are difficult if not impossible to convey to a child’s concrete mental landscape. Simpler versions would be attempted to overcome that barrier.

Though the right balance where children were concerned seemed to be hopelessly elusive, many tried. Thomas Cranmer issued a work in 1548 titled “*Catechismus, that is to say a shorte instruction into Christian religion for the synguler commoditie and profyte of children and yong people.*” Calvin’s 1556 catechism was published in London in 1560 and titled “*The catechisme or manner to teach children the Christian religion.*”<sup>3</sup> Early in his ministry John Owen wrote catechisms for his congregation<sup>4</sup> in which, he noted, “The Lesser Catechism may be so learned of the younger sort, that they may be ready to answer to every question thereof.”<sup>5</sup> None of these found the balance that was sought, but the presence of these attempts reveals an ongoing desire to provide a resource for the catechizing of children.

Since Owen’s catechism for “the younger sort” was published in 1640, just prior to the convening of the Westminster Assembly, the idea that the Assembly would write a catechism for children is plausible. It is worth noting, however, that when others wrote catechisms for children they said so. As Green outlines the Assembly’s work, there is no direct mention of children having been in view at all, much less primarily in view. This suggests that their vision may have been more broad than just children.

When the Assembly’s work was complete, and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland acted in 1648 to approve the use of the Shorter Catechism in its churches, they made no mention of it being specifically for children. They found it “agreeable to the Word of God, and in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this Kirk.” As such they approved the

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<sup>3</sup> I. M. Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c.1530-1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 61.

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *Works of John Owen* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), I: 465–46. Owen introduces this catechism to his congregation with these sweet words: “Now, in all this, as the pains hath been mine, so I pray that the benefit may be yours, and the praise His . . .”

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Kelly Kapic for making me aware of both Owen’s catechisms and of Green’s history.

Catechism “to be a Directory for catechising such as are of weaker capacitie.” In a subsequent act the same General Assembly rejected another catechism which, they noted, *had* been written for children. But of that catechism “agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster, with assistance of Commissioners from this Kirk” there is no mention of children at all.<sup>6</sup> No doubt those of “weaker capacitie” included children. But there is no reason to suppose that it was adopted with children as its primary audience.

We make a mistake in assuming that even if the Catechism *had been* aimed primarily at children that it hit that target. Clearly it was not uncommon to write catechisms for children. Equally clear is that success was hard to come by. With all due respect to those godly men gathered at Westminster, it’s hard to imagine that such a gathering of academics and divines would be those best equipped to produce a successful catechism for children. To speak to children in a way they can comprehend is a gift that there is no reason to believe the Assembly necessarily possessed. Green notes how many efforts were made to produce supplements to the Shorter Catechism for the very purpose of making it accessible to children. “The debt of the Shorter Catechism to the phrases of the Confession of Faith gave it authority but often at the expense of simplicity or clarity. Those catechists who used it found that its answers needed explaining or subdividing to make them digestible to the young or ignorant, and soon a growing number of expositions, explanations, paraphrases, and modified versions of the original began to appear.”<sup>7</sup> If it is true that the Assembly wrote the Catechism mainly for children, it is perhaps accurate then also to say that they were not completely successful in their effort.

Success eluded all until in 1840 a former grammar school teacher, Joseph P. Engles, found the sweet spot with his “Catechism for Young Children Being an Introduction to the Shorter Catechism”<sup>8</sup> published by the American Presbyterian Board of Publications. This work alongside of the Shorter Catechism itself has endured. Both were successful in their diverse intentions. But only one was written with only children in mind.

## A Broader Audience

To say that the Catechism was written for children is technically correct but functionally misleading. We need to embrace and promote a broader understanding of the Catechism’s origin. Originally the Westminster Assembly envisioned a single catechism to accompany the Confession of Faith. It was later judged impossible to write one catechism that contained the meaty theological detail deemed necessary that would still be accessible to those lacking in theological years and experience. So the decision was made to create two catechisms. Green notes that according to the minutes of the Assembly, the one, eventually known as the Larger, was to be “more

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/church-scotland-records/acts/1638-1842/pp166-200#h2-0010>

<sup>7</sup> Green, *The Christian’s ABC*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that Engles, at least, distinguished between children in general and “young” children in particular. The idea of children covers a broad developmental range.

exact and comprehensive.” The other, the one known as the Shorter, was to be “more easy and short for beginners” or in another place in the minutes “for the more rude and ignorant.”<sup>9</sup> Given this background, it is no surprise that the Shorter feels like the Larger improved by the hand of a careful and judicious editor. The Shorter is as true as the Larger, and, in many respects, arguably just as comprehensive. But its power and beauty, and its endurance, come from its compactness.

By all accounts the Assembly succeeded in producing a catechism useful for and accessible to those who are beginners in theological conversation. In fact, and perhaps inadvertently, they so improved the Larger that they created a resource that all who engage in theological thought and discourse find indispensable. As Green says, though the Shorter was much humbler in size “it was to prove to be the most important” and that “the face of English catechizing was changed permanently” by its appearance.<sup>10</sup>

When we say without nuance that the Catechism was “written for children” our hearers will think of the small child. When we look at church curricula on the Catechism we think perhaps of the twelve year old. But the Assembly’s category of the “rude and ignorant” was broader than both, and we who teach can help others realize that.

In the United States, ordinary life is suspended every fourth Thursday of November for a holiday known as Thanksgiving. On that day, families gather to feast, traditionally on roast turkey, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie. Those who labor in the kitchen to produce this special meal do so for all who are hungry, all who need to be fed. Some of those hungry and needing to be fed are children, of course. But to step back and declare what a wonderful meal had been prepared for the children would be a misstatement which not only would be an offense to the cooks, it might send the adults elsewhere.

The Catechism was written to give essential instruction in sound doctrine to those hungry for it and in need of it. As such it succeeds admirably. It is a rich feast. But have we, by perpetuating the popular idea that is a feast intended for children, caused those hungry to miss the meal because they don’t see a spot for them at the kids’ table? That is my concern. I want none to miss the feast.

### **A Needed Recovery**

Yes, the Catechism was written for children. But it was also written for people like Charlie Mora. When Charlie was about thirty Charlie met Marge, the woman who would one day become his wife. She dragged him to her Orthodox Presbyterian Church where he heard the gospel and was genuinely converted. He longed to learn more, but his church had no class or other resources for people like him. In desperation this thirty-year old man attended a class with twelve-year olds where he was given the grounding he needed through the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This set Charlie on a trajectory which later led him to become one of the finest elders with whom I was ever privileged to serve. But few adult men or women will have the kind of

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<sup>9</sup> Green, *The Christian’s ABC*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Green, *The Christian’s ABC*, 81.

humility that moved Charlie to sit at the kids' table. It should be unnecessary to ask them to do so.

Theological ignorance in our churches is well documented, heightened with ready digital access to theological error. The Catechism is a powerful resource with which to fend off error and ignorance. It needs to be unshackled from its unfortunate and unhelpful reputation to make it accessible for people like Charlie.

The Westminster Assembly put great stock in the training up of children as a path by which the "kingdom of grace may be advanced" (WSC 102). But covenant faithfulness is not the only path by which the church advances. By producing a catechism that was for all those unlearned in the Christian faith, they acknowledged and valued those who would enter the church from outside the covenant family. They positioned the church with resources by which the nations themselves, and not just their children, could be discipled.

By God's grace, our churches will continue to be full of young twenty-somethings, those "rude and ignorant", as I once was, and hungry to be taught "the way of God more accurately." (Acts 18:26) The Catechism stands ready to serve this end. We need to let it.

## What is Biblical Critical Theory? A Review Article

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Christopher Watkin's *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture*<sup>1</sup> (*BCT*) is a remarkable book that will bless the Church and the academy. Do not be intimidated by the length of the book. Watkin is a delightful writer who is always clear and often witty. Throughout 28 chapters, he expounds key moments and movements in redemptive history, moving from the biblical text to contemporary application in all facets of culture. Taking the book's title as a guide, we will consider what is biblical, critical, and theoretical about *BCT*. This review will summarize some benefits of the project for the Church then move to consider some of its distinctive features.

### The Benefits of Watkin's Project for the Church

First, Watkin offers a sound exposition of crucial moments, movements, and structures from Genesis to Revelation in redemptive history. He is well-sourced theologically. His writing is devotional yet academic, sermonic yet technical at times, often witty, and always clear. Each chapter has study questions at the end. One can easily envision small groups working through this text together, with a Bible in hand for the relevant Scripture passages. The breadth and quality of the biblical survey would be worth the book's price.

Second, Watkin moves from sound biblical exegesis to sound cultural exegesis (we will discuss his method later), drawing upon a stunning array of sources. His formal training is in French Studies (Cambridge University, M.Phil., Ph.D.). He has published widely in French studies, philosophy, and theology. (He has several volumes in the P&R Great Thinkers series on French Philosophers.) He is a Senior Lecturer in French Studies at Monash University in Australia, a renown global research institution. All this breadth is displayed in *BCT*, but never arrogantly or excessively. Watkin's biblical and accessible response to various cultural issues would also warrant the book's price.

Third, Watkin's unique method (more below) provides a pathway for believers to move from Scripture to conversation with unbelievers about some of the most polarizing issues of our time. Critical theory is concerned with the marginalized' experience and the majority's ethics. Traditional apologetics in the Reformed tradition tends to engage epistemology first, asking interlocutors to set their experience aside. In today's social climate, the conversation often fails to bloom. The Reformed apologist declares the unbeliever irrational, and the unbeliever declares the apologist ethically irresponsible and uncaring. Watkin's use of biblical figures (below) to diagonalize (also below) false dichotomies in the culture opens the dialogue without compromising biblical conviction.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022).

Fourth, *BCT* will benefit scholars. The work will generate many interdisciplinary insights that will be easy to expand upon because of careful sourcing. While written in a popular style, *BCT* has a scholarly precision. In addition to a general subject index, there are specific indices for biblical figures, proper names, and Scripture references.

Indeed, another remarkable feature of this work is that Watkin advances a novel thesis that scholars will have to consider while at the same time writing an accessible book for the Church. *BCT* crosses all the traditional boundaries—academic, pastoral, professional, and popular—and does so beautifully. Watkin models for other scholars how to cross these boundaries responsibly. The Church could use more literature like this from scholars that are accessible, designed for study, and sourced with scholarly precision for the academy. Given the target audience, Watkin's arguments and assertions may leave scholars wanting more. They will not be left, however, feeling that he has been sloppy or careless.

Watkin locates his primary scholarly contribution in *BCT* in mapping his cultural and theological insights "onto the Bible's storyline from Genesis to Revelation."<sup>2</sup> He hopes "this fresh arrangement is in itself significant."<sup>3</sup> He also sees himself advancing a new way to do cultural apologetics that others can build upon: "By exploring biblical and late modern figures in a framework of biblical theology, I have provided a crudely drawn map, the finer details of which others can complete in ways I never could."<sup>4</sup>

Having considered some of the benefits of *BCT*, we turn now to consider some of its distinctive features. This review focuses primarily on the text of *BCT*. Scholars will find it helpful to scan the footnotes of the chapters where his formative influences are transparent. Since *BCT* is written to be accessible, the skeptical reader might wonder whether Watkin's lack of extensive argumentation for his method betrays a lack of knowledge. To be swiftly relieved of such a concern, one need only consult the many volumes and peer-reviewed journal articles he writes for his day job as a scholar in French studies.

Dr. Watkin is a rising star in the field of French studies. He recently published the first comprehensive account of the voluminous corpus of the French polymath philosopher Michel Serres, entitled *Michael Serres: Figures of Thought*.<sup>5</sup> This book provides an additional theoretical background to Watkin's understanding and use of figures in *BCT*. In January 2020, Watkin lectured on Michael Serres at Stanford University's Division of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures. The lecture, "Michel Serres: Thinking in Figures," is available on YouTube.<sup>6</sup> Through these sources, one can learn more about the philosophical background to figures.

<sup>2</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 603.

<sup>3</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 604.

<sup>4</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 604.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Watkin, *Michel Serres: Figures of Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0q8bo3RL0ik> (December 16, 2022).

### **What is Biblical in *Biblical Critical Theory*?**

Christopher Watkin is convinced that the Bible is the word of God. He grew up in a practicing Christian family with warm piety. As his intellectual interests matured, Watkin found himself in French studies and consequently immersed in the world of 20<sup>th</sup> century critical thought. On more than one occasion, Watkin remarked that before *BCT* was a book that he wanted to write, it was a book that he wished he had available to read. He came to theology to resolve intellectual tensions in his own Christian experience. Herman Bavinck, Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, Esther Meek, and Tim Keller are influential Reformed voices for Watkin. *BCT* is Biblical in its commitment to the Bible and Reformed theology.

The biblical emphasis of the project is also obvious in the book's structure. Watkin takes inspiration from Augustine's *City of God*, the first half of which was a critique of the Roman world, the second half a fulsome presentation of the City of God. Watkin proceeds in the reverse order. He patiently moves through the whole canon of Scripture, expositing key moments and movements in redemptive history and applying them to a wide range of modern, post-modern, and contemporary issues. As noted, Watkin understands this structure as one of the primary contributions of *BCT* to Christian social theory.<sup>7</sup>

### **What is "Critical" in *Biblical Critical Theory*?**

To what extent is this volume critical in the technical sense of the term as it is used in the academy today? There are wide varieties of critical theorists in the academy. Watkin is concerned with offering an account from Scripture that encompasses the totality of the concerns represented in critical thought. He describes what he means by critical theory in the introduction:

As I began to sketch in the preface, these social theories have a number of features in common: they address themselves to everything, seeking to explain everything in their own terms; they bring some objects, events, and values into focus, making them the figure of our attention, and relegate other objects, events, and values to the ground of our peripheral vision, tracing constellations and connected dots in our manifold perceptions; they bring with them a particular set of questions and concerns, in terms of which they seek to understand, explain, and transform society; they are not just theoretical or philosophical, but they span both high and low culture and often fuel activism and lobbying for social change.<sup>8</sup>

As critical theorists endeavor to make "certain things visible and certain things valuable," Watkin seeks to do the same through a fresh reading of redemptive history. He registers his particular critical interest in four ways.

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<sup>7</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 603.

<sup>8</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 28.

First, from the field of Gestalt psychology, Watkin embraces the figure-ground distinction. Perception is divided into figure and ground: the figure is what you see, and the ground is the background. The figure is perceived as it is because it is given license to shape what is there. No one can pay full attention to everything in the same depth or detail. Watkin wants to broaden the figure-ground distinction used in theories of perception into a theory of knowledge and ethics.<sup>9</sup> This is an innovative move for Watkin, an aspect of his method that warrants further elucidation and critique.

The "so-what" is always made plain in BCT. Watkin can be called a biblical critical theorist because he wants to give due attention to what remains unseen or undervalued—what remains in the background—reassesses which figures should be orienting us to this background, and bring new figures into view that cause us to see afresh that which was unseen before. As with secular critical theories, once the Bible makes visible that which was unseen before, this new vision will have ethical implications. This is another feature in which Watkin is a critical scholar—he is not a dispassionate describer of redemptive history or contemporary cultural issues. He elucidates for action, and often with verve. Preachers will appreciate and benefit from this aspect of the book.

Second, Watkin is concerned with the so-called "as-structure" of experience. The "as-structure" of experience is from the philosophical discipline of phenomenology, which studies the structure of experience.<sup>10</sup> "As-structure" refers to the difference between reality and our experience of reality. This is evident in the way in which two people can experience the same reality as meaning something radically different. One person sees in a political march a sign of democracy, another a sign of potentially violent revolution. Referencing Terry Eagleton's *Ideology*, Watkin summarizes:

What we are presented with is exactly the same; what we experience it as is radically different. A great deal is at stake in the differences between these experiences, and so the terrain of competing theories today—or what is sometimes called the culture wars, a term that is itself a prime example of seeing-as—is in large part "the struggle of antagonistic social interests at the level of the sign," at the level of the meaning we attach to things."<sup>11</sup>

Watkin's concern about accounting for how different people experience the same realities is a classic concern for critical theorists in the academy. This area of emphasis can have pastoral value as well. If Watkin's exposition and cultural analysis can help foster greater understanding and unity among Christians from different ethnic, social, or national backgrounds, then we are better for it.

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<sup>9</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>>

<sup>11</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 6.

Third, Watkin wants an apologetic method that can enter various worlds of discourse. He embraces Foucault and Latour's contentions that different eras (Foucault) and different institutions (Latour) tend to produce their own canons of acceptable discourse, which, if they don't always delimit what can be received as truth, certainly determine what has the most profound resonance for participants, adherents, and interlocutors. Put simply, there are times and places where certain ways of saying things "ring true" and other ways do not. Watkin believes the Bible can be brought into contact with alternate worlds of discourse with subversive, reshaping power. His primary tool for this contact will be figures, which "help us get a handle on the fact that each cultural moment has certain broad commitments and assumptions that shape what people can meaningfully think, say, and do."<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, Watkin is concerned with setting forth an all-encompassing theory that can explain everything on its own terms. In this way, a *BCT* aims to out-narrate contemporary theories just as Augustine's *City of God* out-narrated the Roman world in his day. Watkin would likely say that Augustine was the first comprehensive critical theorist in the best sense of the term for Christians. In *City of God*, Augustine sought to make the right things visible and valuable under the light of the Holy Scripture. Watkin's commitment to letting Scripture define terms and God's revealed speech define reality will resonate with presuppositional apologists.

### **What is "theoretical" in *Biblical Critical Theory*?**

In *Michael Serres: Figures of Thought*, we learn that the concept of the figure became intuitive to Watkin in his reading philosophy as a graduate student:

What does it mean to 'understand' a philosopher? As a beleaguered PhD student finding my way in the forest of modern and contemporary French thought I remember what it felt like finally to come to terms with a particular thinker. This sensation almost invariably came at the moment when I began to discern the characteristic 'moves' of the philosopher in question, to see the ways in which, time and again, they approached disparate subjects in distinct and recognisable ways, such that I came to be able to predict in a general sense the likely contours of their response to any given question. Not that they became predictable, not that they ceased to surprise me, but nevertheless I was able to fit what I was reading into an emerging understanding of the pattern of their thought. Once I began to understand how a philosopher thought in general, it became easier to understand what he or she thought about any theme in particular.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Watkin, *Michel Serres*.

Watkin believes that a close, attentive reading of Scripture reveals the significance of creation and redemption similarly.<sup>14</sup> While God can never be domesticated or mastered, we have in Scripture access to as much revealed divine truth as we can handle this side of glory. God is showing us in Scripture patterns in creation and redemption. Figures arise out of careful contemplation of Holy Scripture. Figures are at the center of Watkin's theory. When all the types of figures combine, they form the world of meaning for an individual (more below).

What is a figure? The first sense of figure has to do with figures of speech, e.g., metaphor, simile, alliteration, etc. "Each figure is a repeatable structure or pattern of language that can be filled with almost any content whatsoever."<sup>15</sup> The key is that the structure or pattern is found repeatedly in the Bible.

Serres understood figures as algorithmic operators, "complex functions for producing an infinite variety of outputs from infinite possibilities of inputs."<sup>16</sup> These structures and patterns are also generative. Different senses of meaning arise when one puts different words in a relationship using these structures and patterns. When repeatable patterns in space and repeatable rhythms in time are deployed beyond literature and language to include creation, ideas, systems, and behavior, they become helpful in analyzing culture. Watkin says this work mirrors God's work in creation, where he organizes space and creates rhythms.

How many types of figures are there? Watkin says that there are six categories of figures. The six figures are time/space; language/ideas/stories; objects; behavior; relationships; and structure of reality. Taken together, these six categories form the "figuration totale of a given cultural moment." It is important not to place one figure in the controlling position over all the others. Examples of biblical figures include:

the biblical concept of covenant, or repeated narratives embodying the "first shall be last" motif (language, ideas, stories); the rhythm of promise and fulfillment (time); the biblical idea of God as the ruler over all space, not like one of the localized gods of the ancient world (space); the biblical distinction between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God (structure of reality); the first Christians meeting together on the Lord's day to sing, break bread, pray, and hear teaching (behavior); the unity of all believers in Christ, and God as the lawgiver (relationships); and, the location and architecture of the tabernacle, or available modes of transport for Paul's missionary journeys (objects).<sup>17</sup>

In discussing Watkin's critical concerns, we already noted the figure-ground distinction. The Biblical figures that arise from Scripture have the effect of shaping

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher Watkin, *Thinking through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2017). This short book has an extended treatment on the need to study Scripture and culture with a posture of attentiveness.

<sup>15</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Watkin, *Michel Serres*. Kindle, Loc 743.

<sup>17</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 9-10.

the way we perceive our experience. Figures provide us with our world of meaning. "A world is not only that which is perceived by human consciousness. It also includes networks of machines or ecosystems that rhythm and pattern reality just as effectively or extensively as any human actor."<sup>18</sup> Crucially, given the concrete nature of Watkin's critical concerns, world is a more concrete and comprehensive concept than worldview. It includes rational and physical elements.

Watkin's goal in *BCT* is to bring the world of the Bible into conversation with our world. The process by which this happens is disruptive and subversive. There are no neutral encounters. Borrowing from Ricoeur, Watkin wants the Bible to "refigure" our worlds:

Encountering another world can be a disruptive, subversive experience, and this is the mode in which I want to engage the Scriptures in these pages. I want to explore how the world of the Bible refigures our contemporary world with all its priorities, values, assumptions, and desires."<sup>19</sup>

First, there is prefiguration—what we bring to the encounter with another world. Second, there is configuration—what happens when the new figures we encounter affirm, challenge, or subvert the figures constituting our world. Finally, there is reconfiguration—what happens when we emerge from the encounter with a new world constituted by new figures. These processes are happening continually across all six figures domains in three contiguous movements.<sup>20</sup>

One aspect of the process is called *diagonalization*. As the world of biblical figures encounters conflicting positions within culture, the biblical figures will often cut across these positions in a way that reveals them both to be lacking. A Biblical alternative emerges, which is more fulsome than anything that contemporary culture has to offer. Watkin stresses that *diagonalization* is not a fancy name for compromise or a repristinating of the Aristotelian mean: "let us not make the mistake of thinking of it as a cardigan-and-slippers-wearing, middle-of-the-road compromise between two bold options" (19).

This process of reconfiguration aims to "out-narrate" the story that the contemporary culture is offering. Augustine did this by first critiquing the Roman world of his day, then putting forward the Biblical world in its fullness. Watkin does the reverse: he sets forth the biblical world and then shows how it out narrates the contemporary alternatives. This "out-narration" is the project's payoff, wherein the Bible's critical theory is shown to be more effective at making the things unseen visible and valuable.

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<sup>18</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 11–12.

<sup>19</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 13–14.

<sup>20</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 13.

## Conclusion

There is something new at work in *BCT* besides its presentation. In *Biblical Critical Theory*, Christopher Watkin sets forward a comprehensive model for integrating Biblical theology and cultural apologetics. He has provided a new tool—figures—which does a different kind of work in the apologetic task—diagonalization. Critically, the work of Watkin and Serres on figures has significant implications for natural theology, epistemology, the relationship between nature and grace, and apologetics that lie beyond the scope of this review. While more familiar territory for Reformed scholars, some will likely also be inclined to review Watkins' transposition of aspects of Ricoeur's narrative theory to Reformed theology, ethics, and apologetics.

Positively, there will be those who take up Watkin's invitation to walk in this new way of figural apologetics:

If it does its job well, the present volume will provide a warm-up act before the main event, a pump-priming exercise making it just a little easier for others to come after me and do the real labor of deploying a range of biblical figures as they carefully and painstakingly work through complex social questions. Some of these interventions will deploy only a handful or even only one of the biblical figures I have identified; some will no doubt find others I have missed.<sup>21</sup>

Will we one day speak of *Christian Figural Apologetics*? Time will tell. As critical evaluation of this method unfolds concurrently with the positive application of figures in various fields of endeavor, the durability of Watkin's method may well be demonstrated.

Whether Watkin has developed a new Reformed school of apologetics or is simply applying presuppositional apologetics, *BCT* is a helpful project for our cultural moment. There are moments in the history of the Church that call for a comprehensive response. Augustine responded to the Romans with *City of God*. Aquinas responded to medieval Islam with *Summa contra Gentiles*. Bavinck responded comprehensively to Hegel, Darwin, Feuerbach, and Marx (whose shadows still loom large over contemporary social theory) with *Christian Worldview*. Machen responded to early 20<sup>th</sup> century liberalism with *Christianity and Liberalism*. In our cultural moment, Watkin is responding to critical theory with *Biblical Critical Theory*. If we find his work lacking, he welcomes our contribution:

I am painfully aware of the gaps in the present volume. Do I not understand the richness of the sacrificial system? Have I not even heard of the Holy Spirit? Do I simply not care about all the harm Christians have caused in history? Would someone please give me some Aquinas or some African theology to read! In my defense I can only say: if you see something missing, add it; if you see something broken, fix it.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 605.

<sup>22</sup> Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 604.

- Book Reviews -

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***The Apocalyptic Paul: Retrospect and Prospect*, by Jamie Davies. Eugene, OR: Cascade Library of Pauline Studies, 2022. 177 pages, \$25.00, cloth.**

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When asked in class, “Dr. Cara what is the ‘Apocalyptic Paul’ (AP)?” My answer was something to the effect of: AP scholars want to emphasize the other-worldly salvific actions of God breaking into this world—“apocalyptic” actions. The AP began with Ernst Käsemann in mid-twentieth century who emphasized that Paul expected an *imminent* return of Christ along with Christ’s defeat of evil powers and a down playing of individual salvific concerns. It then was modified to emphasize Christ’s death/resurrection as the “apocalyptic” event with Louis Martyn being the key figure, especially due to his 1997 Galatians commentary. The current standard bearer for AP would be Douglas Campbell. I associate the AP primarily with the (over) emphasis upon the death/resurrection event to battle and defeat evil powers to the extent that (1) it significantly downplays or outright rejects God’s activity in prior redemptive history and (2) it significantly downplays or outright rejects forensic categories and individual implications such as justification. The AP has always been a minority view in the scholarly Pauline guild due to the majority’s disagreement with # 1. For Reformed scholars, both # 1 and # 2 are significant problems.

If a student persisted and wanted something to read—hard to believe my explanation was not good enough!—I would send them to two places. First, read N. T. Wright’s eighty-page section on AP in his *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Fortress, 2015). Wright goes through the major figures and primarily critiques them, especially concerning # 1 above. Second, read Martyn’s excursus “Apocalyptic Theology in Galatians” in his *Galatians* commentary (AB 33A, Doubleday, 1997). This excursus gives the main outlines of Martyn’s influential views.

Now that I have read Jamie Davies’ book *The Apocalyptic Paul: Retrospect and Prospect*, would my answer change? Well, see below. The first half of his book (“Retrospect”) is designed to answer the above question. The second half (“Prospect”) is designed to moderately critique the AP, give some methodological corrections, and modestly suggest some of his proposals. Davies currently teaches at Trinity College Bristol, which is broadly evangelical in the Anglican tradition.

First the “Retrospect” portion: In sum, Davies well explains the hard-to-explain AP. He covers all of the major players starting with Käsemann through Campbell. Usefully, Davies also includes a brief pre-Käsemann discussion of Weiss, Schweitzer, and Bultmann to explain Käsemann’s emergence. In addition, and very informative for me, he includes several contemporary scholars that are influenced by AP but also want to modify it, Alexandra Brown, Susan Eastman, and Lisa Bowens.

Davies argues that most AP scholars, with Campbell as a notable exception, see Paul as influenced by the theology/theologies that comes from Second-Temple-Judaism's Apocalyptic literature (e.g., 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra). Paul may not have read these works per se, but he was aware of their general theology. He then combined this with his understanding of the Christ event to come up with his theology. Note, the question as to why "apocalyptic" is in the name "*Apocalyptic* Paul" is much debated (and ultimately not that important). Is it based on the connection to Apocalyptic literature or the use of apocalyptic in the sense of cataclysmic event unrelated to Apocalyptic literature?

In Davies' summary of the AP scholars and in the remainder of the book he emphasizes three themes, eschatology, soteriology, and epistemology. For the more hardline AP scholars, concerning *eschatology*, they emphasize the radical "invasion" of the Christ event into the evil world as opposed to a redemptive-historical escalation of God's activity culminating with the Christ event(s). For *soteriology*, the emphasis is on defeating the evil powers as opposed to individual concerns of justification, sanctification, and glorification. For *epistemology*, the emphasis is on only hearing God speak (in a Barthian sense) and downplaying traditional general and special revelation. The modified AP scholars, including Davies, want to soften these dichotomies.

Davies also notes the significant influence of Barth on the AP, or at least the "early" Barth of the *Romans* commentary. He also includes a section, less useful to me, on some systematic theologians who have incorporated aspects of the AP. The most prominent of these is Douglas Harink.

Secondly the "Prospect" portion: Here I will be brief. Davies wants to soften some of the dichotomies listed above but still keep important insights from AP. He strongly suggests that a methodological change is necessary. What is needed is a three-pronged interdisciplinary approach that combines insights from (1) Second-Temple-Judaism and canonical apocalyptic literature, (2) systematic theology with an emphasis on the "later" Barth of the *Church Dogmatics*, and (3) insights from past and current AP scholars. He then uses this methodology to critique aspects of the three dichotomies and to give proposed modifications.

How would I change my answer above now having read Davies? Probably not much. Maybe I would note the Barth connection, and I certainly would add that one should read the fifty-six page summary by Davies. This will provide somewhat of a balance to Wright's more trenchant critique, and Davies' section is extremely well-written for the uninitiated into the confusing AP labyrinth.

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**Justus, H. Hunter, *If Adam Had Not Sinned: The Reason for the Incarnation from Anselm to Scotus*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2020. xvii, 257 pp., \$75.00, cloth.**

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The hypothetical question of whether the Son would have become incarnate had there been no fall, has received sustained attention of late. This surge in interest, however, is usually motivated by particular Christological (or Christo-centric) concerns characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century theological intuitions, which usually append earlier theology to their projects for reasons quite different from their original context. Justus H. Hunter's monograph considers the hypothetical question from Anselm to Scotus, and argues that, contrary to some contemporary interpretations, the Scotist and Thomist position on this matter actually comprise a harmonizable answer, or at least two discrete moments in the history of the question. Indeed, Aquinas and Bonaventure represent a third 'moment' in the proceedings of the debate, with the first moment involving an affirmation in response to the hypothetical that argue for the necessity of the incarnation, a second that prioritizes the freedom of the divine will and thus denies that necessity. The third 'moment' then, is a sort of *tertium via*, that argues for the fittingness of the incarnation (xiv-xv). Scotus's proposed arguments initiate a new (fourth) moment, that moves the discussion away from modal issues to 'the order of divine intentions' (xv).

The first chapter defines some key terms: to answer the hypothetical question for these medieval theologians, one should determine an answer to a 'general question' and a 'primacy question'. The general question has to do with how one might determine the reasons for which God works in general *ad extra*, while the primacy question has to do with the primary reason for the incarnation (14). Determining the primary reason does not, then, preclude other reasons for the incarnation, ordered in a particular way. The debates on the hypothetical, then, have less to do with the ordering of the decrees and the supra/infralapsarian binary, and more to do with 'nesting' the hypothetical within a general principle for divine action. The second chapter on Anselm expounds on some of the key moves that he makes in *Cur Deus Homo*, including accounts of the ways in which necessity might be 'improperly' predicated of God (for, God is never obligated by some external power), that reasons supplied for the divine economy should be 'compossible' with the divine nature, and the 'fittingness' (*convenientia*) of the incarnation.

Robert Grosseteste, a theologian of the first moment, is covered in the third chapter. What marks out the first moment is the deductive ways by which Grosseteste argued for the actuality of the incarnation in possible worlds where no fall obtains. Deductive arguments are supplied from divine attributes or the benefits that the incarnation brings sans the fall: 'if *x* is some good, and our *W*-world is capable of *x*, then *x* will be actualized.' (80) In effect, Grosseteste 'presses all of Anselm's *convenientia* arguments toward necessity'. (109)

The fourth chapter outlines the responses of the Dominicans at Paris, and theologians of the second moment, as represented by Geurric of Saint-Quentin and Albert the Great, before turning to Aquinas. While Geurric and Albert responded in opposing ways, both argued not from the necessity of the divine nature but rather from divine power and freedom (without the fall, an incarnation would not be necessary after all, for, say, the union of wills between God and human creatures suffices to communicate their union, [207]). In other words, while Geurric provides a negation to the hypothetical while Albert an affirmation, neither argue for their respective answers via a deductive or necessitarian mode of reasoning. Hence, while Albert affirms that the perfection of God's works seem to imply the actuality of the incarnation even without the fall, Albert's 'argument does not establish necessity. Why? The only way to know the truth about the hypothetical question is through revelation' (136).

Thomas inherits this posture of eschewing rational demonstration to determine an answer to the hypothetical question. Rather, an answer can only be supplied if one relies on divine revelation and infers probabilistic reasons for the incarnation's 'fittingness' with certain truths about God, and the fall as a 'necessity condition' (143). The incarnation is thus not a necessary entailment from the fact of divine goodness, for that goodness is already manifested in a myriad of ways: 'In this way, Thomas circumvents the Grossetestean deductions from divine perfections to the necessity of the incarnation' (144). Indeed, Thomas develops this trajectory of reasoning further in his later writings, and his reasons for the fittingness of the incarnation presuppose its soteriological purpose.

The fifth chapter traces the arguments of the Franciscans, from the *Summa Halensis*, Odo Rigaldi (representatives of the first and second moment, respectively), and Bonaventure, whose 'exposition has a subtlety and theological vision on the motive for the incarnation unparalleled in any of the figures we have encountered to this point' (181). Bonaventure, like Aquinas, prefers the language of congruity to refer to the work of the incarnation: 'while the incarnation reveals divine attributes, it is not necessitated by those attributes' (178). A proper response to the hypothetical depends on a prior answer to the primacy question: is the incarnation, say, primarily to manifest some divine attribute, to satisfy some human need, to unify God with humans, or to redeem humanity from sin? If the incarnation's primary reason is redemption from sin, then all other congruent reasons are annexed to the primary reason. Though it is possible to say that there are possible worlds where an incarnation obtains without a fall, the incarnation itself is not necessitated by some divine attribute, and our reasoning about God's will should be subordinated to revelation. Thus, Bonaventure prefers a negative response to the hypothetical question, despite acknowledging the compossibility of possible worlds where there might be an incarnation with no fall (181). Affirming that the primary reason for the incarnation is redemption from sin, then, does not mean neglecting other congruous reasons for the incarnation – that it does manifest some divine attribute, or that it satisfies human longing – but it does subordinate these reasons, and they would presuppose the condition of the fall. Hunter sums up Bonaventure's argument for the negative response by identifying five reasons:

To state them succinctly, the redemption from sin is the primary reason for the incarnation because:

- (a) It is the only clear authoritative reason for the incarnation.
- (b) It retains divine freedom over creation.
- (c) It places Christ beyond all perfections of the universe.
- (d) It commends the mystery of God's incongruous response to sin.
- (e) It inflames the love of God in the heart of the faithful. (184)

To reiterate, that Bonaventure prefers the negative answer to the hypothetical does not lead him to deny the fundamental importance of Christ, or that Christ is, in the *de facto* order decreed, the crown of creation. To say that Christ came principally because of sin is not to suggest that he came *solely* due to sin.

The last chapter summarizes the arguments of the book and closes by observing the contributions of Scotus, who represents a new 'moment' in the argument – a moment that develops the arguments from Aquinas and Bonaventure, rather than necessarily in competition against them. Scotus's considers the hypothetical by examining the order of the divine intentions. He distinguishes between the order of intention vs the order of execution. While the former has the incarnation as the primary locus, the order of execution might have the incarnation as logically following the decree to permit a fall.

This brief review does not do justice to the carefulness of Hunter's arguments, or the way in which he showcases the usefulness of possible-world analysis for understanding and elaborating on the 13<sup>th</sup> century debates. If there is one lacuna in Hunter's fine work, it seems that he could supply some constructive suggestions for contemporary reflections on the hypothetical questions (per 139n. 90). He did, after all, suggest that the modern debates, influenced as they were by Reformed and Barthian concerns on the ordering of the decrees, the object of election, and the degree to which one's theology is 'Christo-centric', has 'skewed' (26) a right perception of 13<sup>th</sup> century concerns. An analysis of how the medieval and modern could fruitfully dialogue on this point, given Hunter's corrections and presentation, is still forthcoming and calls for more work to do.

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**Albert N. Martin, *Pastoral Theology, Volume 3: The Man of God: His Shepherding, Evangelizing, and Counseling Labors*. Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2020. \$35.95, cloth.**

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I'm keen on Puritan and Reformed works in pastoral theology. At their best, they never separate three indissolubly linked areas of ministerial life: personal piety, preaching, and pastoral care. Albert N. Martin's three volume work is a notable contribution to this great tradition.

Since volume one appeared in 2018, I have made volume one, *The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life*, a required text in my first-year Pastoral Ministry course, and have found helpful lecture materials in volume two, *The Man of God: His Preaching and Teaching Labors* (links to both reviews in *Reformed Faith & Practice* provided). Martin's knowledge and use of classic texts in pastoral theology is extensive. I tell students that were they to write down the texts he cites and quotes, they would have a comprehensive reading list suitable for a lifetime of study.

A strength of these volumes is the author's patience. Before proceeding to offer practical counsel, he first explores his understanding of the biblical basis for the various responsibilities of the pastor. Only after the scriptural foundation is laid does he move on to practical application. It should go without saying that readers need not be persuaded at every point that the author has interpreted the text correctly to value this approach; it is commendable, and the way pastoral theology should be done. Volume three, *The Man of God: His Shepherding, Evangelizing, and Counseling Labors* concludes Martin's studies on the shepherding office with three units: church government, corporate worship, and evangelism and counseling.

The church government section examines the relationship between shepherd and polity, and includes interpretation of relevant biblical passages and practical counsel on the attitudes of the shepherd, his relationships with elders and deacons, the purpose and exercise of corrective discipline, and nurturing the corporate ministry of the church. Martin contends that a pastor must teach the congregation about the biblical basis of his own pastoral work (5). Expectations of both pastors *and* congregations must be biblically shaped and shared. For faithful ministry to take place, a pastor must understand how to spend his time and energy in the work to which God has called him; his congregation should share that same understanding. Problems are inevitable when expectations between pastor and flock diverge.

As we expect from someone with nearly five decades of hands-on ministry in one congregation, Martin understands the costliness of pastoral ministry and the internal forces that work against its faithful discharge. He observes that

“There is in our remaining corruption a pocket of selfishness that does not welcome receiving the pain that comes from genuinely caring for others. We are self-protective by nature. At least, I know I am, and I think that you most

likely have a similar pocket of corruption. It costs us to have an open heart. It costs us to be vulnerable to feel human need and respond in a godly way. (25)”

The author affirms the parity and plurality of elders within a local congregation, and devotes considerable time to describing their qualifications, diversity of function, responsibilities to the congregation, and responsibilities to fellow elders.

The office of deacon receives ample attention and numerous practical issues are addressed. Among them is diaconal assistance, including forms of non-monetary assistance (141-42). These kinds of practical matters do not often appear in pastoral theology texts. Students preparing for ministry will do well to give thought to such before they begin service at their first church. Ministry leadership is intensely personal and concrete, a fact that can be lost amidst the rigors of academic preparation in seminary.

Few matters require as much sensitivity, skill, and resolve as corrective discipline. The nature, purpose, and types of discipline are considered. Of course, how these principles are applied in actual cases demands discernment and wisdom. In a volume of this length, it is too much to expect detailed case studies – but if I had time with the author, I would ask many questions about his experience with the administration and outcome of church discipline in his own congregation.

Chapters on the “Corporate Ministry of the Body to Itself” includes a masterful exposition of the New Testament’s “one-anothering” commandments and the attitudes that must attend them.

The prayers at the end of each chapter remind seminary professors that theological instruction is a powerfully spiritual work. We conduct our labors in union with our Savior, who said, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Presbyterian readers will differ with the author in polity and sacrament (baptism). As we would expect from a faithful Baptist, the author is committed to the independency of the local church (as opposed to Presbyterianism, see pages 67-68, 71, and 239) and to credo-baptism. That said, the author is uniformly respectful of Presbyterians, demonstrates a careful study of their positions, and cites their most able pastoral theologians regularly and appreciatively.

Still, views on polity and sacrament must be taught primarily from the theological convictions of the pastor’s denomination. In my case, that means Presbyterian polity - including the elder’s responsibility to judicatories beyond the local church - and the administration of baptism to both believers and their covenant children. For this reason, I will not use this volume as a principal text for my students, the majority of whom are preparing for ministry in the Presbyterian tradition. I will include it, however, as a helpful ancillary text.

Adherents to the regulative principle will find instruction on corporate worship to be biblically informed and reverent. All young ministers would do well to heed his counsel: “I confess to you as an older man, that if I had it to do all over again I would, early in my ministry, discipline myself to read extensively, exploring the history of Evangelical and Protestant and Reformed forms of worship” (321). Seminary worship courses serve as an introduction to a lifelong study of the theology, history, and practice of Christian worship.

Martin's valuable chapter on public prayer provides a wealth of edifying reflection. Pastors must cultivate the gift of public prayer lest their prayers become stale, repetitive, and predictable. Prayer meetings, once considered vital, have become an endangered species of congregational life. In three chapters devoted to the subject, readers will find encouragements for sustaining and leading prayer meetings.

Additional chapters include the administration of the sacraments and officiating at weddings and funerals.

As in any work that offers an abundance of practical counsel, readers may find themselves shaking their head in disagreement. I did. But the book is provocative in the best sense of the word – it invites reflection on pastoral convictions and the way ministerial duties are discharged.

Roughly 100 pages are devoted to the pastor as evangelist and the evangelistic outreach of the church. Throughout these pages pastors are reminded of their duties. Among his exhortations: “Reflect often on the brevity of life,” “reflect on the horror of hell,” and “have a proper valuation of the worth of a man's soul” (538-39). Evangelism is a spiritual labor. Therefore, the pastor prays before, during, and after his preaching (556). Throughout the pages, I was continually reminded of the evangelistic responsibilities I assumed when I entered pastoral ministry and found myself renewed in my motivation.

This volume concludes with a lengthy series of chapters on the weighty responsibility of pastoral counseling. Young pastors will be challenged to reflect deeply on what it means to offer pastoral counsel. They must take to heart the fact that developing these skills is a process that takes time and can only be obtained by experience (619). Also, the importance of the pastor's demeanor – his tone of voice, posture, and general appearance – are rightly noted (684). Good pastors are good listeners, and the exhortations to attentive listening and the asking of probing questions are much needed.

Despite numerous helpful points, this section left me with many concerns that I deem serious. The criticism of integrationist Christian counselling is severe. Fair enough; this is a contested issue. However, what the author means by integration needs clearer definition, and he fails to interact meaningfully with integrationist literature. Martin relies heavily on Jay Adam's *Competent to Counsel* in assessing non-nouthetic counseling approaches (669-72). Much has changed in the world of Christian counseling, nouthetic and otherwise, since 1970. The author himself recognizes that significant modifications have taken place within the nouthetic counseling movement through the years (712-13). A few general changes are mentioned, but additional specifics and further explanation are needed. Some assertions attack strawmen. For example, “we must bury the notion that an effective pastoral counselor must be a mind reader or a super-psychologist, knowledgeable in the latest pronouncements of the psychiatric and psychological gurus” (616). In four decades of ministry, I have never heard any pastor make that claim.

At several places, his specific counsel raised, to my mind, red flags. For example, refusing to meet with a wife who wants counsel about her husband's sin before she has followed the steps of Matthew 18:15-17 is problematic (688-89). What kind of sin? Is she in danger? Does she need help in knowing how to bring a matter up

with her husband? The information supplied is insufficient for this counsel to be useful.

Including one's wife in an initial counseling session for the purpose of demonstrating that he, the pastor, is a "one-women man" (696) is fraught with questionable assumptions – ranging from what if the pastor is single, to unfounded suspicions of the counselee's motives, to the qualifications and preparedness of the pastor's wife, to the pastoral ethics of creating this kind of counseling session.

When Martin advises, "do not allow the demands of pastoral counseling with people who have chronic problems to erode the time available for positive, constructive pastoral counsel with others" (630), I sympathize with his concern. But perhaps here is where a professional Christian counselor, with expertise in specific areas, can prove a valuable resource in assisting the pastor. After all, he is far more likely to have seen the troubling behaviors frequently and obtained expertise that can help the person to make progress in his sanctification. Specialized training and experience can prove an asset. Dealing with bulimia by threat of public church discipline is, frankly, disturbing (736).

My concerns stated, I am in agreement when Martin writes, "The pastor who labors in preaching and teaching does not suddenly become a different person in a different office with a different function when he enters a counseling session. He is still an elder, still a shepherd, still ministering the Word of God, only now in a private counseling setting. There should be no radical disjunction between the two situations of ministry, the public and the private." (617) I was encouraged to see the author acknowledge psychiatric and medical resources available to pastors in their counseling labors (713), but more space needs to be given to this critically important subject.

I recommend Albert N. Martin's three-volume *Pastoral Theology*. In my reviews, I have indicated that seminarians and young pastors, with a lifetime of ministry before them, will benefit from reading them. By God's grace, they should endeavor to set a good and godly course from the start. But these books will also be a fine addition to the libraries of seasoned pastors. Young and old alike need to be brought repeatedly to the touchstone of scripture lest they stray. Every pastor will profit from the godly exhortations of this older pastor who has stayed the course.

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***Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice*, edited by William R. Edwards, John C.A. Ferguson, and Chad Van Dixhoorn. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2022. xxvii + 644 pages, \$26.99, cloth.**

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I love practical ministry books, but there can be a downside: detached from scriptural theology, they become manipulative, promoting worldly methodologies to achieve ends that are at odds with the holiness of life that God seeks for his church. Ultimately, the minister and his work must be shaped by the character of God, who has revealed himself in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. True, a minister must understand the needs of his church and community as he pursues his work. But every plan must also be brought to the touchstone of Scripture and tested for its biblical fidelity. To that end, pastors will find *Theology for Ministry* a most helpful book.

*Theology for Ministry* is both the book's title and the burden of the volume's articles. Twenty-six contributors – all of whom have pastoral experience – insist that shepherding practice must rest securely on a theological foundation derived from the doctrines of God's word. How fitting that their work honors pastor-theologian Sinclair Ferguson. For more than five decades, Ferguson's books, lectures, and sermons have mined the scriptures, demonstrating how sound doctrine shapes pastoral life and practice. Each contributor comments briefly on the influence Ferguson has had on his life and/or ministry.

While the book is not a commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrines covered do come, for the most part, in the order they appear in the confession (Scripture, Trinity, the decrees of God, creation, providence, etc.). This arrangement proves beneficial for professors like me, who are persuaded that the Westminster Confession of Faith (along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) is among the most valuable instruments in the pastor's toolbox. Throughout, contributors interact with the Westminster Standards.

*Theology for Ministry* is now a required text in my introductory pastoral ministry class. Following are several areas that I look forward to discussing with my students.

In the first chapter, Carlton Wynne contends that scripture is foundational to the pastor's life and ministry. After all, the word of God is indispensable to the salvation and sanctification of God's people, sustaining them until they reach their heavenly home (14). He quotes J. Gresham Machen, who wrote that "whatever else the preacher need not know, he must know the Bible; he must know it at first hand, and be able to interpret and defend it" (5). Wynne declares: "Show me a pastor for whom the Bible is the song of his heart and the source of his deepest convictions, and I will show you a pastor who speaks with the power of heaven behind his words, yet who walks in a spirit of humility and in utter dependence on God" (9).

Tragically, many Christians go their entire lives without hearing a single sermon on the Trinity. In chapter two, Robert Letham makes a spirited case for

teaching the doctrine of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Son that “undergirds” it (30). Soon, my congregation will sing:

God of God, Light of light,  
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin’s womb:  
Very God, begotten, not created.

How will they sing intelligently, Letham asks, if they go uninstructed in the Son’s eternal generation (27)? The church’s hymnody contains an abundance of doctrinal treasures. What a shame it is when they are sung without understanding, especially when they proclaim cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.

A clear understanding of creation, argues Ian Hamilton, is vital to pastoral ministry. The one true and living God’s essential plurality, revealed in the opening chapter of Genesis (1:26), is foundational to understanding God’s purpose in creation. All things are created through the Son and for the Son, a truth that has enormous implications for suffering Christians who must learn to set their personal trials within the framework of God’s comprehensive goal for his creation (52-53).

As beings created in God’s image, men and women must not deny or minimize the importance of their physical bodies. “Sanctification is radically physical. The devotion that God seeks from his children is not theoretical; it is psychosomatic. Our devotion to God is to be expressed in and through what we do with our bodies. It matters what we look at with our eyes, what we do with our hands, where we go with our feet, what we think with our minds. Sanctification is not a theory; it is a lifestyle of concrete, embodied, loving obedience to God” (60).

Getting the basics of covenant theology is indispensable for the Reformed pastor. Therefore, I appreciated David McWilliams’s concise and clear presentation of the broad outlines of the covenant found in the Westminster Standards. He concludes by reflecting on the way that covenant theology shapes pastoral piety. Because theology’s goal is covenant fellowship, the pastor should “radiate experiential piety” in his life and preaching, even in such routine acts of worship as the benediction, which “is a pronouncement of the covenant bond of God with his people, a bond of fellowship with the members of the Trinity.” Just as congregations can sing hymns mindlessly, so pastors can go through the acts of worship mechanically, detached from the wonder of God and without affection for his people. So, in connection with the benediction, McWilliams asks, “Have you seen God’s face in Christ? Then show the fatherly character of God and the tender mercies of his people.” (126)

In his chapter on the work of Christ, David Gibson argues “that the doctrine of the work of Christ shows that what God wants for his people, what he desires and loves, is *the fellowship of perfection*” (150). His exposition of Hebrews 10:1-18 is the basis of his argument. The minister declares the blessed truth that God forgives believers’ sins, a forgiveness that comes from the sacrifice of Christ and results in a life of joyful obedience to God. “Forgiveness is great, yes, but better by far than tearful apologies is actually living as we ought in selfless delight, enchanted with God and loving our neighbor as ourselves” (163). The minister’s eyes must always be fixed on Christ, who gave to God the “devoted, delighted obedience” that every man owes him. Christ was able to offer himself up as an acceptable sacrifice for sin only because he was first “a

guilt-free and wholly obedient man, and so worthy of taking the place of guilt-laden, disobedient sinners” (164).

As the minister moves among his flock (their lives – like his – broken by sin, who both yearn to be forgiven and be forgiving), he proclaims that God in Christ remembers their sin no more. He offers Jesus who “can forgive *and* makes righteous. He has completed Adam’s work, fulfilled his mandate, restored what was lost, paid what was due, borne the curse, and so creation and creatures will again one day enter our perfect Sabbath rest.” (168)

Union with Christ is a doctrine cherished by every true minister. Phillip Ryken reminds readers they are united to Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection, his humiliation and exaltation, a union that has profound implications for Christian ministry (175-176). Commenting on Roman 8:17, he writes, “Pastoral ministry is not a matter of life and death, but a matter of death, then life” (177). One of the reasons young ministers leave the ministry is a result of unrealistic expectations. They are surprised, shocked, and overwhelmed by the conflict they experience in church. Conflict is just one of many forms that suffering takes in the life of the minister, a reality that the doctrine of union with Christ prepares a minister for. “Pastoral ministry could not be in union with Christ unless it entailed difficulty, discouragement, and sometimes death” (180)

Chapters 12-17 cover the doctrines of justification, adoption, sanctification, faith and repentance, perseverance, and assurance of faith. Each contributor upholds a strong commitment to biblical and confessional theology.

Those whom God justifies he adopts into his family. Men preparing for Reformed ministry should be most grateful for their Westminster heritage. In its confession and catechisms, unlike earlier confessional documents, the doctrine of adoption is given its own chapter and questions. As Ligon Duncan observes, “it is one of the joys of the minister of the gospel to proclaim, explain, and apply the Bible’s teaching about the freedoms and privileges of believers by virtue of their adoption” (245). Believers are assured that their all-sovereign Lord and loving heavenly Father will never cast his children off, making clear “the connection of adoption to the doctrines of perseverance and assurance” (251-252). Later, in his fine article on “Assurance of Faith,” Joel Beeke offers reasons from scripture why many true Christians lack assurance, and how faithful biblical preaching can lead to their experiencing that assurance, an assurance “that produces holy living marked by spiritual peace, joyful love, humble gratitude, cheerful obedience, and heartfelt mortification of sin.” (323-324,339)

Philip Ross’s “The Law of God” takes Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 19, with its categories of moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws, and works out its implications in the areas of head covering, tithing, and preaching.

It is the third area – preaching the moral law – that I will draw my students’ attention to. The pastor must be in the right frame of mind as he preaches the law. Angry demands do not make obedient Christians (358). The moral law must not be preached “with severity that empties it of all sweetness” (359). He must keep in mind that “the best example of what free and cheerful obedience to the Decalogue will look like in a preacher filled with the Spirit of Christ must be Christ Jesus.” His obedient

life “was not the mere absence of transgression, but many acts of consecration flowing from a pure and undivided heart” (361).

Chad Van Dixhoorn’s chapter, “The Sacraments,” offers valuable counsel on matters pertaining to the frequency of observing the Lord’s Supper, as well as what needs to be said prior to the distribution of the elements. Professors and pastors must teach “young ministers to identify what must *always* be said, and then help them create lists of what can *eventually* be said, one or two points at a time, as the weeks and months roll on in a man’s ministry” (460).

In the final chapter, Van Dixhoorn provides a biographical sketch and reflects on Ferguson as a teacher, pastor, preacher, and author. William Edgar’s afterward reflects on his relationship with Ferguson and the nature of true friendship. Readers will find a list of key terms at the end of each chapter (defined in a glossary), recommendations for further reading, and discussion questions.

I enthusiastically recommend this book. At a time when many seminaries are reducing the number of hours required for a Master of Divinity degree, Reformed Theological Seminary steadfastly holds to a rigorous and thorough course of studies. We live in an age of doctrinal declension and moral upheaval. As our chancellor puts it, “today’s pastors need to know more, not less.” I am grateful to place this book into the hands of my students as they study the scriptures and explore the doctrines that must shape them if they are to have God-honoring lives and ministries. Inasmuch as it also directs them to the writings of Sinclair Ferguson, it is a book that will serve ministers well for years to come.

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