cherishes communion. Ambrose experienced that like many of his pietistic colleagues did in the preaching of and pondering on God’s Word, in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, in the solitude of the soliloquium, in communing and conversing with fellow believers.

The provisional climax for Ambrose was founded in contemplation, by way of precursor to the eschaton. Though Schwanda’s intention is pertinently not “to transplant or create a neo-Puritan culture in the twenty-first century”, he does plead with numerous arguments for a ‘retrieval’ of this piety. So ‘retrieval’ does not mean: repetition. It is revival. I agree with Schwanda wholeheartedly. If the church wants to honour its secret, it should neither lose itself in a moralistic drive for action, nor in intellectual hair-splitting, but rather lose itself to God, for the church and the Christian are of God because of the merciful wonder of the unio and the communio.

A great deal can be learnt from this book and at least as much is to be enjoyed. Soul recreation!

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Recent theological debate has often focused on the relationship between union with Christ and justification, but what about union with Christ and sanctification? Be Renewed takes up this subject in a way that exemplifies well how to write systematic theology in conversation with the Bible and historical theology while aiming to address today’s church. It will be of great value to ministers and systematic theologians in particular. The author also teaches all Christians how to live the Christian life in union with Christ without reducing this theme to an empty and vague mantra such as “preach the gospel to yourself every day.”

This is one of the most interesting and exciting volumes of V&R’s Reformed Historical Theology series. It combines contextual historical investigation with biblical theology and systematic theological reflection (18). Van Vlastuin surveys figures from church history in relation to union
with Christ and sanctification including such diverse figures as Augustine, Aquinas, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, John Owen, the Keswick movement, John Wesley, Martin Lloyd-Jones, C.S. Lewis, and numerous others. He also includes substantial expositions of Scripture in relation to his theme, such as his lengthy treatment of Romans 7:14-25 in chapter five. He weaves his subject harmoniously into the entire system of theology, with special emphases on Christology, Pneumatology, and Eschatology.

His title illustrates the thrust of his argument. Renewal highlights the positive emphasis on making progress in holiness, as opposed to a negative emphasis on making a “small beginning” only (128-30). The passive imperative in the title reflects the fact that sanctification is ultimately a work of God effected through union with Christ (chapters 2-3), while its imperatival force retains the biblical emphasis on human responsibility and spiritual struggle (chapters 6-7). The subtitle, “a theology of personal renewal”, indicates that his position is one among many other options, each of which have something to teach us, even when they are largely in error. The title to his conclusion, “Balance”, indicates the character of the entire work. In an irenic spirit, with great discernment and charity, Van Vlastuin takes what is useful from almost all of the authors and movements surveyed, he evaluates them through Scripture, and he formulates his theology in a helpful way. In this manner, he shows readers how theology should be written. He is polemical without being combative, and his overall thrust is positive and useful to believers.

While his historical analyses are generally good, they are also deficient contextually at points. For example, he does not adequately situate Calvin and Luther in their historical contexts. This is particularly evident by the absence of references to other contemporary authors in each tradition as well as his lack of dependence on Calvin’s commentaries in the major analysis of his thought presented in chapter one. This runs the risk of giving the impression that Calvin, like Luther, founded a theological tradition. While we should not detract from Calvin’s significance in the Reformed tradition, this places undue weight on the magisterial Reformer in relation to the development of post-Reformation Reformed theology. Contextual development is necessary to understand better the nature and limitations of his influence on the tradition.
The most glaring deficiencies in his treatment relate to his treatment of the Westminster Standards (130-34). Van Vlastuin appears to pit the emphasis on union with Christ in the Heidelberg Catechism with the covenantal structure of the Westminster Confession. This misunderstands the function of union with Christ in the WCF and Catechisms. For example, Westminster Larger Catechism questions 65-90 situate the entire *ordo salutis*, including sanctification, in union and communion with Christ in grace and glory. Question 75 explicitly connects sanctification to the work of the Spirit in uniting believers to Christ in his resurrection. He also fails to distinguish adequately between union with Christ and communion with Christ. In the Catechism, every benefit of redemption is grounded in mystical union with Christ, while the Spirit communicates every benefit of salvation to believers through communion with Christ.

This connection actually bolsters Van Vlastuin’s theological conclusions, though he does not recognize them in Westminster. The covenantal structure of the WCF also places Christology at the heart of the covenant of grace (WCF 6-7). Instead of contrasting covenant theology with union with Christ, this model solidifies the emphasis on union with Christ at the heart of redemption generally and of sanctification in particular. The irony is that the WCF ends up supporting the author’s theology more effectively than he does precisely because of its covenantal structure, making Westminster a development upon rather than a divergence from the Heidelberg Catechism.

His treatment of John Owen (235-37) also illustrates the periodic deficiencies in his historiography. He contrasts Owen with Jonathan Edwards, arguing that Edwards treated the indwelling of the Spirit in Christ as both the pattern for and the link between the Spirit’s work in believers (237-39). His final criticism of Owen is puzzling when he argues that Owen did not connect believers to the “salvation-historical character of the cross of Christ” (237). This virtually omits Owen’s extensive treatment of this subject in the first two hundred or so pages of *Pneumatologia*, on which Van Vlastuin relies primarily in his analysis. It is possible to argue that Edwards developed his views from his reading of Owen and that there is more continuity than discontinuity between the two authors at this point. Other authors, such as Sinclair Ferguson and Alan Spence, have argued that the Spirit’s relation to Christ as a pattern for believers was actually his primary contribution to pneumatology and
sanctification in English-speaking theology. Other authors have also located similar emphases in medieval doctors, such as Peter Lombard.

It is difficult, if not impossible to be a master of every field. Yet a systematic theology must be a generalist rather than a specialist in this connection, since he must draw from historical theology, exegesis, biblical theology, and practical theology in order to form his conclusions. In spite of the deficiencies noted, Van Vlastuin is an exemplary systematic theologian. He teaches readers how to pursue their sanctification in union with Christ. He models the theological balance and discernment need to produce an irenic and useful theology that serves the church.

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