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## **Herman Ridderbos and Romans 11 – Two New Translations**

*Guy Prentiss Waters, with Richard B. Gaffin Jr. / 4–23*

## **Doctrine and Devotion, Truth and Love, Faith and Practice:**

**Witsius, Cunningham, and Warfield on Ministerial Preparation in Seminary**

*J. Ligon Duncan III / 24–43*

## **Rhythms of Rest and Work in the Ministries of Douglas F. Kelly and William Still**

*Alex Mark / 44–56*

## **A Puritan Critique of Contemporary Christian Nationalist Proposals**

*John S. Simons / 57–65*

**Book Reviews / 66–73**



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### **In This Issue**

Two translations of Herman Ridderbos on Romans 11 by Guy Prentiss Waters and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. will appear this summer in *Reformed Theological Review*, whose editors have kindly permitted us to publish them here as well, thereby extending their reach among North American readers.

The articles by Ligon Duncan and Alex Mark are from the recently released *Festschrift* for Douglas F. Kelly, *Generation to Generation*. We thank our friends at Christian Focus Publications for allowing us honor Dr. Kelly this way, and we hope these articles will whet the appetites of readers for other chapters in the anthology.

The essay by John Simon, an alumnus of RTS Orlando, was originally presented at the meeting of the Evangelical Theological last November in Denver.

JRM

## Herman Ridderbos and Romans 11 – Two New Translations<sup>1</sup>

Guy Prentiss Waters, with Richard B. Gaffin Jr.

### Introduction

Herman Nicolaas Ridderbos (1909-2007) was one of the premier Reformed New Testament scholars of the twentieth century. For most of his professional life (1943-1978), he served as Professor of New Testament at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in Kampen.<sup>2</sup> Ridderbos's influence within the international Reformed church has come largely through his publications. His monographs on the Kingdom of God and the theology of Paul have served as the primary means by which English-speaking Reformed students, pastors, and scholars have gained an introduction to Ridderbos and his thought.<sup>3</sup> Ridderbos is best known for articulating a specifically Reformed redemptive-historical interpretation of the New Testament, particularly of the Synoptic Gospels and of the Pauline epistles. In this respect, he served as a vital counterpoint to the Bultmannian exegesis of the New Testament that dominated mid-century New Testament scholarship. Despite their age, his publications remain a valuable resource for equipping readers to engage contemporary currents of Pauline interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

The bulk, if not the majority, of Ridderbos's books are commentaries. English-speaking readers are familiar with his commentaries on Galatians, Matthew, and John.<sup>5</sup> Ridderbos has also authored commentaries on Romans, Colossians, and the Pastoral

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<sup>1</sup> Forthcoming from *Reformed Theological Review* and published here with the kind permission of its editors.

<sup>2</sup> No comprehensive biography of Ridderbos has been authored. See, however, the brief but useful sketch of Riemer Roukema, "Herman Ridderbos's Redemptive-Historical Exegesis of the New Testament" *WTJ* 66 (2004) 259-62, and that of B. Jan Aalbers and Heinrich Baarlink, *Herman Ridderbos: Nuchter en bewogen* (Kamper Miniaturen 9; Kampen: Vereniging van Oud-Studenten van de Theologische Universiteit Kampen, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. Raymond O. Zorn, transl. H. de Jongste; Philadelphia: P&R, 1962); *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (transl. J. R. De Witt; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975). The Dutch originals were published in 1950 and in 1966, respectively. To these works we may add the essays printed in Herman N. Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> Although space precludes elaboration, we note how Ridderbos's exegetical presentation and defense of such lines of Pauline teachings as union with Christ, justification by faith alone, and the law of God are profoundly useful in facilitating an informed response to both the New Perspective on Paul and post-New Perspective readings of Paul.

<sup>5</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches in Galatia* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953); Ridderbos, *Matthew* (BSC; trans. Ray Togtman; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997). Ridderbos's commentary on Matthew initially appeared in Dutch in two volumes, the first in 1941 and the second in 1946. His commentary on John also initially appeared in Dutch in two volumes, the first in 1987 and the second in 1992.

Epistles.<sup>6</sup> None of these latter three commentaries, however, has ever been translated into English.<sup>7</sup> Regrettably, the extended exegesis within these commentaries that undergirds the necessarily more compact and concise handling of particular texts within Ridderbos's *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* is inaccessible to individuals who are unable to read Dutch.

One such example of this phenomenon is Ridderbos's exegesis of Romans 11. In *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, Ridderbos offers, in brief compass, an interpretation of Rom 11:11-32 and the place of Israel within the scope of Paul's argument in those verses.<sup>8</sup> But it is in his commentary on Romans that he offers a fuller and more extensively exegetical presentation of that argument. Below is offered, for the first time in English, a translation of Ridderbos's exposition of Rom 11:12, 25-32 from his *Aan de Romeinen*. English-speaking readers will now be able to compare this exposition with the corresponding and complementary discussion in Ridderbos's *Paul*.

Four years prior to the release of *Aan de Romeinen*, Ridderbos published an essay within which he sketches an interpretation of Rom 9-11.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has prepared a translation of the portions of that essay pertinent to Rom 11:25-32, and is pleased to have it included in this article.<sup>10</sup> It provides a fine complement to Ridderbos's exposition of Romans 11. Like the translation from *Aan de Romeinen*, the translated excerpt from Ridderbos's essay is presented for the first time in English translation.

To introduce these two pieces and to place them in context, it is helpful to survey three leading interpretations among Reformed interpreters of "all Israel" in Rom 11:26 ("And in this way all Israel will be saved").<sup>11</sup> First, Calvin, like Augustine before him, understood "all Israel" to consist of the entirety of the people of God, Jew and gentile, at the consummation.<sup>12</sup> Second, many Reformed interpreters understand Paul to be speaking of a mass conversion of Jewish persons who happen to be living immediately before the return of Christ at the end of

<sup>6</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *Aan de Romeinen* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1959); F. W. Grosheide and Herman N. Ridderbos, *Aan de Efeziërs. Aan de Colossenzen* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1960) [F. W. Grosheide authored the commentary on Ephesians; Ridderbos, on Colossians]; Ridderbos, *De Pastorale brieven* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Ridderbos's commentary on Rom 7:14-25 in *Aan de Romeinen* has been translated by Henk Bruinsma and exists in typescript, but has never been published.

<sup>8</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 354-61.

<sup>9</sup> Herman Ridderbos, "Israël in het Nieuwe Testament, in het bijzonder volgens Rom. 9-11," in G. Ch. Aalders and H. Ridderbos, *Israël* (Exegetica. Oud- en nieuw-testamentische studiën II, 2; Den Haag: Van Keulen, 1955), 23-73.

<sup>10</sup> Gaffin's translation covers pp. 57-64 of the original essay.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the commentaries, see the surveys of Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Carlisle: Paternoster, 1979), 139-47, esp. 139-41; Cornelis P. Venema, "'In This Way All Israel Will Be Saved': A Study of Romans 11:26" *MAJT* 22 (2011): 19-40, esp. 28-29; and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 183.

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians* (trans. R. Mackenzie; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 255. For Augustine's interpretation of this passage, see Letter 149, *FC* 20:253, as cited at Gerald Bray, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VI – Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 298.

the age.<sup>13</sup> Third, other Reformed interpreters read Paul to be speaking of the totality of elect Jews throughout history, viewed from the perspective of the consummation.<sup>14</sup>

It is this third view for which Ridderbos vigorously contends. Ridderbos acknowledges in his 1955 essay on Romans 9-11, authored four years before he published *Aan de Romeinen*, that, in his day and context, “the great majority of recent exegetes” understand Rom 11:26 to refer to “a great religious revolution ... consisting of the conversion of Israel as a whole at the end of the days.” He confesses that “under the influence of the current exegesis, initially I too was of this opinion,” but that he has subsequently come to reject it. He maintains that neither Rom 9-11 as a whole nor Rom 11:25-26a particularly affords any exegetical basis for the “conversion of all Israel after the fulness of the gentiles has entered,” that is “in post-history.” “All Israel,” rather, “is the full number of those who in the course of history, in conformity and together with the true Israel of the old day, have repented before God, have believed in Christ, and have understood and accepted the true nature of Israel’s election: not by works but on account of the righteousness which is given by God.”

It is in *Aan de Romeinen* that Ridderbos develops this line of interpretation of Romans 11:11-32 in more exegetical depth. We will briefly summarize Ridderbos’s exposition of Rom 11:25-26a, and explore how his exposition of verses surrounding that text both complements and enhances his reading of Rom 11:25-26a. Critical, for Ridderbos, is the identity of the “mystery” of Rom 11:25. The word “mystery” does not denote an arcane secret but the purpose of God manifested in redemptive history. Ridderbos insists that the “mystery” in view in Rom 11:25 is not reserved entirely for Paul’s future but is presently being unveiled – historically and revelationally – in the course of Paul’s ministry. That “mystery” consists in the fact that there is a partial hardening upon Israel, but a hardening that is not permanent. That hardening, Ridderbos says in his comment on Rom 11:25, “exists under an ‘until’” – that is, the entrance of the fulness of the gentiles.

The mystery, however, does *not* extend into Rom 11:26a (“and so all Israel shall be saved”). This statement of Israel’s salvation is neither an “addition” to nor an “explanation” of the mystery. The mystery concerns the “manner whereby and the way wherein all Israel shall be saved,” namely through Israel’s partial hardening and the subsequent entrance of the gentiles into the people of God. What, then, is the force of Paul’s introductory phrase, “and so” (*kai houtōs*)? Ridderbos does not deny a temporal element to this expression, but stresses that Paul is not speaking of a third and final stage subsequent to Israel’s hardening and the entrance of the gentiles. Paul’s point is simply that Israel’s salvation is “substantively

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (rev. ed.; New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1896), 589; S. Greijdanus, *De brief van den apostel Paulus aan de gemeente te Rome*, Vol. 2 (Amsterdam: H. A. Van Bottenburg, 1933), 515-7; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 2:91-103, esp. 98; Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 87-91; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (2d ed.; BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 599-601; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 738. This position must be distinguished from the formally similar position espoused by many dispensational premillennial interpreters, on which see Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 140, and Venema, “In This Way,” 28.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to Hoekema, who argues for this view, see William Hendriksen, *Israel and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 34-52; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 698-700; and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 668-72.

dependent” upon the entrance of the “fulness of the Gentiles” (11:25). The way in which God will bring “all Israel” to salvation will be through bringing gentiles to faith in Christ.

To whom, then, does Paul refer when he speaks of “all Israel” in Rom 11:26? Specifically, how does that expression “relate to the presently visible, empirical Israel”? Ridderbos is insistent that this phrase gives no quarter to Barthian universalism – such a doctrine runs against the whole tenor of Paul’s argument in Rom 9-11, particularly, and the Epistle to the Romans, generally. Ridderbos also rejects Calvin’s view, that “Israel” refers to the whole people of God, Jew and gentile, for the simple reason that it would require an improbable textual “switch over from Israel to the church.” Neither, Ridderbos argues, is “all Israel” referring to the generation of Jews alive at the return of Christ. For one thing, this would implausibly identify a single generation with the whole nation. Moreover, it would situate Paul’s statement not in “history” but in “post-history.”

While the phrase “all Israel” does carry the sense of “a quantitatively full number,” Ridderbos contends, it is no less qualitative in denotation. Specifically, “all Israel” stands in contrast with the “remnant” of Rom 11:5, and is the equivalent of the “fulness” of Israel that Paul has mentioned in Rom 11:12. The term “fulness” carries the sense, Ridderbos comments on Rom 11:12, not of “all Israelites (and all gentiles) head for head.” It is, rather, a “full number fixed by God,” and an “eschatological, not ... a national concept.” But the term, in this respect, carries also “a qualitative meaning” in that it conveys “God’s purpose of salvation for Israel (and gentiles).” It expresses the divinely-intended outcome of God’s ongoing grafting of Israelites back “into their own tree” (Rom 11:23).

The salvation of “all Israel” is therefore not a sudden conversion *en masse* at the end of history. When Paul says that “all Israel will be saved,” he is speaking, rather, to Israel “sharing in the eschatological salvation,” in keeping with the jealousy that Paul has earlier mentioned in Rom 11:11,14. This interpretation of Rom 11:26a is confirmed, Ridderbos argues, by what Paul says in the verses that follow. The Isaianic citations in Rom 11:26b-27 describe God’s work of redemption in Christ, particularly for Israel. Because God has pledged to fulfill his covenanted promises of salvation to Israel, there is hope of “salvation in the future for rebellious Israel.” Israel’s present hardening, in other words, is not God’s last word for Israel. The dual perspective that the church is to adopt towards Israel, articulated in Rom 11:28, confirms that “God’s grace remains open for [Israel and] his message of salvation continues going out to them.” In Rom 11:30-32, Paul argues for an “interdependence” of gentile and Jew in salvation that will extend throughout redemptive history – “Israel by its disobedience brought the gentiles to salvation; reciprocally, by the mercy bestowed upon them, the gentiles attract Israel. That is the secret of God’s economy of salvation.” The mercy of God to Israel, described in Rom 11:26a, is a present reality, according to these verses – “In this way already now Israel, despite its partial hardening, finds the granting of grace and it will be saved in its one-day fulness or wholeness.” But “down to the end the motifs of [Rom] 9:23 continue to resonate.” It is in Rom 11:32 that Paul articulates the “fruit and goal of the divine work,” namely mercy to all.

In conclusion, Ridderbos argues that the “mystery” of Rom 11:25 is the divinely-ordained interplay between partially-hardened Israel, on the one hand, and gentiles who are coming to faith in Christ, on the other. The latter provokes the former to jealousy and therefore prompts Jewish persons to believe in Christ and thus be engrafted into their own tree (Rom 11:23). This process is one that Paul describes as spanning the duration of redemptive history (Rom 11:30-32). The outcome of this dynamic will be the “fulness” of the

Jews (11:12) and the “fullness of the Gentiles” (11:25) – “God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (11:32). It is after this fashion, Paul reasons, that “all Israel will be saved.” “All Israel” (11:26), synonymous with the “fulness” of Rom 11:12, refers to the whole number of Jewish elect persons spanning redemptive history. They will be “saved” not in a sudden, end-time, mass conversion but precisely through the dynamics that Paul has outlined in Rom 11:11-32. It is this conviction about the depth and breadth of the grace of God that prompts Paul to lead his readers in the ascription of glory to God alone in Rom 11:33-36.

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**Herman Ridderbos, *Aan de Romeinen (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1959), pp. 261-9, 253-5 (Romans 11:25-32, 11:12)***

**Translated by Guy Prentiss Waters**

*Translator’s Note:* I am indebted to the keen editorial eye of Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., who has improved the translation in more ways than I can mention. All footnotes are the translator’s. Reference has been made in the footnotes to sources that Ridderbos references in the course of his commentary (and, where available, to English translations of those sources).

***The divine mystery in the entrance of the gentiles and the salvation of Israel***

In this following section of his argument Paul comes to a conclusion. Closely connected with what he has said in verses 22-24 about the grace, severity, and power of God, he now indicates the content of the mystery of God in redemptive-history, that the marvelous interdependence, in which God deals with Israel and the gentiles, ultimately also entails the fulfillment of God’s promises for Israel.

**11:25** In verse 24, the apostle has spoken with great emphasis about the re-ingrafting of the now still unbelieving Israel (the broken branches) into their own olive tree. With a new and emphatic beginning (“For I do not want, brothers, etc.”), he now develops this thought further as the contents of a mystery to be made known to them by him. Here too the purpose of this disclosure is to keep Christians from among the gentiles from relying on their own wisdom instead of paying attention to the manifestation of the saving counsel of God.

By the “mystery” that the apostle now makes known is not to be understood in general a kind of secret teaching but, as also appears from the use of the word elsewhere, the hidden counsel of God as this, realized gradually in redemptive history, “is revealed” (cf.



16:25; Col 1:26, 27, et al). One can pose the question whether the apostle, who with his prophetic-kerygmatic preaching accompanies and shows as it were the mysteries of God revealed in Christ (cf., e.g., Eph 3:3-7; 1:9-10; 1 Cor 2:7 ff.; Col 1:25 ff.), speaks here of a mystery that has already been revealed in the progress of God's work of salvation, or whether this mystery still awaits this revelation but for him, as an apostle prophetically gifted by the Spirit (cf. Eph 3:5), has already been disclosed (cf. 1 Cor 15:51). The answer is connected with the interpretation of the content of the mystery. It consists first of all in this, that "a partial hardening has come about for Israel, until the fulness of the gentiles shall have come in." This is the hidden way of God, as this begins to be delineated before the illumined eyes of the apostle; it is the connection that appears to exist between the unbelief of Israel and the ingathering of the gentiles. A connection, to which he also in the preceding verses has already repeatedly pointed out and around which his thoughts continue to move as a marvelous motif in the divine economy of salvation, compare verses 30-32. To this extent one can thus say that the mystery not only has reference to the future but is already being actively realized. On the other hand, the apostle also goes still further than the present. For he also indicates here the duration of Israel's partial hardening, namely as extending *until* the fulness of the gentiles shall be ingathered. With these last words is intended the point in time wherein the full number fixed by God (compare at verse 12) of the gentiles shall have come to the eschatological state of salvation. The way which God deals with his people and in which He makes known to others "the riches of his majesty," 9:23, does not mean, therefore, the end of Israel as the people of God. The hardening of God exists under an "until." And this "until" not only includes that with the end of the present dispensation and the entrance of the redeemed in the future, the punishment of God in the present dispensation concerning a portion of Israel automatically finds its end but that this, as also appears unmistakably from what follows, shall make room for the salvation of "all Israel," verse 26a.

*gar*: "enkenthrishēsontai" of verse 24 is now further explained. *Ou ... thelō hymas agnoein*, compare 1:13; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13. In all these places with the vocative "adelphoi." The whole expression announces an important transition in the argument; the reasoning demonstration goes over into a prophetic pronouncement, compare 1 Cor 15:51. See for the definition of the concept *mysterion* in Paul also my *Paulus en Jesus* (1952), p. 61.<sup>15</sup> For a similar view of divine "mysteries" in the Qumran texts, see, e.g., J. van der Ploeg, *Vondsten in de woestijn van Juda* (1957), p. 110, 190.<sup>16</sup> *Touto* has in view what follows. In place of *en beautois* (A, B), *κ*, C, D, and others read *par' beautois*, and P46, Ψ, G, et al., *beautois*. The reading with *par'* has a parallel in 12:16. Following Bl.-Debr. §188, 2\*, both *en* and *para* are connected in certain places in the LXX.<sup>17</sup> The single dative should be understood as a dative of advantage. However, whether one reads "for yourself," "in yourself," or "by yourself" (the choice is difficult), in it there is still the element of *self-conceit*, to have enough of which one

<sup>15</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paulus en Jezus: Oorsprong en algemeen karakter van Paulus' Christus-prediking* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1952); ET, *Paul and Jesus: Origin and General Character of Paul's Preaching of Christ*, trans. David H. Freeman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1958).

<sup>16</sup> J. van der Ploeg, O.P., *Vondsten in de woestijn van Juda: De rollen der Dode Zee* (Utrecht: Prisma, 1957); ET, *The Excavations at Qumran*, trans. Kevin Smyth, S.J., (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1958).

<sup>17</sup> ET, Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

*himself* already thinks he knows. For *pōrōsis*, see on verse 7. Some Latin MSS have “caecitas,” that can point to the reading, *pērōsis*.

When the apostle now speaks of *pōrōsis apo merous ... achri hou*, etc., he does not wish to say that the present (in his days) hardened part (*hoi loipoi*, v.7) should all remain in this hardening, until the fulness of the gentiles has come in. After all, he speaks himself of “to provoke to jealousy,” “not to remain in their unbelief,” verses 11, 14, 23, which, as appears from verse 14, looks on their conversion in the present time, compare also the “now” in verse 31b. There will indeed remain, therefore, a partial hardening, but this does not take away from the possibility of conversion in the present time (see the exposition). See for *to plērōma* my comments on verse 12. J. Munck, *Christus und Israël, Eine Auslegung von Röm 9-11* (1956), p.100, wants here to understand *plērōma* as the conclusion of the preaching of the gospel to the gentiles, 2 Tim 4:17.<sup>18</sup> However, here the *plērōma* of Paul’s ministry or of the preaching of the gospel is not spoken of, compare 15:19, Col 1:25, 2 Tim 4:17 (places to which Munck appeals). However, to want to understand it in this sense appears to us an evasion of the obvious meaning. Also one must understand the *eiselthē* in a temporal sense, which the word, contrary to Munck’s appeal (in my opinion, incorrectly) to Bauer and Liddel-Scott, nowhere appears to have. Incidentally, the word *eiselthē* is differently understood. Some supplement: “to the faith” (Lietzmann) or “to the church” (Kühl).<sup>19</sup> Lagrange even thinks of a metaphorical use that recalls the image of the “entrance” in the preceding discussion.<sup>20</sup> However, this last is certainly artificial. We will have to do here with an eschatological term: to enter into the Kingdom of God or something like that. Thus the word in the Synoptics is used repeatedly, Matt 5:20, 7:21, et al.; also in the absolute sense used here, Matt 7:13; 23:13; Luke 13:24. See also Heb 3:1 ff.; 4:1 ff. Nowhere else in Paul do we find this word in this sense.

**11:26a** In close connection to verse 25 then follows: “and so shall all Israel be saved.”

With this we stand, first of all, before the question, to what extent these words still belong to the content of the mystery. Although one could conclude from the construction of the sentence that these words are merely to be understood as a further addition or explanation of the mystery described in v.25b, the opening words of verse 26 (“and so,” etc.) are connected with the saving significance of the “until” such that at least *the manner in which* Israel shall be saved also forms the content of the divine mystery. Indeed, one can ask to what extent for the apostle the future salvation of “all Israel” is itself made known as the content of a mystery that is to be understood only now. After all, for this he appeals not to a revelation or to the presently perceptible realization of the hidden purpose of God’s saving decree, but to the firm promise and to the irrevocability of his gifts of grace and calling (vs. 26 ff.). Therefore, it is expressly the manner whereby and the way wherein all Israel shall be saved that represents the mystery of God: so, as is described in what precedes, after first the partial hardening has occurred, and by its fall the riches of the gentiles have taken place, all Israel shall be saved.

<sup>18</sup> Johannes Munck, *Christus und Israël, Eine Auslegung von Röm 9-11* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1956); ET, *Christ & Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9-11*, trans. I. Nixon (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> H. Lietzmann, *An die Römer*, 4th ed. (HNT 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933); Ernst Kühl, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Leipzig: Verlag von Quelle & Meyer, 1913).

<sup>20</sup> Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Saint Paul Épître aux Romains*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Études Bibliques; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1930).

The question remains then, what one is to understand by the salvation of all Israel and in what sense the apostle can speak about this with such great certainty. In our opinion, he intends to express, both with the “until” and with the “all Israel shall be saved,” that the present partial hardening of Israel will not annul the final salvation of all Israel. And with “all Israel” he means the same thing as what in verse 12 he has called “the fulness” (as in this context he also speaks of the “fulness of the gentiles”): the whole number of Israel, determined by God, that is once saved by God from all sin and destruction and in which God’s promises to Israel are fulfilled. The mystery of God consists in the unforeseen way, tied to the entrance of the gentiles, in which God brings about the promised salvation of “all Israel.”

One can ask finally how this “all Israel” is related to the presently visible, empirical Israel. On the one hand, here one must beware of a universalistic interpretation. The eschatological character of the terms “all Israel,” “the fullness of Israel” described above is already opposed to such a view. Here the concern is not with a wholeness or fulness established on the basis of empirical research, but with a measure that is determined by God (see the comments above on verse 12). Such a universalism, moreover, would be completely in conflict with the whole tenor of Paul’s gospel, with the main theme of our letter, namely, that the righteous shall live by faith, as well as with the wrestling argument of Rom 9-11, wrestling, namely, to maintain both the mercy and the severity of God, both the omnipotence and the faithfulness of God with respect to Israel. On the other hand, there is in “all Israel” and in “its fulness” not only the indication of a quantitatively full number – how small or large it may be – but of such a wholeness or fulness, which qualitatively in fact can represent the wholeness or fulness of *Israel*. Insofar as “all Israel” not only quantitatively but also qualitatively something other than “the remnant” of Israel (verse 5); “all Israel” says precisely that this Israel shall no longer be “remnant-Israel.” This is so, as also appears from the foregoing, also concerning those who, although now unbelieving, will not remain in their unbelief, verse 23, and by the power of God will still be engrafted into their own tree. That such a conversion would take place *after* the entrance of the gentiles and so would also belong to the contents of the mystery, the apostle does not say and can, in my opinion, in no way be derived from the text. The expression “shall be saved” does not speak of conversion, but of sharing in the eschatological salvation, and is, in my opinion, only to be understood as the divine answer to the faith, the jealousy to which Israel must now be brought, verses 11, 14. Indeed it appears from the certainty with which Paul speaks both in verse 26b and in verse 24, that from unbelieving Israel he expects such a conversion, that in fact “all Israel,” the “fulness” of Israel shall be saved in the sense indicated. Therefore, one will have to place the emphasis upon the *fragmentary* character of the continuing hardening indicated by the apostle in verse 25. The words, *and so*, etc. say, then, that in fact the partial hardening ordained by God is not removed, but, on the other hand, that this does not stand in the way of the salvation of “all Israel.” For as this hardening serves the ingathering of the gentiles, so shall Israel be provoked to jealousy by the salvation extending further and further to the gentiles, verse 31. It is this interdependence, continuing to the end, between the salvation of the gentiles and that of Israel, which appears to be the actual content of the divine mystery, compare verses 31 and 32.

*kai houtōs* receives all the emphasis, because in the *modus quo* of Israel’s salvation lies the mystery. The words (of course) also have a temporal connotation: *and then*. However “*kai houtōs*” is not synonymous with “*kai tote*.” The “then” is already included in “*achri hou*.” The

“so” does not simply say that all Israel’s being saved waits for the entrance of the gentiles, but above all that the former is connected with the latter, therefore is not only temporally but also substantively dependent, compare verse 31b, verse 12. *pas Israēl*: “Hebraizing: ... ‘the whole Israel,’” Bl.-Debr., §275.4, compare §262.3: “the article is lacking in Hebraizing formulae.” Several times this formula is used in another connection in order to indicate the whole people of Israel in a historical sense, compare 1 Kings 12:1; Dan 9:11. In the Mishnah there is a statement, in which all Israel is spoken of in this historical-empirical sense, that it shall have a share in the future world, compare Strack-Billerbeck [op. cit.] Volume 3, p. 293.<sup>21</sup> Paul has rejected such a conception of Israel as a redemptive-historical designation, 9:6.

*pas Israēl* can, in my opinion, only be understood as the *plērōma*, representing the whole people, in the above-described eschatological sense of the word. See, for the view of Matter, above on verse 11, note. The view of Calvin (compare also that of Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II [1942], p. 330), that here the whole people of God is spoken of, both from the Jews and the gentiles (whereby at the same time he also thinks of an eschatological conversion of Israel: “when the Gentiles have come in, the Jews will at the same time return from their defection to the obedience of faith”) is, in my opinion, in conflict with the whole course of Rom 9-11.<sup>22</sup> One cannot suddenly switch over here from Israel to the church. For the universalistic view, see above. Others understand that here the whole empirical Israel is spoken of, as that shall exist after the entrance of the fulness of the gentiles, but then “as a whole, apart from the question of individual persons” (so, e.g., Greijdanus [op. cit.] II, p.516).<sup>23</sup> However, it can’t be shown how the (national) Israel-of-the-last-days could be identified with this understanding of the whole people of Israel. Can one say that Israel as a whole nation is saved, when by that must be understood a fraction of the people that eventually reaches the terminus of history? Moreover, then the conversion of this “all Israel” is shifted from history to post-history, and then “shall be saved” must in the first place be understood as “come to conversion.” Neither for the one nor for the other is there ground in the text. See furthermore also my *Israel* (1955), pp. 58-64.<sup>24</sup> I think that I am able to uphold in the main the interpretation of Rom 11:26 offered there. Only in the explanation given above more emphasis has been placed on the expectation of the apostle of a much more extensive and adequate representation of Israel than can be brought to expression by the qualification “remnant.”

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<sup>21</sup> Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4 vols. (München: Beck, 1922-6); ET, *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash*, 3 vols. trans. Joseph Longarino, Jacob N. Cerone, Andrew Bowden (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021-23).

<sup>22</sup> John Calvin, trans. R. Mackenzie, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 255. The title of Barth that Ridderbos cites is *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik II/2: Die Lehre von Gott. Teilband 2* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1942); ET, *The Church Dogmatics II/2: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957).

<sup>23</sup> S. Greijdanus, *De brief van den apostel Paulus aan de gemeente te Rome*, Vol. 2 (Amsterdam: H. A. Van Bottenburg, 1933).

<sup>24</sup> Herman Ridderbos, “Israël in het Nieuwe Testament, in het bijzonder volgens Rom. 9-11,” in G. Ch. Aalders and H. Ridderbos, *Israël* (Exegetica. Oud- en nieuw-testamentische studiën II, 2; Den Haag: Van Keulen, 1955), 23-73. For the English translation of the excerpt that Ridderbos mentions above, see Gaffin’s translation that follows in this article.

**11:26b-27** The place to which the apostle appeals for his previous statement is Isa 59:20,21, mainly according to LXX, while verse 27b contains words from Isa 27:9 (also according to LXX). In the form in which these biblical passages are rendered here, mention is made of *the* future Redeemer – in Isa 59, the Lord Himself – *who shall come out of Zion*, cf. Psa 14:7. Zion, then, is conceived of here as the place where the Lord dwells and from which also the salvation sent by him goes out. Even if one assumes that Paul thinks of Christ as the Redeemer, one need not refer this particular Old Testament expression to the appearance of Christ. The thought, then, is more general, that in the coming of Christ the announced “redemptive” coming of God Himself is fulfilled. The redemption consists in this, that *He will take away the iniquities of Jacob*, that is to say, will forgive and remove the guilt and, with that, the accompanying punishment. In all this, what in verse 27 is still called with other words *God’s forgiveness of their sins, God’s covenant shall come to light in their favor*, that is, God’s promise once made to Israel to be their God and to give them his salvation. The apostle chooses and arranges the words from the Old Testament such that all the emphasis comes to be placed on what God will do in order to fulfill for rebellious Israel what he has promised it as his people once and again and again. It is this promise repeated in the Old Testament in all kinds of ways to the true Israel, which here forms the basis to hope also for deliverance and salvation in the future for rebellious Israel.

The MT of Isa 59:19 has, as the equivalent of verse 26b: “As Redeemer He will come for Zion and for those who in Jacob turn from their apostasy.” Paul’s quotation agrees with the LXX, except for the words *ek Siōn* (LXX *heneken Siōn*). *Ek Siōn* is understood by some here of the heavenly kingdom, with an appeal to Gal 4:26 (so Michel, compare also Schlatter).<sup>25</sup> It may, however, be asked whether Paul has wished to apply this citation of Isa 59 in this elaborated sense to the Messiah – see the exposition.

Verse 27 is more difficult to identify. The initial words are in literal agreement with Isa 59:20 (LXX). There is, however, no mention of the forgiveness of sins in the context of Isa 59:20. The words, *hotan aphelōmai autou tēn hamartian*, do occur in Isa 27:9 (LXX); here, however, without mention of the Covenant. In substance one may also think of Jer 31:33 ff. (LXX 38:31 ff.). There it is first said *hoti autē hē diathēkē* and in what follows mention is also made of the forgiveness of sins, though with other words (*hoti hileōs esomai tais adikiais autōn kai tōn hamariōn autōn ou mē mnēsthō eti*). The apostle appeals in this citation in verse 27 to a central thought in the Old Testament (the connection between Covenant and the forgiveness of sins) and for that purpose, as far as we can ascertain, connects in a free manner expressions from various sources with one another. The construction of the sentence in Isa 59:21 beginning with *kai hautē* is thereby lost. In the context of our text one can ask with what *kai hautē* corresponds, with what goes before or with what follows. Grammatically the sentence with *hotan* does not fit as the content of *kai hautē*, although *kai hautē* in Isa 59 points forward. However, it is evidently the intention of the apostle, by speaking anew in verse 27b of the forgiveness of sins, to indicate this particularly as the contents of the Covenant of God. *hē par’ emou diathēkē*: the determination of grace proceeding from God and realized by God himself.

<sup>25</sup> Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955); Adolf Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1952); ET, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

**11:28** Verse 28 gives a still further explanation from both sides of the mystery disclosed in verse 25. Of unbelieving Israel it is said that *as far as concerns the gospel* (that is to say, seen in the light of God's work of salvation revealed in Christ) they are *enemies*, rejected by God. The apostle adds to this, *for your sake*, compare verses 12, 15, 30. This is one of the central thoughts. God has turned against Israel in order to maintain the gracious character of his work of salvation, and thus also to open the door for the gentiles. Therefore God's aversion toward Israel is for the sake of the gentiles. This, however, does not remove the fact that the same unbelieving Israel still appears in another way in the divine counsel of salvation: *as far as concerns election* (that is to say, seen in the light of the fact that they constitute a portion of the people chosen by God out of all the peoples), by God *beloved for the sake of the fathers*. Because of God's promise of salvation to Israel's patriarchs, they continue to share in the favor of God towards Israel. This being beloved does not automatically imply their salvation, nor does God's enmity against them include their destruction. God's grace remains open for them, his message of salvation continues going out to them.

*Kata* indicates here in both instances not so much the standard by which something is measured, but the point of view under which, the light in which something must be seen: *with respect to, in relation to*, compare Bauer (op. cit.), p.739, s.v. *kata* #6.<sup>26</sup> *Echthroi* (cf. 5:10) here, as the antithesis of *agapētoi* and in view of the overall context, certainly has a passive meaning. The reference of the expression is not so much to the hostile disposition of God towards Israel, as in fact to the alienated condition from God in which they exist, their rejection by him (cf. v. 15). *Di' hymas* stands over against *dia tous pateras*; the first *dia* has more of a final meaning, the second, a causal meaning. *eklogē* here has in view not the personal election to salvation of all the presently still unbelieving Israelites, but, according to *dia tous pateras*, the election of Israel as the people of God, see the exposition. For the thought, see v. 16.

**11:29** In verse 29 this message of salvation is more closely developed and defended. God's love towards Israel is specified here as *the gracious gifts and calling of God*. Both terms are to be understood in close connection with one another. The first brings to mind what is summarized in 9:4 (cf. 3:1 ff.); "calling," the way in which God, by thus displaying his grace, has drawn to himself and placed Israel on his side. Of this display of grace and this calling, it now holds that they are *without repentance*. They cannot be undone, God does not abandon Israel as his people. This does not mean that Israel's own responsibility, in this case its antipathy toward God would not be operative. Even in God's display of grace and the calling of Israel in history, Israel has always been called to accountability, faith, and obedience. And this continues even at present to apply to them (cf. vs. 23). However, it also belongs to these perspectives, which are comprehended in God's Covenant and calling, that He makes his people willing for faith and conversion (cf. Jer 31:31-34). Although the apostle does not reflect on this connection here, the force of the "impenitence" asserted here is however also included. And what is most profound about this is that in the end Israel will turn out to attain to its fulness.

*Ametamelēta*: in fact in the OT God's repentance is also spoken of repeatedly, Gen 6:6; 1 Sam 15:11, 35; Psa 106:45; Jer 18:8, 10; 26:3,19; 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2, while, on the other hand, the idea is rightly rejected that God, like a man, would have regretted his intentions or

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (1952); ET, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

deeds, Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29. The assertion of the apostle does not contain abstract considerations concerning the immutability of God, but puts the reliability of divine speaking and promising beyond doubt (cf. 3:3 ff.).

**11:30, 31** How much the grace of God for Israel continues to be to be in force, the apostle finally expresses yet once more by pointing anew to the marvelous interdependence of the ways in which God grants grace first to the gentiles, then to Israel. On the one hand, because of that procedure, all reasons for pride and self-sufficiency for the gentiles are removed; on the other hand, the prospect for granting grace to Israel is opened. Verse 30 repeats in substance what has already been said in verses 12, 15, and 28 concerning the connection between the granting of grace to the gentiles and the disobedience of Israel; verse 31 adds to this that unbelieving Israel has now fallen into disobedience – in which the present-day Christians from among the gentiles had once lived – so that, according to God’s marvelous ordinance, it (that is, Israel) now in its turn would, with the gentile Christians, share in God’s mercy; this time, however, not through the disobedience but through the granting of grace to the gentiles. With this last consideration is meant the jealousy-provoking influence that must go out upon Israel from the granting of grace to the gentiles. Israel by its disobedience brought the gentiles to salvation; reciprocally, by the mercy bestowed upon them the gentiles attract Israel. That is the secret of God’s economy of salvation. Of particular importance in this regard is the fact that the apostle contrasts up to three times the *once* of the disobedience of the gentiles to the *now*: namely, of God’s granting of mercy to the gentiles, of the disobedience of Israel, and of God’s granting of mercy to disobedient Israel. The last of these three is thus not only a matter of the future of which verse 26a speaks; it already takes place *now* in the power that goes out to Israel from the salvation given to the gentiles. In this way, already now Israel, despite its partial hardening, finds the granting of grace and one day it will be saved in its fulness or wholeness. Here is the confirmation of our explanation of verses 25 and 26.

*Apeithēsate ... ēlēthēte*: here and in verse 31 again and again set over against human disobedience is *not* their subsequent obedience but God’s mercy. Here is the proper explanation of the change. *Tē toutōn apeitheia*: for the causal explanation of this disobedience see the exposition, vs. 12 – *tō hymeterō eleei* belongs not to the preceding *apeithēsan* (where it does not give the right sense), but, completely according to the substance of the parallelism of this statement, to what follows: *so that through the mercy shown to you, etc.* See for this connection also the detailed and, in my opinion, decisive argument of Greidanus (op. cit.) II, p. 521, 522; cf. for the grammatical construction, e.g., 2 Cor 2:4; see Bl.-Debr. § 475.1.<sup>27</sup> This work points further to “the postpositive *hina*” in places such as 1 Cor 9:15 (2 Cor 12:7); Gal 2:10; Col 4:16, §475.1. Especially in Paul this construction appears frequently. In some MSS *hysterōn* stands in place of *nun* after *autoi*, in others *nun* is missing. However, it should certainly be original and because it seemed unnecessary or was found to be strange, it was omitted or altered. Michel believes that here Paul does not think about the present but about the near future in which the destiny of Israel will turn; and he calls it an enigma that *pote* does not stand in place of *nun*, so that the symmetry *pote ... nun ... nun ... pote* in verses 30-31 would be complete. However, this stems from a mistaken view of the *nun*. At issue here is precisely the present as the time of the decision for or against Christ, cf. also Stählin, *TWB IV*, p. 1106,

<sup>27</sup> See Greidanus, *De brief*, and Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar*, cited above.

s.v. *nun*.<sup>28</sup> For the importance of this view for the understanding of this pericope, see the exposition.

**11:32** Verse 32 recapitulates all this still one more time as the fruit and goal of the divine work, and reduces it, as it were, to its simplest formulation. *God has handed over all* – gentiles and Jews – *to disobedience so that he could have mercy on all*. Disobedience is not the work of God, but the punishment of being enclosed in, imprisoned in, devoted to disobedience. Into that condition of powerlessness and hopelessness God has first brought all, first the gentiles, now also Israel. However, not to leave them in that condition, but to show and to magnify his mercy to all. Down to the end the motifs of 9:23 continue to resonate. The emphasis is on what is repeated: *all*. God has not rejected Israel in its disobedience less than he first did the gentiles, but his saving will with reference to Israel is also no less than that he has shown to the gentiles. The end of God's ways demonstrates how comprehensive his counsel has been, both concerning Jews and gentiles, both in righteousness and mercy.

*Synekleisen*: to shut up in, to transfer: to hand over (e.g. *eis rhomphaian*, Psa 78:62 LXX), compare Gal 3:22. *Tous pantas* has in view the totalities, all classes of men, here especially the Jews and the gentiles as collective entities. The identification of the *pantes* with Jews and gentiles causes to appear afresh that the apostle conceives *pas Israel* in verses 26 as nothing other than the *plērōma tōn ethnōn* in verse 25 and that the *scope* of Israel's being given grace must be determined by no other criteria than those of the gentiles. *eleēsē*: the repeated speaking of *eleos*, etc. recalls 9:23, as the overall thought of chapter 9 also continues to speak in this entire context, see the exposition.

**11:12** Starting from this interdependence of the divine economy of salvation with the gentiles and unbelieving Israel, the apostle now goes on further to highlight the purported *importance* involved of Israel's return to and reacceptance by God. In this he follows an *a minori ad maius* reasoning. First he posits: their *fall* and, coupled with it, their *setback* in relation to the gentiles means *riches* for the nations of the world and the gentiles, see on verse 11. Clear here again, down to the terminology, is the motif of 9:23. If, however, from the setting aside of unbelieving Israel such a salvation is already "set free," what then may one not expect when it (Israel) comes to its *fulness*? With this last observation an eschatological state of salvation is meant, in which presently unbelieving Israel may display quantitatively and qualitatively the picture of God's fulfilling and perfecting dealings with them. In no way, then, in his vision of Israel does the apostle acquiesce in its presently occurring desolate condition, but he focusses all attention, even of his gentile readers, verse 13, on the possibilities that are implied in the "provoking to jealousy" of unbelieving Israel. At the same time he maintains in the "if ... how much more" the connection between the salvation of the world and Israel. For it is the salvation promised to *Israel* in which all generations are blessed. If this salvation already appears in the punishment of Israel, how much more will it appear when Israel itself may be the object of God's fulfilling work of salvation?

*Hēttēma* occurs infrequently; in Isa 31:8 (LXX) in the sense of defeat, debacle. In Paul elsewhere in 1 Cor 6:7 as: to get the worst of it, to lose the battle. Here also to be understood as a denotation of Israel's lost position: *setback*, cf. also Delling, *TWB VI*, p. 303: "*hēttēma* =

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<sup>28</sup> G. Stählin, "Nun," eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), IV:1106-23.



*hēttasthai* to give place to (the Gentiles).<sup>29</sup> Others want to understand it quantitatively: reduction in number, in contrast with *plērōma*. However, the word has more of a qualitative meaning, just as *ploutos* has in view not the great number of but the grace given to the gentiles, see also Leenhardt (op. cit., p.160).<sup>30</sup> To *plērōma autōn* can mean both quantitatively “their full number” and as well as “their fulness” in the sense of the full measure of the salvation bestowed on them. In my opinion here one must think, at least in the first instance, of the first option. In verse 25 the apostle speaks in a similar way of the *plērōma tōn ethnōn*. The meaning there cannot be: “all Israelites (and all gentiles) head for head” Such a universalism is in conflict with the whole scope of Paul’s preaching, cf. esp. 1 Cor 16:22. The size of the *plērōma* must therefore not be sought in the numbers of empirical Israel or of the gentile peoples (in Paul’s day), but in the size set previously by God. *Plērōma* must therefore be understood as an eschatological, not as a national concept, just as in Gal 4:4 it indicates a fulness not to be ascertained empirically but determined by God. In the same way in Rev 6:11 the “becoming full of (the number of) their fellow servants” is also spoken of and in 4 Ezra 4:36 of the coming of the end, “when the number of your peers (the justified) is full,” cf. also Apoc. Baruch 23:4,5. Indeed it warrants adding here that the *plērōma*, thus understood, indicates not only a quantitative limit but also has a qualitative significance: it speaks of Israel’s (and the gentiles’) fulness as that which represents in an adequate way God’s purpose of salvation for Israel (and the gentiles). In this respect, one may perhaps set it over against *leimma*, verse 5 (e.g. with Delling, *TWB VI*, p.303; Schrenk, *TWB IV*, p.218).<sup>31</sup> This *leimma*, too, is the result of God’s special involvement with Israel. However, it does not constitute the final goal thereof but rather sets the ultimate limit for Israel’s fall as the people of God.

**Herman Ridderbos, “Israel in het Nieuwe Testament, in het bijzonder volgens Romans 9-11,” Israel (den Haag: Van Keulen, 1955), pp. 57-64**

**Translated by Richard B. Gaffin Jr.**

### **§ 13. Romans 11:25. The Mystery. [to *mystērion touto*]**

So, then, the apostle comes to the statements of verses 25ff., verses that have been the source of so much debate. He speaks of a mystery about which he does not want the gentiles to remain ignorant, so that they may not be conceited.

The immediate question is what the apostle intends by bringing “this mystery” into the discussion. Is here at last a special secret disclosed, which the apostle has kept back until

<sup>29</sup> Gerhard Delling, “*Plērōma*,” *TDNT VI*:305n.56.

<sup>30</sup> F. J. Leenhardt, *L’Épître de St. Paul aux Romains* (Commentaires du Nouveau Testament 6; 1957); ET, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1961).

<sup>31</sup> Gerhard Delling, “*Plērōma*,” *TDNT VI*:305; G. Schrenk, “*Leimma*,” *TDNT IV*:211-2.

the end as the high point of his entire argumentation, a special revelation granted to him, which he now produces to conclude the whole discussion? Or should we say that here what is already demonstrated in the preceding verses is surveyed once again and shown to be that way of God with his people which was previously hidden but now has come to light?

In our opinion, for the most part one will have to discover the key to the problem in the latter possibility. This also agrees with what in general the term “mystery” means for Paul. It is not in the first place a noetic but a historical category, *not* a secret teaching or a secret revelation for initiates. Rather it is the realization of the divine economy of salvation, which up to now was not visible because it not yet *was*, but which has come to light with the revelation of Christ and thus has been disclosed, is revealed.<sup>32</sup>

This all-embracing revelation of the Christ-mystery has all sorts of facets, among others the entirely new relationship of Jews and gentiles, as that is expressed in Ephesians 3:3ff, especially. What Paul now says about the mystery in Romans 11:25 will also have to be understood in this sense. Paul is not appealing to a divine revelation accorded only to him, but he refers here to God’s way with Israel as this is presently being realized. Accordingly, on the one hand he brings into consideration the historical fact of the hardening of a part of Israel, the irrevocability of God’s gifts and calling on the other. The combination of these two forms God’s *mystērion*. And he directs it once more against the possible pride and conceit of gentile Christians. This is the mystery, the way of God presently being disclosed and evoking worship: hardening has partially come upon Israel until the fullness of the gentiles will have come in; and so all Israel will be saved.

Thus this statement first of all confirms that there is an irrevocable correlation between the partial hardening of Israel and the bringing in of the gentiles. Only what in this respect has already been said in the preceding verses is now given its most pointed formulation.

Israel cannot be blessed – this is the presupposition – without the gentiles. Now, however, it becomes apparent that Israel’s unbelief and its partial hardening is the way in which salvation comes to the gentiles. The stream that was blocked up by the dam of Israel’s unbelief has spread over the entire earth and must now produce its total effect, until the fullness of the gentiles has come in. The latter cannot refer to anything else than the entrance of the full number of the gentiles into the kingdom of God or into eternal life.<sup>33</sup> What then is the mystery? In my opinion, not that hardening has come upon Israel *only* in part. As the content of the mystery one will also have to do full justice to the second part of Paul’s statement. The mystery lies in the fact that Israel must wait for the fullness of the gentiles. That is the revelation of God’s severity upon Israel’s unbelief on the one hand, the way or the “chance” of the gentiles to enter on the other. Israel cannot be revealed in its unity as the people of God and as the people of the promise before the gentiles also have entered. Only then can the life from the dead (cf. vs. 15), beginning with Israel’s acceptance, dawn. Consequently, there is no reason for the gentiles to be proud. They eat from Israel’s table.

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<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., G. Bornkamm, TDNT, IV, 819ff.; also my *Paul and Jesus* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1958), p. 58. [*translator’s note* – the numbering of the footnotes in this translation corresponds to the numbering of the footnotes in the Dutch original]

<sup>33</sup> Some amplify: to faith (Leitzmann) or into the church (Kühl). However this is not in agreement with New Testament usage (cf. Arndt-Gingrich, *Lexicon* and Schneider in TDNT). We have to do here with an eschatological event in the definitive sense of the word. Therefore, it is not an entrance “into the kingdom of God, that is to say, becoming... believers” (Greijdanus).

They are, humanly speaking, those who profit from the opportunity that Israel let slip by. The hardening of Israel works out for their good. However, Israel is not finished as the people of God. As a people divided within itself and apparently abandoned by God, the picture Israel projects may now be unrecognizable. That picture, however, is only temporary; it is only in force until a specified time, namely, until the fullness of the gentiles has come in.

#### § 14 Romans 11:26-32. The Salvation of All Israel.

To that then follow the much discussed words, “and so all Israel will be saved” [*kai houtōs pas Israēl sōthēsetai*]

The first question is whether these words still belong to the content of the mystery. Certainly they may not be detached from it. But at the same time they do not form the mystery proper, its core, as is usually supposed. The mystery proper has already been stated in verse 25b. The words – and so all Israel will be saved – form its direct consequence, as also appears from the construction of the sentence; the *modus quo* of Israel’s salvation is stipulated by what precedes. Only when the preceding has come to pass is the way free for Israel.

However, what do those apparently mysterious words mean? As is well known, Calvin thought that spiritual Israel, made up of both Jews and gentiles, is spoken of here.<sup>34</sup>

We have already seen that Paul’s usage in general argues more against than for that understanding. But also, in my opinion, the entire course of the argument is decisively against this view. Surely Romans 9-11 in their entirety are concerned expressly with the place and future of the original Israel. Therefore, in Romans 11:26 Israel cannot suddenly be understood as the church.

Must we assume then with the great majority of recent exegetes<sup>35</sup> that a great religious revolution is spoken of here, consisting of the conversion of Israel as a whole at the end of days? Although, under the influence of current exegesis, initially I too was of this opinion, after further careful consideration of Romans 9-11 such an eschatological conversion of Israel seems to me not only not mentioned but also not intended by the apostle. The important and, in my opinion, decisive difficulties, both of a linguistic as well as of a material kind, with which this view is burdened, can be seen in what follows:

1) To begin with, it must be considered exceedingly strange that the apostle here discloses a major eschatological event in five words without going into it further with a single word or ever alluding to it elsewhere. Instead, it should be noted that in the verses that follow he simply continues the thread of his argument concerning what is happening to Israel in the present. If we have to do here with a particular, incidental revelation, as many think, is it conceivable then that Paul has it appear in his argument in a single flash, as it were, without ever alluding to it elsewhere in his letters?

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<sup>34</sup> ...“But I extend the word *Israel* to include all the people of God, in this sense, ‘When the Gentiles have come in, the Jews will at the same time return from their defection to the obedience of faith. The salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be drawn from both, will thus be completed, and yet in such a way that the Jews, as the first born in the family of God, may obtain the first place.’” (*The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960], p. 255). Thus Calvin does assume an eschatological conversion of the Jews.

<sup>35</sup> I mention only the names of B. Weiss, Zahn, Feine, Leitzmann, K.L. Schmidt, Stauffer, Billerbeck, Dodd, Greijdanus, Schrenk, Lagrange, Kuss, Meinertz, Sanday-Headlam, Kühl, Schlatter, Nygren.

2) The complete conversion of Israel at the end of days, as some find this announced here, is in an eschatological respect entirely incomprehensible, does not fit any one eschatological scheme, and also is not at all made clear by a single exegete. One must not forget that this general conversion must take place after the fullness of the gentiles has “come into” the kingdom of heaven. This leads to the notion, in my opinion completely unacceptable, that after the entrance of the gentiles into the glorified reality of God, there will still be place and time in the present dispensation for Israel to come to its senses and be converted. Where, however, is this place and time? Is there still to be an interim between the entrance of one-half of mankind into the kingdom of God and the final end of this world? Neither in the Pauline descriptions of the end nor in the New Testament eschatology in general is there, as far as I can see, any place or occasion for such an idea. Bavinck writes correctly that the entrance of the fullness of the gentiles may not be thought of as temporally prior to the salvation of Israel, but that these two must unfold in a completely parallel fashion.<sup>36</sup> Better yet, I would say that they must meet and coincide at one point.

3) Closely connected to this is a no less important consideration. *Not one word* is said about the *conversion* of all Israel after the fullness of the gentiles has entered. Paul does not say, afterward all Israel will be converted, but: and so, in this way, all Israel will be saved. If *houtōs* is not translated with a modal but a temporal force, then one must read, *and then*, that is, when the fullness of the gentiles enters. So then, it is not a matter of a national conversion still to take place at some time in the future; no, *then*, when the fullness of the gentiles enters, *then* all Israel also will be saved. In the light of what Paul has described as the mystery, this *then* means in effect, *then* will all Israel *also* be saved, or, expressed still more pregnantly, *only* then will *all* Israel be saved. *This*, namely, is the mystery, as we saw, that Israel as it were must wait on the gentiles; it can enter the blessedness promised to it *only then* when the gentiles also have found a place in Israel’s inheritance, when they share with Israel in the salvation of the Lord. *Houtōs*, thus, then, then also and only then will all Israel be saved.

4) In Romans 9-11 Paul undoubtedly speaks again and again of Israel’s conversion as the condition of Israel’s salvation. By that he means solely a conversion of Israel in history, not in post-history. Israel must be provoked to jealousy *now*. In 11:14 Paul says that this in part is the purpose of his ministry. He expresses himself forcefully, ... “that, if possible, I might provoke the jealousy of my flesh (and blood) and save some of them.” All this zeal, this intense longing to save even if it were only a few through *his* work is difficult to understand if at the same time the apostle expected over the short or long term the conversion of all Israel as the fruit of one great eschatological event. Rather it appears that the apostle sees no other way for Israel’s conversion than through the preaching of the gospel in history. He speaks of that in 10:14ff. And no differently, when he says in 11:23 that also the broken-off branches of Israel, if *they do not* continue in *their unbelief*, will be grafted in again. There is not a single ground in the context for giving this conditional clause merely a logical sense and not a genuine, historical sense, as if this “not continuing in their unbelief” is already fixed in advance. In view here too is conversion as the fruit of preaching in the historical present, not as a certainty in post-history. No less important is the fact that in verse 31, thus *after* his

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<sup>36</sup> H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. J. Vriend, 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 670. In my opinion, his entire discussion of Romans 11:25, 26 (668–672) is still of great importance.

statement about the mystery, the apostle says that they (the apostate Israelites) have been disobedient now in order that through the mercy shown to you (the gentiles) they too might receive mercy *now*. “Now” is there expressly and not, as one would expect according to the current view of verses 25–26: “one day” or “then.” Israel’s conversion is in Paul’s argument quite clearly a matter of history and not of post-history.

5) On closer examination, the whole notion of a national conversion of Israel in the end time makes the overall thrust of Romans 9-11 nonsensical and completely strange. One assumes that only in this way can Paul see the promise of God to Israel coming to fulfillment. But the question cannot be suppressed whether then this national Israel-of-the-last-days is *the* people Israel. Is that then “all Israel”? What then are we to think of the millions of Israelites who live before the last days? Do they not belong to all Israel? Can one say that Israel as a nation is completely saved, if one must understand by that a fraction of the nation, the small part of this nation that finally reaches the finish line of history? One can suppose that Paul did not foresee this centuries-long development and reckoned on a speedy reversal. But apart from the fact that one must then wonder what significance this word can still have as the time of the world goes on, the problem still remains what we are to think of all the unbelieving and disobedient members of the nation of Israel who have lived before the coming of Christ and who because of this unbelief are so often threatened with punishment and destruction, also in the divine pronouncements cited by Paul. If, however, these do not belong to “all Israel,” how then can one by “all Israel” still understand national Israel? Unless one chooses to adopt a universalistic standpoint and would accept that finally all Israelites, head for head, will still prove to be saved – an assumption opposed by the witness of both Old and New Testaments – one is placed before the necessity, in maintaining the national conception of “all Israel,” of limiting this national restoration to that part of the Jewish nation that will still be found to exist at the end of time. But then on this basis can Paul or anyone else maintain that God is keeping his promise to (national) Israel?

6) The national conception of “all Israel,” however much then it is true that it is not taken in a universalistic sense by most interpreters, is in conflict with what Paul has just demonstrated in Romans 9, namely, that not all are Israel who are descended from Israel. Paul thus challenges just such a national conception of Israel as God’s elect people. His entire argument is directed toward demonstrating that the true Israel is hidden in the national Israel as the kernel in the shell, that one may not identify the one with the other, and that so, too, although national Israel has not accepted the Christ, nevertheless Israel is not rejected as the people of God. It would certainly be very strange if the apostle would subsequently reconsider this view and would present the matter as if God’s promise to Israel would only be fulfilled if what is left of the nation at the end of time will in its entirety repent and be saved.

For all these reasons it is impossible, in my opinion, to maintain the view of *pas Israēl* as a description of national Israel in the last days. “All Israel” in Romans 11:26 cannot mean anything else than those in Israel who will repent and will be brought to the Lord by the preaching of the gospel in history, that is, the elect part (*hē eklogē*) of Romans 11:7, now already visible, *in addition to* those who will repent from the hardening that has come upon Israel and will come to faith in Christ.

The expression “all Israel” comprises the same thing quantitatively as what already in verse 12 is called “the fullness” of Israel, just as “the fullness” of the gentiles spoken of in verse 25 can also be expressed, in the light of verse 32, by *all* gentiles or the whole of heathendom.

All Israel, therefore, is the full number of those who in the course of history, in conformity and together with the true Israel of the old day, have repented before God, have believed in Christ, and have understood and accepted the true nature of Israel's election: not by works but on account of the righteousness which is given by God. That is also the Israel (Jacob) spoken of in prophecy, which the apostle has already cited repeatedly and which here also confirms his statement, verses 26 and 27. In what has preceded we have already seen ample evidence that Paul does not understand these prophecies as universalistic, in the sense of all Israelites individually. It is just the remnant that the Lord will save in his grace and in his severity, 9:28, 29.

Now the question can be asked whether, when Paul speaks here first of a hardening upon *a part* of Israel, which will continue until the fullness of the gentiles has entered, and then of the salvation of *all* Israel, one is not after all compelled to see this beatitude of all Israel in contrast to the hardening of a part of Israel and so both times to understand "Israel" in a national, empirical sense.<sup>37</sup>

Likewise whether, when the apostle goes on to say in 11:28ff. – what concerns the gospel, they are enemies for your sake, what concerns election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable – he does not then after all allude to Israel as it manifests itself empirically in history to him and to the gentiles, and *not* to the remnant to be saved out of it; and whether then it does not turn out again that in verse 26, too, the apostle speaks of this national, empirical Israel.

In our opinion, these counter arguments, however strong they may appear at first glance, are still beside the point. For besides ignoring the above mentioned, in our opinion, insuperable objections against this national conception, one thus misses the real thrust of Paul's statement in verses 25ff. When the apostle speaks here about the future salvation of all Israel, this undoubtedly contrasts with the picture that Israel now presents to the eye of converted gentiles. He wishes to prevent them from drawing wrong conclusions from that picture, as if God has now rejected Israel for good as his people and put them (the gentiles) in its place. Rather it is the case that a partial hardening has come upon Israel which holds back the final acceptance of Israel and the conclusion of the history of redemption and consequently gives the gentiles opportunity to enter. Accordingly, the picture of Israel at present is confused, no longer recognizable. One can suppose superficially that God has rejected Israel. Still this is only a temporary picture. One day, in accordance with what has been constantly promised, the day of salvation will also dawn for Israel. That is not to say that all who (will) have been hardened in the past or present or future will still be accepted after all or will still be converted. This would be in conflict with all the threats of the prophets against the impenitence of the nation Israel as well as with Paul's own statements about the severity of God. But it does mean that then, only then but also certainly then, Israel will be revealed in its true character and destiny, namely as the people of the promises. And then as all Israel, that is to say, no longer as individuals and exceptions in the midst of all the disobedient and obstinate, but in its unity as the eschatological Israel, about which prophecy has constantly spoken, as the undivided multitude of those who from of old have turned to the Lord in repentance, who at the present time have already received Christ, and who in the future will be provoked to jealousy and will shake off the hardening. Then the picture of Israel, now confused, unrecognizable, will again be plain, then Israel will be revealed in its true nature and will be received by God as his people and the fullness of Israel will join with

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<sup>37</sup> Cf., e.g., the reasoning of Greijdanus versus the view of Bavinck (*Romeinen*, II, p. 515).

the fullness of the gentiles and the life from the dead will begin.

This prospect, therefore, must also determine the gentiles' outlook on Israel at present. Certainly they are enemies of God so far as the gospel is concerned (and that for the sake of the gentiles), but so far as their election is concerned they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For God's promises are irrevocable, verses 28, 29. Again, that is not therefore to say that all who are now hardened will still be saved some day or that at the end the last generation of Israel will turn *en bloc* to God in repentance; but it is to say that this same Israel that is God's enemy is also still God's beloved, that from of old God has bound himself to *this* nation, and that therefore the people of God will nevertheless be preserved out of this rebellious people and will emerge at the last day as the true Israel, the seed of Abraham, the Israel of the promises. In this respect, namely by being accepted by God and sharing in his mercy, Israel will not be at a disadvantage compared with the gentiles who are likewise so much in rebellion against God, verses 30ff. Indeed, the motion of the wave that has turned from Israel to the gentiles also reverses. As the gentiles, once disobedient, have now received mercy through Israel's disobedience (that is to say, because salvation turned from Israel to them), so also Israel has now become disobedient so that through the mercy given to the gentiles it might yet again come to repentance and to grace. For *all* – so the apostle concludes, verse 32 – Jews and gentiles, are enclosed by God in disobedience so that he might have mercy on *all*. These last words confirm our view as a whole. When Paul speaks about *all*, he is thinking neither in a national-collectivistic sense nor individualistically; he is thinking in pleromas, that is to say, in the full numbers of those in whom God will glorify himself out of every nation and who represent the entire nation. *In that sense now, namely of the pleroma representing the entire nation, all Israel also will be saved.*

## **Doctrine and Devotion, Truth and Love, Faith and Practice: Witsius, Cunningham, and Warfield on Ministerial Preparation in Seminary**

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### **Introduction**

How are ministers made? That's what seminary was invented to help do (by and alongside the Church), but theological education has lost its way in our time, and we need to return to the Scriptures and to the old paths to find our way home again.<sup>1</sup>

What are seminaries for? Do we still need them? There are a lot of questions swirling around theological education today, and since you are reading this, you clearly care about preparing pastors and Church leaders who believe God's word and embrace sound, biblical, Christian, theology, so perhaps we should reflect together on these things. Many people are looking at other options rather than traditional seminary education in our days, for a variety of reasons: the high cost of residential theological education, the desire to stay connected to a ministry in the local church, or even the view that the very idea of seminary education is obsolete. I assure you that theological educators are thinking about these kinds of things, and hear them all the time.

I even occasionally hear people question whether "seminary" is a biblical way of preparing for the ministry! I've had people say to me 'seminary is not in the Bible,' to which I reply, 'but preparation for the ministry is.' The Bible makes it amply clear that preparation and learning are necessary for ministry. Jesus spent three years with his disciples preparing them for ministry, and it is very clear that, in addition to providing for them a perfect model of self-denying service ("not to be served but to serve," Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45) and mentoring them in practical ministry, Jesus spent a significant amount of his time with them helping them to understand the Bible better because it was fundamental to their witness to him—the mission he was preparing them for (see, for instance, Luke 24:44-48), and the whole Bible emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of sound learning for the wise in general, and for pastors in particular.

Prov. 15:14 says that "The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly." Prov. 18:15 reiterates the principle when it says, "The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." Prov. 24:5 adds, "A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power," reminding us of the old dictum "knowledge is power." The Old Testament wisdom literature is replete with calls to

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Douglas F. Kelly embodies the vision of theological education expressed in this chapter, and has devoted much of his ministerial service to preparing the next generation of Reformed pastors. Dr. Kelly was my senior colleague in Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson from 1990 until his departure to serve at RTS Charlotte, and we served on the RTS faculty for almost three decades. I first met the Kelly family in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1987. They (and I must here mention his beloved Caroline, too) welcomed me into their home and into the deep, rich bonds of their friendship. They became a formative part of my life and ministerial preparation, and they remain precious to me and my family to this day. Dr. Kelly has been a friend, encourager, example, esteemed colleague, faithful intercessor, and a father in the faith to me. The power of his intellect, the soundness of his doctrine, the reality of his piety, and the passion of his prayers have shaped the lives of hundreds of Gospel ministers, and my own. Thank you to all the Kellys: Doug, Caroline, Martha, Doug Jr., Angus, Daniel, and Patrick.



the believer to pursue knowledge. But the Bible says more than this. It emphasizes that ministers need to pursue study of the truth.<sup>2</sup>

Ezra 7:10 describes this great Old Testament leader in this way: “Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Hosea laments the lack of spiritual leaders like Ezra when he says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (4:6). The same aspiration and complaint can be found in the last book of the Old Testament: “For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 2:7).

But it is in the pastoral epistles that we find some of the most direct words of instruction and exhortation regarding ministerial study. Paul can say to Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Here we have an apostolic directive for a young minister to study with the equivalent exertion and effort of a tireless day-laborer. The true minister is a workman (Paul really likes this metaphor!). He works hard at his task. The true minister is to work hard at study so as to know and preach the Truth rightly.

Furthermore, Paul gives Timothy a sterling example of studiousness from his own practice and priorities. Think of his astonishing request in 2 Tim. 4:13 where he asks, “When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.” Now think of it. Paul is only months away from death. He has written the bulk of the letters of the New Testament. He has a lifetime of ministry behind him. And what does he want to do? Study! Winter is approaching and so Paul asks for his cloak, but more importantly he asks for books and parchments. Though almost at the end of his course, Paul aims to keep learning and growing by spiritual reading. Nobody has ever uttered a more poignant pastoral meditation on this little verse than C.H. Spurgeon. Here is what he says:

“How rebuked are they by the apostle! He is inspired, and yet he wants books! He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books! He had seen the Lord, and yet he wants books! He had had a wider experience than most men, and yet he wants books! He had been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet he wants books! He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants books! The apostle says to Timothy and so he says to every preacher, “GIVE THYSELF UNTO READING.”

The man who never reads will never be read; he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men’s brains, proves that he has no brains of his own. Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. YOU need to read. Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers, and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying. You may get much instruction from books which afterwards you may use as a true weapon in your Lord and Master’s service. Paul cries, “Bring the books” — join in the cry.

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the material in this section is adapted from a portion of a chapter I wrote for *Letters to Timothy* (Founders Press, 2004 & 2016), chapter 12 “Keep Studying.”

Paul herein is a picture of industry. He is in prison; he cannot preach: WHAT will he do? As he cannot preach, he will read. As we read of the fishermen of old and their boats. The fishermen were gone out of them. What were they doing? Mending their nets. So if providence has laid you upon a sick bed, and you cannot teach your class—if you cannot be working for God in public, mend your nets by reading. If one occupation is taken from you, take another, and let the books of the apostle read you a lesson of industry.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul is a lifelong learner, and we should be too. But Paul also indicates that there should be a time of preparation before ministry begins. When he says that an elder must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2), he assumes the prior learning necessary to that work, and the Church’s right and ability to discern and make a judgment about that learning when they choose the elder in the first place. He explicitly says that of deacons: “let these also first be tested and then let them serve” (1 Tim. 3:10), and the idea there is that they are to be tested before they serve, just as the candidates for the eldership are tested before they serve. That test certainly applies to the lives and character of the elders and deacons, but because of the elder’s task, to teach, it must also apply to his preparation, knowledge, and orthodoxy.

So, for Jesus and Paul, preparation for ministry is not optional. That preparation is not merely practical, but especially involves a mastery of the Scriptures. And seminary is designed to fulfill this function more efficiently and comprehensively than ministerial apprenticeships could ever do.

Seminary was invented to give future ministers a concentrated period of study with a cohort of colleagues to prepare them for a lifetime of ministry, and if seminary is adequately facilitating a biblical preparation for ministry then it is a very good thing.

B.B. Warfield once said: “The entire work of the Seminary deserves to be classed in the category of means of grace.”<sup>4</sup> Why? Because the main thing that a solid, biblical, theological education does is engage the seminarian with the study of the Word of God, as the means by which Christ communicates the benefits of his mediation (see Westminster Larger Catechism, 154). How does this work?

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation (WLC, 155).

The Westminster Confession reminds us that “The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence” are part “of the ordinary religious worship of God” (WCF 21.5), and these things are specifically part of the worship that seminarians owe to God

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<sup>3</sup> This is from Spurgeon’s sermon #542 “PAUL - His Cloak And His Books” in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 9 (1863): 668-669.

<sup>4</sup> “Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary” in *The Princeton Theological Review* 2:1 (1904): 73.

in their studies, but they are also the very means by which God's Spirit grows them in grace and godliness, and blesses them, in order that they might bless others.

The work of theological education in the confessional Protestant tradition thus falls in the category of sanctification—a special and specific kind of sanctification: the sanctification of the Church's present and future ministry unto the gathering and perfecting of the saints for the glorying and enjoying of God. It is thus necessarily academic and intellectual, devotional and spiritual, as well as practical and ministerial.

Both the seminary and the seminarian must endeavor to tie together in the closest of relations: doctrine and piety, learning and godliness, knowledge and conviction of the truth, with growth in and expression of the truth in love, in the service of Christ and his people. This is one reason that we often speak at Reformed Theological Seminary of wanting to cultivate in our students “a mind for truth and a heart for God.”

The entire work of the theological seminary may thus be construed as serving as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in applying the Word of God as a means of grace. The entire work of the seminarian is to be undertaken as an act of worship: to study to show themselves approved in order to present their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is their spiritual service of worship, and not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their mind, so that they may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2) and handle accurately the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), the Holy Scriptures, which are all God-breathed, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17)—living a life of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), preaching the Word (2 Tim. 4:2), fighting the good fight, keeping the faith, finishing the race (2 Tim. 4:7).

From the standpoint of confessional, Reformed, Presbyterian principles, theological education aims to gather and prepare a cohort of those called by the Church for the Gospel ministry, so that they grow by God's grace together in faith, hope and love, come to a greater and deeper knowledge and conviction of the whole counsel of God, so are thus enabled to handle accurately and to proclaim faithfully the Word of God; to pray continuously, Scripturally, and earnestly; to minister the sacraments, the covenant signs and seals of God, rightly; and to shepherd wisely and lovingly—and who correspondingly have their own hearts filled with and faith matured by that grace and truth, so that their character, life, ministry and witness are shaped by God's lavish, gracious, loving, saving work on their behalf, in Christ, and by his written self-disclosure and revealed will.

This is what prompts John R.W. Stott to say: “the key institution in the Church is the seminary or theological college. In every country the Church is a reflection of its seminaries. All the Church's future pastors and teachers pass through a seminary. It is there that they are either made or marred, either equipped and inspired or ruined.”<sup>5</sup>

The original plan of Old Princeton Seminary reflects these same commitments and aspirations. What was its aim?

It is to form men for the Gospel ministry, who shall truly believe, and cordially love, and therefore endeavor to propagate and defend, in its genuineness, simplicity, and fulness, that system of religious belief and practice which is set forth in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Plan of Government and Discipline of the

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<sup>5</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: the Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 184.

Presbyterian Church is thus to perpetuate and extend the influence of true evangelical piety, and Gospel order.

It is to provide for the Church an adequate supply and succession of able and faithful ministers of the New Testament; workmen that need not to be ashamed, being qualified rightly to divide the word of truth.

It is to unite, in those who shall sustain the ministerial office, religion and literature; that piety of the heart which is the fruit only of the renewing and sanctifying grace of God, with solid learning: believing that religion without learning, or learning without religion, in the ministers of the Gospel, must ultimately prove injurious to the Church.

It is to afford more advantages than have hitherto been usually possessed by the ministers of religion in our country, to cultivate both piety and literature in their preparatory course; piety, by placing it in circumstances favourable to its growth, and by cherishing and regulating its ardour; literature, by affording favourable opportunities for its attainment, and by making its possession indispensable.

It is to provide for the Church, men who shall be able to defend her faith against infidels, and her doctrines against heretics.

It is to furnish our congregations with enlightened, humble, zealous, laborious pastors, who shall truly watch for the good of souls, and consider it as their highest honour and happiness to win them to the Saviour, and to build up their several charges in holiness and peace.

It is to promote harmony and unity of sentiment among the ministers of our Church, by educating a large body of them under the same teachers, and in the same course of study.

It is to lay the foundation of early and lasting friendships, productive of confidence and mutual assistance in after-life among the ministers of religion; which experience shows to be conducive not only to personal happiness, but to the perfecting of inquiries, researches, and publications advantageous to religion.

It is to preserve the unity of our Church, by educating her ministers in an enlightened attachment, not only to the same doctrines, but to the same plan of government.

It is to bring to the service of the Church genius and talent, when united with piety, however poor or obscure may be their possessor, by furnishing, as far as possible, the means of education and support, without expense to the student.

It is to found a nursery for missionaries to the heathen, and to such as are destitute of the stated preaching of the gospel; in which youth may receive that appropriate training which may lay a foundation for their ultimately becoming eminently qualified for missionary work.

It is, finally, to endeavour to raise up a succession of men, at once qualified for and thoroughly devoted to the work of the Gospel ministry; who, with various endowments, suiting them to different stations in the Church of Christ, may all possess a portion of the spirit of the primitive propagators of the Gospel; prepared to make every sacrifice, to endure every hardship, and to render every service which the promotion of pure and undefiled religion may require.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1811.

The aim of this approach to theological education is to produce and prepare shepherd-teachers for the Church who have a mind for truth, a heart for God and who will live a life of ministry. Humble, happy, faithful, brave, loving, pastoral, sturdy, gentle, godly ministers who understand, teach and embody Reformed piety, doctrine, worship, polity, and practice. We want to provide God's people with ministers who know and believe their Bible; who treasure God; who bear witness to Christ and proclaim his Gospel; who are themselves transformed by grace and truth; who love their people; who live to serve; and who have a passion for the great commission.

### **The Insights of Three Theologians**

The reflections and contributions of three Reformed theologians to the vision of theological education described here enrich our understanding of how God makes ministers. In 1675, Dutch theologian, Herman Witsius (1636–1708), gave his inaugural address as a professor of theology at the university in Franeker, subsequently translated and published in the little booklet *On the Character of a True Theologian* (made widely available in Scotland in a translation by John Donaldson in 1856 and again in 1871, with a commendation by William Cunningham, and more recently edited and reprinted in Greenville, SC by Reformed Academic Press in 1994). William Cunningham (1805–1861), *An Introduction to Theological Studies* (seven chapters excerpted from his *Theological Lectures* [1878], from his course for first year students at New College, and published in three editions by Reformed Academic Press in 1991, 1993, and 1994). B.B. Warfield (1851–1921) wrote two superb essays, one on the seminarian, *The Religious Life of Theological Students*, originally an address delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary on October 4, 1911, and published frequently and variously since then (e.g., Phillipsburg: P&R, 1983); and another on the seminary, “*Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary*,” an address delivered to the incoming Students, Sunday afternoon, September 20, 1903, in the Oratory of Stuart Hall, Princeton Theological Seminary (one can imagine J. Gresham Machen, already a student, in attendance), and subsequently published in the *Princeton Theological Review* 2, January, 1904.

### **Witsius, On the Character of a True Theologian (1675)**

Though Witsius does not claim the title for himself, William Cunningham calls him “a ‘true’ and consummate theologian” possessed of “talent, sound judgment, learning, orthodoxy, piety and unction.”<sup>7</sup> Dr. Mike Honeycutt (an expert on William Cunningham, who studied and introduced the modern edition of Witsius’ address) comments on Witsius’ “precise theological formulation and intense experiential religion.”<sup>8</sup> You can see in these two descriptions the qualities that were appreciated and aspired to in the Church’s ministry. Indeed, Witsius’ own definition of a theologian evidences the same interests: “By a theologian, I mean one who, imbued with a substantial knowledge of divine things derived from the teaching of God himself, declares and extols, not in words only, but by the whole course of his life, the wonderful excellencies of God and thus lives entirely for his glory.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Witsius, *On the Character of a True Theologian* (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Witsius, 9.

Witsius tells us that he writes this description of a true theologian (and he is not just speaking of professional academic scholars, he is especially thinking of what all ministers should be) in order “that I may have it continually before me.” He wants his “delineation of the ministerial character” to point him to his duty and to remind him of his shortcomings that “he may the better discern his own failings and learn how humbly he should think of himself.”<sup>10</sup> Already we are seeing that a combination of aspiration and humility are a part of the soil of spiritual growth for the seminarian.

He then outlines his address in three parts. He wants to contemplate how a true theologian is made, what he is supposed to do with what he has learned, and finally what he is to be himself. He says it this way:

Let us, in contemplating such a theologian, inquire first in what school, under what teachers, by what method, he reaches a wisdom so lofty; then into the mode in which he may most successfully communicate to others what he has been taught himself; and lastly, into the habits of soul and outward walk by which he may adorn his doctrine; or, to comprehend in three words the sum of what is to be said, let us portray the TRUE THEOLOGIAN as a STUDENT, as a TEACHER, and as a MAN. For no one teaches well unless he has first learned well; no one learns well unless he learns in order to teach. And both learning and teaching are vain and unprofitable unless accompanied by practice.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The True Theologian as a Student of Scripture and Disciple of the Spirit***

Witsius wants the minister to “lay the foundations of his studies” in what he calls “the lower school of nature” or the “rudiments” (the basics of logic, grammar, rhetoric, moral philosophy, the acquisition of languages, etc.). Whatever is sound and judicious in human arts, whatever is true and substantial in philosophy, whatever is elegant and graceful in the wide extent of polite literature, all flow from the Father of Lights, the inexhaustible Fountain of all reason, truth, and beauty; and all this, therefore, collected from every quarter, ought again to be consecrated to Him.<sup>12</sup>

But he is especially concerned that the true theologian devote himself to the study of Scripture as a disciple of the Spirit. He wants him to “rise from that lower and merely natural school to the higher fields of Scripture study, and sitting humbly before God, let him learn from His mouth the hidden mysteries of salvation” and “be ravished with these heavenly oracles.”<sup>13</sup> Putting his faith in God and God alone, the true theologian is “a humble disciple of the Scriptures” and “must also be a disciple of the Spirit.” Why? Because “in order to understand spiritual things, we must have a spiritual mind”<sup>14</sup> and only the Holy Spirit can

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<sup>9</sup> Witsius, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Witsius, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Witsius, 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Witsius, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Witsius, 30-31.

give that to us (1 Cor. 2:12-16). What is the result of this discipleship? “He [the Spirit] imparts the mind of Christ along with the things of Christ.” What things? “He who is a student in this heavenly school not only knows and believes, but has also sensible experience of, the forgiveness of sins and the privilege of adoption and intimate communion with God and the grace of the indwelling Spirit and the hidden manna and the sweet love of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, our true theologian has an experiential acquaintance of the things of God, and especially the saving benefits of Christ, revealed in Holy Scripture.

### ***The True Theologian as an Experienced and Loving Teacher***

Having been taught in the school of the Spirit in Scripture, our “experienced theologian” (meaning someone possessed of a true and saving knowledge of God, through Christ, by the Spirit) teaches the truth of God from Scripture, and does so from love. That is, having experienced himself the saving and sanctifying realities that are revealed by God in Scripture, and having known himself the love of God in Christ, because of his love for God and for God’s people as God’s own children and his brethren in Christ, he is inexorably drawn and driven to “employ every resource and put forth every effort to win many souls” and to build them up in grace and truth.<sup>16</sup> And so,

he exerts himself to cherish his spiritual children in a winning and gentle manner and with an assiduity which knows no weariness, desiring to impart unto them not the gospel of God only but, if it were possible, his own soul and still more the Spirit of Christ, teaching, admonishing, beseeching, and fashioning and forming them as it were with his own hands, that at length, full of joy, he may, after the example of Christ, present them before God ...<sup>17</sup>

Witsius is less focused on the theologian’s cultivation of skill in the art of teaching than on the motivation of his heart in teaching. What will the love of God yield in the heart of the true theologian as a teacher?

The same spirit of love will lead him to set forth only what is certain, sound, solid, and fitted to cherish faith, excite hope, promote piety, and preserve unity and peace; doing all without prejudice, inclining to no party, abstaining with the utmost solicitude from all novelties of expression, unprofitable speech, strifes, and curious, foolish, and unlearned questions of words, by which the minds of the simple are disturbed, the Church rent in pieces—surmisings and whisperings engendered within, while without, a spectacle is exhibited which affords gratification to its enemies and a cause of triumph to Satan himself.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Witsius, 31, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Witsius, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Witsius, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Witsius, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Witsius, 40–41.

Thus specious speculation and doctrinal deviation are revealed to be derivative not only from pride, but also from a selfish lovelessness for God and his people. The true theologian does not diverge from the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13), precisely because of his love for God and his people.

*The True Theologian as a Man whose Life corresponds to his Profession*

As we have already seen, Witsius taught that “both learning and teaching are vain and unprofitable, unless accompanied by practice.” He was fond of telling his students that “he alone is a true Theologian, who adds the practical to the theoretical in religion.”<sup>19</sup> Chaucer’s compliment of the Poor Parson in the Canterbury Tales, “first he practiced, then he preached” is based upon a similar conviction. Both Witsius and Petrus Van Mastricht (1630–1706) studied under Gisbert Voetius, and both of them stressed that true theology is always practical and never merely notional (hence Mastricht called his magnum opus Theoretical-Practical Theology).

And so the final section of Witsius’ address to seminarians begins with a searching question: “But with what heart, with what success, will that man labor who has not first sought to be himself fashioned after the image of God?” Witsius is concerned here with the minister’s “habits of soul” (his inward dispositions) and “outward walk” (his personal, familial, ecclesiastical and social manner of life). What would the habits of soul look like in true theologian? Witsius describes them:

The desire of heaven, contempt of the world, unfeigned gravity, a modesty leading him to be busy with his own affairs and to abstain from meddling with those of others, a humility teaching him to think soberly of himself and highly of all besides, a mind solicitous to preserve peace as well as truth, fervent zeal tempered with the blindest gentleness, long-suffering under injuries and reproaches, a prudent circumspection in regard alike to the time and manner of action, a precision the most unbending and accurate in exacting of himself, with a readiness to pardon many things in his brethren, and whatever else pertains to this august preparation—these, these are the things which do not simply adorn, but which make the theologian.<sup>20</sup>

These are the things that a godly minister is disposed to. And what does his life look like? Witsius answers in seven copious clauses.

First, he says that the true theologian does not outwardly pretend seriousness, nor long for riches, but sets his heart on things above (Col. 3:1–2). Show me a man who, intently meditating on sacred realities, does not simulate gravity by his beard or dress but, panting after the things which are above and eternal, holds in low estimation the sumptuous halls of the rich and the whole earth itself, with its gold and its silver;

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<sup>19</sup> Witsius, 13 and n.24, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Witsius, 45–46.



Second, he does not covet pleasure, wealth and honors, nor the vanities and allurements of the world, but is wholly satisfied with the grace of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit.

who, satisfied with the grace of Christ the Saviour and the fellowship of the Divine Spirit inhabiting his breast, looks down as from a lofty eminence upon all the vanities and allurements of the world, coveting neither pleasures, nor wealth, nor honors;

Third, he does not become entangled with worldly affairs of business or politics, nor seek after positions, nor is he a manipulator, nor does he pursue the patronage of the great. He neither grovels before superiors in the Church, nor acts superior to his own flock, but concentrates fully on the pastoral care of souls and the interests of Christ's kingdom, appropriately confining his attention to his own place of ministry.

who, devoting himself wholly to the care of souls, and the defense, promotion, and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, does not give himself up to secular business or politics, watches for no office, is no demagogue, does not pay court to the great, does not cringe to his ecclesiastical superiors, nor lord it over God's heritage, and, accurately assigning to the church, the college, and the civil power their proper relative places, confines himself to his own church or chair;

Fourth, as he grows in the things of the Lord and in the duties of the Christian life, he does not compare himself favorably to others, or even to himself, but to those who are more mature, and supremely, to the commands of God in Scripture.

who, the farther he advances in the contemplation of the things which are above and in the practice of virtue, is the less disposed to tarnish the glory of his neighbor, measuring himself not by himself, but with those who are more perfect, and above all, with the perfect law of God;

Fifth, he is zealous for God's cause (rather than his own), and careful for the salvation of sinners, the protection of Christ's Church, and sound doctrine.

who, whensoever the cause of God, the salvation of souls, the defense of the Church, and the guardianship of the heavenly doctrine call for exertion, is all on fire with zeal for God and would rather die a hundred deaths than that one jot should be yielded to the enemy in that cause which is not his, but his Lord's;

Sixth, and yet, he does not want to settle scores, forbears personal criticisms, and doesn't insist on his own views on uncertain questions. He is immovable against vehement attacks and at the same time has a way of attracting and unifying those who are in conflict.

who, at the same time, would seek no revenge for personal injuries, would bear with moderation reproaches directed against himself, and in doubtful matters not insist on his own opinion; who, as was said of Athanasius by the ancients, stands firm as a rock against the assaults of the violent, but as a magnetic center of attraction and union to those at variance;

Seventh, he is not reckless but careful, works hard but inconspicuously, seeking sincerely and simplicity to serve all, not viewing himself as better than others, ready to give others credit, regarding his neighbor above himself.

who, always exercising prudence, attempts nothing rashly, exerting himself unobtrusively even in the most difficult undertakings; who in fine, not feignedly nor

lightly, but with the most unaffected simplicity, is ready to throw himself at the feet of all, preferring himself to no one, but everyone to himself, is forward to give honor to all, esteeming his neighbor more than himself ...<sup>21</sup>

Witsius admits this is an incomplete picture, but it is still beautiful, and humbling. Indeed, he confesses that he himself falls short of it: “How little I resemble, how very far I differ from such a one, no one knows better than myself.”<sup>22</sup> And yet his contemporaries saw much of these characteristics in him. He once said that “the love of truth and the spirit of charity, equally cultivated, constitute the brightest ornament of a Christian mind.”<sup>23</sup> This was on full display in what Honeycutt calls “his irenic polemics with opposing theologians.”<sup>24</sup> Witsius gives us an example, in his teaching and conduct, of minister made by the means of grace, equally concerned for truth and love, and able to speak the truth in love.

Witsius’ model of self-giving to his students is also an inspiring example to all seminary professors. As he concludes his address, and before he closes in prayer, he exhorts and encourages them with these words:

Whatever I can do, for you I will do it. In all that I am, I will be yours. For you I will study; for you I will labor; for you I will write. You will I set before me; you will I carry in my bosom. I shall shrink neither from the weariness nor exhaustion attendant upon study if only I can subserve your improvement.<sup>25</sup>

### **Cunningham, *An Introduction to Theological Studies* (circa 1843, published 1878)**

When William Cunningham began to lecture at New College, Edinburgh in the 1840s, he developed a series of lectures for first year students that were eventually published posthumously in 1878 in a book called *Theological Lectures* ([1878], reprinted in Greenville, by A Press, 1990). I encountered the volume of those lectures when I was a postgraduate student at New College in the 1980s, had it reprinted, and eventually excerpted the first seven chapters and had them published for my new students at Reformed Theological Seminary in the 1990s. When you read them, you get a feel for the kind of wisdom Cunningham imparted to those new ministerial students.

Each of the seven lectures are worth our reflection in thinking through the work of the seminary, but this a chapter, not a booklet. His first lecture sets out helpful explanations of the function of education in general, and definitions of religion and theology in particular. It reminds us in a very Witsius-like way of the importance of an experiential knowledge of God in theology, and of the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding the Scriptures. Lectures two through four sketch out the various branches of theological studies, their significance, and relation to one another. His divisions are: first, exegetical theology; second, systematic

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<sup>21</sup> Witsius, 46–47.

<sup>22</sup> Witsius, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Witsius, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Witsius, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Witsius, 49.

theology; third, historical theology; and, fourth, pastoral theology. Our attention is going to be given to what he says in lectures five and six, so we will here only note that in lecture seven he makes a case for the absolute importance of mastering the biblical languages, as well as being thoroughly familiar with our English Bibles, and reminds ministerial students of the necessity of resting from their academic studies on the Lord's Day.

Now we turn our attention to lectures five and six. His great subjects in them are prayer, meditation, and temptation (meaning the experience of resisting temptation in our trials). In these two lectures, Cunningham urges upon aspiring ministers a sense of the importance of prayer and the Holy Spirit to the attainment of true knowledge of God, he shows the importance of meditation (meaning considered, prayerful, reflection on God's Word) to the minister's growth in grace, and he indicates the vital role of Christian experience, and even temptation, in our preparation for ministry. He is, of course, borrowing his outline from Martin Luther's famous dictum that "Oratio, meditatio, tentatio (prayer, meditation, trials/testing/affliction) make the minister." Cunningham leans more into the idea of resisting temptation than Luther's tentatio/Anfechtung, which Roland Bainton describes as "all the doubt, turmoil, pang, tremor, panic, despair, desolation, and desperation which invade the spirit of man."<sup>26</sup>

### ***Prayer, in Light of the Necessary Agency of the Holy Spirit in Theological Study***

Cunningham begins his exhortation first with prayer (following Luther): "it is the imperative and primary duty of all who desire to become acquainted with theology, and qualified for the office of a minister of the gospel, to abound in prayer and supplication."<sup>27</sup> But what Cunningham labors to do in much of his treatment of prayer in this lecture is to explain why prayer is so primary and necessary. His answer, in short, is that you really cannot understand the Scripture without the direct aid of the Holy Spirit. He says:

It is a truth clearly revealed to us in Scripture, that no man ever really attains to any such knowledge of God's revealed will as will be available for his own personal salvation, or warrant him in entertaining the expectation of being instrumental through the truth in promoting the salvation of others, except through the direct agency of the Holy Ghost.<sup>28</sup>

He then elaborates this point. What is the reason that "the whole of your theological studies" must be accompanied "with a spirit and habit of earnest prayer for the illuminating influences of the Holy Ghost"? The answer he gives is threefold:

First, that all really useful and valuable knowledge of theology, or of God's revealed will, must come from God himself;

<sup>26</sup> *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 26.

<sup>27</sup> William Cunningham, *An Introduction to Theological Studies* (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 57.

<sup>28</sup> Cunningham, 57-58

Second, that God imparts this knowledge in connection with the study of his word, and the other means of grace, through the direct agency of the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Godhead; and

Third, that prayer is the direct and appropriate means which God has appointed and promised to bless, for drawing down upon us the influences of the Holy Ghost.<sup>29</sup>

The only proper conclusion from this three-part argument is that the whole of ministerial studies must be attended with prayer. Cunningham again expounds the point:

If these truths are duly impressed upon your minds, and if along with these convictions you have a real, sincere, and permanent desire to know God's revealed will, with a view to the great practical ends which this revelation was intended to serve with reference to men, collectively and individually, then the natural, the necessary result will be, that you will abound in prayer and supplication for the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, that you will earnestly and importunately seek his guidance and direction with reference to the whole of your studies, to every book which you peruse, every topic to which your attention is directed, and every attempt you make to investigate the meaning of any portion of his word.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Cunningham will argue, prayer alone can protect us from wrong desires for theological knowledge.

It is only a desire of theological knowledge, based upon those views and motives which we have described, that will lead you to abound and to persevere in prayer for the effusion of the Holy Spirit; and if you are not fervent and frequent in your prayers for his guidance, it is the plain dictate of common sense and prudence that you are not yet influenced by a sincere and intelligent desire that God by his Spirit would guide you into all truth. You are not then to infer that you have a desire for theological knowledge of the right kind, based upon right views, unless you are habitually praying for the guidance of God's Spirit; and you may be assured that during the whole of your theological studies, which ought to last during your lives, the restraining of prayer, a disposition to neglect or disregard this exercise, or to perform it carelessly or perfunctorily, may be regarded as marking at once a declension in your spiritual vigour and activity, and also a diminished proficiency in the acquisition of really valuable professional knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

This whole section of the lecture has obvious and lifelong importance for the minister. It also reminds us again of how often we are changed by prayer.

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<sup>29</sup> Cunningham, 58

<sup>30</sup> Cunningham, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Cunningham, 62.

***Meditation, unto the Discernment of Scripture's Meaning and Application, and our Protection from Error***

Cunningham begins this lecture with a definition of meditation, which he identifies as reflection upon our learning and reading, in particular, and especially contemplating the meaning and significance of what we have read, particularly Scripture. He says:

Meditation, as including learning, reading, and reflection, and especially reading and reflecting upon the Word of God, so as to understand the meaning of its statements and the import of its teaching, is that which in the ordinary relation of cause and effect bears most directly and immediately upon the acquisition of theological knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

Why is this so important? Cunningham explains:

You must read and reflect. Theological knowledge cannot be put into you, ab extra [from the outside], without your own faculties being called into vigorous exercise. It consists radically and essentially in the formation of correct judgments, as to the meaning and import of statements in God's word ...<sup>33</sup>

But Cunningham goes on to argue that neglecting to meditate and reflect can leave us open to theological error. He urges in us "the right and honest exercise of our faculties, and the faithful and conscientious improvement of our opportunities," as well as "diligence, caution, and perseverance" in their exercise, in order that we be kept from error.

The knowledge of the truth is the gift of God, and is traceable to or connected with the right and honest exercise of our faculties, and the faithful and conscientious improvement of our opportunities, while the adoption and maintenance of error is owing universally to some failure in these respects; to the want of a sincere and honest desire to know the truth, to the operation of some perverting and misleading influence, or to some failure in the diligence, caution, and perseverance with which our faculties have been brought to bear upon the investigation.<sup>34</sup>

***Temptation, unto Intimate Acquaintance with Divine Truth and its Application in Resisting Sin***

According to Cunningham (and a little different from Luther), temptatio/temptation means "experience, or the practical application of divine truth in the way of guarding against evil tendencies and results."<sup>35</sup> He argues that you really can't understand the meaning and significance of Scripture, or apply it to others to help them resist temptation, until you have

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<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, 69.

<sup>33</sup> Cunningham, 70.

<sup>34</sup> Cunningham, 71.

<sup>35</sup> Cunningham, 63.

had to do so yourself, and have thereby come to understand more deeply the truth of God's word.

You can have no thorough and intimate acquaintance with divine truth, and especially you will be very ill fitted to explain and apply it for the benefit of others, unless you have had some practice in actually bringing it to bear upon the resistance of those temptations with which all believers are assailed in their journey towards Zion.<sup>36</sup>

Cunningham again explains that the experience of temptation, as we take recourse to God's Word, increases our understanding of it, and our ability to rightly apply it to others.

The habit and exercise of applying divine truth for resisting temptation and growing in grace is indispensable to every believer, to every one who has really entered upon the way to Zion. But at present we are called upon specially to notice that it tends greatly to promote and extend men's real knowledge and intimate discernment of divine truth, and to aid them unspeakably in rightly dividing it, or applying it wisely or judiciously for the benefit of others.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, Cunningham says, there is an experiential knowledge and wisdom that can only be obtained by going through such temptation, and that uniquely equips ministers of the Gospel to explain to our flock, clearly and helpfully, how to fight temptation.

This process of actually applying the word of God and the doctrines which it contains to their great practical purpose in the formation of character and in the regulation of conduct, according to the actual circumstances in which men are in providence placed, and the temptations they are called upon to encounter, produces a clear, impressive, experimental acquaintance with divine truth, which cannot be acquired in any other way, and which peculiarly fits them for communicating clear and impressive conceptions of them to others ...<sup>38</sup>

So, we can see in Cunningham's exposition in these two lectures, that even though he was living and ministering in the midst of rising rationalism and infidelity of the 19th century, he fully retains the experiential emphasis in theological education and ministerial preparation that we encountered in Herman Witsius, who ministered in a very different context and time.

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<sup>36</sup> Cunningham, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Cunningham, 63-64

<sup>38</sup> Cunningham, 64-65

### **Warfield, *Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary* (1903) & *The Religious Life of Theological Students* (1911)**

B.B. Warfield, who taught theology at Old Princeton Seminary from 1887 to 1921, and served as its last Principal until 1902, in his address to first year students on “Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary” expresses the aims and aspirations of the theological seminary and counsels seminarians on how they are to make the most of their time and studies:

How are we who teach best to fulfill the trust committed to us, of guiding others in their preparation for the high office of Minister of Grace? How are you who are here to make this preparation, so to employ your time and opportunities as to become in the highest sense true stewards of the mysteries of Christ?<sup>39</sup>

Warfield is balancing two concerns. The first is his assertion that the academic and intellectual work of the seminary must not displace its concerns for the spiritual, moral, and practical preparation for the ministry. He says “intellectual training alone will never make a true minister; that the heart has rights which the head must respect; and that it behooves us above everything to remember that the ministry is a spiritual office.”<sup>40</sup> To that end he will argue that “any proper preparation for the ministry must include these three chief parts—a training of the heart, a training of the hand, a training of the head—a devotional, a practical and an intellectual training? Such a training, in a word, as that we may learn first to know Jesus, then to grasp the message He would have [us] deliver to men, and then how He would have us work for Him in His vineyard.”<sup>41</sup> He candidly admits: “aptness to teach is only the beginning of his fitting. All the other requirements are rooted in his moral or spiritual fitness.”<sup>42</sup>

But the other concern he has is the prevalent rejection of the necessity of academic and intellectual study for the ministry. He means to strongly object to the idea that the seminary’s plan for ministerial preparation is overly intellectual, citing Joseph T. Duryea who declared it “high time that the question whether culture and learning do not unfit preachers for the preaching of the Gospel to ordinary men and women, were referred back without response to the stupidity that inspires it.”<sup>43</sup> In particular, Warfield is concerned about three things: the failure to appreciate the importance of study and learning the ministry, the false juxtaposition of it with the practical and spiritual aspects of ministerial preparation, and neglecting to grasp the reciprocity that should exist between the intellectual and spiritual, the academic and devotional, the theological and practical.

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<sup>39</sup> B.B. Warfield, “Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary,” in *The Princeton Theological Review*, 2:1 (1904): 65.

<sup>40</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 67-68.

<sup>42</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 65.

So, the whole first section of his address aims to keep these things together. Ministerial preparation requires knowledge and devotion, head and heart, truth and practice. He explains:

Our primary business at the Seminary is, no doubt, to obtain the intellectual fitting for our ministerial work, and nothing must be allowed to supersede that in our efforts. But neither must the collateral prosecution of the requisite training of the heart and hand be neglected, as opportunity offers. Nor will a properly guarded attention to these injure the discharge of our scholastic duties; it will, on the contrary, powerfully advance their successful performance. The student cannot too sedulously cultivate devoutness of spirit ... When the heart is thoroughly aroused, the slowest mind starts into motion and an impulse is given it which carries it triumphantly over intellectual difficulties before which it quailed afraid. And equally a proper taste of the practical work of the ministry is a great quickener of the mind for the intellectual preparation. We cannot do without these things. And the student must be very careful, therefore— even on this somewhat low ground—while not permitting any distractions to divert him from his primary task as a student, yet to take full advantage of all proper opportunities that may arise to train his heart and hand also.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, the preparation of our heads, hearts, and hands for ministry ought not to be opposed or put at odds. Indeed, they are inseparably connected and mutual dependent and reciprocal.

In the second section of his address, he attempts to explain how this is to be done in seminary. He outlines five ways that seminary life may serve to assist this well-rounded preparation. First, in attendance upon the public means of grace. Second, additional opportunities for social worship and voluntary association for spiritual purposes. Third, understanding and undertaking the work of the seminary itself as a means of grace. Fourth, and thus, approaching your seminary work as a religious duty and act of worship. Fifth, the cultivation of communal devotion, engagement in and discussion about congregational labor, theological reading and mutual interaction and conversation.

I will concentrate our attention on two of these, the third and fourth, though the fifth also warrants extended reflection. As we have already noted in this chapter, Warfield argues that

The entire work of the Seminary deserves to be classed in the category of means of grace; and the whole routine of work done here may be made a very powerful means of grace if we will only prosecute it in a right spirit and with due regard to its religious value. For what are we engaging ourselves with in our daily studies but just the Word of God, the history of God's dealings with His people, the great truths that He has revealed to us for the salvation of our souls? And what are we doing when we engage ourselves day after day with these topics of study and meditation, but just what every Christian man strives to do when he is seeking nutriment for his soul? The only

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<sup>44</sup> Warfield, "Spiritual Culture", 70.



difference is that what he does sporadically, at intervals, and somewhat primarily, it is your privilege to give yourselves to unbrokenly for a space of three whole years!<sup>45</sup>

So, since seminary is fundamentally ministering the Word of God to future ministers so that they can minister the Word of God to others, and is thus a means of grace, how should the seminarian approach his labors and respond to these privileges? Warfield is definite in his answer and exhortation:

I beseech you, brethren, take every item of your Seminary work as a religious duty. I am emphasizing the adjective in this. I mean do all your work religiously—that is, with a religious end in view, in a religious spirit, and with the religious side of it dominant in your mind.<sup>46</sup>

In other words, as we have already said, seminarians ought to approach seminary as an act of worship.

The third section of Warfield’s address treats of (not Luther’s and Cunningham’s trilogy of oratio, meditatio, tentatio) but of lectio, meditatio, oratio making the theologian. Warfield says: “Lectio, meditatio, oratio, (reading, meditation, prayer) the old Doctors used to say, faciunt theologum [make the theologian]. They were right. Take the terms in the highest senses they will bear, and we shall have an admirable prescription of what we must do would we cultivate to its height the Christian life that is in us.”<sup>47</sup> But having given this trio, he begins with oratio, prayer, and we see the experiential concerns of Witsius and Cunningham alive and well at the dawn of the twentieth century in confessional Reformed theological education. “Above all else that you strive after, cultivate the grace of private prayer,” Warfield says, then he adds “Next to the prayerful spirit, the habit of reverent meditation on God’s truth is useful in cultivating devoutness of life.”<sup>48</sup> What is meditation? Warfield explains: “Meditation is an exercise which stands somewhere between thought and prayer. It must not be confounded with mere reasoning; it is reasoning transfigured by devout feeling; and it proceeds by broodingly dissolving rather than by logically analyzing the thought.”<sup>49</sup>

And what of Bible reading? Warfield connects it to the other side of meditation:

As meditation, then, on the one side takes hold upon prayer, so, on the other, it shades off into devotional Bible-reading, the highest exercise of which, indeed, it is. Life close to God’s Word, is life close to God. When I urge you to make very much while you are in the Seminary of this kind of devotional Bible study, running up into meditation, pure and simple, I am but repeating what the General Assembly specifically requires of you. “It is expected,” says the Plan of the Seminary, framed by the Assembly as our organic law, “that every student will spend a portion of time,

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<sup>45</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 78.

every morning and evening, in devout meditation and self-recollection and examination; in reading the Holy Scriptures solely with a view to a personal and practical application of the passage read to his own heart, character and circumstances; and in humble, fervent prayer and praise to God in secret.”<sup>50</sup>

We hasten on to Warfield’s classic, “The Religious Life of Theological Students”. Given just over a decade after “Spiritual Culture of the Theological Seminary,” “Religious Life” focuses on the student, the seminarian, and the considerations which he needs to be aware of in his ministerial preparation. Warfield starts with a familiar assertion: “A minister must be learned, on pain of being utterly incompetent for his work. But before and above being learned, a minister must be godly.”<sup>51</sup> And just as in “Spiritual Culture,” he is concerned that these not be set in opposition to one another. He will spend the whole essay urging us not to sunder or oppose godliness and learning, theology and religion, mind and heart. “Put your heart into your studies; do not merely occupy your mind with them, but put your heart into them.”<sup>52</sup> Along the way he will give good counsel on how the student can keep learning and devotion together.

But Warfield will also sound the note that only God can make ministers. That is good for us to hear. God makes ministers. Seminary is but his tool, instrument and means. “None but he who made the world, Warfield quotes John Newton as saying, “can make a minister.”<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

Perhaps it is good that we end here. What is seminary? A special and specific kind of means of grace. What does it do? Cultivate doctrine and devotion, truth and love, faith and practice, mind and heart, in the life of the seminarian. What does this kind of ministerial preparation produce? Ministers of the Gospel who

explain, enforce, and apply divine truth as contained in the sacred Scriptures, in order that by the agency of the Spirit through the instrumentality of the truth, men may be first of all turned from darkness to light, and then thereafter enabled to die more and more unto sin, and to live more and more unto righteousness.<sup>54</sup>

In the end, ministers are meant to do two things. Declare the Good News in calling sinners home to Christ (evangelism, “gathering”) and help Christians live the Christian life better (discipleship, “perfecting”). Thus, the minister’s whole life and work is wrapped up in the public and personal administration of the means of grace to these ends. That’s why the Westminster Confession of Faith says that the Church has been “given the ministry, oracles,

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<sup>50</sup> Warfield, “Spiritual Culture”, 78.

<sup>51</sup> B.B. Warfield, *The Religious Life of Theological Students* [1911] (reprinted in Phillipsburg, NJ by P&R, 1983), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Warfield, *Religious Life*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Warfield, *Religious Life*, 15.

<sup>54</sup> Cunningham, *An Introduction to Theological Studies*, 63.

and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and does, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto” (25.3).

This is what seminary was meant to help them do. And we need it today, more than ever.

## **Rhythms of Rest and Work in the Ministries of Douglas F. Kelly and William Still**

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In my first encounter with Douglas Kelly in 2003, I was a relatively new Christian and he was a giant of the faith. Doing my best to impress him, I sought to assert how much I knew about Reformed theology. He did his best not to laugh at me.

Instead, he decided to laugh at himself as he told me the story of when he first returned to his hometown of Lumberton, North Carolina, after receiving his PhD from the University of Edinburgh in 1973. Walking down the street, he heard two men speaking: “There’s that Kelly boy. Did you hear he’s a doctor now?” “Yeah, I heard, but he’s not the kind that helps people.”

How could a man who takes God so seriously, who has accomplished so much, who is so revered in so many spheres of academia, not take himself too seriously? Over the next two decades of walking alongside him, I saw the answer: he was a man whose soul was at rest in the sufficiency of his God, and the last five decades of ministry are the fruit of that rest.

### **Created For Rest and Work**

It may sound strange to most of us today that work is the fruit of rest, but it is profoundly biblical. God created Adam with an extraordinary job description: tend and keep the earth. And yet it is significant that Adam was created on the sixth day, meaning that Adam’s first full day on earth, before he would undertake his duties, was a day of rest. Like a tourist taking in the wonders of a new city, Adam’s first full day was spent thinking deeply about his God, so that his heart could be calibrated to the true north of his Heavenly Father’s glory. All work would flow from that rest, upward to the glory of God.

But the evil one, jealous of God’s glory, despised Adam’s rest in God. Tempting Adam to question God’s trustworthiness, the serpent set a trap and the man stepped in. The result was not equality with God as the serpent promised, but rather a lifetime of seeking to be his own savior, while also knowing at the deepest level he was radically unfit for that job. In an instant, work lost its transcendence and rest became an impossibility.

For this reason, most people tend to see work and rest as polar opposites, equating work with virtue and rest with laziness. Yet biblically speaking, work and rest are not opposites; they are rhythmic complements which glorify God and bless us when they are in proper balance. We were created so that our rest fuels our work, our work builds in us a healthy capacity for rest, and both are vital aspects of our worship of God.

If work is not the opposite of rest, then what is? The opposite of rest is restlessness. With the entry of sin into the world, our first parents (and all their posterity) experienced a deep sense of inadequacy and spiritual nakedness so acute that they hid themselves with fig leaves. But the makeshift coverings only heightened their workload as continual work was now needed to keep themselves hidden. The serpent’s deception interjected into God’s world a new rhythm: work, work, work, yet the only payment he could give was ongoing restlessness.

The effects are clear today: our workaholism, born of a tendency to seek meaning and security through our work, all testify not to the busyness of our schedules, but the restlessness of our hearts. So much of what we call work today is really an expression of that restlessness—a desire to create identity, to find security, and to prove our sufficiency rather than resting in the sufficiency of who God is. If rest would ever come for man’s weary soul, it must come from God Himself.

### Definition of Rest

In 2010, I enrolled at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, in order to study with Dr. Kelly. It was an extraordinary experience to study with world-class pastor-scholars and prepare for ministry. It was also an exhausting experience as I spread myself too thin with courseload, work as Dr. Kelly’s teaching assistant, an internship at a local church, pulpit supply at my home church, all on top of personal and family obligations. I already knew my diagnosis: I needed rest, and it always seemed just a semester away.

I was in my second year of seminary when Dr. Kelly introduced me to William Still’s fascinating work *Rhythms of Rest and Work*. Dr. Kelly sat under Mr. Still’s ministry at Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, and the two remained friends until Mr. Still went to be with the Lord in 1997. Not only were the two men kindred souls in their love for God, but also in their understanding of the rhythms of rest and work that God had built into His creation, which exist both for our good and His glory.

Mr. Still’s words resonated with me:

The fundamental need of humanity is rest, in the sense that man needs to submit himself to God, in order that the divine life may be poured progressively into every part of his being. This is negative in as much as it requires man to cease from himself, that the Almighty may fill him with life-giving grace, but it is replete with the positive and vibrant blessings of God and will last to all eternity.<sup>1</sup>

He was right: the only cure for human restlessness is to rest in the sufficiency of divine grace. While physical rest is certainly a necessity and one that Scripture does address, we can never get enough physical rest to undo the restlessness of the human soul as we navigate life in a sin-cursed world. The soul must come to rest securely in God, or as St. Augustine famously said, “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.”<sup>2</sup>

And mercifully, what our souls crave, our God provides. He commands us to “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him” (Ps. 37:7). He bids us to come, all who are weary, and find rest for our souls (Matt. 11:28-30). He alone can provide rest, for He alone is, in Himself, perfectly at rest. To quote Mr. Still again, “When infinite intelligence finds infinite perfections in itself, infinite stability and integrity of character are assured. This integrity is simply another name for God’s righteousness, or rightness.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Still, *Collected Writings of William Still: Studies in the Christian Life*, Vol 2, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1994), 295.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.

## Rhythms of Rest and Work

Our need of rest is not unanticipated by God, and thus rest is woven into creation's design.

For six days, God worked. He created the Heavens and the earth. The dynamic power of God's creative activity is immeasurable by the human mind as He commanded the stars, the moon, every beast of the field, into existence that each might take its place on the stage of creation.

And at the end of those days, He rested. The significance of this is extraordinary: it is not that God was tired from His activity and needed respite; God was establishing in the created order a rhythm of work and rest, rest and work. Mr. Still says, "God intended the divine experience to be applied to man ... it was as blessed for man as it has been blessed for God Himself."<sup>4</sup>

This rhythm extended to the entire created order: periods of rest for the land and soil (Ex. 23:10, 11; Lev. 26:34, 35) and rest for the animals (Ex. 20:10). Periods of darkness were given for rest, and periods of light for work. Seasons for planting and seasons for harvesting. The Noahic covenant reinforced that such seasonal patterns will last as long as the earth (Gen. 8:22).

None of this is mere coincidence, but a parable of God's care to ensure our rest. Dr. Kelly explains: "In God himself, in whose image we are created, we see a pattern that is in some manner to be repeated in us. We saw that He created the world in six days, and then He entered into his rest." He continues, "We are supposed to work and we are supposed to rest. There's a rhythm in life ... harmony in the natural world, the morning and the evening, the four seasons of the year."<sup>5</sup>

### "Six Days You Shall Do All Your Work"

There is no question that Mr. Still's ideas were deeply ingrained into Dr. Kelly's soul, as this idea of rhythmic work and rest pervade several of Dr. Kelly's writings. His volume on *Creation and Change* reflects recognition of these rhythms, as does his *Deuteronomy: A Mentor Expository Commentary*. For the narrow purpose for which this chapter was written, my primary resource was a series of sermons preached on the law at First Presbyterian Church of Dillon, South Carolina, in the spring of 1975.

In his sermon on the fourth commandment, Dr. Kelly begins by emphasizing the work aspect of Exodus 20:9, "In six days you shall do all your work." Ever the diligent worker himself, Kelly states, "... there is a deep need in us to be creative, to produce, to turn out something useful and fruitful—to work!"<sup>6</sup>

This is not a call to drudgery, but rather a call to worshipful productivity. God has entrusted each of us with unique gifts and talents, and has afforded to us the time to steward

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<sup>3</sup> Still, *Collected Writings of William Still 2*, 297.

<sup>4</sup> Still, *Collected Writings 2*, 300.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas F Kelly, *The Law* (Dillon, SC: First Presbyterian Church, 1975), 86.

<sup>6</sup> Kelly, *The Law*, 87.

those gifts to His glory. Yet the fourth commandment also makes clear that He has not given us more work than what we can accomplish in six days. He does not desire to make work a burden, but rather a joy. What a vital principle for 21st century Westerners: God has not assigned to us more duties in a week than can be accomplished in a six-day span, so that we might have one day in seven for rest.

### **“The Seventh Day is a Sabbath to the Lord Your God”**

God’s creative activity in Genesis concludes with Him taking a Sabbath: “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” Almighty God, who neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4), chose to rest after His work of creation. He did so, not out of necessity (for God needs nothing outside of Himself) but in order to mark creation’s completeness (seven days) and to enjoy the satisfaction of His creative work.

God’s *Sabbath* was not a one-time event, but rather a creation ordinance, woven into the fabric of God’s world. The fourth commandment not only commands that we follow this work-rest rhythm but also gives us the rationale: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Ex. 20:11). God’s pattern established creation’s rhythm.

Just as God had surveyed the creation and rested satisfied in it, the Sabbath was set apart for man to rest satisfied in God. What a gift: a day to set aside all the labors of other days, and to be reminded of the truths of the nature and character of God! Dr. Kelly says that the Sabbath is, “a very positive commandment. It’s intended for our good, for our blessing, for our joy, for a well-regulated and harmonious personal life and life relationships, and life in business.”<sup>7</sup> It is no surprise then that Scripture exhorts us to call the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13).

Perhaps no people throughout history understood the necessity of the Sabbath better than the Israelites after more than 400 years in Egyptian slavery. After Joseph and his brothers settled in Egypt, the land was increasingly being filled with Israelites who had been fruitful and multiplied, echoing God’s command (Gen. 1:28; 9:1) as well as his promise to Abraham and his chosen descendants (Gen. 17:6; 35:11; 47:27). As long as Pharaoh knew who Joseph was, the Israelites had permission to live freely in the land and to work it. But when a new king of Egypt arose who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8), he saw the people who had once saved his nation now as a threat to national security, and he established a harsh form of chattel slavery. Ruthless taskmasters heaped upon them two awful burdens: first, they must make bricks without straw (Ex. 5:10), and second, they did not have a day off. Scripture is descriptive about their experience in Egyptian slavery: their lives were “bitter” (Ex. 1:14), with “hard” (Ex. 1:14; 6:9) service resulting in “misery” and “suffering” (Ex. 3:7) and a “broken spirit” (Ex. 6:9).

Following such a miserable existence in Egypt, one can hardly imagine the joy of hearing that their new King, Yahweh, would actually require that they rest for one full day out of every seven! It was to be a vacation every single week, and more importantly, a regular reminder that the yoke of slavery had been broken.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, *The Law*, 85.

Kelly beautifully summarizes the gift of Sabbath rest, saying, “There’s nothing more beautiful, nothing more healing, nothing that will do more for family life or for an upset personality, than to observe, reverentially and respectfully, the Sabbath Day; and to let God bless you in his own special way on that day.”<sup>8</sup>

### **No Rest for the Weary**

If such a rhythm is baked into creation, why do most of us find ourselves so unhealthily busy? Let us return to our distinction between rest and restlessness: just as Adam and Eve were restless in their hiding and search for security and identity, so too are we. Instead of seeking these things from our Creator, we seek them in the creation, thereby upsetting the very rhythm by which we could otherwise find these things our souls crave.

This is why in our contemporary culture, perhaps more than in any other in history, work has become the means to secure those things. Carl Trueman addresses this difficulty well in his excellent *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*: “Is job satisfaction to be found in the fact that it enables me to feed and clothe my family? Or is it to be found in the fact that the very actions involved in my work bring me a sense of inner psychological well-being?”<sup>9</sup>

As a result, who I am is defined by what I do. And because there is always more to do, rest seems only to get in the way. From this perspective, work is all-consuming, and rest is burdensome.

Such an attitude is deeply theological. David Murray notes several errors that we communicate when we refuse to rest as God has ordained to us:

I don’t respect how my Creator has made me. I am strong enough to cope without God’s gift of sufficient daily sleep and a weekly Sabbath. I refuse to accept my creaturely limitations and bodily needs. I see myself more as a self-sufficient machine than a God-dependent creature ... I don’t trust God with my work, my church, or my family. Sure, I believe God is sovereign, but he needs all the help I can give him. If I don’t do the work, who will? Although Christ has promised to build his church, who’s doing the night shift?<sup>10</sup>

Who among us cannot relate to that? Yet so often we acknowledge it like the man of James 1 who looks in the mirror and sees his face, but then walks away, forgetting what he looks like.

Mr. Still comments with surgical precision:

The beginning of the secret of how to rest and relax is, of course, in one’s attitude, and it may very well be that this is not only a psychological but spiritual matter. Satan’s work in the human heart is largely wrought by a kind of restlessness, and therefore,

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<sup>8</sup> Kelly, *The Law*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 23.

<sup>10</sup> David Murray, “There Are Souls to Be Saved: How Can We Rest?” 9Marks, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.9marks.org/article/there-are-souls-to-be-saved-how-can-we-rest/>.



the beginning of real salvation here must embody a flat contradiction of the necessity of continual activity ...

Once we see that, the battle is half won. It may be that to achieve so much involves admitting with tears of sorrow that we have been too proud to admit we needed rest.<sup>11</sup>

### **“It Is Finished!”**

But how can we rest from our labors when the work is never done? By resting in the One who fulfilled all that was required of us (Gal. 4:4). When the Lord Jesus hung upon the cross, His final cry was *tetelestai* (“it is finished!”), pronouncing that not only was His work finished, but so too was all that God had required of us for salvation. Without the finished work of Christ, peace is an impossibility; through Christ, peace with God is an objective reality.

In Christ crucified and risen, our souls are able to experience true rest, and the Sabbath transforms in our eyes from burden to blessing. This transformation is marked by the transition from the Sabbath coming at the end of the week to now coming on the first day of the week. Following the resurrection on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1; John 20:1), the Church made it her rhythm to worship on the first day as well (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Rather than the old rhythm of working for six days and then finally receiving rest, the New Covenant brings rest first, followed by six days of work. Like the Israelites who were to be reminded every week of how they had been liberated, the New Covenant Sabbath gives us rest first, reminding us that, indeed, “It is finished.” Every week begins with the poignant reminder that we can set aside one day to do no work, and yet we are still utterly loved and accepted by God.

Mr. Still called this “a clear and sweet parable of the Gospel, in which restless sinners are able to rest from their own ineffectual labours in the effectual and fruitful redeeming work of God in Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

Sinclair Ferguson, another disciple of Mr. Still, says that the Christian:

was called to live on the basis of a day when he could reflect on God’s creation, God’s goodness, store his mind with reflections on who God is and how great He is, and then work through the rest of the week on that basis. And that rhythm is really very important. We need that space to have our minds decluttered and to have our minds filled with the truth of God’s Word. It’s the day when our whole beings are intended to be recalibrated into this weekly rhythm of rest and work and rest and work.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Still, *Collected Writings of William Still* 2, 313.

<sup>12</sup> Still, *Collected Writings* 2, 300.

<sup>13</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, “Sabbath Rest,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/sabbath-rest>.

## Rest and Sanctification

In one of His many engagements with Pharisees concerning right use of the Sabbath, our Lord set before us one overarching principle: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath is for man’s good, and what higher good does man have in this world than to grow in sanctification and in the enjoyment of God?

Yet such growth does not happen spontaneously. Mr. Still points out that while Christian conversion is instantaneous (like an earthquake), God has ordained sanctification to be by growth (slowly, requiring the right care and nurture before a harvest is reaped).<sup>14</sup> Sanctification is a process of growth, whereby we learn to do natural things spiritually, and spiritual things naturally.

What is the key to this process? According to both Still and Kelly, it is the product of deliberate, holy rest and contemplation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Mr. Still beautifully explains this truth:

So great and luxuriant are the fruits of the grace of justification flowing from God’s peace with us, that entrance into them has the effect of transforming our character (see 2 Cor. 3:18).<sup>15</sup>

To be clear, there have been many throughout history who have outwardly observed the Sabbath but have never experienced the wondrous contemplation of the face of Christ. The Pharisees were a perfect example: at least on one occasion, they spent the Sabbath plotting how to kill Christ (Matt. 12:14)! Regardless, *abusus non tollit usum*: abuse is no argument against proper use. The Sabbath is objectively a blessing to the Christian soul.

## Rest Enables Us to Get More Done

One principle of rest and work that Still and Kelly both helpfully emphasize is that intentional, diligent rest actually helps us to get more done. Mr. Still says,

To expect the delicate and sensitive human frame and mechanism to maintain constant efficiency from early morning to late at night without any definite relaxation of tension during so many hours is, it seems to me, unreasonable, and explains why we often behave badly, and act inefficiently.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Kelly emphasized extensively the return on investment that we receive in Sabbath keeping:

... the investment that you can get from giving one day in seven to God is absolutely fantastic—it is so high and so rich and so rewarding. How much better your work goes

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<sup>14</sup> Still, *Collected Writings of William Still* 2, 326.

<sup>15</sup> Still, *Collected Writings* 2, 305.

<sup>16</sup> Still, *Collected Writings* 2, 305.

those other six days! Oh, the blessings, the return that you get from giving God what is already his—one day in seven!<sup>17</sup>

Both are quite right: How frequently do worry, angst, people pleasing, and the tyranny of the urgent sap us of the very energies God has given us for the tasks to which He has called us? In a sense, working without first resting our souls in Christ is like riding a bicycle but peddling in different directions: expending much energy but getting nowhere.

Mr. Still stresses the importance of this rhythm for enduring faithfulness: “We therefore see that the idea of resting in God is part of a total attitude, which includes the recognition that as finite creatures we are absolutely dependent upon him—as for our creation, so for our survival and well-being.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Rhythms of Rest and Work for the Busy Pastor**

I suspect that many who will read this work will be among the thousands of pastors who have been impacted by Dr. Kelly during more than a half-century ministry. We cannot help but admire a man who has remained diligent, clear of scandal, productive, and joyful for over half a century in one of the world’s hardest professions.

For most of us, resting doesn’t come naturally. We hear the exhortation in Hebrews to “strive to enter the rest” (Heb. 4:11) and we think “sure—once I get through with this Sunday evening’s sermon, my visitation list, and prepping for this week’s Session meeting!”

Sadly, rest seems like a pipe dream to most of us unless it is providentially forced upon us. Wayne Muller notes in his book on *Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, “If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath—our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create Sabbath for us.”<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes, the thing that makes our job so difficult is our own stubborn refusal to rest, and it is no wonder that so many pastors face burnout. Yet I can testify that as he continues to labor diligently, Dr. Kelly’s zeal for Gospel ministry has not waned one bit.

In many ways, the secret is his commitment to rest and work. As an observer of Dr. Kelly’s life for the last two decades, I’ve seen four particular components to his longevity and productivity that are vital for pastors to understand and practice:

*First, pastors must prioritize time with the Lord in Bible reading and prayer.* Regardless of where he is, what conference he is speaking at, or what other projects loom over his head, he always guards a substantial portion of his time to read the Bible. He describes the profound effect that our own reading can have on us as individuals: “to understand the message of the Word of God is indeed to let loose forces in our lives as powerful as a lion.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kelly, *The Law*, 96.

<sup>18</sup> Still, *Collected Writings of William Still* 2, 301.

<sup>19</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, 1st edition (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2000), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas F. Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?* (Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1989), 193.

Speaking with frankness, Kelly says “There is no reason why most Christians cannot read through the Bible once every year.”<sup>21</sup> Yet with great pastoral tenderness, he recognizes that the Bible can be intimidating and thus recommends following a reading plan, which has been his pattern nearly his whole life. Believing that “Christ speaks to us in all parts of His Word,” he uses a plan that ensures a varied diet from different parts of Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise with prayer, Dr. Kelly advocates for a structured system of planned prayer. He begins with a time of praise, which he follows with a time of waiting and being still before the Lord (Ps 62). Following this comes confession, during which he exhorts us to be very honest and specific about our sins, that we might see how odious they are and turn from them. Next, he urges a time of applying Scripture in prayer, reminding us “God loves His Word, and when you turn His Word into prayer, He is hearing His own voice, and that voice will have a good reception in Heaven above!”<sup>23</sup> Next comes a time of watching, during which he considers the affairs of our world in light of the spiritual battle being waged, and then storms the gates of heaven for those issues. He continues in a time of intercession, in which he again urges specificity through use of a prayer list. Finally, he concludes the time with thanksgiving, acknowledging God’s mercies with specificity.

Sometimes today, Christians are concerned that such a structured rhythm of daily reading and prayer could lend itself toward legalism. This has produced in many believers such a fear of legalism that they do not engage in regular time in the Word or prayer. Yet such fear is unnecessary, as Dr. Kelly reminds us that the goal of this is not self-justification but rather “to keep in the front of our minds a vision of who God is.”<sup>24</sup> When we are able to do that, much like the Sabbath, the work of daily Bible reading and prayer returns an investment substantially greater than what it cost us: “your perspective on life begins to change. Days no longer slip by without a thought of Jesus. You begin to pray when matters get hard to handle, instead of complaining, and you begin to recognize the hand of God at work when things do change. Praise wells up in your heart as you become increasingly alert to His blessings.”<sup>25</sup>

*Second, we must commit ourselves to the mortification of sin.* Just as with the disobedience of the Israelites kept them from the enjoyment of rest in the Promised Land, sin always disrupts our rest. Certainly, the consequences of sin are disruptive, but there is more to it: we cannot possibly keep our hearts and minds still upon Christ while at the same time following the devil’s temptations toward disobedience. Sin always encourages restlessness unless we put it to death.

I remember one particular conversation in which we were discussing heartbreaking news of a pastor who had tragically fallen from the ministry due to moral failure. Dr. Kelly’s words were simple but powerful: “Alex, you will always be presented with temptation. You must kill it. Kill it!” I did not realize at the time that he was paraphrasing John Owen, but

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<sup>21</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, 193.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, 193-194.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, 209.

<sup>24</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, 195.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, 196.

more importantly, I was receiving advice more precious than gold on an essential aspect of longevity in ministry.

*A third pattern I saw in years of watching Dr. Kelly was to resist the temptation to make a name for himself.* In my three years as his teaching assistant, Dr. Kelly received countless invitations to speak, to preach, and to write, many of which came from prestigious ministries and organizations. To be in such high demand would tempt any of us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

Despite nearly endless opportunity for self-aggrandizement, I did not once discern that Dr. Kelly's goal in ministry was to inflate his own ego. It doesn't mean that he didn't face that temptation, but rather than letting it take root in his heart, he confessed it before the Lord and put it to death.

How can we likewise resist such a temptation? We must be at rest in Christ as our sufficiency so that we do not sense a need to seek glory for ourselves.

During the time that I have known Dr. Kelly, he has spoken at many of those prestigious events to crowds of thousands. I have also enjoyed the fruits of his weekly ministry at Reedy Creek Presbyterian Church, a small, wonderful church in rural Minturn, South Carolina, where a dozen people in worship feels like a packed house. Astoundingly to me, he prepares the same for either group, for he understands that the goal is not to impress anyone with himself, but to please the Lord Christ through faithful ministry.

A final reason he has been so effective for so long is that he knows his calling. Far from the common vision of pastors today that more resembles a CEO than a shepherd, Dr. Kelly understands that his primary calling among the people of God "is to feed the flock by leading them to green pastures."<sup>26</sup>

For those of us who are called to the ministry of the Word, so often we are distracted from that chief obligation by a million other lesser duties, many of which are good in themselves.

At times, we compound our duties out of fear of telling others "no" or we wear ourselves out with stress about a whole world of issues that are not central to our calling.

I can remember Dr. Kelly often lamenting that so many pastors today were so occupied with secondary obligations that they were "too busy" for things like morning and evening worship, midweek prayer meeting, and so on. During more than one of our phone calls when I began planting the church I currently pastor, he would ask the question, "Do you have a midweek prayer meeting yet? The saints must gather to pray!" I am deeply thankful that now, in great part due to his influence, we do.

I think that every pastor would profit from the words of another giant of our time, Dale Ralph Davis:

The "busy pastor" obviously doesn't have time to ponder or think or read (or listen), because he is, well, a "busy pastor." Believe me, I know something of the load a pastor carries. But I repudiate the busy-pastor model. I don't think there should be any busy pastors. Ministerial busyness may fulfill our egos, but it empties the soul. Many of us need to join Mary at Jesus' feet if we are to be equipped for our labor.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> William Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, Revised (Christian Focus, 2010), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke 1-13: The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Christian Focus, 2021), 192.

We must know our own capacities and callings, and rather than trying to do everything, we must slow down and focus on the main thing: ministering the Word and prayer.

### **Rest-Powered Pastoral Ministry**

For those of us who have been in ministry for more than a year or two, undoubtedly we have developed bad habits and misplaced priorities. It takes work to break our bad patterns in order to get into rhythm, but consider the benefits that healthy rhythms of rest and work bring to the faithful pastor:

#### *Perseverance in Prayer*

Every pastor has likely heard the account of Luther, who once said “I have so much to do today that I’m going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done.”<sup>28</sup> We appreciate the sentiment, but so few of us can live by that saying because we’re too busy. And if we’re totally honest, we tend to think we can accomplish more with our hands than with our prayers, and thus we do not slow down enough to pray with perseverance.

Perhaps that is the reason we don’t have more answered prayers: because we can’t slow down enough to *really* pray. Dr. Kelly exhorts us that persevering prayer must be part of every believer’s life: “Just as the peasant farmer has to take his ten thousand steps to sow his tens of thousands seeds, each one a part of the preparation for the final harvest, so there is a need for often repeated persevering prayer, all working out some desired blessing.”<sup>29</sup>

#### *Passionate Preaching*

For most of us, especially pastors who have multiple preaching and teaching obligations during a week, we can at times become more like sermon factories than men who have meditated on and marinated in God’s Word before we preach it to His people. As a result, our sermons will often become superficial, because we do not have (or make) time to slow down and think deeply about God.

Proper rhythms of rest and work shut down the sermon factory, and instead allow us to follow the sort of preaching Mr. Still spoke of: “The preaching of the Word of God, when it flows through a living vessel dedicated utterly to the Master’s use, is not only an event in the lives of those who hear it but becomes, first, a decisive act, and then, necessary food for their souls.”<sup>30</sup>

#### *Patience with Problem People*

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<sup>28</sup> Kazlitt Arvine, *Cyclopedia of Moral and Religious Anecdotes* (Nabu Press, 2010), 303.

<sup>29</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*, 163.

<sup>30</sup> Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, 27.

There are many professions in which hurrying to get the work done can be admirable. Assembly line workers, for example, will be rewarded for how much they can produce in a short amount of time.

In pastoral ministry, such a mindset can be detrimental because we are not manufacturing products; we are in the “business” of, by the grace of God, “warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). There are no shortcuts or hacks, and we must resist the temptation to see quick results when dealing with the souls of those whom God has entrusted to us. Mr. Still points out that right rhythms of work and rest help us to have “good-natured tolerance,” “waiting with buoyant good humour and expectancy to see babes grow up into God’s salvation (1 Pet. 2:2) and as living stones into Christ’s church (1 Pet. 2:5) as a spiritual house.”<sup>31</sup>

In 2012, Dr. Kelly led a group of seminary students through an extra-curricular study of Mr. Still’s *The Work of the Pastor*. Of all the wonderful lessons of that book, Dr. Kelly particularly sought to ingrain in us the holiness of our calling as we work with God’s people:

God has caused you to become pastor to some souls here who are as valuable to Him as any in the world—your quiet persistence will be a sign that you believe God has a purpose of grace for this people, and that this purpose of grace will be promoted, not by gimmicks, or stunts, or new ideas, but by the Word of God released in preaching by prayer.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Peace with the Outcome of Ministry*

The expectations upon pastors are weighty, but of all the stresses we face, the greatest comes from within: we think we’re far more important than we are. As we practice a healthy rhythm of rest and work, we experience the regular reminder that there is one God, and He can handle things quite well without me. Mr. Still poignantly says, “The fact that God will look after the world while you take a little time should give you a sense of real relief!”<sup>33</sup>

Such a disposition will not only build stamina for ministry, but it will make ministry infinitely more effective, because the in-rhythm minister understands he is but a tool, and God is the Master Craftsman.

### **Longing for the Future Sabbath**

No discussion of Dr. Kelly’s understanding and practice of “Rhythms of Rest and Work” would be complete without a glimpse into the future, final rest that believers eagerly await (Phil. 3:20). While we will never fully experience complete and perfect rest in this world, the day is coming in which we will. Today’s Sabbaths are but a foretaste of that “final, perfect consummation of all the purposes of God in and through His creation, which has been

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<sup>31</sup> Still, *Collected Writings of William Still 2*, 326.

<sup>32</sup> William Still, *The Work of the Pastor* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2010), chap. 1, Kindle.

<sup>33</sup> Still, *Collected Writings of William Still 2*, 314.

washed clean through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 5:9) for whose pleasure all things are and were created (Rev. 4:11).”<sup>34</sup>

I wish to conclude this chapter in the same way that Dr. Kelly concluded several of his own treatments of this topic: with an extended, wonderfully galvanizing quote by Robert Murray M’Cheyne.

It is a type of heaven when a believer lays aside his pen or loom, brushes aside his worldly cares, leaving them behind him with his weekday clothes, and comes up to the house of God. It is like the morning of the resurrection, the day when we shall come out of great tribulation into the presence of God and the lamb, when the believer sits under the preached Word and hears the voice of the Shepherd leading and feeding his soul.

It reminds him of the day when the Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne shall feed him, and lead him to living fountains of water. When he joins in the psalm of praise, it reminds him of the day when his hands shall strike the harp of God, ‘where congregations ne’er break up and Sabbaths have no end.’ When he retires and meets with God in secret in his closet, or like Isaac in some favourite spot near his dwelling, it reminds him of the day when he shall be a pillar in the house of our God and go out no more.

This is the reason we love the Lord’s Day. This is the reason we call the Sabbath a delight. A well spent Sabbath we feel a day of heaven upon earth. For this reason we wish our Sabbaths to be wholly given to God. We love to spend the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship except so much as is taken up in works of necessity and mercy. We love to rise early on that morning and to sit up late, that we may have a long day with God.<sup>35</sup>

Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>34</sup> Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation And Change: Genesis 1:1–2:4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms*, Revised edition (Mentor, 2017), 336.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew A Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M’Cheyne* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 539.



## A Puritan Critique of Contemporary Christian Nationalist Proposals

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Various Christian Nationalist proposals have received significant attention over the past few years. Several of these have explicitly or implicitly referenced New England puritanism in support of their argument that governments should implement moral legislation based on the Christian faith. However, the discussion of these proposals has not considered the ways in which the puritan founders of Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Haven would have critiqued the proposals. Those essays that have drawn parallels to puritan thought have largely done so by referencing a handful of sermons without considering whether the sermons are representative of the broader conversations within early New England.

The issue of whether or not the puritans were Christian nationalists is complicated by the relationships between the various puritan colonies and the English monarchy. Additionally, the colonists were not seeking to form a new nation; rather, they continued to conceive of themselves as English citizens. The issue is also made complicated by the fact that different authors have different definitions regarding what constitutes Christian nationalism.

Many authors do not provide a clear definition of the term, instead choosing to identify the term with a cluster of views that they either affirm or oppose. Stephen Wolfe in his recent book *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, has defined the term as “a totality of national action, consisting of civil laws and social customs, conducted by a Christian nation as a Christian nation, in order to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good in Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Wolfe’s defense of Christian Nationalism includes the establishment of Christianity as an official religion through the election of Christian government officials, the passing of explicitly Christian laws, as well as other steps to reinforce “social customs” that are consistent with a Christian national identity.<sup>2</sup> If one were to replace the word “nation” with “commonwealth” in Wolfe’s definition, then it would probably apply fairly well to the puritan founders of New England.

With that starting point, I am going to consider several ways in which the puritans would respond to contemporary proposals in support of Christian Nationalism. More specifically, this paper will consider how the puritans of New England might respond to questions regarding the suitability of proposals for a more explicit Christian influence on government, calls for a strong executive power to protect the church and Christian belief, and arguments related to resistance and revolution against non-Christian leadership. The paper will draw on examples and arguments across the different puritan colonies in order to arrive at a broader critique of contemporary proposals.

Many of the recent arguments in support of Christian nationalism seem to presuppose that their proposals are suitable for the United States today. For example, Wolfe

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2022), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfe, 10.

includes an epilogue to his recent book that discusses how to apply his defense of Christian nationalism to the contemporary United States.<sup>3</sup> These authors do not pause to ask whether it is theologically or politically appropriate to implement their ideas. This is one area where many Puritans might begin to question their proposals. There were active discussions among Puritans in England and New England regarding whether it was proper for the church to have influence over the magistrates.

For background, it is important to remember that under the English model, the state had authority over the church rather than the other way around. The English reformation began with the Acts of Supremacy, which declared that King Henry VIII was the head of the Church of England. The King (or in the cases of Mary and Elizabeth, the Queen) had the authority to appoint bishops and to exercise significant influence over the teaching of the churches. Puritans had long been concerned about the dangers of royal authority over the church. Thomas Cartwright had argued for Presbyterianism as a better alternative as early as 1573.<sup>4</sup> In fact, distrust of episcopal authority played a significant role in the decision of many puritans to sail west across the Atlantic and found colonies. The separatists in the Plymouth Colony had first removed to the Low Countries in order to have freedom of conscience, and then sailed to New England as they saw the Dutch culture influence their children in ways that made them uncomfortable. Many of the colonists in the Massachusetts Bay Colony agreed with John Winthrop's assessment that King Charles I and the Church of England would oppose any further reformation and sought to distance themselves from what they perceived as growing corruption within the hierarchy of the Church of England.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the founders of Connecticut and New Haven included those who had fled from the Church authorities in order to avoid trial before church tribunals for their failure to obey the Act of Conformity.

In light of these motivations to form their own colonies it is understandable that the colonists questioned whether it was acceptable to provide the church with greater authority over the civil authorities. Additionally, it also makes sense that their correspondents in England would question whether what they were hearing about governments in these commonwealths were both true and permissible. The best example of this type of argument is a treatise written by John Davenport, which he titled a *Discourse about Civil Government in a New Plantation whose Design is Religion*.<sup>6</sup> In this work, Davenport responds to a conversation, probably within Massachusetts Bay Colony, whether the "the right and power of choosing civil magistrates belongs to the Church of Christ."

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, 433–76.

<sup>4</sup> Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 40–41.

<sup>5</sup> Winthrop wrote that "The land grows weary of its inhabitants" as he began promoting plans to migrate to Massachusetts. *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>6</sup> John Davenport, *A Discourse About Civil Government in a New Plantation Whose Design Is Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson, 1663). On the authorship of this discourse, see Bruce E. Steiner, "Dissension at Quinipiac: The Authorship and Setting of a Discourse about Civil Government in a New Plantation Whose Design Is Religion," *The New England Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1981): 14–32; Francis J. Bremer, *Building a New Jerusalem: John Davenport, a Puritan in Three Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 383 note 26.

To frame the context for this question, keep in mind that in England, church membership was not an issue. Under the Church of England, one was considered a member of the parish in which he or she lived; nearly all newborns were baptized, thus all adults were church members. In New England, church membership was not automatic. Instead, one had to be accepted into church membership. In Massachusetts, a man had to be a church member in order to become a freeholder with the right to vote in elections. In Connecticut, by contrast, one could be a freeholder without being a church member. Davenport is responding to debates over this issue in this treatise.

In responding to the question of whether church members have a right to select magistrates, he argues that the question is not well stated because no one would argue that all magistrates in all places should be only selected by Christian churches. Davenport argued that there were limitations on when it was appropriate to form a government that was founded on Christian ideals. Thus, before framing his theological defense for the form of government that he intended to frame for the Colony of New Haven, he first had to consider the suitability of a government framed by Christian beliefs and values.

Davenport, following the typical logic of puritan writers, seeks to create some representative categories and then consider whether or not it would be appropriate for the churches within each category.<sup>7</sup> He considers four categories: first, those countries that are primarily heathen but where Christianity is a tolerated but small minority; second, countries where Christianity is under restraint and persecution; third, countries where Christianity is protected by magistrates, but Christians lack the ability to serve as magistrates; and fourth, countries where “sundry Nations are so mingled,” that though residents live in the same country, there are different regional laws due to the different representations.<sup>8</sup>

Davenport is also careful to distinguish between “a Commonwealth already settled, and a Commonwealth yet to be settled, wherein men are free to choose what form they shall judge best.”<sup>9</sup> Quoting Paul’s epistle to the Romans, Davenport points out the necessity of Christians being “subject to the higher Powers” even when those in authority are heathens who persecute the Church. Davenport argues that there is greater freedom to establish religious influence on government when starting from scratch. In those cases, if all of the citizens, or an overwhelming majority, are in agreement about the ways in which the church might influence the work of civil government, then it would be appropriate to do so. After making a series of distinctions, Davenport was able to conclude that it was appropriate for a group of Christians who were church members and who wanted to start a new commonwealth to establish a government in which the magistrates were elected only by those who were members of the church.<sup>10</sup> There are a lot of qualifications in that sentence. Conveniently enough, this is the type of government that Davenport and his followers sought to establish when they founded the colony of New Haven in 1639.

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<sup>7</sup> Puritans often employed Ramist logic, which sought to subdivide a question into relevant categories to permit a more careful answer.

<sup>8</sup> Davenport, *Discourse About Civil Government*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Davenport, 9 (spelling and capitalization modernized).

<sup>10</sup> Davenport, 14.

Davenport's discourse is particularly relevant to this conversation. Those who support different versions of Christian nationalism often cite this work. They usually want to embrace Davenport's argument that the ecclesiastical and civil authorities should not be "set in opposition as contraries... but as co-ordinate states in the same place reaching forth help mutually each to other, for the welfare of both."<sup>11</sup> However, these authors often skip over the qualifications that Davenport provides before he reaches this point. In short, Davenport and other puritans would likely question whether Christians in the United States, as it presently exists, should be subject to the legal authorities, rather than trying to exert authority from the ecclesial sphere to reshape the civil sphere as it may have existed in the past. It is worth adding the qualification here that the America of the past was more complex than is often acknowledged in contemporary political debate and that the puritan commonwealths of early New England did not represent the views of those in other colonies. Thus, those arguing from puritan authors are cherry picking one view from the history of America that supports their argument.

In his epilogue, Wolfe concedes that the United States as a whole is not likely to support the establishment of policies and laws to reinforce an American Christian identity. He goes on to suggest that there are hundreds of counties and several states that have "a majority of conservative Christians." Even at this level, Wolfe's argument does not appear to align with the demographic data. According to the Pew Religious Landscape Survey, Tennessee is the only state where a majority of the adult residents identify themselves as "Evangelical Protestants."<sup>12</sup> There are several states in which a majority of adults identify themselves as "Christian." However, both of these labels mask the broad diversity within these populations. While Catholics and Evangelicals may agree on some aspects of Christian identity, Evangelicals often disagree among themselves on a large number of issues, as the puritans did. This broad representation would cause puritans in seventeenth-century New England to question the ability to form a government. The puritans did not want to have Baptists or Presbyterians establish churches in their colonies. This does not begin to approach their concerns about Quakers. Additionally, the puritans would not have wanted to share power with Anglicans or Roman Catholics. They would have had difficulty considering these groups as brothers and sisters for the purpose of establishing a common government.

Wolfe and others who advocate for Christians to actively work to shape the government along more explicitly Christian lines often ignore the diversity of religious beliefs present in the United States and the significant challenges that this would pose to reshape the legal system. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the puritans who founded New England's colonies all migrated away from England, a country where nearly all citizens identified themselves as Christians and yet still had significant disagreements among themselves regarding how to govern.

Seventeenth-century puritans would also have questions about the fact that many Christian nationalists see the realization of their vision flowing through a strong executive presence. Stephen Wolfe describes this aspect of his vision by saying that he "cannot conceive

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<sup>11</sup> Davenport, 8. For example, Stephen Wolfe cites Davenport to support the idea that the "civil and ecclesiastical orders are two species of order." Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, 112.

<sup>12</sup> Pew Research Center, "2014 US Religious Landscape Survey," 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>.

of a true renewal of Christian commonwealths without great men leading their people into it.”<sup>13</sup> He continues to describe the importance of having a strong “Christian prince,” arguing that his vision will not be fulfilled by “wonks and regulators.” Instead, his vision is for a leader who is both an “executive power” and a “personal eminence in relation to the people.”<sup>14</sup> He describes his proposal as “theocratic Caesarism” that relies on a great man to awaken a Christian people and to lead them for their own good.<sup>15</sup>

In general, the puritans of New England would strongly disagree with this emphasis on a strong executive power. As I mentioned before, the New England puritans left England due to their dissatisfaction with James I and Charles I, both of whom claimed to be Christian princes. The puritans had seen first-hand the dangers of allowing a strong executive power have influence over the church. When Elizabeth I acceded to the throne, many Christians felt that her restoration of Protestant religion had not gone far enough and hoped for further reformation of the Church of England. Hopes that James I would promote ecclesial reforms were quickly dashed. Instead, James I and his successor Charles I presented themselves as Christian princes seeking to support the Christian values of seventeenth-century England. However, to the puritans, they appeared to be arbitrary rulers who promoted Arminian bishops who supported his own power. It was in response to this strong Christian prince, that puritans began to consider migration to North America.

At this point, it is helpful to point out some of the differences between the puritan colonies in New England. Generally speaking, there were four colonies, each of which had slightly different foundations and systems for their governments. The first colony established was the Plymouth Colony that settled in what is now southeastern Massachusetts in 1620. The members of this colony had acquired a patent from the Plymouth Company. There has been a lively debate whether to consider the founders of this colony as puritans or separatists, but the distinctions between these two categories are not as important for this discussion. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was established under a legal charter in 1629. The colonies of Connecticut and New Haven were both established without an English charter when colonists purchased tracts of land from the native tribes south of the Massachusetts Bay colony, along Long Island Sound. These latter two colonies established their own systems of government with Connecticut adopting the Fundamental Orders in 1639. The New Haven Colony established a plantation along the Quinnipiac River later that year. This town merged with several other towns in 1643 and signed the Fundamental Agreement as their legal charter.

As they established civil governments, they intentionally created systems with a weak executive power and stronger representative decision-making. In civil government, this meant a governor who had little authority apart from the general court and the assemblies. In their churches, they opted for congregational governance over either bishops or presbyterian models that concentrated power among the clergy. In other words, their approach to forming a Christian government was the opposite of having a strong Christian prince.

Under the terms of the Massachusetts Bay Company charter, the government of the company, and of the colony, was vested in the assistants. A dispute on the authority of the

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<sup>13</sup> Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, 278–79.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfe, 278-79.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe, 278.

assistants arose early in the history of the colony. In 1630, the eight original members of the Massachusetts General Court voted to declare themselves a self-perpetuating body by determining that the assistants—the elected magistrates—could select the colony’s magistrates without a vote of the freeholders. The residents resisted this move and called for the appointment of deputies to represent their interests. The deputies inspected the charter and realized that the assistants had overstepped their authority. These deputies forced the assistants to return some powers to the General Court, by requiring the approval of both the assistants and the deputies to admit freeholders, to approve taxes, and to distribute colonial lands. The debate over the distribution of power in Massachusetts continued until the adoption of the 1648 legal code.<sup>16</sup> At the height of the controversy, Governor John Winthrop faced charges that he had abused his authority as governor in response to a dispute over the Hingham militia, but was acquitted of wrong-doing.<sup>17</sup> After his acquittal, Winthrop addressed the General Court in what has become known as his “Little Speech on Liberty.” His speech reveals that while Winthrop sought a strong executive power in the colony, not everyone agreed with him. At least some scholars have suggested that the colonists who departed from Massachusetts to form the Connecticut Colony did so in part in response to this issue.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the Fundamental Orders in Connecticut created significant limits on the authority of the colony’s governor. As in neighboring Massachusetts, the colonists vested the government of their colony in a representative body, not in an executive officer. The governor was to be selected from among the elected magistrates and served primarily as the chairman of the magistrates. The governor, along with the other magistrates and a group of deputies served together to form the General Court of the colony. The magistrates did not have a negative vote on colonial decisions, meaning that the power balance favored the deputies selected to represent the various towns within the colony. Connecticut further limited the power of its governor by preventing governors from serving consecutive terms in office. This limitation existed from the founding of the colony in 1636 until 1660, when the freemen repealed this policy and then proceeded to reelect John Winthrop, Jr. to a second term in office. As an additional measure, the Fundamental Orders provided a provision to allow freeholders to call a meeting of the General Court, a provision which was likely a response to the fact that Charles I was refusing to call Parliament in England and was governing by sole rule.<sup>19</sup> In short, Connecticut did not trust its government to a strong executive leader, but rather chose to limit executive power in favor of a government by the committee of the magistrates and deputies.

Finally, the Fundamental Agreement in New Haven contained similar provisions to prevent tyranny within the colony. The freeholders of New Haven demonstrated a strong

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<sup>16</sup> David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 22–46; George Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 28–37; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 405–21.

<sup>17</sup> J. S. Maloy, *The Colonial American Origins of Modern Democratic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 135–36.

<sup>18</sup> Maloy, 114–39, 143–46.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, *A Reforming People*, 39.

trust in Theophilus Eaton, who served as governor of the plantation of New Haven from 1638 until the ratification of the Fundamental Agreement in 1643, and he then continued to serve in that role until his death in 1658. However, the provisions of the agreement were similar to those in Massachusetts and Connecticut, vesting authority in a General Court with limitations on the authority of the governor. The fact that Theophilus Eaton had to be reelected each year demonstrates the fact that he had to maintain the trust of the colonists over time.

In summary, while the governments in puritan New England were not governments by “winks and regulators,” they clearly and explicitly limited the executive power. The puritans worked to avoid arbitrary rule and tyranny within their colonies. They did not want an eminent “Christian Prince” to awaken the people and lead them. They viewed the prophetic function of preaching and awakening faith as squarely within the duties of the ministers who led the region’s churches.

One area where the puritans would likely have agreed with contemporary proposals for Christian nationalism is in the advisability of laws that reinforce Christian values and beliefs. Both Wolfe and the puritans would value laws that advance the kingdom of God on earth. The nature of such laws is perhaps easier to imagine in the context of puritan culture. The puritans, perhaps, lived in a culture with more shared values and beliefs than exists today. This is particularly true among the first generation of puritan colonists in New England. These colonies did not permit either Presbyterians or Baptists to establish churches within their colonies until they were required to do so after the restoration of the monarchy and the passing of the Acts of Toleration. Likewise, Anglican churches did not exist within the colonies until after Governor Edmund Andros arrived to implement the Dominion of New England. Andros physically took control of church buildings and established congregations for the Church of England.

One area that Wolfe cites as a possible area of legislation is the punishment of blasphemy. However, he does not address how a Christian prince would identify which theological positions warrant protection and which would warrant punishment. While the puritans had significant theological disagreements, they also had broad areas of agreement. Puritan magistrates could depend on their ministers giving them fairly consistent answers regarding which practices would warrant punishment. For example, all of the puritan colonies sought to prohibit Quakers from preaching within their jurisdictions. The same was true of Catholics and Baptists. It is hard to imagine a Christian prince in contemporary American culture seeking to describe the core beliefs of any of these groups as heretical. Thus, Wolfe does not provide any substance on what he means when he says that “Punishing blasphemy would . . . solidify a culture of pious speech.”<sup>20</sup>

The challenge of defining blasphemy brings back the question discussed earlier in this paper regarding whether Puritans would consider the contemporary context of the United States as appropriate for the level of coordinated national action that proponents of Christian nationalism are proposing.

A final issue for discussion is the ways in which Christians might resist a government that does not share their values. Wolfe’s book includes a chapter that argues for the right of violent revolution against tyranny. The puritans had much to say on tyranny. In fact, Wolfe begins his chapter on this topic with reference to Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish Presbyterian minister who argued for the rule of law as a protection against monarchical tyranny against

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<sup>20</sup> Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, 292.

the church. In fact, many puritan arguments against tyranny are focused on abuses committed against the church, right worship, and right doctrine. It is in later periods that these arguments are turned more toward the protection of individual rights rather than to the communal rights of a congregation.

Wolfe begins with a traditional argument regarding the right to revolt against a tyrant whose government is unjust. Part way into his chapter, Wolfe turns a corner. He notes that contemporary evangelicals live in a context of religious freedom and begins to argue in favor of violent revolt against tyranny in the form of the “soft power of liberalism” which seeks to make religion a private matter rather than against a tyrannical ruler. He continues his argument by arguing for the “lesser-magistrate doctrine” as a principle by which a lesser magistrate or authority interposes itself against a tyrannical higher authority. Both the aim of privatizing piety and the intervention of a lesser-magistrate were part of the context in which puritans formed their colonies in New England.

In some respects, Elizabeth’s *via media* sought to resolve conflict between Protestants and Catholics by allowing for a more private Christian experience. The term “puritan” was applied to those who pushed back against this settlement and argued for more public preaching that emphasized the importance of personal holiness. These are the very values that Wolfe argues should be enforced by a Christian Prince within a Christian nation.

English puritans eventually reacted to English opposition in several ways. First, puritans sought to form little churches within the local church to pursue their own personal piety. After the King and the Archbishop outlawed conventicles, and compelled conformity with the Book of Common Prayer, a group of puritans decided to resist this tyranny by departing England and establishing colonies in New England. The puritan magistrates in New England acted as lesser magistrates providing resistance against the monarchy. Wolfe explicitly condones this form of resistance to the soft power tyranny of modern liberalism.

After further legal challenges, English puritan leaders in Parliament chose to more directly defy King Charles I for his “tyrannical” actions in seeking to expand his ecclesial authority to include the Church of Scotland. During the Second English Civil War, the Parliamentary Army arrested Charles, tried him for treason and executed him under the authority of Parliament. Thus, the puritans in Parliament sought to live out the type of armed revolution that Wolfe endorses as an appropriate response to tyranny. They also sought to establish a Christian commonwealth similar to that which Wolfe proposes.

Wolfe quotes puritan treatises against tyranny, but he doesn’t consider the outcome of the political experiments in England and New England that put into practice the principles for which he is advocating. The Commonwealth in England collapsed after only eleven years. Charles was executed in 1649 and his son Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660. The inability of the Parliament to successfully rule the commonwealth, whether under the Council of State or the Protectorate, highlights the challenges that flow from seeking to form a single “Christian” government to rule a “Christian” nation, when in truth that nation consists of multiple groups of Christians who do not agree on key areas of doctrine and worship. During the Commonwealth, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists contended for influence within the government and church. At the same time, Quakers and other emerging religions gained influence among the people and sought to subvert the authority and influence of the prevailing religious groups. To round things out, Catholics continued to fume over their removal from power. By the time that George



Monck marched into London with the Scottish army in 1659, many were ready to welcome back the monarchy in order to bring an end to a decade of chaos.

The experiments in New England lasted for much longer than the Commonwealth of England. However, anyone who reads the many jeremiads of the second and third generation of ministers knows that the colonies were constantly fighting against outside influences that sought to undermine godly laws on the one hand, and the sinful human hearts that resulted from the fall of Adam on the other hand. These ministers lamented a decline in piety that was mirrored in waning church membership and baptisms. At the same time, some residents of the colonies pushed back against what they described as the “tyranny” of the ministers and magistrates for laws that seemed to be overly restrictive. Despite their best efforts to pass laws to suppress sinful behavior, protect the church from external and internal threats, and to promote the Christian religion, their work seemed to be a continual game of whack-a-mole. The steady stream of newcomers—who often did not share the puritans’ values or beliefs—created constant pressure on the Puritan experiment. Puritans asked to reflect on Wolfe’s proposal would likely note the higher degree of doctrinal and philosophical alignment within the founding generations of the puritan experiments than exists today. If those more cohesive communities were not able to successfully combat external influences on the spiritual lives of their children, then how might a less cohesive community hope to do better? Wolfe does not contend with the failure of these experiments to combine Christianity and nationalism in a lasting way. Neither does he provide a compelling reason to believe that future experiments might successfully address how a Christian Prince might successfully combat the challenges of worldly influences and sinful hearts.

In conclusion, the early puritan conversation about the suitability of a particular form of government to its context raises the most important questions regarding Christian nationalism. The founders of early New England thought that their small towns, strengthened by covenants amongst their residents, and covenants within their churches were the ideal environment to build a government that was founded on biblical principles. Their experience in England and their reading of scripture led them to oppose strong executive power. They wanted laws to reinforce their beliefs and to oppose blasphemy, but often struggled to reign in their differences even with these laws. Ultimately, they were not able to combat the external influences that undermined their values and beliefs among subsequent generations. Based on their theology and their experiences, New England’s puritans would likely question whether the current proposals would be workable in a pluralistic United States.

– Book Reviews –

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***Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, edited by William den Boer and Riemer A. Faber. Landrum, SC: Davenant Press, 2023. 2 vol., \$89.95, clothbound.**

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Let me state my conclusion up front: Every English-speaking Reformed pastor and student would do well to own these two outstanding volumes. That may sound hyperbolic, or even cliché, but it's true. This is an invaluable resource that can serve as a wise, reliable, profound, and easy to use (which does not mean simple) reference for anyone interested in defining and defending Reformed theology.

### **A New Edition of an Old Book**

This new edition of the *Synopsis of a Purer Theology* uses the English translation (with minor changes and corrections) from the three-volume academic Brill edition published from 2014 to 2020. Davenant Press has done the church a great service by presenting the same content, but now in a more accessible and more affordable format. The *Synopsis*, first published in 1625, was composed between 1620 and 1625 by four professors at Leiden University: Antonius Thysius (1565–1640), Johannes Polyander (1568–1646), Andreas Rivetus (1572–1651), and Antonius Walaeus (1573–1639). Based on academic disputations at Leiden, the *Synopsis* represents a full, yet streamlined, summary of theology as it was understood in the Netherlands following the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).

The *Synopsis* was meant to be an academic textbook that offered a theological and philosophical exposition of the orthodox (“purer”) Reformed faith. The two volumes are composed of fifty-two disputations which move through the standard theological loci: prolegomena, doctrine of Scripture, God and his attributes, the Holy Trinity, creation, providence, anthropology, the decrees, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, soteriology, Christian worship, ecclesiology, sacraments, the civil magistrate, last things. For the contemporary reader, it is interesting to note which topics, that we might ignore or deal with quickly, are given their own disputation. For example, there is a disputation “Concerning the Good and Bad Angels,” another one on idolatry that deals with physical art and iconography (not with idols of the heart), a long disputation on the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day, a disputation each on almsgiving and fasting, on vows, on purgatory and indulgences, on the calling and duties of ministers, and on church discipline.

The *Synopsis* is a potent expression of Protestant scholasticism. The prose is not dry or lifeless, but it is often technical and presumes a certain familiarity with theology as an academic discipline. In the chapter on justification, for example, mention is made of the efficient cause for justification, the assisting cause, the internal impelling cause, the initiating external cause, and the material cause. Distinctions like this are not uncommon. The work as a whole is well-organized, with clearly stated topics and with each disputation consisting of dozens of numbered paragraphs. This makes the *Synopsis*, though dense, surprisingly accessible. One can easily look at, say, Disputation 29 “On the Satisfaction by Jesus Christ” and see what the Leiden professors thought about the atonement.

As a textbook for theological students, the *Synopsis* often speaks deliberately out of, and with reference to, the church's long tradition of theological exploration. For example, in a single paragraph in the chapter on the Sabbath, Antonius Thysius (who was responsible for this disputation) references no fewer than thirteen church fathers: Eusebius, Ignatius, Jerome, Justin Martyr, Dionysius bishop of Corinth, Theophilus of Antioch, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Sozomen. Of course, the Bible is far and away the most important source for the *Synopsis*, but the disputations also refer to historical and literary texts from classical antiquity, cite Medieval authors like Aquinas, Lombard, and Scotus, and engage with Roman Catholic apologists like Robert Bellarmine and Gregory of Valencia.

### What Curious Minds May Want to Know

Given the nature of the *Synopsis*, it would be impractical to provide anything like a proper summary. The *Synopsis* is a work of systematic theology, so one can fairly surmise what the book is about. But if a summary is not necessary, it might be worthwhile (or at least interesting) to highlight a number of sections where we might be especially curious to know that the Leiden professors think.

On the existence of God: "in Theology we should not ask 'whether God exists,' since Theology takes for granted that He does exist." At the same time, the *Synopsis* insists that "because of the foolish and devil-surpassing blasphemy of certain atheists . . . we shall demonstrate his existence by two kinds of evidence: nature and reason" (6.3).

On divine simplicity: "that the divine essence is altogether without any composition, whether the composition be from material and integral parts, or from the essential parts of matter and form, from genus and difference, subject and accident, act and potency, and finally, essence and existence" (6.24).

On the Son as *autotheos*: if we consider the Son in his absolute essence, then the Son of God is rightly called *autotheos* [God of himself] as Calvin and some of the church fathers call him. Yet, if we consider the same essence as existing in the Son under a distinct mode of subsistence, "then He is God of God, light of light, as defined in the Nicene Creed" (8.18).

On the filioque clause: the *Synopsis* defends the Western acceptance of the clause, but also tries to find middle ground with the East, by affirming, as a way to "settle" the controversy, that "the Father spirates the Holy Spirit through the Son, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son" (9.19).

On guardian angels: the *Synopsis* is ambivalent. "It cannot be gathered so clearly from Scripture whether a single angel is assigned to each individual person" (12.52).

On idolatry: the *Synopsis* rejects the "notorious differentiation between *latria* and *douleia* in the sense used by the papal party." The Leiden professors see Roman Catholic worship as full of idols and idolatrous practices, no matter what they call it. And yet, the *Synopsis* does not take a hard line against every kind of image. "What we have said about images should not be taken to mean that generally consider every use of images to be unlawful; in our view this applies in an absolute sense only to images of the Trinity." Later: "we do not even reject outright all forms of worship or honorary decorations" (19.27-28).

On the Sabbath and the Lord's Day: this disputation is one of the longest and most fascinating in the entire work. Thysius thinks the Fourth Commandment is different than the other nine, in so far as the specific Sabbath command is not reiterated in the New

Testament. The general principle of “reverent rest” for the worship of God remains, but the Jewish Sabbath and other commandments involving rituals have been abolished. The *Synopsis* rejects “the idea of an ‘original Jewish Sabbath,’ and Sabbatarians or Sabbath-keeping Christians” (21.59). Thysius is adamant that the Lord’s Day should not be overrun under the pretext of Christian liberty, but the Sabbath per se is not a command for Christians. And anyone who has to subscribe to Presbyterian or Reformed doctrinal standards will be interested to hear Leiden’s conclusion that “activities aimed at modest bodily invigoration and relaxation are not prohibited, since they belong to the purposes of the Sabbath-day” (21.36). As for special celebrations in the church calendar like Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, Thysius believes they can be put to good use so long as they are not thought to be divinely prescribed and are not celebrated with superstition (21.61).

On using set prayers in worship: “It is our contention that so long as they are spoken from the heart with due intent, the formulae are not only lawful but very useful” (36.33).

On giving alms to everyone who begs: “But we do not consider among their number [of the poor to whom we must give] those who are fit, or wayfarers and professional beggars, who, having been dulled by their base and idle laziness, practice mendicancy and put the security of their livelihood on us, and by feigning a state of wretchedness, by means of various tricks and craftily thought-up pretenses with which they would around compassion, by going about in public, door-to-door, or showing up at busy crossroads, they ask for a small gift, and in this way unfairly eat up someone else’s bread” (37.18).

On two kinds of “helpers”: while the *Synopsis* speaks of three offices (ministers, elders, and deacons), its description “two kinds of helpers” gives the outline for teaching elders and ruling elders: “some administer God’s Word as well as the government of the Church, while others administer only the Church’s government” (42.3).

On the mode of baptism: “In the Christian church it always has been deemed a matter of indifference whether we must baptize with a single immersion or with three. And so too for the question whether we must use immersion or sprinkling” (44.19).

On the future ruination of the world: there is no agreement on whether the ruination of the world will involve only a change in the qualities of this world, or whether it will mean the complete destruction of this world (52.56-58). The *Synopsis* concludes that the whole visible universe will be purified like metals are purified of their dross by fire (52.60).

## Conclusion

Hopefully, the selections above demonstrate something of the usefulness, judiciousness, and thoughtfulness of the *Synopsis* (not to mention how relevant and fascinating are some of the conclusions). To repeat myself: these two volumes deserve to be the shelf of every busy pastor and every serious theological student. While the work should not be read as the final word on every theological question it raises, there is no doubt that the *Synopsis* will help the careful reader arrive at purer and better understanding of the historic Reformed orthodox.

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**William Boekestein, Jonathan Landry Cruse, and Andrew J. Miller, *Glorifying and Enjoying God: 52 Devotions through the Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023. \$22.00, clothbound.**

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“Catechisms are small books of big doctrines” – that’s the claim made by the authors of *Glorifying and Enjoying God: 52 Devotions through the Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Catechisms, they write, “boil down Scripture into major theological themes reflecting the high honor Scripture gives to doctrine” (33). Page by page, the authors back up their claim. The scriptural doctrines set forth in the Westminster Shorter Catechism are presented, accompanied by clear expositions of their biblical foundations. The devotional quality of the book lends itself to profitable personal use by believers at every stage of the Christian life, from teenager to senior saint. Its crisp and well-structured declarations of doctrine make it profitable for officer training, Sunday School classes, and small groups.

The book’s publication is timely. Reformed Theological Seminary is in the early phase of a multi-year enhancement program designed to ensure that the Westminster Standards are incorporated into every component of its curriculum. When graduates leave RTS, it is the desire of the seminary’s trustees that they be equipped to use the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms to strengthen God’s church.

In my lifetime, I have been saddened to see the church’s doctrinal standards frequently placed at the periphery of church life. Quite appropriately they are used to determine the doctrinal fitness of candidates for ministry and for resolution of doctrinal conflicts in church courts. Occasionally they appeared in Sunday School classes. Mostly, however, their use was limited to the most doctrinally alert members of a congregation.

As an instructor in pastoral theology, I enthusiastically commend *Glorifying and Enjoying God* to my students and fellow pastors. While I prize more extended treatments of the catechism (e.g., Thomas Boston’s), the church must have accessible, concise, and *contemporary* expositions of the catechism that can be integrated into the church’s educational ministry and devotional life, as well as providing a gateway for new Christians to enter the joys of Christian theology.

*Glorifying and Enjoying God* is arranged into fifty-two chapters accompanied by brief devotional chapters covering the 107 questions and answers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It offers a manageable method for busy Christians to obtain a solid grounding in Christian theology.

The goal of the authors is “not only to increase knowledge but to stoke love for God” (ix). They succeed in by providing clear exposition, lucid illustrations, heart-targeted applications, and culturally engaged observations. I will supply examples of each.

First, exposition. Perhaps the most widely known answer in any Christian catechism is the Shorter Catechism’s first: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” The authors note that,

as light is to the sun, God’s glory is the sparkling of the deity. God cannot be made more glorious, just like the sun cannot be made brighter. But God’s glory, like the

sun, can be reflected. To glorify God is to advertise Him (Ps. 19:1); He is life's most significant reality, radically worthy to receive glory, honor, and power (Rev. 4:11). We glorify God when we make it our goal to please Him in all things (1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9). (3)

Another example, this time regarding Christ's two natures:

Each nature of Christ is critical to His work of redemption. If He were not human, He would not *feel* our infirmities. If He were not God, He could not *fix* them. Because He is fully man, He can be my substitute. Because He is fully God, He can be your substitute too. That is, the infinity of His divine nature makes it so that His single sacrifice on the cross is accepted for the countless multitude who will believe on Him." (56)

These kind of expositions – faithful to the biblical text, cogent, and accessible – appear throughout the volume and will deepen readers' understanding of biblical revelation.

Next, lucid illustrations are taken from life experiences, literature, history, and Puritan works. On God's providence we read:

God's character interprets His providence. You trust some people because of their holiness and wisdom. We all have friends we would let make almost any decision for us because we know their character. Others say, "Just trust me" – but we can't. God, however, is trustworthy. God's works of providence are His most holy and wise preserving and governing of His creatures." (35)

The authors model the skilled use of illustration – each illumines the point made, and needless details are omitted. As intended, their illustrations foster understanding of the exposition without ever taking on a life of their own that detracts from the principal point.

All good preachers make heart-targeted applications. While giving a full-throated defense of the sanctification of the Lord's Day, our authors help us to think how to glorify and enjoy God on his day.

We should enjoy the Lord's Day (Isa. 58:13). Perhaps curiously to modern people, the catechism forbids all Sunday recreation. That might not sound enjoyable. But we shouldn't practice activities that entice us to forget God (Isa. 58:13–14) any more than we should fear activities that truly help us delight in Him (Luke 14:1). (126)

Valuable counsel on how to receive the ministry of the word is provided: attend it with diligence, preparation, and prayer (see WSC 90). Refuse to be a critic, practice full engagement with the word preached, receive God's love, commit your way to him, and practice the sermon. One aspect of practicing the sermon is godly conversation about the sermon. Why? Because "talking about what we hear reinforces our recall ability." (174-176).

Finally, cultural engagement is an attractive feature of this volume. Every generation – indeed, every decade – needs fresh presentations of the catechism. We stand on the shoulders of the faithful of preceding generations, but like a human pyramid, we must be prepared for the next generation to stand on ours, and especially so as we occupy space in a rapidly changing moral landscape.

As they answer the question, "What is a human?" the authors observe:

Neither men nor women are better than the other. But they are different. The church must be careful not to tacitly communicate either that women are inferior to men or that gender distinction doesn't matter. . . . Male chauvinism is sin. Men are called to assist women to be as productive, influential, nurturing, and sacrificial as God has called them to be. The church should be fiercely pro-woman. The church must also oppose unbiblical feminism that denies that "the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). (29-30)

The church confronts challenges today that were not at the forefront of earlier eras. It is gratifying to see the authors wrestling with some of these within the context of the church's confessional standards.

At the outset, the authors express their hope that the book will facilitate family worship, assist in officer training by encouraging the careful study of the catechism, and provide one way to make the Shorter Catechism a part of the weekly liturgy in the fashion of the Heidelberg Catechism's fifty-two Lord's Day divisions. They even hope that unbelievers will find the book a reliable guide to the Christian faith.

But one aspiration struck me as particularly relevant to readers of *Reformed Faith & Practice*. The authors "pray that by God's grace the Spirit may use His Word reflected herein to revive weary souls and stoke joy in the Lord." (xv) In my experience, their prayer was answered.

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**Elissa Yukiko Weichbrodt, *Redeeming Vision: A Christian Guide to Looking at and Learning from Art*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 266 pages. \$29.99, paperback.**

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We are formed by the images we consume but our formation largely hinges upon the posture we've adopted when encountering those images. Dr. Elissa Yukiko Weichbrodt argues in *Redeeming Vision: A Christian Guide to Looking at and Learning from Art* that when we approach art with the hope of better loving God and our neighbor - we no longer just *see* art. Rather, we *experience* it with an "embodied vision" (13) - one that leads us to a posture of contemplating the artist behind the work, the environment in which it was created, and the framework for which it was designed. It is this decision to contemplate art, versus merely consume it, that ultimately aids in our transformation. Her message is timely in our media obsessed, "cancel" culture where images are viewed at warp speed, and everyone is a quick critic. Her message also challenges the prior notion set forth by the likes of Crouch and Fujimura that we become culture makers mainly by our creative contributions. Rather, Weichbrodt asserts that Christians can make meaningful contributions to the culture by

simply viewing artwork with intentionality. A redeemed approach to viewing will result in a change in our hearts, toward both the artists and the messages they put forth, so we might ultimately see each through the lens of Christ. It requires some tools, as well as sufficient curiosity, but the result is a deeper awareness and love for both God and neighbor.

Aptly pointing out that great art is rarely obvious, Weichbrodt introduces the fundamentals for analyzing art with some intelligence in the opening chapters of the book. She outlines key compositional elements that artists use to provoke emotion and capture focus - and also gives color as to why an artist may have chosen a given medium to convey a certain subject (ie, abstract art vs photography). As the book progresses, Weichbrodt discusses various works of art enabling a reader without formal art training to appreciate the complex, yet subtle, underpinnings of a composition. Also included is a chapter devoted to contemplating how the placement of the art - albeit in a museum, a church or an Instagram reel - has historically, and often intentionally, shaped the culture's perception and value of a given work of art. The brief history she provides on the formal establishment of museums was particularly insightful here. Most interesting, however, is the space dedicated to helping readers take inventory of the preconceived notions they might bring to the table when encountering various works. This chapter alone is worth the read as the author forces you to slow down and take stock of the unexpected ways that prior exposure to various subjects and settings, and the assumptions made about them, can unconsciously influence our interpretations and reactions.

Within each chapter, Weichbrodt provides side by side visual analysis of colorful, often familiar, illustrated works. These analyses contain rich commentary on the artists themselves, the era in which they worked, and what is known about the forces driving them to create. In some cases, she also provides background on the public's initial response to the work. Through this method, the reader is left with the distinct impression of how much is missed, as well as how much is at stake within a culture, when its people view art without an embodied vision. What's more, the reader is forced to chew on the following challenge: view art with a redeemed perspective and watch how it can draw you into unexpected moments of adoration, confession, and lamentation. Doing so may just slow down the inner critic within all of us that is quick to comment.

Weichbrodt does this to prick the same nerve that Crouch does in *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, calling out the Christians who set thick guardrails around any subject appearing to stray too far from comfortable, conservative norms. She seems to be speaking directly to the many well-intended Christians who avoid lingering over arts, of all disciplines, if their subjects appear to border on the lines of what is unfitting, unholy, or even just too liberal. She writes in response,

*“But as Christians, it is our love for God and neighbor-not a love for art and culture on their own-that should push us into these visual encounters... We can move toward artworks from unfamiliar cultures or toward images that initially make us uncomfortable precisely because we are seeking to love God and our neighbor more fully. In practical terms, this means that we refuse to make ourselves the center of an artwork. This approach is different than personal judgment. When we judge artworks or images, we make our own feelings, experiences, or stylistic taste the highest rule... If, however, we are looking in order to love God, then we find opportunities to wonder at his power, to delight in his presence, and to confront our idolatry... Likewise, our love for neighbor, past and present, means that we consider the artist's embodiment, their location in time and place.*



*We take their context seriously. But a loving orientation toward the makers of art and visual culture does not mean a wholesale embrace of their actions and beliefs...Yet when we are oriented in love toward God and our neighbor, those same images can become liturgies of generous curiosity, lament, or repentance. Our loving commitments help tell a better, more truthful story of the world.” (15-17)*

Her challenge is appropriate. Weichbrodt opens the book referencing the misuse of Philippians 4:8 as a catchall phrase for guiding our visual habits, warning that establishing it as an ultimate rubric would prevent all of us from ever engaging with our complex world in any meaningful way. This is true, but the reader is left still hoping the author will define what art actually is. Are *all* expressive works, fashioned by the hands of men, art? And do all of them *really* warrant our lingering and meditative gaze, or should our eyes ever bounce? The author touches on this somewhat in her chapter on framework, but a longer, final discourse somewhere in the book would be helpful for guiding the reader in thinking through how they (and their children) might navigate through today’s steady stream of graphic images. Yes, good artwork forces us to look for the Imago Dei where it has been denied (253), but this leads again to these unanswered questions: when is something art and when is it not even art at all? Rookmaker’s definition of art in his 1973 article “Art, Aesthetics, and Beauty” could be a useful inclusion as he provides a helpful distinction of what elevates any man-made work into a work of art to be appreciated.

In summary, Weichbrodt offers helpful commentary for pressing into the culture with godly intent and courage. The book is well-organized, peppered with whimsy, and packed with substantive insights. She provides a solid toolbox for the Christian reader hoping to engage with art with some savvy - whether in a museum, on a screen, or in a glossy magazine. Most importantly, she equips the reader to engage with art for the sake of loving God and man more wholeheartedly.

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