

An Extended Review of It's Good to Be a Man

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INTRODUCTION

A few weeks ago I decided to read and review Michael Foster and Bnonn Tennant's book *It's Good to Be a Man*. The blog posts included in this review have been reformatted for use in this PDF and were written over a couple of weeks as I read through each chapter. I'd generally read a chapter a day and then wrote my thoughts about the chapter in review on the same day and posted them to friends on Facebook. Once finished, I decided to take the completed posts and put them up at <https://reformed.cloud/an-extended-review-of-its-good-to-be-a-man/>.

Overall, I can't recommend Foster/Tennant's book and as you go through the chapter-by-chapter reviews, you'll see why. Although I offer heavy criticism of the work, I wouldn't call this an *exposé* as my primary focus is not on the authors themselves but the arguments and claims they make that I find generally wanting. I don't expect everyone to agree with my conclusions and since this set of reviews was a read-then-review effort chapter-by-chapter, a more complete review in summary that addresses the book overall may be something I'll write later. I also included in this series of posts a couple of excursions about video games and other technological issues that Foster/Tennant comment on and in one case Douglas Wilson as well.

I didn't read any other reviews of the book with the exception of a quick read of Alastair Robert's review of Foster/Tennant's book and another prior to reading the book and offering my own comments. For my part, reviewing two books in one shot isn't fair to the writers and not every work lends itself to the sort of compare and contrast normally done when that's the strategy. I wouldn't call myself an expert in masculinity so I'm not approaching this as having read thoroughly either the requisite social science research, so-called red-pill secular masculinity literature, or more Christian considerations of the topic. I do have expertise in philosophy, theology, development, social science, technology, and interdisciplinary approaches concerning a variety of issues that likely make my contribution informed in a different way that is both unique and thought-provoking.

I've also not consulted with the authors in writing except to ask about their own qualifications especially as it pertains to methodology, something I address later below. I hope folks find these reviews useful and offer them in the spirit of helping to steer young Reformed men toward a Christian understanding of what it means to be a man that may not be working with the same training and considerations that I might offer. Overall, what I provide below in another format online seems to have been received well and more than one person has suggested I put the individual chapter reviews in a PDF document. So, enjoy!

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IS JERUSALEM BURNING?

Is Jerusalem burning? I get the power of an analogy and I have no issue with calling men to faithfulness. But, our cities and our churches are not in fact burning the way they would had an empire like Babylon visited them. We use words in ways that betray their actual meaning and participate as a result in the deconstruction of our own ability to speak to our actual situation. The sort of alarmism these words perpetuate is part and parcel of the sort of postmodern crisis that is employed to manipulate a reader. What follows will undoubtedly be a lack of sound argumentation, from Foster and Tennant's *It's Good To Be A Man*:

Jerusalem is indeed burning. Many men in the Church know it, and they are tired of living in the ash heap. The conditioning of our culture cannot conquer their masculine nature—they want to fight. But they crave guidance.

When the Babylonians burned Jerusalem, God raised up Nehemiah to rebuild it. But where are the Nehemiahs of our day? Where are the pastors who build with a trowel in one hand and fight with a sword in the other? Where are the Christian leaders who can rally men with words like this—and mean it? “When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: ‘Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses’” (Neh. 4:14).

The Church is not known for such men. And so in the absence of godly Nehemiahs, young men are turning to Absaloms. *Someone* must help them repair what is broken and rebuild what has been

THE WAR BETWEEN PATRIARCHIES

You can't lay claim to a biblical argument when you're really just echoing evolutionary science and modern sociology. Foster and Tennant's *It's Good to Be a Man* starts with Cicero just as Goldberg (1973) does originally and then quotes Goldberg (1993) a few paragraphs later to support patriarchy as “the natural and inevitable state of the world”. So, the book relies on 20th century evolutionary science and anthropology to make a sociological claim that is at best only partially true signified by the careful qualifications Goldberg offers in revising his original 1970s theory that was poorly received by the academic community at the time. Further, Goldberg is working with different definitions in terms of what patriarchy means than Foster and Tennant offer. Goldberg's (1973) treatment is about society and “suprafamilial” (above the family, 30-31), while Foster and Tennant see patriarchy as simply universal, “the natural rulership of men”.

Goldberg offers his theory as a careful academic exercise, but Foster and Tennant reduce it to the fact of the matter. Of course, their claim is interspersed with reference to the Bible and redemptive history and who would expect otherwise in a book by

Christians? They even claim that patriarchy is “built into the fabric of the cosmos” whatever that means. But, is that really true? Is there something patriarchal about Mars and Jupiter orbiting the Sun that we missed? The point here is not whether men rule the home, but how wide and universal the claim Foster and Tennant are making in their interpretive maximalism in recasting Goldberg. Here is the quote they offer from Goldberg:

In no society, anywhere or at any time, have these realities been absent . . . In every society that has ever existed one finds patriarchy (males fill the overwhelming percentage of upper hierarchical positions and all other hierarchies), male attainment (males attain the high-status roles, whatever these may be in any given society), and male dominance (both males and females feel that dominance in male-female encounters and relationships resides in the male, and society and authority systems reflect this).

Goldberg, Why Men Rule, 1993

Foster and Tennant then matter-of-fact conclude, “So, patriarchy is the natural and inevitable state of the world” neglecting to let their readers know that Goldberg in fact is not working with the same universality in mind.

But, the appearance of an obscure quote from Cicero in the opening sentences of the first chapter of *It's Good to Be a Man* without attribution to Goldberg is concerning and likely means that there is some level of plagiarism attached to this text, a sign that the authors are working off of a compendium of various sources but not always giving credit where credit is due or offering anything original that adds to the current melee of arguments and positions on what it means to be a man.

THE ANTI-TECHNOLOGICAL STANCE OF IT'S GOOD TO BE A MAN

Foster/Tennant say:

We are living in a world of fatherless males who don't know how to rebuild the walls of society. They have become clueless bastards. They know how to build, explore, and conquer—in video games. They must turn to YouTube to learn how to jump-start a car, tie a half-Windsor knot, and do a push-up. Social skills are even harder for them. They scour the internet to learn how to stand up for themselves, make friends, and talk to women. The knowledge that is normally transmitted from father to son has been lost. They have to rediscover it for themselves.

Foster/Tennant

There is an anti-technological focus in *It's Good to Be a Man* that is problematic. I have [a separate Foster video I'll review where I'll be critiquing this trend at length](#). We can certainly say that fractured homes and divorce has resulted in many problems for men in terms of knowledge transfer between the generations and lacking fathers. But, as usual, Foster and Tennant overstate the case and take a swing at technology and our innovative society in the process. Going to YouTube to figure out how to do things is actually a great good and not every father was some kind of blue-collar mentor that knew how to fix everything.

One of the problems of this book is the perspective of the authors themselves and their own socioeconomic background in its writing as it colors their analysis. You can see it with the profanity they invoke to describe men as “clueless bastards” while [Ephesians 4:29](#) tells us to avoid such speech and the WLC encourages us to preserve the good name of our neighbors. Imagine, though, what this book would have looked like had someone who is so busy with his vocation in play that he pays people to jumpstart his car were that ever needed instead of doing it himself? What's more important, transferring actual generational knowledge or knowing how to fix a car? Or, what about the Dad that teaches his children to manage entire economies by allowing them to play civilizational video games? None of these potential lessons are possible because the blue-collar nature of the authors bleed into their perspective and their arguments.

SEX AND SEXUALITY

The next four chapters of Foster and Tennant's *It's Good to Be a Man* focus in the main on sex and sexuality. I'll be addressing problems with the first three and save the last for tomorrow. The problem here is that the chapters are short but the amount of criticism needed is much longer. So, I'm going to do my best to keep it short (fail!) in this section and maybe I'll add other posts later on for things I just don't get to in this first pass.

Foster and Tennant are working with a definition of dominion as “fruitfully ordering the world in God's stead”. The problem with this definition is manifold. For one thing, God isn't absent from the world and we're not really acting in his place per se. He is present everywhere, sees all, and is all-powerful to both support and implement his dominion and ours in the earth both with us and through us. We don't act in God's stead, we act on his behalf in cooperation with his ongoing work. This is an important point we can't miss because it helps us avoid the sort of rank error that sex in the main is what drives dominion rather than the many other things our Lord involves us in seeing the mandate come to fruition. God's dominion and the dominion he offers mankind is not premised even in the main on physical procreation and saying sex is

the engine of dominion is yet again reducing the variegated nature of what God has given us in dominion.

Foster and Tennant would have us believe that sex is the “union of male and female in one flesh” that “drives man forward in their created purpose of bringing heaven to earth by establishing God’s rule”. No biblical Christian denies the legitimate role of sexual union and having children as it pertains to the dominion mandate, but is sex itself really the engine that drives this car? How then does sex figure into the expansive dominion mandate we have in Christ to see all the nations come to him and live as they should?

No, the real engine of dominion is love expressed in God’s grace. ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son’ who then worked to save it and establish Christ as King over all. We love him because he first loved us and that love expresses itself in everything we do. We shouldn’t even have to say this, but no sex was in play between Mary and her husband for the incarnation to occur and yet the Second Adam both established dominion for mankind in a way that the original Adam couldn’t and extended it far beyond the natural physical relationships of households and families. We’re seated in the heavenlies in Christ ruling with him already and not because sex drove us there

Thirty percent of this book is on sex in one way or another and that’s probably a conservative estimate. But, does sex make up 30% of any man’s life? Does sex make up the primary focus of dominion sufficient to call libido the engine driving it? Here also is where Foster and Tennant remain thoroughly postmodern, perhaps even Freudian, because it’s the very lever of sexuality that Marcuse et al. use to corrupt our society in an effort to tear it down.

Further, for Foster and Tennant, sex is a matter of exercising power given their definition of what dominion actually is in establishing a household. For the authors, sex and more specifically the sex drive of men establishes households which establishes cities and eventually nations. Anyone who has read Foucault ought to be hearing alarm bells going off right about now! This isn’t Christian as much as it is a Foucauldian merry-go-round and only plays into a mindset that looks at power and relationships in a systemic way absent other pressing concerns. Foucault addressed how power works and not really the what or the why of it. Foster and Tennant are doing much the same with a very similar reductive approach and it’s no accident that both Foucault and Foster/Tennant find themselves concentrating in the main on sex.

Note that Foster and Tennant state that “union is not the end goal: it is the means to fruitfulness and productivity”. The instrumental view of union via sex Foster and Tennant hold here even excises love (what they call sentimentality) out of the equation. The word love between these chapters on sex only appears eleven times and six of them refer to what Satan loves! But, what does the Bible teach? The Scriptures speak about marital union in places like Genesis 2, Matthew 19, and Ephesians 5 and most certainly do not consider it merely a means to an end nor is love absent from its pages. A man is to love his own wife as he loves his own body, not

divorce her, giving himself up entirely for her as they become one together. This is so much the case that Paul in Ephesians 5 invokes the language of marital union in reference to the church as Christ's Bride. Are we really going to say that union with Christ is somehow only the means and not the telos of the church in coming to him? That doesn't make any sense but that's ultimately the conclusion Foster/Tennant would have to provide if they were consistent in how they look at this.

One of the most curious aspects of this book is all the Satan talk by Foster and Tennant. Satan is introduced as a foil to what they consider to be the right way to proceed especially when sex is being discussed. This too is a bit of a postmodern hat trick, ultimately providing an opposing dialectic rather than an actual biblical argument. Most of this talk about Satan, however, is speculation as to what Satan feels, thinks, and does and has very little in the way of biblical support. Foster and Tennant more than once claim that Satan's chief desire is his own dominion and that his strategy is an attempt to tear down God's hierarchy. Satan's desire is set against man's sexual desire here and that's why it's important to see the dialectic in play rather than an actual biblical argument. So, for Foster/Tennant, Satan presents androgyny as his key target and ideal whereas men's libido is natural and desirable.

But, is this what we really find in the Scriptures about Satan? Was Satan after God's hierarchy or redrawing gender lines in afflicting Job? There is a kernel of truth in the basic notion that Satan works against God and what he has established, but we're dealing with a large movie popcorn here, complete with loads of butter and salt, and all of it cooked up for you to eat while you watch their version of the battle of the ages on Foster and Tennant's big screen. Satan according to Foster/Tennant hates sex and "hates the whole system of biological sex...He is an enemy of male and female...He hates God's kingdom, and the millions of atoms it is built up from: households". But, the Bible doesn't teach this about Satan or speak of him in this way.

Notice how a household for Foster/Tennant is ultimately something built physically. The chapter after this quote then proceeds to tell the reader that the war between patriarchies is ultimately spiritual. Foster/Tennant enforce a dualism here that is problematic and ultimately Gnostic. They then attempt to demonstrate that Satan's plan and paganism's original project was about establishing androgyny while God's plan has been dominating power via proper sex all along. The problem with invoking paganism as a witness here is twofold. First, paganism was much more diverse, complex, and all-encompassing in the ancient world than whatever it wrongly did with sexuality. Really, the amateur level anthropological and sociological claims being made remain one of the worst features of this book

The crowning sacrament of paganism as Foster/Tennant claim was not in fact misguided sexuality or blurring those lines but rather human sacrifice. So, again, Foster/Tennant are merely dealing in reductive glosses invoked to argue for something that is less than biblical. Secondly, Romans 1:28-32 makes it very clear that God gives men over to a depraved mind as a result of their sinfulness and not by virtue of some cosmic near deity working against him as the great villain of all things sexually pure.

Don't get me wrong. Satan exists, paganism was bad, and there is real spiritual evil at work in this world. I'd submit, however, that Satan's work is bigger and more widely felt than what one man might experience in his life. Yet, Satan also isn't omniscient or omnipresent nor is he the master villain behind every corner. He's not God and we shouldn't pretend he's only just short of being so. He roams about looking for people to devour, but in a planet of 2.5 billion Christians his influence has to be something different than individually directing each of us especially after the victory Christ has secured.

One of the clearest signs of a narcissistic American church and the sort of men's movement that plays into it is making villains that take the blame for sin rather than dealing with the truth of the matter—the clear sinful actions of men that we accomplish all by ourselves quite without the help of some evil super villain. We're not Minions and Satan simply isn't the Felonius Gru. We need to get back to biblical religion and Foster/Tennant just don't take us there.

TOXIC SEXUALITY

The next chapter on sex by Foster and Tennant in *IT'S GOOD TO BE A MAN* is entitled "Toxic Sexuality", a term they employ but never really define. Sexuality normally refers to things like how a person feels about sex, their sexual identity, or sexual practices. Instead of offering a definition and detailing what toxic sexuality is the chapter takes a brief look at what they call "evil patriarchy" in the early Genesis narrative starting with Cain's genealogy and then the reader gets to go on a roller coaster ride of a rather misogynistic look at certain women in the rest of the chapter. The authors do say "as sin grows, society under an evil patriarchy rapidly deteriorates into what we can rightly call "toxic sexuality" but in saying so the actual definition isn't offered. All the reader really gets is a brief comment on polygamy in the genealogy of Cain and is then introduced to toxic sexuality as a result. Since Genesis 4-6 doesn't really focus on sexuality in the first place, the consideration of Foster/Tennant here remains suspect. More normal looks at what the Bible might consider toxic sexuality are things like pornography, fornication, adultery, homosexual behavior, and the like. But, none of these words are mentioned more than 3-4 times each in the entire book and none of them even make it in this chapter on toxic sexuality in the first place.

Foster/Tennant offer a reductive dialectic of good versus evil patriarchy in the early narrative of Genesis that isn't exactly telling the whole story. One might consider that the passages aren't really about patriarchy in the first place, but rather focused in the main on the redemptive arc of salvation that winds its way through mankind's early existence prior to the flood. There is such a thing as an antithesis that is working between good and evil but more subtle and necessary considerations are entirely lost on Foster/Tennant and their miss here forces them to say things like cities are built in the main as monuments to evil men practically without qualification. They even claim that Cain himself built a city to make a name for himself but they miss the fact

that the city itself was not in fact named after Cain but rather his son Enoch. Doing so isn't providing a name for Cain but rather a heritage for his children. Regardless, Foster/Tennant seem unaware that there is something more in mind here with cities than the immediate narrative lets on in their mention. The culmination of salvation history is found in the heavenly city of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-27). The Bible begins with a garden and ends with a city, but for Foster/Tennant the reader is supposed to think about patriarchy and its apparent enemy toxic sexuality.

Foster/Tennant also claim that "genealogies exist in Scripture to show how God is moving forward His [redemptive] purpose in a specific family line". Of course, saying so makes sense to men who believe sex is the engine of dominion. The problem is that the authors then have to explain why the first genealogy in Genesis is about Cain's line instead of the righteous son of Adam. For Foster/Tennant, Cain's genealogy exists to show how far man strayed early on by building cities, exercising tyranny, and corrupting marriage and sex. But, is that really what these genealogies are about in sum? What the authors neglect to mention is that there are other genealogies and lists in the Scriptures that are detailed that are not in fact directly about the coming of the Messiah. The fact is that genealogies in Scripture do more than show how God is moving through a physical family tree to accomplish his purposes. What Foster/Tennant present is reductive because genealogies in Scripture also imply a what and why as much as they describe how. Genealogies demonstrate the faithfulness, love, and grace of God through specific peoples as it pertains to the establishment of his providential design.

So, the picture is much bigger than merely demonstrating that God used a particular family to bring salvation to the world or win some WrestleMania patriarchal contest of the ages. This is why we see the original genealogy of Cain in Genesis 4 addressing technological innovation and the creation of the arts (Gen. 4:19-22). These skills and inventions are an important part of the dominion mandate when we have later commentary in the law mentioning things like copper mining for use in the land he promises to Israel (Deut. 8:9) to say nothing of the fact that the Lord is our Shepherd (Psalm 23). Further, technological innovation and things like music are gifts the Holy Spirit provides to men who are made in the image of God and reflect it through their creativity even while sin remains in play (Exo. 31:1-11). Interestingly enough, Foster/Tennant also skip over the fact that technological innovation, music, and animal husbandry are all the product of the wives of Lamech through the sons they had. We can certainly speculate as to why this is but what we can't do is simply gloss over these details in order to enforce a focus that simply isn't in the text, that somehow toxic sexuality is one of the main focal points here as Foster/Tennant claim. The authors state that Genesis 6 is shown to be toxic sexuality in the main and the reason for the eventual destruction of mankind via the Flood. The problem is that the text just doesn't display this emphasis and instead says something far more problematic. If anything, the first part of Genesis 6 is about the daughters of men marrying the sons of God. The passage itself and the mention of the Nephilim (Gen. 6:1-4) is quite controversial and few claim to know exactly what is being said. Yet

again, however, the reader is presented with a matter-of-fact rendition and the real problem here for Foster/Tennant is deviant sex given their claim that sex is the engine of dominion. But, this is a forced read.

The passage in verse five tells us the actual problem, “the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”. The problem wasn’t toxic sexuality per se but rather that their corruption was total and complete. In fact, when something specific is said about the wickedness of mankind in verse eleven we see violence, not sexuality, emphasized. Nothing is said about cities, about tyranny, or anything directly about sexuality. No doubt total corruption meant sexual corruption as much as anything else but the text of Genesis 6 simply isn’t focusing on it the way Foster/Tennant would like. Curiously enough, however, the narrative of Genesis goes on to speak of the patriarchs in very frank terms regarding their infidelities, but somehow that’s just not relevant for a chapter on toxic sexuality. Instead, Foster and Tennant move to discuss what they call toxic femininity. Now, let’s remember the book purports to be on what it means to be a man. The authors mention toxic masculinity as a speed bump just before but the next section drives on and on about problematic women in a way that can only be described as misogynistic. “Yoga pants, short skirts, Daisy Dukes, low-cut tops, caked-on makeup, and the like” are all invoked to tell us how immoral women are “in the Church today”. I don’t know about your church, but I don’t see that kind of dress in mine!

Curiously, for Foster/Tennant the charge against avoiding harlots in Proverbs and elsewhere becomes a charge against immoral women as women to avoid. The postmodern sleight of hand and redefinition should be apparent to the careful reader when harlotry is replaced with the adjective immoral and then talk proceeds to the problems of how some women might dress themselves. The discussion then moves to the lack of modesty as yet another problem among these women even while Foster/Tennant spend no time telling us what modesty actually means or why the Bible might find it important. Further, they also fail to note that one can be too modest in appearance and cultures like the Hasidic Jews, the Amish, and certain Muslim communities all have issues with infidelity and abuse as a result of their overly modest culture. These details and considerations are once again left out of the discussion so that the chapter can move on to the real problem: loud women. Of course, Foster/Tennant immediately explain that they’re not talking about women who engage “with too much volume” but in saying so it’s like a left-handed compliment, “that is only the most crude kind of loudness”. No, for Foster/Tennant they mean women with a loud heart. I have a sneaking suspicion they’d also not tolerate the voice of women they can hear either though given the way they disparage that “crude kind of loudness”.

The Scriptures do speak of certain women that are restless and whose heart results in contempt for a husband in committing adultery and being disagreeable. The context of Proverbs 7 is about adulterous married women and not women who don’t

dress the way some think they should or are just too loud for certain men. A massive equivocation is eventually revealed here because Foster/Tennant directly contrast the harlotry of Proverbs 7 with the quiet submission of women in churches in terms of how they read 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

The authors go so far to say:

“...women in the Church are not to draw attention to themselves in any way. They are not to seek to stand over others, whether through their clothing or their speech or their will. Rather, they are to remain meek and modest, quiet and self-restrained, “entirely submissive.”

We find out all along that in fact Foster/Tennant are not in fact just talking about a loud heart. They expect complete silence on the part of women in the church. That’s simply misogynistic and unbiblical.

When we look at the Scriptures we find Miriam “the prophetess” publicly leading the women in spontaneous song after Israel passes through the Red Sea (Exo. 15:20-21). We still sing her celebratory words today. Elizabeth “filled with the Holy Spirit” cries out a blessing “with a loud voice” on hearing the news of the Messiah to come (Luke 1:41-42). Mary herself exclaims the Magnificat in reply (Luke 1:46-55). Priscilla and Aquila together corrected Apollos in regard to the errors he had made in his own public ministry (Acts 18:18-28). Other women in the New Testament church were called prophetesses and one was likely called an apostle (Luke 2:36-38; Acts 21:8-19; Romans 16:7). Lydia ran her own business, was likely the first convert in Europe, and “prevailed upon” Paul to stay at her home (Acts 16:15). Further, older women have a direct teaching role in guiding younger women in the church (Titus 2:3-5). The broader admonitions in the New Testament to speak in an edifying way are just as applicable to women as they are to men (Eph. 4:29-32). The only real limitation we see with women in the New Testament church is that the office of elder is reserved for married men of good character and reputation (1 Tim. 3:1). So, the notion that women must be ‘entirely submissive’ and quiet without regard to their calling and vocation in their own lives and in the church is just manifestly false.

In essence, Foster/Tennant go too far in attempting to tell men to stay away from women that aren’t serving God. 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is really just saying that women should receive proper instruction as the truth of the matter and remain modest in how they comport themselves. Quiet doesn’t mean absolutely silent in this passage but instead means to take God’s proclaimed word for the truth that it is. Incidentally, men are required to receive the proclamation of God’s word in the same way. In any case, what Foster/Tennant provide goes far beyond what the Scriptures actually say and ignore a lot more of what they say in the process.

Foster and Tennant continue their social critique of toxic sexuality and extend it to what they call the effeminate church in this next chapter. I actually do agree that some sectors of the church in America remain more feminine than masculine though I would probably disagree as to what that really means, what it looks like, and how to address the problem. The overly aggressive Young Turk syndrome of juvenile Reformed 20/30 somethings in our circles is in fact an effeminacy all its own perpetuated by missing fathers and their celebrity pastoral replacements, but you won't see Foster/Tennant criticizing that! Foster/Tennant instead quote Podles and his book *The Church Impotent* (1999), a book I read and largely agreed with originally. After four graduate degrees and nearing the end of a PhD, the way I read now compared to the way I read twenty plus years ago has changed and so I'm finding myself less certain about some of the conclusions in his book and many others. Today I pay much more attention to definitions, presuppositions, implicit assumptions, philosophical considerations, and methodology on the part of authors. While I don't plan to exhaustively read Podles again, he at least took the time to define terms like "masculine". Foster/Tennant generally don't.

The problem here isn't just a matter of being imprecise. Foster/Tennant use a lot of terms in very special ways that they simply don't define at all. Rather, the authors expect their readers to know what they're talking about and tend to beg the questions they address as a result. So, true to form, the chapter on "the effeminate church" provides an opportunity to talk more broadly about methodology in writing than I might otherwise because effeminacy itself is left to the wayside as yet another term that doesn't get defined.

A work should be evaluated on its intended purpose and not as something it isn't. *It's Good to Be a Man* was not intended to be a scholarly volume and in fact its authors have very little in the way of academic qualifications. So, no evaluation should think that the work is some kind of scholarly or authoritative tome on the subject that just doesn't pass muster. If we use moving as a way to say this, Foster and Tennant aren't the sort of professional movers that come in with a massive truck, box everything up carefully for you, pack it properly, and safely deliver your furniture to the appropriate address. No, Foster and Tennant are more like 'two guys and a truck' and their work should be seen as such. Mirrors are going to be broken, wine glasses shattered because heavier boxes were thrown on glassware, and some stuff has to be left behind because they didn't bring a big enough truck. But, they'll get the job done! After all, this is just a popular book so they've not promised the world. They're setting this 'two guys and a truck' expectation in order to avoid questions about whether they can actually pull off the move in question. And, this is natural given the background of the authors. Foster has a Bachelor's in Divinity from Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and an unfinished degree in History from Northern Kentucky University. Bnonn Tennant has no formal academic training at all. Foster has 24 years of what we might call varied ministerial experience both inside and outside Reformed

denominations while Tennant has little to no experience in pastoral ministry. Foster pastors a CREC church in Ohio currently but Tennant's church background is a bit more suspect. Tennant was excommunicated from a Reformed Baptist church over issues of justification and is apparently part of some kind of Reformed church plant at present. Foster has experience counseling as a result of his ministerial work but nothing is on record for Tennant. But, why go here to address the background and education of the authors when this is a popular level work?

The reason for doing so is bound up in the interdisciplinary nature of the work as presented and the problems of method in making the claims they offer. Foster/Tennant don't just make theological or pastoral claims sufficient for a popular guidebook in understanding how to be a Christian man. They also address or make sociological, psychological, anthropological, cultural and even technological claims among other things. Yet, they do so in a fashion that makes clear that they're not as familiar with many of the subjects they address or the existing debates more broadly as they let on in putting forward their point of view. To date, I've provided a substantial review in detail of various problems with what they've presented and will continue to do so into the remaining chapters. So, this is no mere swing at them in order to enforce some kind of credentialism. The problem is that their background demonstrates a general unfamiliarity with the way conclusions are reached and arguments are made more broadly. Foster/Tennant work with a methodology in the book overall that doesn't speak capably to what they address and how they should address it even at a popular level. Besides, works that purport to be Reformed in doctrine and practice should be better argued and more capably presented for us to consider. Authors that write should be better trained and more fluent with the subjects they're considering than what's demonstrated here in *It's Good to Be a Man*.

The shotgun approach of the authors force them to make claims they don't defend while only asserting particular positions on a wide variety of subjects. This can be an effective strategy in dealing with people at the popular level that don't know any better but it amounts to a manipulative form of argumentation. In reality, the methodology presented here is really just postmodern because it attempts to use the power of words to persuade and critique on an unsuspecting and typically uninformed public without the requisite argumentation that would make a real case. People who are fluent in the various disciplines at a scholarly level typically see through the assertion of mere claims and begging the question that Foster/Tennant engage in over and over both because they have a demonstrated mastery over the subject matter in question and they know an empty claim when they see it.

For example, Foster/Tennant make much of white knighting in talking about the effeminate church but somehow fail to mention that such a syndrome is seen as something both men and women do (Lamla and Krieger, 2015). So, thinking white knighting is a feminine or effeminate trait that men exhibit in church is entirely suspect if we go with the actual consideration of psychology as a discipline. More likely, the authors have developed their point of view from the sort of urban legend

definition of white knighting at the popular level on the Internet, where some men defend women in online conversations. Regardless, the authors don't demonstrate that white knighting exists in the church as a denial of masculinity and only assert it as such. It might be true, for example, that some ministers are "dependent upon female approval for their sense of self-worth" but no evidence is given for such a claim beyond the bare assertion. All we really get is a quote from Spurgeon about foppy ministers that establishes nothing except Spurgeon had an opinion about certain ministers he encountered. But, what does that have to do with the church in the twenty-first century?

Often, Foster/Tennant resort to secular authors if they want to support a particular point but they do so only to put a few bricks at the bottom of a house of cards they then build as if that creates a solid foundation for what they're claiming. For example, it's not immediately clear that someone like "secular psychologist Robert Glover" would agree that so-called "white knights" are the very "nice guys" he addresses in his own work, that it remains a phenomenon only men engage in, or even the notion of patriarchy itself as what ought to be the norm. In fact, Glover considers patriarchy as damaging to men and not just women so it's not even clear that what Glover identifies as "nice" among men is the same as what Foster/Tennant are keying off of here in this chapter. Glover doesn't mention white knights in the book they reference and yet an equivocation is immediately offered by Foster/Tennant to consider them as the same by building off Glover's description of the nice guy and applying it to so-called white knights in the church. Now, maybe Glover makes things clear elsewhere that white knights and nice guys are the same but we're only provided with the one reference they do offer in citing him where he doesn't address it at all.

Foster/Tennant then take something like their bare claim regarding white knights and move into further assertions without evidence. Women in churches, according to the authors, "strive to include anyone agreeable, regardless of error" and "strive to exclude anyone disagreeable, regardless of orthodoxy". No evidence or argumentation is given to support this claim. Things like this ring a bit as if Foster/Tennant are speaking to their own experiences more than anything since no real evidence is offered. The problem with experience as a guide (yet another postmodern problem) is that others have different experiences. I've met a lot of women in churches that are entirely disagreeable and in fact foster it (no pun intended). The only way to move past what experience teaches is to engage in sociological and cultural analysis that is likely both quantitative and qualitative but Foster/Tennant don't seem to know about more formal research considerations like this or even consider it relevant. Further, the authors also haven't considered that cultural considerations weigh in here as well. Women and men do not behave or think the same in various cultures whether that's the broadly reserved and Swiss-German culture of rural Pennsylvania, the refined culture of Southern gentility, or the more casual culture of the American Southwest.

Foster/Tennant then go on to talk about women in a misogynist way similar to the way racists talk about a minority they don't like, "Women will always be tempted to remove discomfort. This happens even with the best women, out of a well-intentioned concern for the emotional well-being of others". Is evidence offered here for this claim? No, the authors just continue to build the house of cards and offer stereotypical nonsense. Further, like the previous example, we can point to other experiential claims that blow away the stereotype presented by Foster/Tennant. Next they claim, "A church in which the influence of women is not checked by masculine rule—where, indeed, it is instead elevated and amplified—will always descend into mystical emotional chaos." This wide-ranging claim is also suspect in the extreme when we consider entire branches of Christianity that are exclusively male-led, such as the Eastern Orthodox, and delve regularly into mystical apophatic expressions of Christian teaching and practice that have existed for more than a thousand years. What makes "mystical emotional chaos" the province of feminine expressions of Christianity except the naked claim Foster/Tennant offer without evidence?

When Foster/Tennant do get around to talking about men and their plight in today's church they offer false dichotomies. Either men must "check in their testicles" or they are "escorted to the door" by those white knightings for the women in the church. Either they "lay aside their masculinity" or they "lay aside their Christianity". Again, this back and forth between two extremes is really just a false dichotomy and a reductive consideration that forces a postmodern dialectic that's not actually in play. More likely, men exhibit a range of behaviors on several fronts that we may or may not consider effeminate in our churches. Adding the outstanding scholarship of Peter Jones as cited as a plank to support the notion that the American church is fostering androgyny as a return to a more pagan norm is just groundless because Jones isn't even addressing what's going on in today's churches in the article in question that they cite. The research Jones puts forward that Foster/Tennant cite is on the pagan past and not a postmodern present. Jones is doing religious history while Foster/Tennant are attempting to do sociology. While Jones in other work no doubt goes where Foster/Tennant would like, what's provided in citation does not in fact treat what they lay claim to in any detail.

Graduate study in methodology is relevant here, what Foster and Tennant don't have or seem to be familiar with, because it helps us see where assumptions and presuppositions are operative, even ones the authors might not be aware of—what we might call blind spots. Further, more study in how we get to a particular conclusion helps weed out bad methodologies where claims are made but no real evidence is offered for them. The problem is that the two options for men in today's churches as described by Foster/Tennant aren't the only ones and in fact preclude the actual solution to any sort of problems in this vein. The New Testament tells us to stand firm and fight where we are rather than move on to what we might consider more fruitful ground ([Eph. 6:10-17](#); [1 Cor. 16:13](#)). No doubt Foster/Tennant want to advocate men to be men and stand firm, but what they're saying here is that it's impossible in today's

churches mainly because of women. But, that's just not true nor is it helpful to say so by disparaging women in the process.

In short, Foster/Tennant display methodological problems in this chapter and elsewhere throughout the book. The authors do not define their terms, their scope is too broad, as a result they make wide-ranging claims without support, they implicitly support a postmodern approach, they are seemingly unaware of the underlying assumptions they bring to their treatment of the subjects in question, and they offer extended commentary on subjects that they don't demonstrate any mastery over.

NO FATHERHOOD, NO MANHOOD – PART 1

Foster and Tennant continue with a chapter titled “No Father, No Manhood” and proceed to emphasize the importance of fatherhood for Christian men. I'm not sure we can point to any Christian that would say fatherhood somehow isn't an essential part of what it means to be Christian. The differences occur where Foster/Tennant adopt a more domineering position about fatherhood and men more generally in line with a strong patriarchal focus.

Some of the language in this chapter is undoubtedly problematic. For example, Foster/Tennant claim that to image God, we must first fear him. Further, they claim that “without fathers, sons remain boys”. The authors also engage in profane speech by calling men without fathers “functional” and “clueless bastards”. What they mean is that men growing up with fathers are “clueless about how to harness and aim their masculine natures”. But, why not just say that and avoid the invocation of a word like bastard? Foster/Tennant use profanity for its jarring effect rather than adding anything new even to their own discussion right along with the postmodern design of the book more broadly. Speech for Foster/Tennant exhibits power, not meaning, otherwise normal words and actual arguments would suffice. The problem also remains that [Ephesians 4:29](#) makes it very clear that our speech ought to be edifying and gracious. Shock jock language shouldn't have a place in formative Christian writing.

The more troubling language, however, is the idea that we “image God” and failing to recognize that the IMAGO DEI is something that isn't lost in anyone even when they're not yet Christian. All men and women have been created in God's image and their very being reflects that whether their father was present in their life or not. A man may be dead in his trespasses and sin but he's still a man made in the image of God ([Eph. 2:1-10](#)). Foster/Tennant switch to a verbal form to emphasize behavior that is learned rather than stick with the way the Bible speaks about what it means to be made in the image of God. This is a dangerous move that goes well beyond what the Scriptures actually teach.

Of course, we know that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” ([Proverbs 9:10](#)) but how do we know that the fear put forward by Foster/Tennant is actually

the same thing we find in Proverbs since they don't bother to define the term except as it's related to bodily harm? In contrasting a mother's nurture to that of a father, Foster/Tennant claim that a father is "a force who brings comfort not by folding us into his body but by subjecting us to his body. He has a fearful power to impose order upon us". This reads like a passage straight out of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. All we need to know about our fathers is the extent to which they use their own body to discipline us with force? That's the point of fatherhood in the main when it comes to "imaging God"? The Bible treats what it means to be a father in an entirely different way and it's simply wrong to see a mother as nurturing and a father as forcefully punishing. In the Bible, God appears as an intimate Father who expresses steadfast love (CHESED, covenant faithfulness, 1 Chron. 7:13) not in terms of punishment but rather in terms of blessing, reward, and inheritance (Matt. 6:6, 8; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Ephesians 1:3-12). Part of a father's love is discipline, but even discipline isn't primarily a matter of bodily harm. The greater aspect of fatherhood is love, not wrath or fear, because fatherhood itself is based on who God is and what he has done in creating, redeeming, and sustaining us.

Not having an earthly father does not mean that men just remain boys as Foster/Tennant argue. Typically, not having a father means life is a lot harder and lessons take years to learn that would otherwise come more naturally. But, every boy grows up and becomes a man because that is who God providentially makes men to be. Treating grown men like boys is the very thing that handicaps many churches in the first place and introduces a reductive dynamic that makes men out to be something less than they are.

Other mistakes by Foster/Tennant demonstrate their problematic scholarship in this chapter and the rest of the book. Foster/Tennant would have their readers believe that a father's overall fitness is the best indicator of a child's future health on the sole basis of a very limited study of 47 prepubescent girls over a 2.7-year period. Body fat in these girls changed anywhere between 2-8 pounds based off the total body fat in a father. But, they neglect to mention that the study itself concludes that until further research is in play no one can know if these slight changes move on past puberty. Further, the claim here by Foster/Tennant is about children and fathers, something the study didn't address as broadly in the first place.

Foster/Tennant also fail to mention that the study included girls that were siblings (13 of the 47) and used multiple linear regression equations to come to their conclusions. For the non-statistically inclined that means that a lot of assumptions and other variables went into this predictive analysis that can only be described as subject to question without further confirmation and something that only makes a very minimal scholarly claim about a very small group of extremely young girls.

For Foster/Tennant, the actual analysis is really just an endnote in their chapter and is presented as evidence for their claim without discussion, an exceptionally weak way to substantiate their claim. We might see this on a student paper where the

student is having a hard time coming up with enough viable sources that back his research or where really weak claims are being made. Instead of researching further or adjusting the paper's claims, the kid just footnotes something he doesn't expect his professor to check. True to form, if it was just one footnote among many others the reader might consider this a minor error not worth mentioning. But, the weakness presented in the notes provided by the authors is spread across the book. For example, instead of using well-established Reformed commentary, Foster/Tennant invoke the NET Bible several times as a place to find meaningful interpretations on particular passages in spite of the contradictory Wikipedia-like crowd-sourced problems the project presents in line with its general evangelical/dispensational focus. Strategies like this make the scholarship Foster/Tennant exhibit suspect especially when the reader can easily look up the citation provided and see how it's not quite the evidence the authors need to establish a point.

One of the most startling things about this book is its lack of emphasis on Jesus Christ as the Second Adam and someone to emulate as a man. In fact, the authors are constantly referring to "natural" this and that in terms of relationships, sex, and many other things like fatherhood that they miss the forest for the trees. Is dominion really about natural fatherhood, sex, and having children alone? Or, is biblical dominion about more than that? Foster/Tennant claim that "the most important aspect of [Adam's] sonship is becoming a father". But, where does the Bible actually say this? Jesus Christ, the one who is perfect as Man and also fully God, didn't become a father or even get married! Yet, we're told that the most important quality of representing a father in terms of sonship is becoming one. In fact, Christ had no earthly biological father because of the incarnation. Christ learned from Joseph but very early on the Scriptures make it clear that he was about his Heavenly Father's business ([Luke 2:49](#)). However, Christ didn't become the Father or another father in any sense true to the claims of Foster/Tennant when it comes to him being fully man. There is a sense in which we can speak of Christ as 'the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace' and the 'firstborn of all creation' but these considerations are not what Foster/Tennant are pointing to in this chapter when talking about sons becoming fathers ([Isaiah 9:6-7](#); [Col. 1:15](#)).

There seems to be some level of confusion between ontology and the performative life of a Christian found in obedience here in Foster/Tennant's thinking. I would suggest that this may come from a more postmodern outlook influencing their consideration than the authors themselves have consciously recognized. Much of the way Foster/Tennant think about things is directly related to what we might call red-pill secular thinking about masculinity in our society as exhibited by figures like Rollo Tomassi and Jack Donovan. A trinitarian view of life is not in play here. A Christocentric perspective is not the focus of this book by Foster/Tennant. Yet, who is the King of Kings and the one that has taken dominion over all? Jesus said, 'If you love Me, you will keep My commandments' ([John 14:15](#)) not live and take dominion in the main by having children and becoming a father. What is important here as an adopted son of the Father is having faith in God and obeying the full counsel of his

word. Christ himself said that his mother and his brothers were those that did his Father's will (Matt. 12:46-50) and as a result denied the ordinary relevance of the natural family for kingdom obedience as far as his royal messianic calling was concerned.

There is too much in this chapter to analyze in one post, so tomorrow I will be addressing Foster/Tennant's considerations that teachers are insufficient pseudo-fathers, that pastors ought to be, and also some notes on technology relevant to the chapter in question. Stay tuned!

NO FATHERHOOD, NO MANHOOD – PART 2

The next iteration of this continuing review is part two in evaluating Foster/Tennant's chapter on fatherhood in *It's Good to Be a Man*. Foster/Tennant seem to present fatherhood as a matter of imparting knowledge and wisdom but for whatever reason don't consider that God providentially places other people into the lives of men beyond those Foster/Tennant have in mind. While the reader can certainly agree with Foster/Tennant that a teacher can't replace a father, at the same time that doesn't make teachers or other mentors that come along the way to help young men entirely useless or somehow inappropriate.

Foster/Tennant want to talk about a void that men have in not having fathers that drives them to look elsewhere as if that's a problem, but again these considerations are mere claims on their part offered without support. Maybe some men have a psychological need for someone to fill the void of fatherhood so-called, something probably considered a given by many in society. However, one wonders what kind of real evidence exists for this aside from the mere claim made by Foster/Tennant or how different this really is than similar Freudian claims rooted in psychoanalysis. Here Foster/Tennant are likely reflecting the zeitgeist of our times in considering psychological needs as a driver for behavior rather than a biblical worldview.

The need for teachers in the lives of men without fathers is more practical and useful than Foster/Tennant consider whether that comes from YouTube or through a professor at a university. The Bible speaks often in Proverbs and elsewhere that counselors and advisors are actually a good thing (1 Kings 12:1-15; Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 15:2; 15:22; 24:6; 27:17). In other words, there is room to consider that men are being wise in seeking help from other sources aside from missing fathers and not merely to fill some void. Foster/Tennant want to knock the influence of teachers so they can point men to pastors as fathers, something the Scriptures don't advocate. In fact, Jesus himself said to call no man father in Matthew 23:9 and yet Foster/Tennant are leading the reader to the conclusion that the real resource for fatherless men is the pastor.

A pastor, however, is not in fact a replacement father to men but rather a shepherd and brother. In Reformed churches, the biblical requirement is for more than one

elder in leading people and not the singular pastor as a father. One of the great weaknesses of the Presbyterian model versus the Dutch Reformed is the notion that an elder or pastor is somehow hierarchically over members and not shoulder to shoulder with them in the same church. In fact, in most Presbyterian environments, elders are not even seen as members of the church but instead function as members of the presbytery where the real decisions are made. This problem can become a further distortion of biblical ministry when Baptists used to the notion of a single pastor guiding a church become Presbyterians in a denomination like the CREC but continue the Baptist ethos as they go even though they technically work with a plurality of elders. Sometimes a plurality of elders is really just the main guy with a bunch of yes men as a result. Bavinck et al. make it clear that ministers in the church are responsible to and report to the collective membership of the church without the need for an additional hierarchy even when a plurality of elders is in play. The elders represent Christ to the church but the people also represent Christ back to the elders so that there is ministerial accountability.

Seeing pastors as fathers has too many parallels to Roman Catholic ministry to ignore and often creates a mediatorial relationship between priest and parishioner that can very quickly become unhealthy and unnecessarily domineering. This problem is compounded when husbands likewise consider themselves a mediator between God and their wives. The sexual abuse scandals of the Roman Catholic Church should be a stern warning for anyone wanting to go beyond what Scripture outlines here. While it's certainly true that men are to imitate their spiritual leaders in obeying God's commands more broadly speaking, care has to be taken to avoid simply doing what other men say as a matter of course especially when power is unduly exercised in a fallen world and the relationship is attempting to model fathers and sons. Further, the pastor's role is not to dictate what men should do but rather to teach and equip them to practice ministry in their own lives (Eph 4:11-12).

Jesus instructed the people to do and observe whatever the Pharisees said as long as it was consistent with the Mosaic law and the commandments of God. But, Jesus also quite clearly told the people not to imitate the way the Pharisees completely disregarded the law (Matt. 23:1-4). Part of the express messianic mission of Jesus was freeing the people from the undue influence of exploitative, domineering, and abusive clergy (Ezekiel 34; Matthew 7:15-20; Luke 4:18-19). While someone like Timothy was viewed as a son by Paul or Paul spoke of himself as a father to the Corinthians, the normal relationship of pastors as fathers has far less biblical support than is typically considered especially when we remember that Foster/Tennant here are claiming that ministers ought to replace the missing fathers of men and not merely help lead them in discipleship to see God as their Father.

What Foster/Tennant are really doing here is over-extending the analogy of fatherhood employed by Paul to speak of Christian discipleship. Christian ministry isn't a stopgap to missing fathers because discipleship happens in the church whether one has a father or not. Pastors don't replace fathers for Christians that already have

them and asserting that they ought to for those that don't is saying more than Scripture outlines. Christian discipleship is a matter of bringing men to their Heavenly Father and not taking the place of earthly ones. Additionally, to avoid treating passages like Matthew 23:9 and their implications in Foster/Tennant's discussion on these points is a huge oversight and shows how prejudicial their case is.

Paul, for example, was not saying he replaced a natural father so men could be men but rather that he was foundational in bringing folks to Christ and modeling what it meant to be Christian. The 'mature man' of Ephesian 4:13 is figurative here, speaking of the body of Christ where all members grow into maturity rather than the notion that Paul was ever making men out of fatherless boys. Paul was also speaking covenantally in addressing Christian brothers so his statement expressing himself as a father in places like 1 Corinthians 4 isn't about men being men but rather discipling the whole church to be mature in the faith. That's why we see Paul addressing wives, children, slaves, and even apostates in his letters to the churches as part of the body of Christ. Overall, Foster/Tennant miss the mark here in terms of the role of pastors leading a church when they make these passages about fatherhood rather than what Paul was actually saying about ministry and discipleship.

One other thing I'd like to consider in this chapter is some of the commentary on technology because Foster and Tennant talk about participation and the physical presence of a father as it pertains to being a son. For the authors, "sonship is imitative...not something learned from afar, but something learned by participating in another man's life...sonship involves real life discipling". Further, the authors claim that sons without fathers "long for [them]..why they idolize...they do it from a distance-disembodied". Foster and Tennant then say that "God created us as embodied creatures, where the physical and the spiritual are intertwined...we are not living in the Matrix. Embodied existence is the only way for human males to truly participate in the experience of other men". Last, the authors claim that "love requires a physical connection". All of this is leading up to their recommendation that men get into a church and follow a pastor as their father.

However, the distinctions Foster/Tennant make here are typical ways Christians often talk about technology as disembodied, lacking a physical connection, and pretending there is a difference between "real life" and the virtual. But, the problem with this from a technological and ontological perspective is that what they say just isn't relevant or true. There is only one reality and it is the reality we all live in thanks to God. There is also never a time when we are disembodied short of death itself (2 Cor. 5:8). So, a son lacking a father is never really about being disembodied or some kind of alternate reality because experience is always embodied and reality is always one and the same. Furthermore, love in fact does not always require a physical connection and no doubt Foster/Tennant handle this from the standpoint of looking at sex or its outgrowth as the engine of dominion. Foster/Tennant help maintain a materialist worldview in describing sex and its social effects as the primary driver of

dominion and in doing so echo the secular masculinity arguments of men like Rollo Tomassi.

The misconstruals Foster/Tennant offer here are not just a lack of precision in saying what they want to say. If all they really meant was the notion that being a father with a son requires face-to-face proximity and presence, I'd have little issue with the claims they make. Furthermore, they confusingly defend a claim about physical connection by referencing trinitarian oneness, something that isn't physical in the first place and yet contains love. Too bad love for them doesn't require logic because statements like the ones they make in this section betray the fact that the authors haven't considered this topic in any depth or provided anything here other than a reflection of common Luddite concerns about technology and its use many Christians regularly express.

Foster/Tennant are just wrong to say that you can't have "digital oneness" in speaking about being online. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, most churches met via Zoom or Webex every Sunday when they couldn't meet in person. Are Foster/Tennant really going to argue that such connections online weren't really worship on a Sunday because folks weren't in the same room? We can certainly say churches weren't worshipping the way they might normally and should if a global pandemic weren't in play, but that fact is not material to the claim here. Furthermore, worship via Zoom is not in fact a disembodied experience. People are not even physically separate in Zoom, they merely exist with less proximity in play if for the moment we agree for the sake of argument that proximity means nearness. In reality, proximity could also refer to the ability of the church to be one together anywhere by virtue of the Holy Spirit. Foster/Tennant here represents spiritual as non-material but in fact spiritual for a Christian is about the presence and work of the Holy Spirit so the Gnostic dialectic they wind up engaging is a misconstrual of what we really mean by using the term spiritual.

In Zoom, church members are still face-to-face and physical togetherness only represents the Spirit-filled nature of believers together that allows them to transcend time and space. But, even here, the physical nature of a Zoom call is still physical. Monitors streaming atoms of light into eyes to see everyone's faces retain physicality via electrical signals through computers out to the Internet across and into everyone else's homes. At no point is the physical nature of worship compromised because a different technology is in play to make it happen. After all, the physical medium of technology isn't witchcraft. Someone isn't in a different reality or world because they're using Zoom instead of sitting next to others in worship. But, forget Zoom for a moment. Is the worship of the universal church on any given Sunday compromised as a whole because local congregations aren't all in the same room? Such a claim would be absolutely absurd. The work of the Holy Spirit and the technological innovation we have in something like Zoom actually can foster oneness in Christ and has for churches worldwide. After all, technology itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Exodus 31:1-11).

Besides, we forget that the common instruments of worship, even the sacraments themselves, are technological. Are we worshipping less if we're not in a building? Or, is less worship in play if no pews are present and we all stand? Further, if we don't commune via the Lord's Supper is Christ not present in his flesh with us or is Colossians 1:27 entirely irrelevant unless and until one is consuming the Body and Blood of our Lord in the Eucharist? That last question would answer yes if one is a Lutheran or Roman Catholic, but the Reformed understanding of Christ's presence is manifestly spiritual and not directly tied to the physical elements of the Supper themselves or even its use on occasion. Further, are we or are we not seated in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6)? Are Christ's two natures divisible such that we only experience his presence and love if he is with us physically the way Foster/Tennant talk about physical connections and how they're required for human love? To say so means going wide of the Definition of Chalcedon and Christian orthodoxy. Last, God is not a man and he is the absolute definition of love. Yet, for us, somehow Foster/Tennant argue that love must be physical.

At best, Foster/Tennant carve out an undue separation between the physical and spiritual that is manifestly a reflection of the false dichotomies of a Gnostic dualism and at worst mere materialism when they claim that love must have a physical connection. All of this serves to allow Foster/Tennant to claim that men without fathers need to find a pastor they can trust and get in a church where they can be physically present and learn from the man God gives them as a sort of pseudo-father.

Of course, men should be in church and churches should be faithful to the gospel. Foster/Tennant know that the world doesn't always work this way and considers that the "majority of pastors are themselves clueless bastards, weak in constitution and effeminate in conduct". The dilemma their advice faces is that clueless men are likely going to be clueless about picking the right men to follow and so ultimately they offer advice that can't be taken seriously or implemented as offered with any level of discernment by already clueless men. After all, fatherhood isn't something sons choose. So, the whole model they've been working up to here falls apart if what they say is true. How is that solved? Foster and Tennant reply that a man should uproot and move to a region in the country where there is a good church or join a church plant where they live.

But, indiscriminately applied this also remains bad advice. Church plants are notoriously unstable. They fold very quickly and often fail. Most folks put church plant fails at or near 80%. Most all of them are gone in ten years or less. Further, church plants today are typically not composed of a normal membership of folks that represent the sort of generational diversity needed to model and exhibit Christian living with wisdom. Most church plants are pastored by very young men but following a young pastor with kids barely out of diapers is likely not going to give one the insight needed that real seasoned men in the faith might provide. But again, how does someone who is clueless clue themselves in about what a good church looks like?

The real solution is doing what we're called to do as Christians. Trust and obey. Search the Scriptures and learn how to rightly divide the word of truth. Being busy with these things is more than enough to keep one on the straight and narrow even if a man isn't in a good church. God will providentially move you elsewhere if that's required, but for most folks standing firm where you are and being obedient to God is the order of the day. Developing a specialized understanding of ministry as a matter of patriarchy is a distraction from our calling to live for God's glory. Foster/Tennant are just on the wrong track.

NO GRAVITAS, NO MANHOOD – PART 1

The ongoing review of Foster/Tennant continues and this one will address the first chapter on gravitas entitled "No Gravitas/No Manhood". A red flag appears when the authors actually get around to defining a term like "gravitas" while avoiding fundamental definitions elsewhere in their book. Why start defining a word nine chapters in? The reason has to do with the plain fact that the Scriptures don't really have a concept of gravitas that remains vitally important to masculinity given the scarcity of the term in the Bible. In fact, one might question whether masculinity itself is ever a focus of the New Testament more broadly. The authors know they have to offer some kind of explanation as to what they mean when they invoke gravitas as a result. So, gravitas is defined the way Foster/Tennant want to define it in their focus on masculinity in fine postmodern fashion. The Scriptures, however, use a particular word to speak of dignity or the old KJV translation of "gravity" in just a few places like Titus 2:7 and 1 Timothy 2:2 and 3:4. Foster/Tennant are aware of this connection because they cite Calvin's commentary on Titus 2 but don't bother to consider application of these passages in any detail.

Oddly enough, one of the things they don't mention is that 1 Timothy 2:2 invokes the word in question in reference to the whole church leading a tranquil and quiet life with dignity regardless as to a person's gender. In fact, of the three times the word "semnotes" is used in the New Testament twice the word is used of men specifically, first of pastors with their children (1 Tim. 3:4) and then of Titus in how he should be an example to others with a life characterized by purity in doctrine and doing good deeds (Titus 2:7). A related word is used of older men in Titus 2:2 but not applied to younger men. The old Roman concept of GRAVITAS though is nowhere to be found in the New Testament, however. Interestingly enough, young men are instructed to be sensible or of a sound mind rather than instructed to be dignified right out of the gate (Titus 2:6). There is likely more here to say about the life of the mind (2:1, "the things fitting for sound doctrine") that seems conspicuously absent from Foster/Tennant's blue collar red-pilled treatment of what it means to be a man. Regardless, the word translated dignified for Titus and other pastors means the sort of behavior that entitles one to special respect, dignity, or being honest. While the Greek word has certainly been translated as GRAVITAS in the Latin Vulgate, there is no evidence that it's to be understood the way Foster/Tennant apply it specifically to men.

Another problem for Foster/Tennant is that Titus is the focus of Titus 2:7 in being dignified and not the younger men the authors write the book for in the first place. Further, the gravitas he displays is not merely to provide an example of right living but also purity in doctrine. The same would be true for pastors in 1 Tim. 3:4 but is related only to childcare and capably making sure children are obedient. Younger men are given different instructions in Titus 2:6 but somehow that isn't even discussed in the book in the first place. What that really means is that Foster/Tennant's consideration of what it means to be a young man is at best incomplete and at worst unscriptural. However, there is another problem here. Young men are still men and so while an ideal toward dignity and right living is appropriate young men aren't anything other than men simply because they're young or immature. Yet, Foster/Tennant would have us believe that having gravitas is a large part of what makes you a man. The claim they offer in this regard demonstrates a false ontology in terms of what a man is and not just what he may become.

So, instead of framing the case biblically the authors resort to something different. Foster/Tennant refer to the old Roman virtues to speak of gravitas as "a man's seriousness, his dignity, his weight". Discussion then moves toward the Hebrew term "KABOD" particularly in noting the heaviness of who God is along with men and nations that have some level of glory or honor attached to them. But, Foster/Tennant aren't satisfied to think the Hebrew term and gravitas are exactly the same as the old Roman GRAVITAS or even what they mean by the term. For the authors, one is a matter of grace ("KABOD") and the other works (gravitas), "something that must be earned" and recognized by others. This distinction, however, is artificial especially when we remember that everything a Christian does in terms of works is a matter of grace by faith also (Eph. 2:8-10). The authors then equivocate and say on the one hand that gravitas is something earned but in the example they provide Jesus somehow has it instantly in appearing before a crowd and speaking with authority. What the authors really mean by gravitas is rather vague, "the result of having settled into your Christian identity as a man". It's not the glory or heaviness of "KABOD" but "when you become proficient at reflecting the glory you were made to reflect" by "becoming more like Jesus".

Again, the authors invoke the need for spiritual fathers as part of the process because without them you can't have gravitas. One is bound to ask, however, what men were the spiritual fathers of Jesus given that he had instant gravitas. Our Lord seems to have bested the religious leaders at twelve years old and his earthly father Joseph is completely out of the picture in the gospels once the public ministry of Jesus moves into focus in the gospels. If spiritual fathers aren't required for Jesus the Second Adam, are they really required for men to be men? One of the lingering problems with this book is its failure to take seriously the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding Christian men to be who they should be. No doubt the church has a communal focus and men receive equipping from pastors, but priestly fathers is not something we see in the New Testament. Foster/Tennant would like to see gravitas but that particular "virtue" isn't listed among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 with love, peace, gentleness, kindness, patience, and the like.

Foster/Tennant invoking Jesus in Mark 1:22 as “one having authority” exhibiting an earned gravitas to a crowd that presumably never heard him before is playing fast and loose with Scriptures since the better interpretation via Calvin is seeing the power and work of the Holy Spirit in play as Jesus spoke with the divine authority that accompanied him. So, there was no sense in which Jesus earned this by virtue of what he had done previously that a crowd not familiar with him might recognize. This display of speaking with authority is also reminiscent of the divine encounters of Moses and not really the way someone might carry himself as a matter of gravitas. Oddly enough, the strange thing for Foster/Tennant is that just a few paragraphs after saying gravitas must be earned the authors turn around and say “gravitas comes from God”.

All of this confusion points to the fact that whatever gravitas is for Foster/Tennant their considerations are not from the biblical text alone and carry a highly subjective consideration of the subject that ultimately remains framed by something other than Scripture. A reader can certainly speculate where views about gravitas might come from for Foster/Tennant and there is no lack of commentary on it in the so-called manosphere where “red-pilled” secular men and even some Christians are busy thinking they need to carry gravitas to bed women.

Historically and culturally, more broadly gravitas as framed by Foster/Tennant or considered by the so-called manosphere has more to do with ideas about being a man that have floated down culturally into American blue collar life inspired by a British Empire wishing to impart toughness and dignity in its men around the world. The myth of gravitas is also seen in nineteenth century romantic revivals of Stoicism and Roman culture signified by essays about Marcus Aurelius as told by the likes of Matthew Arnold. Freight has also been carried through the undue romanticism of men like G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. We can also see it in a British aristocracy eager to hold on to their privileged life among a new and industrialized England in fine Victorian fashion.

The story of gravitas is told a number of ways but there is nothing in the Old or New Testament that looks to gravitas as a significant feature in being a man beyond having a moral character that others respect and what in any other context would just be called right living. Yet, this sort of gravitas is available and required of women as well. The Queen of England has historically displayed both the glory of her royal office and the exemplary behavior of a benevolent sovereign sufficient to be respected around the world. Someone like former First Lady Barbara Bush carried herself similarly. In fact, Titus 2:3 speaks of older women as needing to be reverent or venerable, seen as worthy of great respect, and carrying themselves in that way. So, overall what exactly is uniquely masculine about the sort of gravitas that it seems both men and women enjoy after a well-lived life?

Essentially, Foster/Tennant engage in special pleading to establish the notion that *gravitas* is what makes a man a man and something to look toward. There is more to say here as the chapter moves beyond definitional territory into things like fearing God while a second chapter on *gravitas* goes on to address what Foster/Tennant call masculine virtues. I'll address these things in the next iteration or two of this continuing review.

NO GRAVITAS, NO MANHOOD – PART 2

Foster/Tennant attempt to flesh out the concept of *gravitas* as they go but first consider the fear of the Lord as primary to the sort of *gravitas* they think a man should develop. As discussed in the last post, the reader will recall that there are actually only three passages in the New Testament directly relevant to something called *gravitas*. So, building two chapters off of such a passing interest on the part of the Apostle Paul is automatically suspect. True to form, Foster/Tennant make an initial statement about *gravitas* and then start talking about the fear of God and how they think men should behave. Why? Apart from the authors' redefinition of the term, there is very little biblical support for what they claim.

But, do the Scriptures actually say that the fear of God moves one toward the sort of *gravitas* Foster/Tennant argue should be a part of men's lives? They don't present any such evidence from the Bible. For the authors "*gravitas* means to be taken seriously as a man" and "you must become more like Jesus". Further, Foster/Tennant say *gravitas* will only come by "making a practice of meditating on the *gravitas* of God". But, what do the Scriptures say about God and *gravitas*? The answer is only silence from God's word. The Scriptures use the term "*KABOD*" (or "*KAVOD*") to speak of God and his glory as a matter of heaviness. But, there is no real place where the Scriptures say God has *gravitas* and particularly so given the way Foster/Tennant define the term as a sort of earned recognition from men. Remember here that the authors previously distinguished between "*KABOD*" and "*gravitas*" as two different concepts so speaking of God as one with *gravitas* is going well beyond the Scriptures once their own definition is made plain.

Nevertheless, Foster/Tennant want the reader to start with 'the fear of the Lord' as the way to make a clean start in getting *gravitas*. The discussion of fear as it pertains to fearing God here isn't entirely bad but what they point out isn't a matter of masculinity or what it means to be a man. Everyone is told to fear God and the knowledge that Christians have as a result of fearing God is available to all, men and women. Another problem with this chapter is what the authors have said to this point in linking the fear of fathers to physical punishment, sex, and power. Foster/Tennant also don't see fear as something learned without reference to either physical or spiritual fathers, so there is more in the presentation here than the standard Reformed consideration of biblical fear that the authors seem to be laying down as a matter of course in their search for *gravitas*.

The less obvious subtext of the authors' discourse is also at work in the points Foster/Tennant offer that have affinities to Enlightenment and postmodern thinking. Notice that for Foster/Tennant a man must be willing to be confronted and change. A man must also be willing to be made low. A man must capably trust his betters and avoid speaking ill of others. All this in normal discussions of what it means to be a Christian disciple might be appropriate in the right context and with the right qualifications, but Foster/Tennant in the main put this all as a matter of sonship with spiritual fathers, ultimately pastors that guide men in how to be men. Remember that for Foster/Tennant getting gravitas "requires spiritual fathers". In essence and in context the claims of Foster/Tennant make relationships about power rather than love and as such represent a Foucauldian design I doubt the authors themselves have even considered. Foster/Tennant sing along with Bob Dylan in making the fear of the Lord about how 'you're gonna have to serve somebody'. Remember that for Foster/Tennant dominion is driven by sex and implemented as a matter of power. Of course, the authors do state that "to fear God is to love Him and to walk in His ways". The problem here, however, isn't about how fear is defined in short form but what they mean in terms of how it is exercised. Note that fearing God for Foster/Tennant is loving God but the only points the authors actually offer in doing so are wrapped up in how a man relates to others via exercises of power and not to God himself.

Here the reductive nature of their postmodern take of the fear of the Lord comes into play because the authors only look at hierarchical power among men in considering the subject. Yet, the Scriptures see the "fear of the Lord" as much more comprehensive, not just a matter of being ready to be rebuked or change when confronted along with the few scant considerations Foster/Tennant bring to bear besides. Instead, the fear of the Lord is a way to reference the laws and commands of the Scriptures (Psalm 19:8-9), ultimately the way God reveals himself and the response of men in return, the way we live for God, what motivates us toward right living, and something that can be taught (Psalm 34:11). The fear of the Lord also includes trust, love, and emotional responses of fear or awe as we might more normally understand these terms all wrapped up together in a manifold and humbling response when we encounter God and his word. In Deuteronomy, love and the fear of the Lord are treated as synonyms but in Foster/Tennant love is only ever mentioned twice in the whole chapter. Bruce Waltke goes through a more complete look at the fear of the Lord in his commentary on Proverbs 1-15 (p. 100 ff.), where much of what's presented above can be found.

Discerning the fear of the Lord in Proverbs 2 is not in fact a matter of getting the right spiritual father in play but crying out to God for discernment and lifting your voice in prayer to God for understanding (Proverbs 2:1-5). The Bible tells us to pray for wisdom, not merely meditate on God's "gravitas" (James 1:5). Notice that the teachers of Proverbs 1 are initially a son's father and mother but eventually Wisdom herself becomes the teacher because we find out in 8:22 and elsewhere that wisdom is eternal and really the Word himself (Proverbs 1:8, 20). In fact, the identity of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is one of the key passages the early church used to defend the Trinity.

So, as Paul says, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

Had Foster/Tennant presented the fear of the Lord in a more biblical fashion and with God’s “KABOD” in play as the driving factor of understanding just who he is and what the Lord has done there would be little to write about in reviewing the chapter. But, Foster/Tennant’s flattened conception of their made up concept of gravitas and the more biblical notion of the fear of the Lord falls short here especially because the fear of the Lord is the start of wisdom for anyone in Christ. There is nothing distinctly masculine about fearing the Lord and the Scriptures don’t delineate a difference between how women meet and deal with God compared to men. In fact, Galatians 3:28 even says there is no male or female when it comes to being in Christ. To say otherwise is to go beyond what the Scriptures make plain.

Foster/Tennant then spend the rest of the chapter talking about the extremes of men who are too serious and men who are too silly. But, all this is a sort of false piety that the Scriptures spend no time talking about in the first place. The Scriptures speak positively about how a Christian should live in the Spirit and what that looks like for all believers that sees no treatment in the book in the first place (Gal. 5:22; 1 Cor. 13). Foster/Tennant’s take enforces a negative dialectic and an apophatic take when they focus on a man that is either too serious or too joking. Another astounding miss, Micah 6:8 remains absent from the book’s pages even though it tells us what is required of a man, ‘to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with his God’. Instead, Foster/Tennant continue with what shouldn’t be done because they’ve run out of passages that speak to gravitas and they’re really just offering a postmodern reductive take on the Scriptures in service to the gods of masculinity.

GRAVITAS THROUGH DUTY

Foster/Tennant continue on with gravitas and expand on the qualities and duties of masculinity in the next chapter. One of the most curious things about a book like this is how comments are made along the way that can’t be ignored that frame what’s being claimed by the authors. Claims along the way reveal assumptions about men, masculinity, women, and how they all relate together that are in fact troublesome here. For example, on the one hand gravitas is all a matter of God’s grace and yet for Foster/Tennant it’s also something that must be earned. The postmodern slip and slide goes back and forth between these two extremes throughout these chapters and likely signals a problem with how the authors view justification by faith as well as sanctification. We might remember that Tennant was excommunicated by his church for issues with justification so this is no small issue to note. Men, the authors say, “procure well-regulated morals” but do so via God’s “undeserved help”. Dominion isn’t earned, but “we do need to earn...the ability to use this gift well”.

A more disturbing example is the way the authors talk about women in reference to men. For Foster/Tennant women remain sex objects while men are seen by women

as “success objects”. Sexual objectification is a huge topic that is normally the province of feminist and psychological theory though Foster/Tennant do not demonstrate any real knowledge of such in their book other than the popular usage of such terms. The reason noting this remains important is not just because of a deep-seated prejudice the authors demonstrate toward women. Using the term “sex object” in passing is problematic in any discussion since it has such a long history in gender and other studies. In other words, how the authors use words are not just a matter of what they mean but also what they signify to others. True to form, the authors aren’t entirely unaware that they’re dipping into popular discourse because of how they term women and men as sex or success objects.

The authors are merely content to assert that women are viewed as sex objects and move on to talk about how that makes women and sex “the baseline purpose of that sex, the foundational design, the way in which they fulfill their duties of dominion” in contrast to men who are built to work. The implication for Foster/Tennant is that women exist primarily to have sex with men and in doing so help men fulfill the dominion mandate. Saying so is entirely reductive on the part of who women were created to be in conjunction with men. Sex is certainly a central part of marriage but in and of itself is not its entirety nor even its main focus. Again, remember that for Foster/Tennant sex is the engine of dominion.

In saying so as they move on to other points, Foster/Tennant remain a feminist’s dream target in making it very clear that their view of women is misogynist, reductive, and the very thing feminists have worked to undo all these years. Foster/Tennant seem entirely unaware that treating someone as an object means according to Nussbaum that women are at the very least instruments for men, do not have any sort of bodily autonomy, lacking in agency, interchangeable with other objects, retain no boundaries, remain the property of men, and the feelings and experiences of women need not be taken into account in order for men to be gratified. Langton, for example, also considers the sexual objectification of women to reduce women to their bodies, their appearance, and a matter of silencing them. The source for much of society’s current thought about sexual objectification actually moves all the way back to Kant in lowering a person to be something other than human and stunting the full recognition that they too exist as someone rational and capable of making choices. In a way, Foster/Tennant’s view is reminiscent of the way Aristotle viewed slaves as instruments and extensions of their master’s hand (Pol. 1.1254b, great discussion in the first chapter of Agamben, *The Use of Bodies* re: instrumentality). What the reader should remember, however, is that the Bible does not describe or reduce women in this way.

As if seeing women as sex objects wasn’t enough, Foster/Tennant spend no real time talking about pornography—the dirty underside of considering women in this way. The problem is only mentioned three times in the entire book, twice in the first chapter, and finally in reference to romance novels as “women’s porn”. In reality, their

view of women as sex objects minimizes the significance of the problem of porn by reductively considering women and who they are in relation to men.

Of course, Foster/Tennant also claim that men are seen as “success objects” as well. All of this fits nicely into thinking about women and men with stereotypical roles that cave to the discourse of the prevailing culture, carry on a reductive consideration of both sexes, enforce a dialectic of opposition, and on the whole remain unhelpful and unbiblical. The treatment offered in passing by the authors is more a reflection of traditional societal perspectives framed by historical Enlightenment-bound philosophy and postmodern culture than they might care to admit or make known.

The outlook provided by Foster/Tennant frame the rest of the considerations in the chapter as the focus attempts to make certain values more masculine than the Bible makes plain by enforcing a stark set of supposed differences between men and women. Other problems ought to be noticed along the way also. Foster/Tennant are very quick to overextend analogies and so a husband as head of the wife in Ephesians 5:23 for them somehow means that “the man is, put crudely, the brains of the operation”. That’s not what Ephesians 5 teaches and the interpretive maximalism that entertains logical fallacies via false analogies continues to handicap their consideration of what it means to be a man. Somehow, Foster/Tennant have also forgotten about Abigail and Nabal (1 Samuel 25). Nabal is boorish and unwise, described by his own wife as a “worthless man” while Abigail goes against her husband’s wishes and provides King David with what he needs. Later, Abigail then marries King David when Nabal dies as a result of hearing what happened when God judges the matter in a rather final way. All of this is odd behavior if being the head means being the brains of the outfit of any particular couple. Rather, headship is about covenantal arrangements not cerebral function.

For Foster/Tennant since women are sex objects wisdom, workmanship, and strength are chiefly masculine traits. Sure, a woman can gain wisdom but only by asking her husband or pastors. Workmanship is only available to men even while women can demonstrate skill because only men, according to Foster/Tennant, are useful. Why? Men are success objects and being useful apparently has little to do with being a sex object! Then, strength for the authors is inherently masculine because “a woman who is strong like this is butch and unnatural”.

All this is patently absurd since wisdom, workmanship, and even strength are not masculine values in the Bible even in the main. Men and women due to their differences may express such things differently but they all remain the province of anyone made in God’s image and led by the Holy Spirit, including women. Wisdom is personified as a woman in the Scriptures even while she represents the LOGOS of the preincarnate Christ (Proverbs 8:1, 22-31). Wisdom is something the Proverbs 31 wife has in verse 26 that shows no sign of being bestowed upon by her husband but rather an inherent part of who she is, how she is to be valued in a husband finding such a wife, and what she does in fearing and serving God. When we turn to the New

Testament, Paul himself in the first chapter of Ephesians prays that the Father give all the saints (v. 1) “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him...that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened”.

The section in Ephesians 5 on women and men in marriage is prefaced by telling the whole church to “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”. Colossians 4 instructs the church as a whole to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders”. 1 Corinthians 1 contrasts divine wisdom with human wisdom, indicating that wisdom among mankind is a matter of what both men and women have and display. There really is no instance where wisdom is seen as a masculine virtue in the main contra what women might gain “at home” as claimed by Foster/Tennant.

Workmanship is also something both men and women develop. As if Proverbs 31 wasn't enough of a rebuke to the notion that masculinity is chiefly about developing useful skills, Foster/Tennant also ignore the duties and calling of women in their lives and vocations to focus on men as success objects. Women are not sex objects as Foster/Tennant maintain even if the broader culture of society might view it that way. Women are mothers and daughters, lovers, fighters, champions of the faith, mentioned as such in Hebrews 11, and honored in the Scriptures right beside men for their great and useful contributions to God's calling in their lives. Women devoutly run businesses in the Bible and host apostolic missionaries ([Acts 15:11-15](#)). Other women are prophetesses and servants in the church, applying gifts of mercy and care to those in need ([Acts 21:8-9](#); [1 Tim 3:11](#)). Miriam composes and sings a song spontaneously in response to the song of Moses, leading other women in worship before the entire congregation ([Exodus 15:20-21](#)). Still others are evangelists and even correct men who are publicly in error ([Acts 18:24-28](#)). On rare occasions, women may even drive a tent peg into the head of their enemies or lead when men won't (Judges 4). Nowhere in the Scriptures can a reader find workmanship or usefulness as a strictly masculine value.

Strength for Foster/Tennant is defined as “the fortitude through which you stand firm under pressure, through which you translate the virtue of wisdom into action”. But, how is this exclusively masculine? The answer of course is that strength isn't exclusively masculine especially when defined this way. Deborah and Jael have already been mentioned above. The Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1 in opposing Pharaoh is another. Rahab the harlot hides the spies of Israel in Jericho, helps them escape, and finds a place in the messianic line of Christ himself as a result (Joshua 2; [Matthew 1:5](#); [Hebrews 11:31](#) [James 2:25](#)). Hebrews 11 goes on to talk of the faith of women who received back their dead by resurrection (v. 35; 2 Kings 4).

The rest of the chapter continues in attempting to flesh out additional values that just don't pass muster in terms of being strictly masculine. Women also envision and plan, build and supply, and guard and fight. Enterprise, constancy, and readiness are not the sole province of men. Foster/Tennant simply fail to prove that masculinity is

defined by these things and embrace a false piety as a result. All the commentary they provide is interesting but it offers nothing in the way of biblical support for their view. In fact, as pointed out above there is much in the way of biblical support to see the things Foster/Tennant point out as inherently a part of what it means to be made in the image of God for both men and women.

The next post will comment on video games as a special aside mentioned in this chapter but there is another video by Foster that deserves additional commentary. I'll link to the video tomorrow and provide commentary. Then, on to chapter 11 on 'bearing the weight' of dominion.

HOW PORN & VIDEO GAMES HIJACK MANHOOD

Michael Foster and Douglas Wilson engage in a conversation on YouTube about pornography and video games in a way that remains problematic. For one, linking video games to pornography puts a stigma on one that only belongs to the other. Is there something inherently wrong with video games like there is with pornography? The answer is of course no. Another way to look at this equation is to consider that Foster and Wilson are also making pornography something less by equating it to video games. Elsewhere, Foster has had to admit that video games in fact are not in and of themselves wrong and that right use of them is possible. Here in this video he is not so careful, however. After all, great marketing copy masquerading as pastoral advice is never a matter of making careful distinctions. For the extended commentary you'll have to pay \$79 a year on Canon+ via your iPhone.

Just in passing we might note that Foster/Tennant complain in their book about young men using YouTube to fix a car but somehow it's useful for telling people how to be a man. Remember that Foster/Tennant have written that sonship can't be gained from YouTube and that spiritual fathers/pastors have to be physically present in the lives of their newfound adopted sons. There is more here to Foster and Wilson's commentary about masculinity aside from their misguided critique of video games. Technology itself is being disparaged while the authors also take advantage of its capability to spread their message. Why have pastoral conversations on YouTube at all if it can't be "learned from afar" and "cannot be picked up from YouTube or from blogs or from books"? "Real life discipling" isn't via YouTube but look at all the videos Foster and Wilson provide in attempting to do that very thing, especially if you spring for the annual Canon+ subscription on your smartphone. Have we forgotten the words of Jesus, "therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them" (Matt. 23:3)?

Porn and video games are inextricably linked here in Foster and Wilson's eyes due to how they both supposedly dissipate masculine strength. The sort of pastoral advice that oscillates between one extreme and the other continues to enforce a postmodern dialectic. Participating in video games on the one hand is effeminate and fake dominion while on the other carefully qualified to be just fine. What exactly

constitutes reasonable use and participation in video games Foster and Wilson never really specify or even mention in this short clip while the claim is made that video games produce effeminate men. The ambiguity and blurred lines between the two make for problematic advice and demonstrates how subjective and empty this kind of pastoral counseling remains. If pressed, the abuse of video games remains the target even while Foster and Wilson sloppily indict video games themselves as the producer of something other than masculinity.

What is the scriptural basis, however, for equating video games to pornography in a video like this? Foster and Wilson use a sort of interpretive maximalism to inordinately apply Proverbs 31:3 to video games as yet another example of “do not give your strength to women”. Foster picks up on what he and Tennant argue elsewhere, that somehow “playing video games and “binge watching shows” is “fake dominion”. Isn’t it interesting that binge watching Netflix is also included here? The so-called Metaverse isn’t even a reality but it also gets indiscriminately added. How about the kitchen sink? Should we throw that in also? Why not just say don’t waste your time with activities that aren’t productive rather than making all this about masculinity, dominion, and effeminate behavior? The Scriptures clearly say that believers are to wisely redeem their time as given to us by God (Eph. 5:16). But, this is an admonition Foster and Wilson won’t immediately go to because it is given to the church as a whole and not just men. In other words, the Scriptures that really apply to the abuse of something aren’t invoked because they don’t help Foster and Wilson enforce their problematic understanding of biblical masculinity.

One of the greatest weaknesses of Foster/Tennant’s IT’S GOOD TO BE A MAN is that it never really defines masculinity. Everywhere the term is used as if the reader knows what the word means. The problem here, of course, is that there are competing definitions for the word across a wide spectrum even among authors that Foster/Tennant utilize and value. Douglas Wilson himself vaguely defines masculinity as a sort of sacrificial responsibility. Leon Podles defines masculinity as a pattern of union and separation. More basic definitions such as what makes a man a man are also everywhere. In all these definitions, echoes of Freud or Jung abound. Sometimes, the noun is treated like a verb. Masculinity is a set of behaviors rather than a state of being. What do Foster/Tennant mean when they use the term? We don’t really know except that they base their ontology of a man off the dominion mandate and the behaviors they identify as part of what Genesis lays out in the creation narrative. So, at best we can only infer that Foster/Tennant mean masculinity is something wrapped in the exercise of power to dominate the world through production, with sex as the engine of dominion in being fruitful and skillful workmanship at the ready to maximize dominion.

The undue emphasis on production, however, could easily be seen as yet another place where postmodernism is in play. Here is another area where Foster/Tennant and Wilson fall short. Is life only a matter of work? Put another way, was the garden in Eden only for working? Wasn’t the garden also something to enjoy? Wasn’t the Lord

himself walking in the garden in the cool of the day, signifying both communion and enjoyment with him that should have been had without the Fall (Genesis 3:8)?

The Bible says “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” not work constantly and never stop. The Bible also indicates in Deut 14:26 that after tithing obligations are taken care of a man can buy whatever he likes in feasting before the Lord including “strong drink”–yet another thing that can lead to a ruined life if abused. Wine itself is made especially to gladden the heart of man (Psalm 104:15). In fact, even the Sabbath rest of the Lord’s Day in each week is not the only time when leisure is in play especially in a society where work itself is not the grueling thing it has been in the past due to the ever-expanding influence of the gospel in our society both through technology and the outworking of Christian culture.

What Reformed churches need to spend more time on here is developing a theology of leisure. Notice what Foster and Wilson are criticizing here, what’s in view while doing so, and what they don’t. Video games are equated to pornography while whiskey is on the table between them. So, there has to be some implicit theology of leisure and enjoyment in play on the part of Wilson and Foster yet they’re selective about what they enjoy. What about something like football? Football is practically another religion in the lives of many men yet it receives absolutely no attention in Foster/Tennant’s book on what it means to be a man. Neither does baseball, basketball, golf, cricket, soccer, hiking, fishing, or camping. Why not? Well, for one, football and other activities like it are seen as masculine affairs. Whiskey is something they would say men enjoy. Video games and the use of technology, however, are not typically seen in those categories and they’re new to our society. So, video games become an easy target in violating the sacrosanct ideas of masculinity that they value in fine Luddite fashion. Further, football is seen as real while video games are virtual or fake. But, as I’ve commented before on Foster/Tennant’s book this dichotomy is false as everything in this world is both real and physically situated.

The other problem here is that Foster/Tennant are only concerned to deal with masculinity as it pertains to productivity and do not in fact treat leisure or play-enjoying God forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 1)–in their book. Curiously, a lack of focus on enjoying God forever also means a flattened and reductive view of sex that misses its enjoyable qualities in favor of producing children and seeing it as the engine of dominion. That’s also why we see Foster/Tennant and Wilson minimize the problem of pornography among men but maximize the negative potential of abusing video games in their book and this video. Foster/Tennant even state on their ‘It’s Good to Be a Man’ website that pornography use isn’t adultery in the confessional sense of ‘actual adultery’ that would result in divorce, because after all ‘it’s just pixels’. Someone tell Jesus (Matthew 5:27–28)! The only way to arrive at that conclusion is to focus on the nature of sex as a productive physical activity in marriage to exercise dominion and to continue to embrace a false dichotomy between what is real and what remains for them a virtual fantasy. The problem is that Foster/Tennant’s definition of sex remains reductive and as a result has implications

far beyond merely thinking about how to be fruitful and multiply. This, of course, has clear implications for women also in terms of how their own consideration of something like unfaithfulness in pornography is ignored or minimized in favor of enforcing artificial distinctions between the real and virtual that Foster/Tennant maintain without basis.

Like the Ginsu steak knives however, there is more here in the special pleading Foster and Wilson offer and what they ignore with video games more specifically. Video games are played by both men and women in significant numbers. The notion that video games are the sole province of young men with time to waste is inaccurate, as 41.5 percent of video games are played by women and 58.5 percent by men. So, the further claim that video games are inherently masculine is also suspect. Recent studies have shown that video games can increase your attention span, improve intelligence, increase the ability to make decisions and problem-solving, and even improve memory and learning. In a knowledge-based economy, these are important skills to develop while the physical skill of digging a ditch is likely less helpful from an earning perspective (though there is something to be said for the lacking supply of tradesmen). Video games can also be a creative force in observing and creating new connections between different tasks and problem-solving. In other words, participation in technological endeavors more broadly enforces the creative nature of men and women made in the image of God to excel and adapt to present circumstances.

And, skill with video games is applicable to a wide range of important careers in technology and other spaces. Learning how to interact with AI and other automated algorithms in game play gives an important perspective to dealing with technology in other areas of life. The church overall needs to work on things like data literacy and technological capabilities from infancy forward because society's increased rate of innovation means rightly dividing the word of truth going forward is going to mean fluency in all things technological. Tomorrow's apologists for the faith are going to be technologists, not textual critics or marketing hacks. But, Foster and Wilson only reductively consider video games as a societal problem and then proceed to do armchair analysis of social, political, and psychological factors in concluding that masculinity is something governments condemn as Pharaoh did in killing male children. Perhaps in another post I'll demonstrate how they don't even get that societal diagnosis right but hopefully I've provided enough food for thought here in considering what they have to say and how far it remains from the truth of the matter.

HOW TO BEAR THE WEIGHT/MANHOOD THROUGH MISSION

Today is two for one day in reviewing all things Foster/Tennant. This review will address the chapters "How to Bear the Weight" and "Manhood through Mission". The chapters really address much the same thing as they focus on the mission and calling of men particularly as it pertains to their work. Overall, the chapters end with the sort of bland mission/vision goal setting we find in almost any other self-help book where

someone is examining their future and making changes for the better. After all the theological talk, the net result of Foster/Tennant's advice is to write out three to five achievable goals that aren't impossible in spiritual, physical, economic, vocational, and relational areas to start a new life. Then, the authors want their new recruits to write out a mission statement describing it all and go to town getting it done. Anyone working in the corporate world should recognize the sort of advice given here, merely 'dominionized' for Foster/Tennant and their overall focus on men as rulers of their destiny in line with what they see as the kingdom work of the mission of God. This is coupled with additional advice asking the reader to consider what makes them happy, what they're good at, and how they're gifted in order to think about where to go next in doing work for the kingdom. Reading along, I almost expected the authors to pull out a spiritual gifts test for the reader to take and send in for Foster and Tennant to score!

Of course, Foster/Tennant continue to present a reductive account in invoking the *missio Dei*, a term they use but yet again don't bother to define. Men are told to order their lives according to God's mission but what is that exactly and how does that take place? Of course, the mission of God as he reveals himself and establishes his kingdom in the Three and One of the Trinity is no small thing to quietly pass by on the way to thinking about the mission of men and their participation in the same. Joe Boot's work *The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society* is especially instructive here but not found referenced within their pages nor is there any real discussion of what the mission of God actually is in Foster/Tennant. Dr. Boot defines the *missio Dei* as "the universal implementation of the 'reign of God' found first in the "'sending of God' (of His Son, the Holy Spirit and His church) and the universal 'reign of God' (*basileia tou Theou*) and is therefore not limited to earlier, somewhat truncated, soteriological, cultural, or ecclesiastical definitions of 'mission'". The reason a definition must be offered is because the mission of God is a controversial term and exists as such both used and abused by a great many folks in trying to understand the work of God and our salvation in him. Over the last thirty years, a lot of postmodern nonsense slipped into the church in the name of both the *missio Dei* and "missional" theology so a proper definition is in fact necessary.

Foster/Tennant likely agree with a definition like the one offered by Dr. Boot given their emphasis on dominion, but at the same time simply assuming that's what they mean isn't helpful in understanding the corresponding mission of the redeemed man in response. Dr. Boot goes on to define mission as straight out hundred proof "biblical theology and doxology as the mission...biblical theology externalized and applied to every area of life". Foster/Tennant define mission instead as, "your best effort at wisely integrating your interests, skills, and circumstances into a personal vision for exercising dominion over what God has given you". The difference between Dr. Boot's understanding of mission and Foster/Tennant could not be more profound. Foster/Tennant essentially present a Christianized version of modern psychological self-help psychobabble rather than focusing on the true mission of mankind in God's sending. That is why chapter 12 ends with goal setting and crafting mission

statements instead of understanding and applying the consideration that theology determines doxology in how we live.

A constant strategy of Foster/Tennant in the book is to present a negative case and enforce a negative dialectic. So, the first three points of “Manhood Through Mission” is about avoiding the wrong assumptions about “mission”. Why do Foster/Tennant go here instead of fleshing out a fuller conception of mission as defined by Boot? The simple answer is that there just isn’t anything but the skin and bones here of what in other contexts is just a repeat of secular psychology and typical career advice the reader could find almost anywhere. So, Foster/Tennant have to talk about something and decide to frame the matter in theological terms rooted in dominion. But, Joel Osteen or Tony Robbins could have told the reader to have three to five goals and a mission statement as a way to a “Best Life Now” sort of future.

However, there are likely more complex social reasons why Foster/Tennant dive down into a negative dialectic about mission and a man’s work. There is a sort of Rust Belt blue collar flavor to Foster/Tennant’s book that is likely more about the authors and their background than they let on in their writing. Having lived in western rural PA for several years now, the commentary they write at once resonates with a prevalent mindset among many of the folks who remain here after the coal, lumber, and steel industries have left the region, stuck in dead-end low wage low skill manual labor jobs, and perpetuating what might be called a sort of lower to lower middle class lifestyle transferred from generation to generation as poverty reigns supreme. After all, the median per capita income for the county we live in is \$25,000 a year. Work is drudgery for many of these folks and they live for the weekend to fish, hunt, or roll around in ATV’s. The so-called Rust Belt that runs from New York to the Midwest is filled with the lingering problems of industrial decline, poverty, mindsets that on the whole are often quite negative about innovation and moving past one’s circumstances, a poor work ethic, a lack of initiative, and a generational culture that sees nothing but low wage work and just surviving going forward.

Foster/Tennant are busy in these two chapters tempering the expectations of men in terms of having any sort of grand visions or plans toward a better future as a result of dominion. Elsewhere in the book they want to avoid being dreamers. In fact, the authors tell their readers to abandon the idea that a man’s mission must be epic and that a person’s mission will be limited by the extent to which a man conforms to God’s law, another way of saying that being successful and obeying God’s law in society don’t work well together. Expect to be banned from Twitter. ‘Don’t get too excited about all this dominion stuff,’ they’d say. Further, Foster/Tennant also want men to avoid thinking mission will include any sort of detailed map of a man’s life. In chapter 11, the authors make quite the point to say that dominion is a matter of toil and grind rather than “palaces and throne rooms”. “Manning up” is all about not being lazy, a struggle, and hard labor. Adam’s curse in working is still in effect and you’ll certainly feel it. A man’s life can’t be easy and soft and must find blessing in “pushing a heavy boulder up a mountain every day only for it to roll back down”. Foster/Tennant want

the reader to believe that happiness isn't found in a material/spiritual dualism and appeal to Christ as the one who helps a man cope with the illusion that "your life sucks less than it does" as a result of seeing it differently in Christ.

Foster/Tennant claim that "the Spirit changes everything" and they're not being Gnostic, but they don't escape the charge quite so easily. If Christ really does redeem work and transforms the everyday life of men, is work still a curse? In passing, we might ask whether work was the curse in the first place since that's not what the Bible actually teaches. Foster/Tennant only suggest changing one's "mindset of toil and futility" and look at things another way in Christ. The problem here is that work itself has been changed, not only that our mind must change. Toil and grind may reflect some "dirty jobs" in the economy but men are not in fact limited to continuing in lives and careers that are low wage and low skilled. Further, Foster/Tennant's perspective here is about man as an individual and forgets that the mission is actually multi-generational. Therefore, a map detailing both specific plans and multi-generational dreams more than just a few goals is the sort of planning that is likely going to be more helpful than thinking you're on mission simply because you think of your dead-end job differently. Part of the authors' mindset is reinforced by universalizing passages of Scripture about suffering that were never meant to be taken that way. American culture is largely Christian and self-determinative. Men are not in fact bound to stay in bad jobs and hard labor like they live in a concentration camp in Siberia or slave on a farm for a Roman noble. Education is widely available here to switch careers and businesses can be started at the drop of a hat with almost nothing. Opportunity is had by all to take the risks necessary to move into a more complete mission-minded framework in advancing the kingdom. And, yes, failure is likely too but never remains unrecoverable in American life. But, Foster/Tennant make nothing of these new realities while focusing on how hard and difficult work is and saying it's going to stay that way, except of course in how one thinks about it. What good really does it do to tell men, "Yeah, your life really does suck, but think happy thoughts!"?

A proper chapter on mission in light of the *missio Dei* would address the blessings and nature of risk, reward, and ownership as it pertains to vocation and life. Men need to take more risk in our society and can, not less. Outlining man's mission is about understanding the progressive work of God and the favor he bestows in offering grace and giftedness in vocation to men and their families. Further, otherwise ordinary men who have adopted the sort of hundred proof mission Dr. Boot outlines in his book have turned the world upside down, they've built nations, fought tyrants, and done things never thought possible before much like the Hebrews 11 men and women before them. When men became biblical men during the Reformation in taking God at his word, they spawned multi-generational advancement that included things like the advent of modern science, Ivy League universities, accounting, banking, global trade, technological innovation, freedom of women from bad patriarchal designs and limiting lives, peace among the nations, and global prosperity through capitalism. In fact, in the last thirty years, a billion people have been brought out of extreme poverty through the outworking of Protestant economic thought. So, I very much take issue

with the notion that the calling and work of men on mission is somehow always going to be something other than epic. Foster/Tennant are just dead wrong here and their reductive approach to mission is really just recasting Rust Belt-like poverty in Christian terms. What Foster/Tennant miss is that “epic” is normal for our God and abundant life or the *shalom* peace of God has far more this life blessing attached to it than they let on in their negative assessment of men at work in this life.

True to form, Foster/Tennant enforce a postmodern outlook even in the way they consider their negative assessment of where men are in the culture and society around them. Foster/Tennant tell men, “the deck is stacked against you, it is a shock to the system...A lot of men awaken to this reality only to stew on the raw deal they got. And, to be sure, modern men are victims of a twisted man-hating system. They are casualties of the war on gender: scarred, injured, and discouraged...We can relate.” I doubt seriously that Foster/Tennant have read Foucault and Marcuse and instead intuit their own insecurities in relating the notion that men are victims and that the deck is stacked against them. Further, the authors also seem to be unaware of Marx and how he talked about awakening the proletariat as they attempt to do the same with men they feel find themselves in this terrible position. They echo the language of Marx, Marcuse, and even Foucault in seeing a system at work bent to destroy them, a victimization as a result of gender wars, and a sort of technological rationality to it all that is inescapable. Had Foster/Tennant any real knowledge of how critical theorists, postmodernists, and even Marx himself thought and wrote about these things they likely would have expressed what they want to say differently because otherwise they risk informed readers seeing their claims as yet another postmodern systemic critique of society. But, instead Foster/Tennant go along with the standard cultural way to say these things in fine postmodern fashion.

This is a problem not only because Foster/Tennant echo postmodern language but more importantly what they claim simply isn’t true. While the notion of white privilege is a myth of no small measure that serves the postmodern gods of our society through critical theory, there is enough evidence in social science research to consider that what Foster/Tennant call out as the victimization of men is really just a remembrance of the blessings men in general continue to enjoy in our society. Christians don’t call what social scientists see as white privilege a matter of privilege, but there are in fact a great many benefits in being a man in a society that is still largely Christian that Foster/Tennant ignore in their special pleading. Further, using postmodern discursive techniques helps prep Christians to think about society in postmodern ways and inadvertently lends credence to deconstruction in Christian life and society. More importantly, however, men find themselves in the situation they’re in by virtue of their own action and not in fact because of a system designed to beat them down. Men aren’t victims. Men are blessed by God to be men and women are also blessed to be who they are even when both find themselves in trouble and sin. After all, the title of Foster/Tennant’s book is “It’s Good to Be a Man” but you wouldn’t know that by reading these two chapters! A simple change of mind or “wokeness” isn’t going to turn things around for men and their problems either.

Foster/Tennant know this otherwise they wouldn't attempt to move men from red-pilled angry status to being faithful to God in life. But, at the end of the day, their advice isn't all that different from other self-help manuals or the postmodern move toward utopia, 'Change the way you think about things, live differently, stick with your tribe, but keep doing what you're doing even though you continue to suffer and nothing seems to change', Marcuse practically said the same thing in *One-Dimensional Man* in pinning toward utopia. About the only thing Foster/Tennant add is getting into a good church and being among good men with some kind of spiritual father in the lead. Tomorrow's post will address the sort of fraternity Foster/Tennant advocate. As you can likely tell, there are a few problems there to consider as well.

THE NECESSITY OF FRATERNITY

Foster/Tennant continue on to talk of the necessity of fraternity in this next chapter. For the authors, having a gang, tribe, or brotherhood of associated men is something a man needs in order to be a man. The claim here is not just that men should have other men around them but that it remains a necessity as far as being a Christian man is concerned. The view Foster/Tennant put forward hails more from the masculinity movement itself than any biblical consideration offered in the chapter they write. The chapter begins with a quote from a Catholic scholar, descends into popular descriptions in five different movies, and ends with reference to comments made by Jack Donovan. Along the way, some biblical material is put forward or discussed but only in piecemeal fashion as the authors craft a larger doctrine in line with red-pill masculinity that easily make this chapter the most dangerous in the book. What the authors don't do is make a biblical case for the sort of fraternity they espouse. There is certainly a kernel of truth to the notion that men befriend one another and sometimes develop lifelong relationships with other men but membership in the church is not like joining a motorcycle club. The problem here is that Foster/Tennant mean much more than mere friendship and the design they have in play goes against the very working of the gospel to move away from natural tribal affiliations and fraternities toward a gospel life in and among the wider church.

Foster/Tennant would have Christian men gather a "tribe" around them and aren't afraid to use the term "gang" in reference to a brotherhood they feel should work as a primary guide and center of their life on mission. In fact, the authors even argue that male intimacy is a sort of lost art in today's society and use the friendship of David and Jonathan as support for what they consider to be a model friendship. There is a subtle equivocation here between friendship and fraternity that Foster/Tennant miss as they present it. A deep and abiding friendship of two men is not necessarily the same as a fraternity or gang of men working together toward a common purpose. In fact, Jonathan and David were at the crossroads of a relationship where they had opposing missions in play between Jonathan's father King Saul and the divinely ordained replacement found in David. Foster/Tennant would have the reader believe that these friends and newfound brothers are in play to help with one's mission and

yet that wasn't the case with David and Jonathan. Yet, Foster/Tennant roll with the equivocation between friend and brotherhood because a story like Jonathan and David helps them establish their unique brand of brotherhood as a matter of male intimacy.

Foster/Tennant argue that "sexual homogeneity is what forms the strong bonds of friendship" yet somehow overlook the fact that it is entirely possible to be friends with members of the opposite sex as well as join them in common cause. Further, Foster/Tennant spend no time actually exegeting 1 Samuel 18 where Jonathan is first noted loving David as he loves himself, a virtual restatement of the Second Greatest Commandment, an obligation we have toward all those we know, and not just someone that might inspire us or we might befriend. As usual, the claims they make are just claims with little in the way of actual support for their argument. Instead, the reader is pointed to examples from several movies, an example of a returned soldier that misses the camaraderie of war, and the claim that all this just isn't gay or homosexual in nature. Yet, Foster/Tennant outright say that men need the love of men. Men need this love emotionally and to exercise dominion over the world. The authors go so far as to say that it is needed for "the most basic piety...to exercise dominion over yourself". Without the correctability offered by brotherhood, a man can't even be virile according to Foster/Tennant.

But, does the Bible really teach that intimate male friendship and deep abiding relationships between men in their own tribe or gang remain required for a man to be Christian and live in obedience to Christ? The answer is that no such requirements are listed in the Bible for men to maintain same sex relationships and to say so does in fact border on a sort of homosexual or homosocial advocacy. Foster/Tennant can avoid the charge in their own minds because they present a reductive view of sexuality and sex in the first place as the engine of dominion. And, to be clear, Foster/Tennant would manifestly deny that there is anything "gay" in putting forward what they believe about fraternity. But, homosexual behavior is not just about the physical act of two men together. Homosexuality is also about the exercise of power, male intimacy, and things common to the very items described above that Foster/Tennant say is required for even "the most basic piety". The background and argument for this point of view has to be framed from the observable postmodern culture inspiring it especially since the Scriptures aren't playing a central role here in their presentation of the topic.

Jack Donovan is cited twice in the last part of the chapter and has a very similar view to the one espoused by Foster/Tennant but it's likely that few know that Donovan himself has been (is?) a homosexual, a white nationalist, and a former Satanist who has been busy leading neopagan groups over the last several years. Curiously, his increased denial of his previous identities seems to track with his increased popularity in red-pill masculinity circles. I guess fundraising from normal folks is hard when you're leading the Wolves of Vinland, a Norse neopagan group outside

Lynchburg, Virginia complete with their own Viking long hall where they ritually slaughter animals on their compound.

Somehow Foster/Tennant feel Donovan's contribution is important enough to directly quote in their book even while Donovan remains anything but a Christian and in no sense offers his consideration of the sort of tribes and gangs in question as biblical. Rather, Donovan's position presents an evolutionary view of men associating with men to do men things. The point here is not to poison the well or offer any sort of guilt by association but instead to trace where these ideas are actually coming from as presented by Foster/Tennant with the very sources they use in their book.

Foster/Tennant are mimicking the general considerations of an Alt-Right, red-pilled, neopagan masculinity seen very easily in white nationalism and white supremacy circles. Further, the view the authors espouse is also the very sort of thing that is attracting gay men to white supremacy in recent years. Foster/Tennant are not making a biblical case in this chapter about friendship or fraternity even while they quote certain Bible passages they feel remain favorable to their view. Rather, they mimic a sort of churchified presentation of fraternity among men that is eerily similar to what neopagans like Donovan advocate.

But what does the Bible teach about tribes, fraternities, and friendship? Simply put, our Lord came to end the curse and separation of Babel through Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The particularity of Israel in the Old Testament became universal in Christ and that is why tribes and peoples now come to faith in Christ and do not in fact remain separate or look for new associations outside the church that already bought them. Nations still exist and tribes and peoples are to be led to the gospel, but as we advance toward the eschaton there is no sense in which Christian men or anyone else should be starting and maintaining new tribes or new gangs dedicated to this or that purpose the way Foster/Tennant suppose. Why? Because Christians themselves are together "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (ethnos, tribe/people), a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). Note that membership in the church is available to all and in Christ there is no distinction between men and women or Jew and Greek (Gal. 3:28). The gang-level correctability Foster/Tennant would like to note as instrumental and required for men to be Christian is not seen in the New Testament and isn't how the church functions. Instead, Paul encourages men and women—really, the whole church—to engage in "teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). James 5:16 instructs us to confess our sins to one another and pray for each other. The church is to gather together regularly to encourage one another, stimulating one another to love and good deeds, and exhorting each other daily (Heb. 3:13 10:24-25). Real discipleship happens in the church among the whole congregation and not in some group of men along for the ride like they're the Sons of Anarchy.

Additionally, confessional Reformed theology and practice has consistently stayed away from fraternal organizations and groups that Catholics and others consider valuable whether fraternal orders, monastic orders, or pseudo-religious groups like the Masons. There are very good reasons why this is the case including the tendency of an organization or group of people to replace the church, to corrupt men through inappropriate associations, and engage in false teaching. In fact, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church even released a report against Freemasonry and similar groups as the kind of thing that competes against the church and fails to establish true Christian universalism found in all those from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” that bow down before the Father (Rev. 5:9). No doubt, Foster/Tennant would like to claim their brotherhood is a brotherhood in the Lord but the problem is that the church’s brotherhood is one that includes men, women, children, and in Paul’s day even slaves and masters (Eph. 6:1-9; Gal 3:26-29).

THE EXCELLENCE OF MARRIAGE

Foster/Tennant in their final chapter handle marriage and do so with a sort of flair that demonstrates the primacy they maintain for men and masculinity over and above women and their God-given place in marriage. For Foster/Tennant, marriage is essentially a tool to help men accomplish their mission in life and not much more. The authors speak of two rails which run on this track. The first rail is being in a gang with other men to help a man get there. The other rail, Foster/Tennant say, is having a wife. Of course, talking about two rails effectively makes brotherhood equivalent to marriage in terms of its nature and role in a man’s life rather than recognizing the fuller and more central nature of two becoming one in marriage. The reader might also get the impression that brotherhood, since it’s the first rail, is more important than marriage though Foster/Tennant don’t come right out and say that. Men like Jack Donovan likely would, however.

Throughout the book, Foster/Tennant are typically busy making claims without actually substantiating them in terms of real argumentation. The same is true here where various passages of Scripture are put forward as proof-texts but detailed treatment of the texts in question are typically not offered. The authors present two different kind of women in summary fashion as they are discussed in the Proverbs but focus very little on the comparisons made in any detail. So, the reader is left to infer what a ‘Proverbs 31 wife’ looks like and what kind of woman to avoid in finding a wife.

The authors then claim that whatever else one understands about marriage, a wife is only a complement to a man’s mission and not the mission itself. Remember that for Foster/Tennant their definition of mission is, “your best effort at wisely integrating your interests, skills, and circumstances into a personal vision for exercising dominion over what God has given you”. The definition Joe Boot has offered is “biblical theology externalized and applied to every area of life”. The differences are important because Dr. Boot’s definition is both more wide-ranging and more

comprehensive. For Foster/Tennant, their vision is on the whole related to vocation rather than the understanding that all of life is mission in God to glorify him and enjoy him forever (WSC Q/A 1).

Foster/Tennant's definition limits the nature of the mission in play. When all of life in obedience to God becomes the mission, a wife becomes not only a complement to man's mission but also a central and integral focus of his life in loving and serving God. So, there is a sense in which a wife is the mission rather than a mere complement to it because everything is a matter of obedience to and love for God. After all, the Scriptures flat out say 'to love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Eph. 5:25). Foster/Tennant aren't interested in giving anything up because their idea of a man has other more important things to do.

Christ's entire focus as the incarnate Messiah in establishing dominion on this earth was to give himself up for his own bride the church and Ephesians dictates a similar focus for men in marriage. The 'great mystery' of Ephesians 5:32 is the fact that as Christ becomes one with his bride so too a man and woman become one together in marriage to pursue a life in God as one. Note that a wife isn't just a complement to her husband in terms of granting assistance but that they become one person together pursuing the mission of applying biblical theology to all of life.

Foster/Tennant then continue down the path of looking at marriage with their reductive mission. For the authors, a man should have a mission in play before he seeks a wife and women desire a man already on mission. Of course, as usual, these claims are provided without any evidence that they are either true or necessary for young men in finding a wife. But, for the Christian man whose entire life is already a matter of glorifying God and enjoying him forever why isn't obedience to God enough for Foster/Tennant prior to marriage? What wife wouldn't want a man that is obedient to God and loves him above all else?

The Scriptures provide no prescriptive command for a man to have a particular calling in life discerned prior to getting married and in fact the descriptive narrative of much of the Bible would seem to speak against what Foster/Tennant offer. Moses married Zipporah after fleeing Pharaoh while on the run for murder but before he is tasked by God to lead Israel out of slavery, a mission he didn't exactly want to pursue in the first place (Exodus 2:21; 3:10). Jacob after stealing his brother's blessing is sent away by Isaac to marry from the daughters of Laban because his mother couldn't stand the thought of him marrying a Canaanite. Isaac blesses Jacob, clues him in to the covenant of his father, and Jacob has a dream along the way but his mission as such isn't revealed as something he really pursues until after he was married, wrestles with God, became Israel, and in fullness not until after he was long gone as a patriarch given how his purpose was wrapped up in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bringing the world to Christ (Genesis 17:3-8; 28:1-4; 32:24-32; 35:9-12; John 8:56). Besides, as noted before, the Bible says what is required of a man. The Bible does not say, "Make sure you know what you're going to do with your life before getting married".

Rather, the Bible says that the Lord requires a man to “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micaiah 6:8).

Foster/Tennant would like to see men adopt a specific calling based on giftedness, interest, and skills but this ignores wildcards like circumstance and opportunity. Additionally, the sort of 1950s blue collar ideal of having a factory job, working for the same company for 40 years, and making sure your kids do better than you surely has an influence on how Foster/Tennant are considering something like this. Circumstances, opportunity, and life often cause change and men exist in seasons of life, so a person might spend only part of their life running a business, pastoring a church, working a corporate job, being a missionary, or any number of other things as their vocational identity and what God makes possible at any given time. Look at the life of Moses, first a royal son, then a criminal and fugitive, then a shepherd in the middle of nowhere, then a hesitant leader calling men out of slavery, then a leader of the people, and eventually one whose face shone with the glory of God. Was Zipporah merely an afterthought or just some kind of complement or helper in keeping Moses on task in running from Pharaoh and living in the middle of nowhere never to think of another calling or mission? Rather, Zipporah appears more like a woman that helped Moses remain faithful to his actual calling, ‘glorifying God and enjoying him forever’ (Exodus 4:24-26). Foster/Tennant’s advice might be something to consider for upwardly mobile people thinking they’re going to have a great career out of college, but what they present isn’t really true to the vast array of life callings and providential directions God often has for people. Furthermore, the pastoral advice the authors attempt to give just isn’t laid out anywhere in the Scriptures.

On occasion, Foster/Tennant seem to fuss with words rather than deal with what’s actually being said. Men are often referred to as incomplete without ‘their better half’ and while it’s certainly true that any man is fully made in the image of God without a woman we also know that the Scriptures matter-of-fact say that it wasn’t good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). So, man was given woman and she becomes part of a man in their joining (Genesis 2:23-24). In other words, without a wife a man isn’t really what God designed for man to be once they are together. Even Christ himself has a bride. So, perhaps a crass consideration of man as incomplete is unwarranted but the deeper meaning of incompleteness is most certainly relevant in thinking about what it means to be man and wife together.

Foster/Tennant continue their reductive postmodern treatment of marriage by deemphasizing things that the Scriptures note as important. For Foster/Tennant, it’s just okay for a man to be “a little smitten” with an attractive woman that might make a good wife, but becoming infatuated or crazy about a woman is supposedly unmanly and ungodly. Yet, Jacob himself finds Rachel, kisses her on the spot, lifts up his voice, and weeps! Then, he immediately indentures himself for seven years in waiting to secure his newly found bride (Genesis 29:11; 18). Even the Proverbs talk about a man with a woman in love as something too wonderful to understand (Proverbs 31:19).

Foster/Tennant also claim that marriage is never a matter of finding one's soulmate or that there is only ever one particular woman in the world for a man. The authors say, "Placing a woman on a pedestal like this, thinking of her as "the one" is enormously destructive and actually reflects the vestiges (and possibly return) of pagan thinking in our culture. It is yet another variant of androgyny..." Foster/Tennant are attempting to deny the notion of "true love" and in the process deemphasize the nature of the joining of man and wife together by God in love as found in the Scriptures. The authors also unwittingly reduce the woman in marriage to a mere companion or helper that can be easily replaced. Foster/Tennant are just wrong here and barking up the wrong tree. Eve in the creation account is the pinnacle of creation and the last created being God put in place in the Garden of Eden. Women are referred to explicitly as the glory of man just as man is the glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7). So, there is more here to think about in terms of who women are in marriage aside from the notion that they are merely a weaker vessel called alongside to help a man do his real work.

God only created one particular woman for Adam so in the paradigmatic case for marriage what Foster/Tennant say just isn't true. Further, how would Paul apply the authors' understanding of marriage on this point to the church? The Bible says that God predestined a particular people in Christ, foreknew each of them, called them, justified them, sanctified them, and glorified them (Eph 1:3-5; Romans 8:28-29). In fact, God not only chose a particular people as his singular bride in saving them, he also ordains and works all circumstances together for their good in seeing them come to and remain in Christ. Would Foster/Tennant answer, "Well, not really..."?

Foster/Tennant also amazingly omit any reference to Song of Songs in the entire chapter (or book!) and for obvious reasons. There, both bride and groom express love for one another that is at once intimate, dazzling, romantic, and obviously expressive of two people who think that they are made for each other. The full import of "My beloved is mine, and I am his" takes on a meaning in Christ and God that far transcends the baseless claims of Foster/Tennant in considering the full implications of God's sovereignty when it comes to marriage (Song of Solomon 2:16). Now, of course, the secret things belong to God and discerning the woman God has for a man is not always simple or easy but the clear implication of Scriptures is that marriage is between a man and a woman that God arranges providentially between them. To say otherwise is to be something other than confessionally Reformed in terms of one's theological outlook.

The pagan and postmodern view is one that is reductive and disallows the biblical nature of marriage, something Foster/Tennant do in spades here. There is even more in the way of problems with this particular chapter given the importance God has placed on the joining of men and women together in marriage. Foster/Tennant even go so far as to claim they know the subconscious desires of what women want in the closing section of their treatment of marriage! But, any critical review has to stop somewhere and by now readers have been made quite aware that *It's Good to Be a Man* is not a book for young men to read in being a Christian man.