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‘Guide me, o Thou Great Jehovah’ – A Typology of Divine Guidance in Contemporary Evangelicalism*

Kees van der Knijff

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Über viele Jahre hinweg gab es in der evangelikalen Welt eine Flut von Büchern zu dem Thema göttliche Führung und darüber, “den Willen Gottes zu finden”. Obwohl es einige Vorschläge gegeben hat, ist bislang noch keine überzeugende Typologie der verschiedenen Ansichten zu Führung entwickelt worden. In diesem Artikel schlägt der Autor eine Typologie vor, die sich auf die unterschwelligsten theologischen Axiome konzentriert, welche in den vielerlei Ansichten zu göttlicher Führung

beinhaltet sind: Was genau tut Gott, wenn er sein Volk führt? Dieser Ansatz führt zu einer Unterscheidung zwischen drei Führungsmodellen: Führung durch Offenbarung, Führung durch Hinweise und Führung durch Veränderung. Die Vorteile und Grenzen dieser Typologie werden kurz erörtert. Abschließend zeigt sich, dass diese Typologie auf eine Reihe entscheidender theologischer Fragen hinweist, mit denen man sich auseinandersetzen muss, um eine solidere theologische Erklärung zu göttlicher Führung zu entwickeln.

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RÉSUMÉ

Le monde évangélique a produit depuis des années un nombre important d’ouvrages traitant de la manière dont Dieu nous dirige et de la « recherche de la volonté de Dieu ». En dépit de quelques suggestions, aucune typologie convaincante des positions diverses sur ce sujet n’a encore été élaborée. L’auteur propose ici une typologie qui se concentre sur les présupposés théologiques qui sous-tendent les points de vue divers sur cette question : que fait exactement Dieu lorsqu’il conduit son

peuple ? Trois modèles sont ici distingués en fonction du moyen dont Dieu se sert pour conduire les siens dans sa volonté : par la révélation, par le discernement qu’il suscite dans le cadre d’une relation intime avec lui, ou par la transformation de la personne. Les mérites et limites de cette typologie sont brièvement examinés. L’auteur montre que cette typologie fait ressortir un certain nombre de questions théologiques déterminantes qui doivent être traitées en vue de l’élaboration d’une théologie plus solide de la manière dont Dieu nous conduit dans sa volonté.

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SUMMARY

For many years, the evangelical world has seen a flood of books on divine guidance and ‘finding the will of God’. Although some suggestions have been made, no convincing typology of the various views on guidance has been developed yet. In this article, the author proposes a typology that focuses on the underlying theological assumptions involved in the various views on divine

guidance: what exactly does God do when he guides his people? This approach results in a distinction between three models of guidance: guidance through revelation, through intimation and through transformation. The merits and limitations of this typology are briefly discussed. Finally, it is shown how this typology points to a number of crucial theological issues that need to be addressed in order to develop a more theologically robust account of divine guidance.

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1. Introduction

In his famous hymn *Guide me, o Thou Great Jehovah*, William Williams (1717-1791) used Exodus imagery to formulate a powerful prayer for divine guidance.¹ Yet, its words, and especially the sentence ‘Let the fire and cloudy pillar, Lead me all my journey through’ can give rise to multiple interpretations and corresponding spiritualities of guidance. When this prayer is sung, do we use the Old Testament narrative as a beautiful metaphor, or are we actually praying for God to lead us by concrete signs?

Not only *can* references to divine guidance in sermons, songs and articles lead to various views on the reality and specifics of such guidance, but in fact they *do*. The topic has received much attention in parts of the evangelical world and is sometimes described as one of the central tenets of evangelical spirituality. As Joseph Bayly wrote in 1968,

If there is a serious concern among Christian students today, it is for guidance. Holiness may have been the passion of another generation’s Christian young men and women. Or soul winning. Or evangelizing the world. But not today. Today the theme is getting to know the will of God.²

Given the number of publications still devoted to the topic of guidance and the will of God, Bayly’s evaluation seems no less valid today than it was in 1968.³ It is to this topic that the present contribution is devoted. In it, we try to answer the question in which ways the biblical theme of God as guide is interpreted and concretised in contemporary evangelicalism. Thus the goal is not to evaluate the different views, but rather to propose a number of models – or a typology – by means of which the widely divergent views on the issue can be adequately categorised.

2. Methodology

This article will proceed in the following way. First, a number of existing typologies of divine guidance will be introduced and discussed. Subsequently, we propose a new typology that we believe does more justice to the complicated field of mainly popular literature on the issue. After introducing the different models and their main characteristics, we discuss the drawbacks and merits of the proposed typology. The insights provided by the typology will then be translated into a number of systematic theological issues that need to be addressed in

order to develop a robust theological account of divine guidance, and a corresponding spirituality, from a Reformed perspective. The article will close with a number of concluding remarks.

However, before delving into the material discussion of guidance, a number of methodological issues need to be clarified. Firstly, it is important to realise that, as indicated, most accounts of divine guidance are developed in popular writing, not in a precise academic style.⁴ This does have consequences for the coherence and consistency of the contributions themselves, but it also makes the development of a clear-cut typology more complicated. Secondly, given the amount of attention devoted to guidance and the will of God in a wide variety of media (e.g. books, sermons, periodicals, Bible study materials and blogs), three constraints have been used to select the material on which the proposed typology is based: the analysis is based on 1) books, 2) written originally in English and 3) first published between 1980 and 2010. The resulting selection of 39 books has been analysed with regard to the view on the will of God expressed in them, the proposed praxis of decision-making in light of this view, a succinct account of the main line of argumentation, and the possible specific contribution of each author to the discussion.⁵

3. Existing typologies of guidance

Attention for divine guidance and ‘finding the will of God’ seems to have grown since the final years of the nineteenth century, when the first books on the theme appeared.⁶ Those early books were characterised by a focus on the method and praxis of finding God’s will. Especially after World War II the number of books on guidance increased dramatically. Though the causes of this phenomenon are no doubt complex, there is a clear link with the development of Western societies from relative static and predetermined entities to highly dynamic patterns of interaction and development in which many personal choices have to be made.⁷

Until 1980, no explicit typologies of the different views on divine guidance existed. Most contributions presented a similar approach, speaking of a – mostly undefined – specific will of God for the individual believer and proposing a number of steps to be taken to ‘find’ the will of God. Several approaches were advocated, but did not present themselves as radically different from a supposed mainstream perspective.

The situation changed with the publication of Garry Friesen's controversial *Decision Making and the Will of God*.⁸ Friesen presented a 'biblical alternative' to what he labelled the 'traditional approach', where the 'traditional approach' stands for the view that God has an ideal plan for every individual that he will make known through a combination of signs. Friesen named his own view on guidance the 'wisdom view' and portrayed this wisdom view and the traditional view as the ends of a spectrum on which all views can be placed. According to Friesen, intermediate options take features of both views, often in an inconsistent way. He described the intermediate positions as 'traditional view with wisdom leanings', 'synthesis of traditional and wisdom views' and 'wisdom view in traditional vocabulary'.⁹ As said, Friesen's book sparked the discussion on guidance within evangelical circles, where initially his two opposite views were taken over as the main interpretative grid.

An example of someone who generally adopted Friesen's distinction is James Petty. Although in his *Step by Step* he developed three categories, Petty's traditional and wisdom views correspond with Friesen's proposal; he adds a 'traditional charismatic view' to cover the distinctiveness of views that ascribe a crucial role to the direct and verbal communication of God.¹⁰

One of the more scholarly contributions to the theme, Stephen Kovach's dissertation *Towards a Theology of Guidance*, once again adopts Friesen's categories. However, Kovach chooses to make the name 'traditional view' more informative – like 'wisdom view' – by renaming it the 'blueprint view'. His description makes clear that the substance of the view remains the same:

Under the blueprint view, God has a perfect plan, or blueprint, for each person's life. This plan includes who you are to marry, what school you are to attend, what job you are to take, etc. The goal of each believer is to discover God's perfect plan and to discern the one correct choice God has for you in each and every decision.¹¹

A more radical adaptation that Kovach made was to add a distinct third category, which he introduced as a more moderate view in between the two extreme positions. This third category, which Kovach named the 'directional view', includes books by influential authors like Henry Blackaby, Klaus Bockmühl, Gordon Smith and Dallas

Willard.¹² Apart from being moderate accounts on, for example, the question whether all decisions have to be approached in connection to 'God's will', it is difficult to see how these authors fit together in a distinct category that is substantially different from Friesen's spectrum.

The first author to introduce a really distinct third category was Gordon T. Smith. Arguing that according to both the 'blueprint school' and the 'wisdom school' 'God is distant from the decision-making process',¹³ Smith proposed a view in which an intimate relationship with God and the discipline of discernment are the central aspects. He distrusts on the one hand overly formulaic accounts in which several steps need to be taken to 'find' God's will, and on the other hand accounts that put too much trust in human abilities. Smith and a number of related authors draw on Ignatian or Jesuit spirituality for their accounts of discernment.

Finally, in 2009 a book appeared in which proponents of three different views on guidance and the will of God present their views and comment on the other positions.¹⁴ Its editor, Douglas Huffman, also thinks a tripartite typology does most justice to the actual positions taken in the debate. The views included are the 'specific-will view' (cf. the earlier labels 'traditional' or 'blueprint' view), the wisdom view and the relationship view (Smith's position).

4. Evaluation of current typologies

As will be clear from the above analysis, there are currently basically two different options: One that presents the various models on a continuum between a traditional view and a newer wisdom view (Friesen) and one that distinguishes three distinct approaches in the literature that all have their particular features (Smith, Huffman).¹⁵

What all typologies share, however, is imprecision in the names of the models. So, for example, the label 'traditional view' does not say anything about the content of the model described, while the combination of a blueprint or specific-will view and a wisdom view is theologically strange in that the first describes an element of God's side of guidance, while the latter focuses more on the human side. In order to gain as clear a picture as possible of the existing models, a typology is needed that describes the positions from a theological, not a historical point of view. Furthermore, when adopting the theological approach, a single point of

departure must be taken to describe the options.

Based upon our analysis, in what follows I will propose a new typology of views on guidance as found in the evangelical world. This typology is based upon the following considerations: First, our reading of the contributions on guidance between 1980 and 2010 suggests that a tripartite division does most justice to the differences between the various contributions. Second, the different models of divine guidance take their point of departure in the divine activity of guiding, because we believe this does most justice to the biblical idea of God as guide. A positive side-effect of this approach is that it has the potential of detracting from overly individualistic accounts of guidance in which the believer and the specific acts they have to perform are at the centre of attention.

The above considerations result in the following three models of guidance: Guidance through revelation, guidance through intimation, and guidance through transformation. I will now sketch each of the models by describing their theological essentials, the resulting praxis of guidance, a number of remarks on the specifics of the argument upon which the view is based, and examples of authors who take the view described.

5. Model 1: Guidance through revelation

The first, and among evangelicals most common, model of guidance is the one where guidance takes place through forms of revelation. At its core is the conviction that God has a detailed will or plan for the life of every individual believer. Throughout their lives, and especially at crucial junctures, God will provide ‘road-signs’¹⁶ to show individuals which way has to be taken or which decision is to be made. Thus, basic assumptions of this model are that 1) God has such a ‘plan’ and 2) He does reveal it to believers. To do justice to proponents of this model, it is important to understand that most adherents explicitly subordinate the revelatory status of the directions to that of Scripture, acknowledging that subjectivity has a huge influence. Most authors would presumably not speak of guidance as revelation, but as a very specific *application* of what has already been revealed.¹⁷

Within this model, differences exist on a number of issues. Thus, the more charismatic authors reckon with concrete divine speaking, while others concentrate on different forms of direction, like specific applications from Scripture or peculiar circumstances. Furthermore, some authors focus

only on major decisions, while others include even minor details.

The *praxis* of perceiving divine guidance mainly consists of paying attention to the various directions God provides. A key idea of this praxis is that God does, so to say, speak ‘in stereo’, that is, the signs support and reinforce each other. In the words of Tim LaHaye, ‘[w]hen the road signs begin to line up in a straight line, we know we’re properly approaching the “runway” to God’s will. It’s a matter of coordination.’¹⁸ The forms of divine direction most commonly mentioned are application of biblical material, specific answers to prayer, circumstances (‘open and closed doors’) and – unsolicited – advice from fellow believers. Others also include the inner voice of the Spirit, inner peace or a strong ‘burden’. Major differences exist regarding the value of personal desires, gifts and common sense as features of guidance.¹⁹ Contributions of this model of guidance often propose a set of ‘steps’ or a ‘method’ (sometimes in an almost algorithmic fashion) to ‘find’ the will of God.²⁰ Especially the notion of *finding* the will of God is frequently encountered within this type, displaying the presupposition that God has already provided something to find, or that he will do so when convenient.

The *argument* for this model is most often based on the author’s view of God and on a straightforward application of biblical narratives, Old and New Testaments alike. The deduction from the author’s view of God to the model generally takes the following form: God is love, hence his will is always best for us. God is all-knowing, so his directions are always right. God’s love for some also ensures that he will not let us miss out on what he intends for us.²¹ With regard to the biblical material, Old Testament guidance narratives play a crucial role, with sometimes entire books being structured around them.²²

Prominent *authors* who propose a version of this model of guidance are Tim LaHaye, Henry and Richard Blackaby, Peter Masters, Charles Stanley and Jack Hayford.²³

6. Model 2: Guidance through intimation

The second model of guidance encountered in evangelical literature can be described as guidance through intimation. The word intimation and the related verb ‘to intimate’ stress the subtlety of the kind of guidance described by the view. Besides, they also bring with them the connotation of an

intimacy of relationship.²⁴ Both aspects are of central importance to this model. Proponents of this model maintain that God has a distinct will for the individual believer and that he promises to somehow make it known. Yet, they would not speak of 'searching' the will of God as an activity that belongs to the essentials of the Christian life. Instead, they stress the importance of growing into an intimate relationship with God in Christ. The result of this growth will then be an ever-increasing awareness of the indwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of the believer and a growing ability to hear his 'still small voice' within.²⁵

Yet those who hold this model generally are not naïve and they know that in focusing on the heart the risk of subjectivism looms large. They acknowledge that the Spirit is not the only one who speaks to the human heart, but that other spirits and personal inclinations also strive for its attention. Therefore, in their *praxis*, they introduce the ancient concept of *discernment* as a crucial part of Christian praxis. The discernment proposed is not a method or a skill,²⁶ but an active perception of the promptings of the Spirit within. In developing their concept of discernment, some authors draw explicitly on Ignatian spirituality and its ideas of consolation and desolation, inner peace and inner turmoil, as decisive concepts. Other forms of divine communication are not excluded, but in the words of Dallas Willard, 'the more spectacular is the less mature'.²⁷ For those matured in their discernment, no spectacular acts of God are necessary to convey his guidance. The major role of discernment in this model also reflects on the humility with which interpretations must be held. Whereas in the first model most authors try to achieve certainty regarding the will of God, authors of the second type are generally aware that discernment is and remains a human activity; hence its results are fallible.²⁸

Key *argumentative* features underlying this second model are the idea of the 'still, small voice of God' as derived from 1 Kings 19 and the tradition of thought on the discernment of the spirits, with a primary role for the Ignatian and Wesleyan contributions. In general, a salvation-historical approach is taken to biblical narratives. As a result, Old Testament narratives are not portrayed as being straightforwardly applicable, as in the first model. The focus is on the New Testament concept of the *indwelling* of the Spirit and the mainline Protestant tradition is criticised for its denial of personal communication of the Spirit.

Key *representatives* of this model of divine guidance are Dallas Willard, Klaus Bockmühl, Gordon Smith and David Benner.²⁹

7. Model 3: Guidance through transformation

The third model of guidance, which we called guidance through *transformation*, is closely related to what in earlier typologies was described as the wisdom view. At its base lies the classical theological distinction between the revealed and the hidden will of God (resp. *voluntas signi* and *voluntas beneplaciti*). The major consequence drawn from this distinction is that what God thinks necessary to reveal of his will is already revealed in full in Scripture. Although the details of individual lives are included in God's hidden will, there is neither reason nor promise to expect additional divine revelation or communication.³⁰ This does not mean, however, that God does not guide believers. What it does imply, is that any guidance is less concrete and more process-oriented. Although it is not made explicit in contributions of this type, this form of guidance becomes an aspect of the sanctification of the believer. In other literature, especially in contributions advocating the first model, this view is regularly accused of being deistic.³¹ From the perspective of the present typology, it will be clear that this is a misunderstanding. The main difference between the views is not whether God is actively involved in guidance, but whether his presence is revelatory or transformative.

Practically, this model shifts the believer's main responsibility from finding the will of God or discerning his voice within them to making wise decisions and bearing full responsibility for them. Friesen, for example, formulates his four basic statements as follows:

Where God commands, we must obey.

Where there is no command, God gives us freedom (and responsibility) to choose.

Where there is no command, God gives us wisdom to choose.

When we have chosen what is moral and wise, we must trust the sovereign God to work all the details together for good.³²

What is clear from these statements is that freedom, responsibility and wisdom play different roles here than in the other models. The required wisdom and maturity are both gracious gifts of God and the result of certain spiritual disciplines, again in

close parallel to Protestant theological accounts of sanctification. Prayer, Bible reading, meditation and study, and the formative influence of the Christian community are key here. Among the authors who advocate this model of guidance, different stances exist towards forms of direct guidance. Those differences are closely related to the disputes on cessationism within evangelicalism.³³

With regard to the *arguments* supporting this model, it moves most in line with classic theological accounts of divine providence and sanctification. With regard to the biblical material, and especially the narratives, a strong salvation-historical approach is taken with an emphasis on Hebrews 1:2: Jesus is the final Word of God. As a result, the focus is on the New Testament paraenetic teaching and less on the more narrative parts of the Bible.

Key *representatives* of this model of guidance through transformation are not only Garry Friesen, but also Bruce Waltke, Jay Adams, James Petty and Kevin DeYoung.³⁴

8. Merits and limitations of the proposed typology

Like any typology, the one presented in this article has both its merits and its limitations. One of its main merits is that it spells out, more than the existing typologies did, that underneath different views on guidance important *theological* issues are at stake. This result is obtained by abstracting from the often practically oriented literature with its focus on what the individual believer can or should do to receive or understand divine guidance. Instead, by focusing on the question of what the theological nature of guidance is, a deeper understanding of the underlying similarities and dissimilarities between the models has been reached. This deepened understanding, in its turn, will lead to new questions to ask and new venues to investigate. Thus, the new typology will be valuable because it helps us to trace the issues at stake and highlight the implications of each of the various positions in their pure(st) form.

That being said, however, we should note that the proposed models cannot do full justice to the intricacies of the many individual positions, most of which cannot be neatly categorised. A typology like the one presented will always remain something of a construct, even when based upon prolonged study and analysis of many individual examples. As Richard Niebuhr argued with regard to another typology:

When one returns from the hypothetical scheme to the rich complexity of individual events, it is evident at once that no person or group ever conforms completely to a type. Each historical figure will show characteristics that are more reminiscent of some other family than the one by whose name he has been called, or traits will appear that seem wholly unique and individual.³⁵

This limitation of any, and hence also our, typology also means that it is possible to add further categories or subdivide the current models.³⁶ Yet, as this is an initial exposition of different models of guidance in evangelicalism, a concise typology with sharply delineated models that are characterised by a single focus does best fit our purposes.³⁷

9. Theological questions to be answered

In the previous section it was claimed that the typology of guidance developed here provides insight into the underlying theological questions at stake. The present section mentions a number of issues that are mostly not discussed explicitly in evangelical accounts of guidance but that need to be developed in order to arrive at more robust theologies and more informed spiritualities of guidance.

Firstly, the discussion on guidance needs to be informed by thorough hermeneutical reflection, with a special focus on the role of Old Testament narratives for the contemporary Christian life.³⁸ Especially the question what kind of applications can be validly drawn needs to be answered.

Secondly, it is remarkable that in a discourse where ‘the will of God’ is key terminology little interaction with the doctrine of *providence* takes place. Is God’s guidance distinct from his (special) providence, or part of it? What does it mean for divine providence that in some views believers can either find and obey or miss out on the will of God? And how can a view on guidance be influenced by the fact that in many classical theological accounts of providence God’s activity of guiding (*gubernatio*) his creation towards its destination plays a major role?

Thirdly, it is relevant to distinguish between what qualifies as divine *revelation* and other forms of divine communication. If inner voices or special ‘signs’ carry divine authority, what then is their theological status? Furthermore, what is the place of subjectivity and objectivity within an account of

revelation?

Fourthly, and this is not only a challenge to evangelical theology but to Western systematic theology in its entirety, an account has to be developed of the Spirit's *indwelling* of believers and of his ministry of *illumination*. In how far does the presence of the Spirit in the heart mean that the inclinations of the heart can now be trusted? And is discernment needed to distinguish what comes out of the own heart from what the Spirit works within the heart? Furthermore, in stating that the Spirit illuminates, do we first of all have in mind his enlightening our interpretation or our specific application of Scripture?

Fifthly, the differences of opinion on the nature of divine guidance are also reflected in divergent views on the closely related issue of vocation or calling. Given the original background of the protestant concept of vocation (*vis-à-vis* the Catholic hierarchy of contemplative and active lives), the critique leveraged against it in the twentieth century from various perspectives, and the changed context (from a relative static society to a highly dynamic one), it is clear that the concepts of vocation and calling need to be rethought and reframed in order to retain their use in the life of the Church. It would be logical to do so in close parallel with reflection on the nature of divine guidance.

Sixthly, the major differences of opinion on the value of personal inclinations, longings, plans and gifts of believers suggest that there is uncertainty about the connection between sin and sanctification and their consequences. Are the consequences of sin so pervasive that the faithful need to suspect their own heart throughout their life, or can they instead trust on the transforming grace of God and as a result follow their heart? Most contributors to the discussion on guidance would deny neither side, but they are not clear on what it means practically to maintain both.

Seventhly, additional research is necessary on the meaning of the related concepts of discernment and Christian wisdom. With regard to discernment, what is especially important is clarity on the question what the object of discernment must be. Traditionally, discernment featured mainly as discernment *of the spirits* and often in the context of prophecy. The question is whether and how the concept can be fruitfully applied in the context of guidance and concrete decision-making. Concerning wisdom, the main question to be answered is what makes wisdom into genu-

ine *Christian* wisdom. In this regard, the renewed interest in virtue ethics – especially the virtue of *prudence* – and character formation within the field of Christian ethics could be a promising line of thought to follow.

Finally, the interest in guidance is closely related to the return of discipleship language over the last century. From this perspective, a number of interesting questions can be raised on the nature of guidance. For example, what does it mean to be a follower and a learner of Christ? How is the idea of the disciple bearing their cross after Christ related to the rather successful picture of the Christian life presented in some of the accounts of guidance, where 'success' can even be a 'sign' of God's approval? On the other hand, does the notion of cross-bearing imply, as some authors suggest, that God's will is most likely the most difficult and unattractive of all alternatives? And could an approach to guidance that advocates wisdom as a central category impel believers to a life of sacrifice?

10. Conclusion

It will be clear by now that it is crucial for evangelicalism to develop a theologically more robust account of divine guidance that takes into account the major theological questions developed in the previous section. In this way, the present article emphasizes the need for theological study and analysis of the generally accepted discourse on divine guidance and the will of God. Its almost exclusive treatment in popular and pastoral literature has already led to a lot of ambiguity and will continue to do so without careful theological reflection on the underlying questions and assumptions.

Unfortunately, no satisfactory typology of guidance as perceived in contemporary evangelicalism was available as a point of departure for such theological reflection. For that reason, this article proposes a new and concise typology, which we believe could function as such a point of departure. Because it takes a theological and not a practical approach, one of the strengths of the typology is that it immediately makes clear the theological questions that are at stake.

Ultimately, a typology also indicates that a choice has to be made when thinking, speaking or writing about guidance. Although it was attempted to present the types in a way that does full justice to the different approaches encountered in the literature, a typology of this kind remains

a construct. Thus, a few different approaches can be taken in positioning oneself in the field. Given that at least some differences between the various models are irreconcilable, it is logically impossible to accept all of them. Theologians and believers alike then, are left with four options with regard to guidance: rejecting all current evangelical models and propose an alternative, endorsing one of the described models, applying different models in dealing with different situations, or combining and harmonising any two of the models. The first option seems unnecessary, while the other three are practised already, either consciously or unconsciously, by many. Whatever choice one makes, it seems advisable to do so consciously and to choose a ‘dominant type’, because in practice it is clear that although the different types can co-exist theologically to a certain extent, they result in widely divergent spiritualities.

C. (Kees) van der Knijff MA is a PhD candidate at the Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His address is c/o PThU, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Endnotes

- * This article is part of a larger research project on the topic of divine guidance. The focus of the overarching project is on the way guidance can be conceived in a theologically robust way within the contours of a Reformed theological framework. In it, we try to address the theological questions formulated in the latter part of the present essay. I thank Professor Gijsbert van den Brink, David Murray and two anonymous reviewers of the journal for their helpful remarks on an earlier version of this article.
- 1 Williams originally wrote the hymn in Welsh in 1745. After the first verse was translated into English by a Rev. Peter Williams in 1771, William Williams published his own English translation in Lady Huntingdon’s Collection in 1772. For more background information, see e.g. Louis F. Benson, *Studies of Familiar Hymns Second Series* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1923) 68–79.
- 2 Joseph Bayly, *Essays on Guidance* (Chicago: IVP, 1968) preface.
- 3 To give an impression of the quantity of material on the topic: For this article 39 books published between 1980 and 2010 were used, and this amount could be increased.
- 4 Interestingly, exceptions apart, most authors included in our selection possess at least one academic title and served as professors at seminaries

- or universities. However, their publications on guidance are, again with the proverbial exception, written for a broader lay audience, and pastoral in nature.
- 5 A full list of the titles used can be requested from the author. The present article will include the most prominent examples in our discussion of the various views. Given the nature of the material no guarantee of completeness can be given, but based on the number of publications involved we believe the typology to present an adequate overview of the field.
- 6 See for two influential examples F.B. Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1896) and Andrew Murray, *Thy Will Be Done* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1900).
- 7 An interesting general account of how the number of choices to be made by individuals nowadays has dramatically increased is found in Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice. Why More is Less* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).
- 8 Garry Friesen and J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1980).
- 9 See the classification of the reviews of other books on guidance in e.g. the 25th anniversary edition of his book or on his personal website, www.gfriesen.net/sections/book_reviews.php [accessed 20-10-2015].
- 10 James C. Petty, *Step by Step. Divine Guidance for Ordinary Christians* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1999) 29–32. In a footnote Petty even adds a fourth category, the ‘priestly view’, characterized by the decisive role of either church offices or a strong charismatic leader.
- 11 Stephen D. Kovach, ‘Toward a Theology of Guidance. A Multi-Faceted Approach Emphasizing Scripture as Both Foundation and Pattern in Discerning the Will of God’ (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1999) 3.
- 12 See Kovach, ‘Toward a Theology of Guidance’, 12.
- 13 Gordon T. Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice. The Art of Discerning God’s Will* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997) 16.
- 14 Douglas S. Huffman (ed.), *How Then Should We Choose? Three Views on God’s Will and Decision Making* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009). The authors involved are Henry and Richard Blackaby, Garry Friesen and Gordon T. Smith. In the final part of the book, Huffman provides a categorised bibliography of many books on guidance, in which it becomes clear that combining positions is more the standard than the exception.
- 15 Thus far, we have adopted the terminology of different *views* that is used in the literature on guidance. From now on, in order to be as precise as possible, we will use *view* when discussing the contribution of a particular author and *model* when we describe a

- group of authors whose views share common characteristics. The resulting *typology* is the overview of the existing models.
- 16 See e.g. Tim F. LaHaye, *Finding the Will of God in a Crazy, Mixed-up World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 85.
- 17 Nonetheless, I chose to label this particular view 'guidance through revelation' because the combination of the application of Scripture with confirmation from a number of other 'signs' makes it difficult to maintain that no additional and distinct message is included. Especially the high status ascribed to circumstances as a message or directive from God points in this direction.
- 18 LaHaye, *Finding the Will of God*, 112.
- 19 So, for example, Blackaby is quite negative about these (Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God. Knowing and Doing the Will of God* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008] 35), whereas LaHaye is remarkably positive about the importance of common sense given the overall contours of his contribution, LaHaye, *Finding the Will of God*, 109.
- 20 For this methodological focus, see for example Derek Cleave, *How to Know God's Will* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1985) 68, who proposes 'a procedure that can be followed in endeavoring to find out just what God wants us to do in this situation' and especially LaHaye, *Finding the Will of God*, 8, 21, who illustrates 'biblical techniques that can help you to make the difficult decisions that will mold the course of your life' and who secures his readers that 'by the time you finish this book, you, too, will be equipped to make right decisions about finding God's will for your life'.
- 21 However, for some authors this is no guarantee that by being disobedient or by paying no attention we cannot actually 'miss' God's best for us. LaHaye, for example, argues that Romans 12:1-2 means three 'levels' of God's will and that by making the wrong decision believers do actually end up on a lower level of God's will. Most authors do not go this far but the consequences of 'missing' God's will often remain obscure.
- 22 E.g. Jack W. Hayford, *Pursuing the Will of God. Reflections and Meditations on the Life of Abraham* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1997) draws lessons on guidance from the life of Abraham.
- 23 LaHaye, *Finding the Will of God*; Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God. Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1990); J. Oswald Sanders, *Every Life Is a Plan of God. Discovering His Will for Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1992); Charles F. Stanley, *How to Listen to God* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1985); Hayford, *Pursuing the Will of God*.
- 24 Although this connotation often seems to be lost in contemporary English, both the verb 'to intimate' and the adjective 'intimate' are derived from the Latin *intimare*.
- 25 The terminology, derived mainly from 1 Kings 19, is also frequently encountered in accounts of the first type, but plays a crucial role in the second type. See e.g. Dallas Willard, *Hearing God. Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999) 77.
- 26 See e.g. Smith, *Listening to God*, 33, who protests against the focus on method in especially the first type of guidance: 'When we formulate simplistic rules ... we cut the vital cord of communication between the believer and God.'
- 27 Willard, *Hearing God*, 103.
- 28 Willard, *Hearing God*, 177.
- 29 Willard, *Hearing God*; Klaus Bockmühl, *Listening to the God Who Speaks. Reflections on God's Guidance from Scripture and the Lives of God's People* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1990); Smith, *Listening to God*; David G. Benner, *Desiring God's Will. Aligning Our Hearts with the Heart of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005).
- 30 E.g., James Petty, *Step by Step*, 101, states that '[w]hat is often called the "individual will of God" should be seen simply as the application of God's commands and character to the specifics of our lives'; cf. Friesen and Maxson, *Decision Making*, 41; Haddon W. Robinson, *Decision-Making by the Book. How to Choose Wisely in an Age of Options* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1991) 24.
- 31 See e.g. James I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Guard Us, Guide Us. Divine Leading in Life's Decisions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 220. No one would say that a strong view on sanctification fits well within a deistic account.
- 32 Friesen and Maxson, *Decision Making*, 14–15.
- 33 Jay Adams, for example, is very radical in his rejection of any direct forms of guidance whereas authors like Friesen and DeYoung are more open to them, but stress that they are exceptions instead of the rule. See Jay E. Adams, *The Christian's Guide to Guidance. How to Make Biblical Decisions in Everyday Life* (Woodruff: Timeless Texts, 1998) 25; Friesen and Maxson, *Decision Making*, 136; Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something. A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will, Or, How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, Etc.* (Chicago: Moody, 2009) 68.
- 34 Friesen and Maxson, *Decision Making*; Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God. A Pagan Notion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Adams, *The Christian's Guide to Guidance*; Petty, *Step by Step*; DeYoung, *Just Do Something*.
- 35 H. Richard Niebuhr on his famous typology on the relationship between Christianity and culture: *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, 1956) 43-44.

Yet Niebuhr continues to stress the importance of using types to call to attention ‘the continuity and significance of the great *motifs* that appear and reappear...’ (emphasis original).

- 36 At a number of points we highlighted differences within the proposed types that could be taken as possible venues for such further (sub)divisions.

E.g., in the third type the question of cessationism is a sensitive point.

- 37 Cf. e.g. Avery R. Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 26.
- 38 The same questions should also be asked with regard to, e.g., the book of Acts, but there the differences of opinion within the literature are smaller.