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Protestant Tradition

Do Protestants have theological traditions? Roman Catholics likely chuckle at the question. Evangelical Protestants with academic degrees work really hard – earnest always – to prove that Protestantism does have a tradition. And then those same evangelicals invariably struggle to lump everything conservative Protestant into one ball of goeey “evangelical tradition.” Presbyterians of a certain age think back to a time when fellow Presbyterians shared a set of go-to authors and texts at least for systematic theology – Charles Hodge, a smattering of Warfield, a measure of Vos, a cup of Berkhof. These older Presbyterians likely worry about the loss of those reading lists thanks to the urgency of relevance and the need for theology to address climate change, abuse, systemic injustice, Christian nationalism.

A YOUNGER VINTAGE OF Presbyterianism, even if conversant with some of the old authors, may regard the traditional reading list as a bit stodgy, confining, and out of step. If younger

pastors have those standard books in their libraries, they are likely either collecting dust or have been discarded at the local public library fund raiser where a copy of Warfield’s essays on Christology sells for all of 50 cents.

However Protestants come down on tradition, paying attention to the way sources (authors and texts) become part of a communion or a group’s “Great Books” is instructive for assessing the strength and viability of Presbyterianism (or any other denomination). The question of tradition here is distinct from the T1 versus T2 classification that Heiko Oberman used to clarify Protestant and Roman Catholic understandings. T1 stood for tradition as an aid to interpreting the Bible and adjudicating church debates while T2 represented a Roman Catholic understanding of two sources of divine revelation, one written, one oral. Tradition in this essay is more like a canon of texts that a Christian communion uses to educate members and ministers in the ways of understanding the faith. It involves everything from Sunday school curricula to catechisms, church history texts to textbooks in theology.

Going all the way back to Geneva’s Academy, when faculty decided on what books to assign for classroom instruction, Reformed Protestants have been in the business of tradition-formation. It does not rise to the level of authority that Rome claims for its teaching status. But the texts assigned especially to men preparing for the ministry wind up setting expectations for a school’s graduates and for the churches in which the trainee will serve. Those theological horizons in

turn establish frameworks for teaching doctrine, resolving controversies, and even for understanding what it means to be Reformed.

THIS KIND OF TRADITION IS NOT authoritative in a biblical or church government sense. It is much more idiosyncratic, for example, in that conservative Presbyterians in Ireland assign authors different from their cousins in Canada; each Presbyterian communion has its own worthies. But these traditions are nonetheless binding. “That’s not the way Cunningham framed the question” may not on the surface seem like a norm-setting assertion. It may even sound illegitimate if someone is demanding a biblical text for support in theological debate. But appealing to William Cunningham in the courts of the Free Church carries a weight that invoking Charles Hodge or even the Scottish-American John Murray in a Scottish context does not.

How then do traditions emerge? And what should Presbyterians look for when someone challenges their tradition? What does a theological education look like (for laity or future pastors) without a canon of Great Books?

The Evangelical “Tradition”

What possibly could it mean for evangelical Protestants to have a theological tradition? Imagine, for instance, students at Moody Bible Institute (founded in 1886), still reading C. I. Scofield’s *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1896). Tracking down course assignments at Moody from the 1890s and early 1900s is beyond the scope of this newsletter, but chances are the Institute’s students then received heavy doses of Scofield’s

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scheme for interpreting redemptive history (likely down to the 1970s). They may have also read James M. Gray, a Reformed Episcopal minister, who presided over Moody between 1904 and 1934. Gray was likely more reliable than some in Moody circles – his 1911 book *Salvation from Start to Finish*, designed for young converts and used in Bible classes in churches indicates, familiarity with theological categories among Reformed Protestants.

Today, a Moody student wouldn't come close to reading Gray or Scofield. Would its students even know who these figures from fundamentalist history are?

ONE REASON THAT TODAY'S Moody students do not read Gray or Scofield is that the Institute's faculty themselves have only superficial acquaintance with these authors. Two examples from the school's theology department may suffice.

One of the school's theologians is Marcus Johnson who holds a B.A. from Moody, and then went to seminary at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and completed a Ph.D. in theology at the University of Toronto. He has done work on John Williamson Nevin and T. F. Torrance. Those are not your typical Bible College theologians.

Johnson's colleague, John Clark did his undergraduate degree at Spring Arbor University, then went to Dallas Theological Seminary, and completed a Ph.D. also at the University of Toronto. He has written on Calvin's doctrine of Christ's priesthood, which is all to the good. Indeed, exposing today's Moody students to Nevin or Calvin, someone could argue, is a positive development.

At the same time, what do students who enroll at Moody expect to learn in theology classes and how do voices not clearly identifiably evangelical go over with them? More important, how do students and faculty look back on Moody's history, the era of Scofield and Gray, and not cringe? No institution's history is without blemish. But when you go from mass produced Bible conference kinds of instruction to higher ranges of Protestant theological analysis, you might need spiritual Dramamine.

FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON, THE evangelical tradition as it were is not necessarily deeper at Wheaton than at Moody. J. Oliver Buswell, one of J. Gresham Machen's allies during the Prebyterian Controversy and president of Wheaton from 1926 to 1940, is said to have beefed up the

college's intellectual profile. As recognition of that accomplishment, the institution named the library after Buswell. But even his New School/Bible Presbyterian theology was too much for the college and he had to leave along with Gordon H. Clark, another conservative Presbyterian. Wheaton trustees considered Buswell and Clark's theological rigor too great a competitor to the school's convictions about holiness and personal piety.

Buswell did write a two-volume systematic theology, published in 1962 by Zondervan. Chances are that after serving as dean of Covenant Theological Seminary between 1956 and 1970, faculty at Covenant switched textbooks in Systematics courses. (Who knows what Covenant now does with Systematics after changing names to "Missional" Theology.)

SYSTEMATIC VS. MISSIONAL Theology aside, low-church, conversionist evangelicals struggle with building and maintaining theological traditions. Mark Noll pointed this out almost thirty-five years ago when he wrote about the revivalist tradition's influence on evangelical biblical scholarship. The trench-warfare that emerged from pro- and anti-revivalist debates left evangelicals on the side of populists against elites, and a wooden reading of the divine qualities of Scripture over against its human traits. The result was "an expression of the Christian faith with a built-in preference for the popular." That populist strand might not mean that an evangelical pastor or Sunday school teacher would automatically gravitate to Hal Lindsey (*Late Great Planet Earth*) instead of Charles Hodge. But it does make it harder to keep going back to a set roster of authors that function as low-level canon in understanding theology and responding to questions about doctrine, Scripture, or worship.

A learned ministry needs a curriculum and that sets into motion a canon of

texts that inform a communion that requires pastors to be learned. Evangelical Protestantism has not relied on a learned ministry. Evangelicals typically look for zeal, charisma, and sincerity in a pastor. When evangelicals do get learning, whether in a liberal arts college or a Bible institute, they imitate what confessional Protestants have already been doing for centuries – adopt texts to teach theology to undergraduate and graduate students. But the selection process transcends the needs of a particular communion. Choices mainly follow from the intellectual biographies of evangelical faculty.

EVERYONE IS GOING TO HAVE A tradition. Creating schools and needing a curriculum makes it inevitable. What remains to be seen is the degree to which a tradition is actually organic to a school and its constituency or whether it is a late accretion that inserts categories foreign to a Protestant group's expectations and self-awareness.'

Henry M. Lewis

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Biblicism

Tim Keller is a biblicist (at least more than you think). Carl Trueman is not. Now for an explanation.

Mark Noll's book on the Bible in colonial America, *In the Beginning Was the Word* (2016) argues that the Protestants who settled in North America, especially the Reformed ones – Puritans, Presbyterians, and Baptists – used the Bible as a primary guide in ways that qualified as biblicist. He explains that "attempts to live by 'the Bible alone' (as the only guide) enjoyed greater currency in the colonies than any other part of Europe." He defines biblicism accordingly as the effort to follow Scripture alone – "absent or strongly subordinating other authorities – as the path of life with or for God." George

Marsden argued that this understanding of biblical authority was a major influence on nineteenth-century evangelicals' insistence that "the true church should set aside all intervening tradition, and return to the purity of New Testament practice."

Were Puritans more guilty of biblicism than Presbyterians? The implication of blame indicates disapproval of biblicism. It may also indicate a measure of skepticism about Noll's definition (despite high regard for his scholarship). When Samuel Rutherford wrote about politics in *Lex, Rex*, he employed arguments from the Bible in addition to making legal and historical claims about the Scottish monarchy. Rutherford had no problem linking Scotland's political authority to the Roman Empire (prior to Constantine's conversion) even as he insisted that Protestant monarchs of his own day should adhere to biblical norms.

THE PURITANS MAY HAVE BEEN A slightly hotter variety of Protestant than Presbyterians, but Massachusetts Bay Puritans were not hesitant to use authoritative authors and texts that came from non-biblical and even pagan sources. The curriculum at Harvard College included the following:

The major components were philosophy (logic, ethics, and politics), the classical languages and literature, and other subjects suitable for a gentleman's education in the arts. . . . Latin was the language of instruction and communication, so that students had to be able to read, write, and speak it as a condition for admission. Beginning students needed only a basic grounding in Greek grammar since this proficiency was developed in all 3 years. Students began by emphasizing logic in order to develop a facility for the disputations that were central to the arts course. Each class devoted one day per week to rhetoric, which prepared students for the flourishes of oratory known as declamations.

Saturdays were devoted to divinity.

WITH THOSE DEFINITIONS AND qualifications out of the way, the difference between two prominent contemporary Presbyterians' use of Scripture is striking and puts the question of biblicism in perspective.

Ever since Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* caught a wave among New and Old Calvinists – not to mention the following he has cultivated at *First Things* as the Presbyterian edition of Christopher Rufo – early returns on the book were striking for not mentioning the author's insights into Scripture. Trueman did not even go to the w(orld)-(vie)w tool kit of applying the anti-thesis – the chasm between the regenerate and unregenerate – to explain contemporary society's capitulation to gender fluidity and its related detritus. He was seemingly only loosely on board with Van Tillianism while he taught at Westminster Seminary but the Van Tillians' praise for his book has been a wonder to behold.

Instead of the Bible or the transcendental method, Trueman relies on the work of Philip Rieff (Jewish-American sociologist), Alasdair MacIntyre (Roman Catholic philosopher) and Charles Taylor (Roman Catholic philosopher) to assess the current debates about self-expression. This is actually a virtue of the book at least for those who complain that evangelicals and Reformed are insufficiently conversant with (and seemingly unwilling to use) the knowledge produced by thinkers who do not start from Christian truths or draw insights from Scripture. Trueman unwittingly freed up conservative Protestants to think thoughts after writers who do not start with God or the Bible.

One example of Trueman's use of thinkers often foreign to conservative Protestants is *sittlichkeit*. This is a German word used by G. W. F. Hegel, then appropriated by Charles Taylor, to

connote the moral obligations that belong to anyone who is part of a society. Trueman explains the importance of *sittlichkeit*: because society is an “ethical community,” members of that society “draw self-awareness from how others perceive a person, which in turn nudges people to behave according to social conventions.”

Trueman argues that thanks to *sittlichkeit*, western societies have “come to see sexual identity as the key to the expression of personal identity.” This is one way that LGBT advocates have been able to gain a foothold in public debates. The flip side, as Trueman argues, is that a Christian understanding of male and female, of sex and marriage, is inherently oppressive and bigoted.

Instead of explaining the opposition between Christians and modern permissiveness as just the latest installment of Augustinian divide between love of self and love of God (the two cities) or the Van Tillian split between the regenerate and unregenerate minds, Trueman employs philosophers and social scientists who assess the therapeutic turn of modern society (that is, using psychology to analyze law and public policy).

TRUEMAN DOES INVOKE SCRIPTURE IN his conclusion. On the particular matter of the human need to belong – *sittlichkeit* – he observes that the church has a genuine opportunity to fill in for institutions that no longer provide a sense of identity or belonging (e.g., nation-states and cities). When Trueman says that churches need to be strong communities that shape a Christian’s moral consciousness, he notes that the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 15:33 teaches that “bad company corrupts morals.”

What is odd about this reference is the failure to mention what Paul did three chapters earlier. In 1 Cor 12 the apostle develops the imagery of the church as a body, with different body parts performing diverse functions for the good

of the church. Had Trueman spent a few pages developing a Presbyterian theology of the body, not in a sexual but a corporate sense, his argument and conclusion would not likely have been stronger than it is. But his decision not to interact with that biblical imagery proves the general point here – Trueman is no biblicalist.

THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID FOR TIM Keller, at least when he dissects Critical Race Theory, a buzz word whose excitement seems to have dampened thanks to the price of consumer goods (rising) and bail (falling). The retired Presbyterian pastor, in a two-part series at the online quarterly, “Gospel In Life,” goes right to the heart of the issue when he starts with a contrast between biblical and non-biblical justice. Amid all the debates and contrasting views of justice, Keller argues, the biblical understanding is best even if believers seldom know it or appeal to it.

To set up his exposition of biblical justice, Keller clears the ground in a non-biblicist way – like Trueman – by using Alasdair MacIntyre to show that Enlightenment notions of justice have run out of gas (good for the climate, though). The idea that society could leave religion behind in pursuit of secular justice has proved an intellectual quicksand. For Keller, all notions of moral goodness, without a transcendent reference, are merely constructed. This would have been another time when a former Westminster professor might have used Van Til for good effect.

Once he uses Roman Catholics to demonstrate the inadequacy of secular justice, Keller goes to the Bible for a true conception. The surprise may be that biblical justice is right in line with the major goals of social justice advocates. He distills biblical teaching into five points (good Synod of Dort fashion?):

1. **Community:** Others have a claim on my wealth, so I must give voluntarily.
2. **Equity:** Everyone must be treated equally and with dignity.
3. **Corporate responsibility:** I am sometimes responsible for and involved in other people’s sins.
4. **Individual responsibility:** I am finally responsible for all my sins, but not for all my outcomes.
5. **Advocacy:** We must have special concern for the poor and the marginalized.

THE DATE ON THIS ARTICLE IS NOT apparent, but it does follow a 3-part series that concluded in September 2020, which means that Keller was writing after the summer and early fall of urban protests that saw billions of dollars in damages to municipal and private property. Imagine if Keller had found support in Scripture for honoring the mayor and governor, or the need to protect a neighbor’s livelihood. For some reason, the demands of biblical justice did not run contrary to the sentiments behind assertions of institutional racism or the plight of poor people in the United States.

Keller’s policy preferences are beside the point. His explanation of the third point about corporate responsibility is indicative of his use of Scripture. He cites Joshua 7 and the example of Achan whose family “did not do the stealing, but . . . helped him become the kind of man who would steal.” Because the Bible teaches the family is important in the formation of character, the stoning and burning of Achan’s family – which Keller does not mention – is seemingly just. This could be the closest Keller ever comes to theonomy which is similar to his justification for punishing a sinner’s descendants. God punishes later generations (Ex 20:5) because “usually” they “participate in one form or another in the same sin” as their ancestor.

Keller even claims that the Bible recognizes and condemns “institutionalized sin” in the forms of “criminal justice systems (Lev 19:15), commercial practices such as high interest loans (Ex 22:25-27; Jer 22:13) and unfairly low (James 5:4) or delayed wages (Deut 24:14-15).” Such institutional manifestations of injustice “do more evil than any one individual . . . may intend or even be aware of” [sic].

BY THE WAY, FOR KELLER TO DERIVE anything on the order of contemporary local, state, and federal systems of law enforcement from Leviticus 19:15 which warns about showing partiality to the poor or favoritism to elites is to show how much strain biblicism places on the Bible and its interpreters.

SOMETIMES, THOUGH, KELLER’S biblicism relies on historical judgments that echo Francis Schaeffer’s frequent simplistic judgments. On liberalism’s balance of welfare state redistribution and free markets – equal opportunity over equal outcomes – Keller gives Christianity’s blessing: “As much recent scholarship has demonstrated, Liberalism’s beliefs in human rights and care for the poor are grounded in Christianity.” Such scholars as Charles Taylor and Larry Siedentop (*Inventing the Individual*) argue that the infinite dignity and worth of persons, irrespective of race, class, and gender, depend on a Christian framework. He includes for support Philip Gorski (sociologist at Yale), Eric Nelson (political philosopher at Harvard) and “many others” to support the notion that “Christian beliefs are the sources of western liberalism’s values of human rights and care for the poor.”

Keller’s biblicism makes room for Ivy League scholarship. Like Trueman, Keller reads widely and finds insights from unregenerate authors and their books. The Bible is still a factor and it does add, in Keller’s case, a touch of authoritative status that Harvard and Yale will not supply for conservative Protestants outside the elite ecosystem.

AS SUCH, THE BIBLE ALONE CANNOT be the remedy for contemporary American society. It does not address complex institutions like modern-day policing or municipal prosecutors. Nor does the Bible carry the sort of weight with most Americans that it may once have when FDR invoked Genesis 1 to justify war against Hitler.

Mark Noll may have a point in rendering Puritans biblicists, and conservative Protestants may still admire and draw inspiration from those colonial Protestants. But these days biblicism, even in its best forms, has to compete with secular thought among the influencers read by the Presbyterian rank-and-file.

Townsend P. Levitt

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Providence Diarist: Why Should Santa Have All the Good Hymns?

Going on vacation is an excuse to play hooky from churches reformed according to the word. The chances of being on the road and finding a Presbyterian congregation with worship that is serious and avoids cringy expressions are hard enough. But in New England you hope and pray for a decent sermon to counter the disappointment that comes with informality in worship leaders, embarrassing children’s sermons, and praise bands where aging boomers still “rock” for Jesus. In fact, the most reliable worship east of the

Connecticut River takes place among the Anglicans where the prayer book still checks bad taste and poor judgment.

ON ONE OF OUR VENTURES WITH Episcopalians friends last summer, we had the option of either zooming worship with them at home or finding a congregation with an in-person service. Since we were in the vicinity of Providence which boasts the oldest Baptist congregation in the United States, we decided to give First Baptist, Providence a try. The facility is in the classic Georgian style of New England churches with the tall steeple, exterior all white, and rich architectural detail inspired by the London architect, James Gibbs. It is in fact one of the two designs proposed for St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square. The interior is equally ornate in the appointments even while avoiding any use of an image or stained glass.

The building, redesigned in the late eighteenth century and vastly grander than the simple meeting house of the original structure, is clearly an example of Baptists putting on airs. The later additions of organ, pew configuration, and crystal chandelier came in the nineteenth century when wealthy Baptists had bank accounts to match their refined tastes.

In other words, the chance to worship at First Baptist, Providence, was a bit like going to a museum to sing praise to God. But when in Rome dot dot dot.

To our chagrin, this particular Sunday found the pastor, a youngish woman dressed casually, perhaps unprepared for a sermon after a week of record heat, well positioned to defeat our Lord’s Day vacation plans. She arranged for the congregation to assemble on the grass beside the church and had the accompanist set up an electric keyboard on a level walkway below the

worshippers sitting on the hill either on blankets or lawn chairs. Instead of preaching, the pastor read a couple of paragraphs from a Frederick Buechner essay – something about memory (if memory serves) – and then took requests for hymns.

ONE IMPORTANT FEATURE OF THIS HYMN sing which went on and on (and on and on) was a reminder that when mainline Protestants sing hymns they use songs popular among evangelicals – “Amazing Grace,” songs by Fanny Crosby and Charles Wesley were prominent in requests. This shared musical repertoire by evangelicals and liberal Protestants may put to rest the notion that Christians learn more theology from the hymnal than the catechism or sermon.

What is more likely is that congregational singing appeals to emotions and warm memories that takes into account little of the doctrinal differences between Jesus as a friend or Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. The hymnody of evangelicals and mainliners comes from the same petri dish of Watts and Wesley, the First Pretty Good and then amplified in the Second Not So Good Awakenings. Finding a singer’s way through that thicket either to biblical inerrancy or the Social Gospel is a fool’s errand. Just sit back and experience the haze of emotions that flow from the Jesus of Sunday school and VBS.

The other curious aspect of this July Sunday morning service was the popularity of Christmas hymns. By my count, worshippers chose one Christmas carol for every other hymn requested. This is not surprising if part of a hymn’s appeal is fond memories. The Christmas season is long and filled with so many opportunities to enlarge piety through gatherings of family and friends. As such, songs reserved for December have an unfair advantage over other parts of the hymnal. At the same time, many Christmas carols are doctrinally wholesome because they express some of the history and mystery of the incarnation.

“Silent Night” is one thing (and not even Pretty Good), “O Come All Ye Faithful” another.

And yet, because of the strange seasonal affective disorder that governs church life – one set of services for Christ’s birth (Christmas), another set for his resurrection (Easter) – Christians have a narrow window for singing some of the best entries in the hymnal. None of these observations satisfy, of course, the strict code of exclusive Psalmody. But the point remains. Why have one hymnal for five weeks of the year and another for the other 104 services (counting evening worship). This is just one more problem inherent in the revered church calendar.

DGH

SC88

39 Alexander Hall

Bavinck Enters the Canon

THIS IS HOW IN REAL TIME A theologian, dead for a century, enters the conversation and becomes part of a theological tradition. It is happening as I write and you read with Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), a gifted theologian and sidekick to Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Seventeen years younger than the polymath, Kuyper, Bavinck held important positions in the Dutch government while also rendering distinguished service to the conservative Reformed churches that had left the state church of the Netherlands. Bavinck was a household name in the Netherlands and even a figure of prominence in the United States. He gave the Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary in 1908 and during his American tour

visited the Dutch-American president, Theodore Roosevelt, at the White House. Had Bavinck lived a decade longer and had the leadership of Dutch Reformed institutions to himself, instead of playing second-fiddle to Kuyper, he might have entered the Reformed tradition in the United States much closer to his own time. But he did not.

Bavinck is making up for lost time though. In a recent essay at The Gospel Coalition, “Do We Need a Revival of Neo-Calvinism?” Cory Brock and N. Gray Sutanto answer “yes.” To their credit, the authors distinguish “Neo-“ from “New” Calvinism. The latter emphasizes the doctrines of grace. Neo-Calvinism in contrast tries to hold on to both an orthodox expression of Reformed Protestantism while also situating this endeavor with the modern world. In fact, aside from the traditional features of Neo-Calvinism that promote the Lordship of Christ over all of life and idea of w(orld)-(vie)w as a comprehensive outlook that should inform all a believer thinks, says, and does, Bavinck’s contribution is to hold on to both orthodoxy and modernity. “Bavinck and Kuyper argued that catholicity doesn’t just mean rootedness in the past but also openness to the present and future.” They add that the Christian’s task is “not to fight for the return of a golden age (for no such age exists) but to continue to show the perennial relevance of Christianity for the modern and to learn from modern thought wherever we may find truth.”

ORTHODOX AND MODERN WAS THE central theme of James Eglinton’s biography of Bavinck, *Herman Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Baker Academic, 2020). To counter students of Bavinck who read him as a “Jekyll and Hyde” who veered between the past (Reformed orthodoxy) and the present (liberal, pluralistic, Dutch society), Eglinton wants to show that this tension was not a bug but a feature of Bavinck’s intellectual achievement. He argues that Bavinck was fully at ease

in the dogmatic tradition of Reformed orthodoxy (Jekyll) while also writing with contemporary thinkers as interlocutors (Hyde). Bavinck's was "an orthodox life in a changing world."

NOT TO BE MISSED IN THE GOSPEL Coalition essay on Neo-Calvinism is that both authors, Brock and Sutanto, pursued doctorates at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Eglington. This is not sinister. It is how modern research universities work. Scholars admit to their programs students who want to investigate what the senior professor is researching. The trickle-down effects run from the senior scholar's own publication, which likely appropriates the research of graduate students, to the students who finish doctorates, have their dissertations published, and - viola - a body of scholarship emerges that adds a theological voice, underappreciated, to the canon of authoritative authors and texts. This is what happened with Jonathan Edwards once Perry Miller put Puritanism on the ring of keys that unlock the psyche and identity of American purpose. A similar sort of scholarly resurgence comes with anniversaries. When people were paying attention to the four hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's birth (1983), scholars and grad students were scurrying to the demand for books and articles to take stock of the father of the Reformation.

In the case of Bavinck's Neo-Calvinism, Dutch-Americans in the Christian Reformed Church had already made straight the path leading to evangelical awareness. Prior to Princeton Seminary's appropriation of the Dutch theological tradition (the 1892 appointment of Geerhardus Vos as professor of biblical theology and Kuyper's 1898 "Lectures on Calvinism") the theological tradition of sorts for conservative Protestants ran through New England and Presbyterian sources. The main thread started with the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards, extended to Old Princeton (from Charles Hodge to J. Gresham Machen), and down to professors who taught at Westminster,

Fuller, Gordon-Conwell, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In this mix of Anglophone doctrinal development, Dutch theologians were generally an alien element.

TO BE SURE, IN THE PRESBYTERIAN world, first with Princeton and then Westminster, the Dutch voices were much more familiar than for those whose landscape extended from Boston and Deerfield, Illinois, to Pasadena, California. Prior to Eglington *et al's* considerable skill, the standard Dutch theological heavy weights were Kuyper (positive), Klaus Schilder (negative), and G. K. Berkhofer (positive). Then came the names, much more widely known, of Dutch-American scholars at Westminster and Calvin seminaries, such as Cornelius Van Til and Louis Berkhof (respectively), and before them, the one blazing the trail between Dutch and American theological circles, Geerhardus Vos. Many of these names, however, will be unfamiliar to pastors and church members without some link to the Christian Reformed Church, the United Reformed Churches, the OPC, or select branches of the PCA.

But the situation is changing thanks to the efforts of the Bavinck Institute which over the past decade sponsored the translation of Bavinck's corpus into English, such as, *God and Creation* (2004); *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (2008); *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 volumes (2004-2008); *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* (2008); *The Christian Family* (2012).

Has Bavinck begun to replace Hodge and Berkhof? If not, the problem may be that American theological seminaries are less comfortable with dogmatics (sounds dogmatic) than with systematic theology. It is an odd aversion since schools serving confessional communions should have an ear for doctrine that is part of

church teaching (i.e., dogma) such as the Belgic Confession or the Westminster Confession. Either way, if Bavinck is attractive to a younger generation of hires in Systematic Theology, we may experience how authors become authoritative: professors make them part of a theological curriculum. It helps especially when a theologian's works are available in the language of the Greatest Nation on God's Green Earth.

Modern Homelessness

Conservative Christian political philosophers often employ an argument that reveals politics may be trumping faith. A common complaint about modern societies ("modernity") is that they create conditions of social mobility that lead to rootlessness and the dislocations that come with it. Rather than being at home in a place, with genuine bonds of friendship, neighborliness, and membership in local institutions (churches, civic associations, volunteer groups), modern people, thanks to economics become deracinated individuals. Moderns have nothing to restrain or ground their base affections and ambitions.

Mark T. Mitchell writes about this problem for *Local Culture: A Journal of the Front Porch Republic* (Fall 2022) when he quotes Roger Scruton asserting that "our greatest need is for home." Mitchell wants to cultivate a love of home (*oikophilia*) and suggests it may only be possible when religion enchants the world and draws people not only to be content in their circumstances but to long to be in a place and be part of human associations. Love of home could possibly counter the homelessness that characterizes modern society.

WHAT PHILOSOPHERS AND POLITICAL theorists do with Christian notions about being strangers and aliens in the world is a mystery. Ever since Adam and Eve went into exile from the Garden, human

beings have been rootless, strangers in a strange land. If someone wants to counter with OT Israel's promised land, please be ready to reject theonomy.

Of course, Christians can over do it. "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through" is a sentiment that does not do justice to all of biblical teaching (not to mention the creation order) that human beings were created to work in this world and live in homes where they work (possibly complete with all sorts of children's activities like Little League). But they were not supposed to identify domesticity here with the new heavens and new earth there. Do not "immanentize the eschaton" was a red light. That phrase crops up in conservative politics and biblical theology. It should also prompt Christian conservatives to avoid blaming modernity for everything they don't like.

SC88

Second Hand Smoke

Smoking Humanized

This is a variation on the theme of Ralph Erskine's poem, Smoking Spiritualized (1778).

The connections between Presbyterianism and tobacco are legion and already well-attested. Rare is the Presbytery or General Assembly or other gathering of churchmen where there isn't some after-business tobacco-centric fellowship. Erskine's tobacco poems are familiar; there's the well-known (though, in my opinion, a wee-bit mediocre) Presbyterian pipe tobacco blend; there's even a plaque hanging in the lounge of my favorite tobacconist's shop in Jackson, Mississippi that bears the names of two Presbyterian elders. But today, I'd like to consider for a few moments the linkage between tobacco and conviviality—presbyterial or otherwise.

MY FIRST INTRODUCTION TO PIPE-smoking was during my undergraduate days from a PCA deacon, who became a dear friend and mentor to me. In God's providence, I wouldn't be where I am today, theologically or ecclesiastically, if it weren't for him. I had something of a fundamentalist mind set when I began college. My parents were not teetotalers (enjoying the occasional glass of wine), but beer and other liquors were associated with drunkards in their minds. And, ever since my mother had convinced my father to give up cigarettes during my childhood, smoking of any kind was likewise associated with social ne'er-do-wells.

Imagine my surprise, when, one lovely autumn evening, my PCA deacon-friend invited me to his front porch to visit, discuss the things of the church, and offered me to borrow one of his pipes and share in some of his tobacco. Not wanting to appear an uninitiated cultural neanderthal, I enthusiastically accepted. He sheepishly handed me some of his Prince Albert's blend (admitting that he was something of a cheapskate), I bumbled around with his pipe nail attempting to tamp down the flakes into the bowl, and we spent the remainder of the evening engrossed in substantial conversation (while I borrowed his lighter to reignite my bowl an embarrassing number of times).

Some years later, post-graduation, I was back in the area for homecoming, and a number of us were seated in the legendary smoking lounge which was Dr. T. David Gordon's enclosed back porch. The day's festivities had ended, and a number of current and former students and our wives were gathered for some extended fellowship, armed to the hilt with our pipes and cigars. I remember one student asking (after the fourth hour of joyful conversation) if there was

something inherent in the act of smoking that invited people to linger and extend conversation. "I think there's absolutely something to that," Dr. Gordon mused between puffs.

MORE RECENTLY, I WAS AT AN informal gathering with a number of other elders, and the fellowship had extended well into the night. A few folks had packed up and decided to retire for the evening. A number of us continued to socialize. I was conversing with one other man in particular, and we had reached a pause in our conversation. I had put away one pipe (as I had reused its bowl enough times for one night), and I could tell from the man's face that he was a little sad that our conversation was winding down. But then, I took out a second pipe, a fresh one, and pinched a new round of tobacco flakes into the bowl, tamped it down and lit up. He smiled and said, "Ah. I thought that our conversation was done, but then I saw you light up another bowl and I could tell that I still had at least another half-hour to enjoy your company!"

A man leaning back into his chair, lighting up another bowl (or his favored cigar) signals: "I'm not in any particular hurry. Let's talk. Let's think. Let's ruminate. Let's enjoy each other's company."

Sometimes the conversation meanders into areas erudite and introspective, sometimes humorous and pedestrian. But almost uniformly, the act of lighting a pipe communicates that "we're going to be here for a little while longer. No need to rush. Let's see where the conversation takes us." People crave flesh-and-blood fellowship. Even the most introverted value meaningful companionship and conversation. Smoking tobacco seems to be one of life's last few affordable luxuries. It is a simple gift that nurtures fellowship and long, extended seasons of camaraderie.

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