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Footnotes: My Own Hand + Dreyer's English + Remembering Don Haymes

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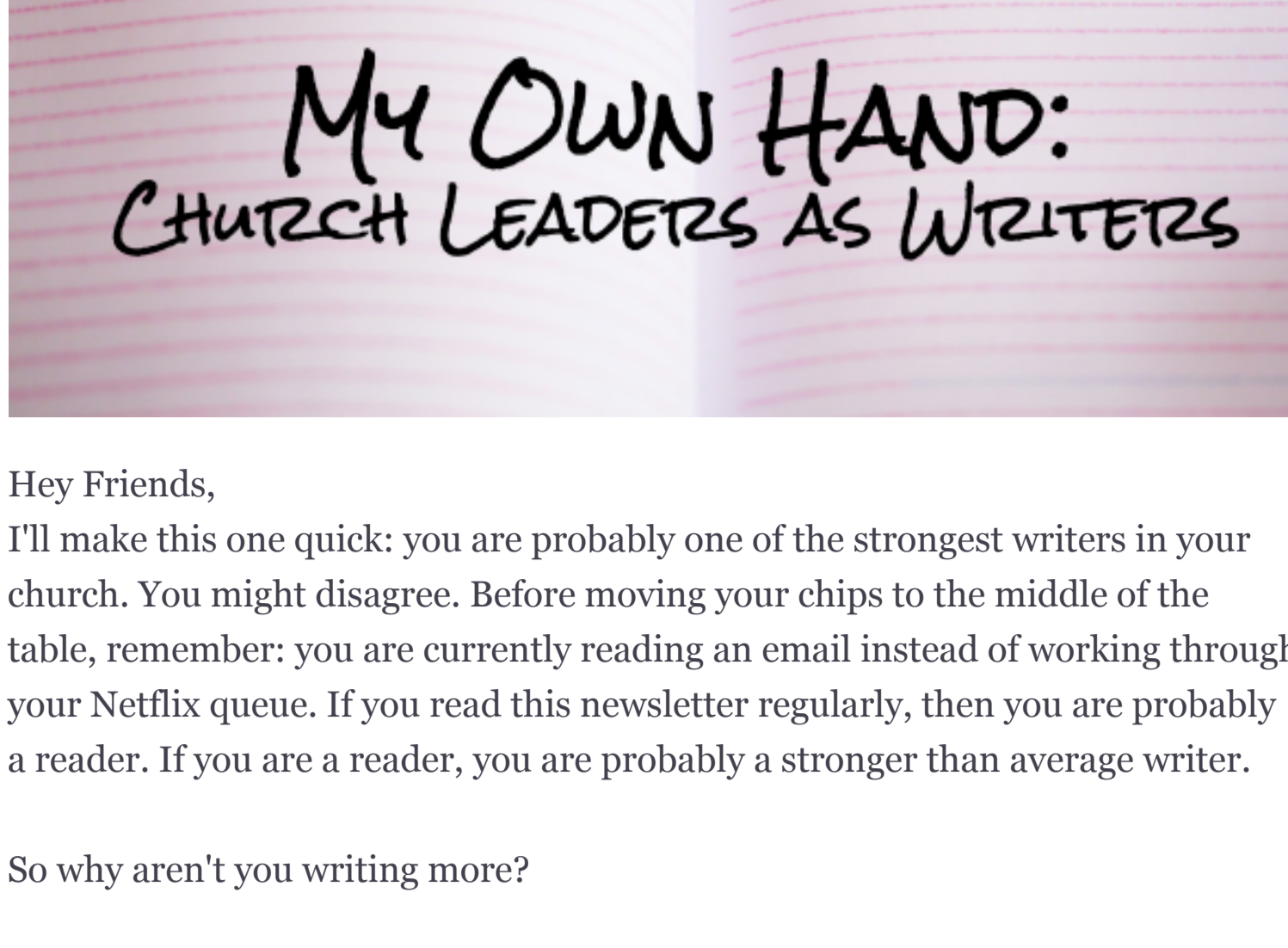
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Footnotes¹

¹Curated Resources for Ministers



Hey Friends,
I'll make this one quick: you are probably one of the strongest writers in your church. You might disagree. Before moving your chips to the middle of the table, remember: you are currently reading an email instead of working through your Netflix queue. If you read this newsletter regularly, then you are probably a reader. If you are a reader, you are probably a stronger than average writer.

So why aren't you writing more?

When I say "write" I don't mean "write books," though some of you have a few in you that haven't yet made it to print. By writing, I really mean stories, reflections, and points of view. I mean online posts, journal entries, obituaries, and bulletin articles. ESPN reporter Sal Paolantonio recently said that he writes handwritten thank-you notes to every person he interviews. Some youth ministers write letters to every student they baptize. I have friends who write journals that they give to loved ones at graduations, birthdays, or anniversaries.

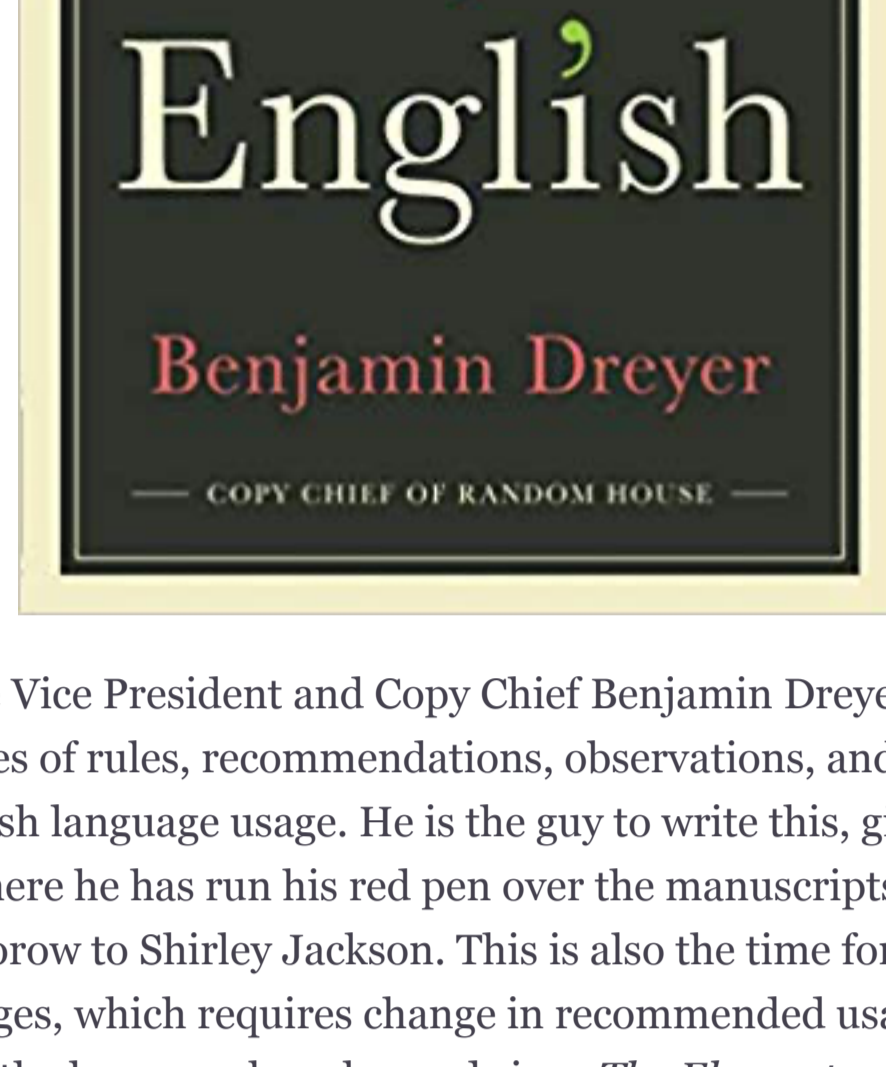
When we write, we aren't simply recording our reflections. Writing is our reflection. Our thinking takes shape *during* our writing process, including our editing process (and even after our writing process when we read what we have written). Writing is part of doing theology. So we should do more of it. And we should do it well.

Today I'd like to talk about writing. In this issue of *Footnotes* you will find:

- A brief review of *Dreyer's English*.
- A tribute to Don Haymes
- *A Few More Footnotes*.



Dreyer's English



Random House Vice President and Copy Chief Benjamin Dreyer has published nearly 300 pages of rules, recommendations, observations, and opinions related to English language usage. He is the guy to write this, given his career in copyediting, where he has run his red pen over the manuscripts of everyone from E.L. Doctorow to Shirley Jackson. This is also the time for this work. Language changes, which requires change in recommended usage. I love Strunk and White, but the language has changed since *The Elements of Style* (which I require as a textbook). When people say that they "could care less," they mean they don't care, even though their wording left room to care less, if taken literally. But we know not to take them literally, since we also know that since Strunk's time the word *literal* has become a type of exclamation point to designate emotional intensity rather than a claim to factual historicity. That's a long way of saying that this book was needed and I'm really glad Dreyer wrote it. Here are a few takeaways:

- *Dreyer's English* has many of the same features as Strunk and White (commonly confused words, frequent misspellings, etc). It has a slightly different tone, however. Dreyer is just as certain (even sarcastic) as Strunk and White. Yet his recommendations feel like they come from a conversation with cultural norms, spoken English, and common sense, whereas the *The Elements of Style* can come off as an authoritative word from the English professor. If William Strunk was Moses coming down from Sinai with the Law, Benjamin Dreyer is a rabbi who has collected all of the legal interpretations and tried to make sense of them in a single document.
- Preachers should give attention to his tips on storytelling (108). I've found that some of the best oral stories have short sentences and a lot of repetition. This is one reason I think some narrative preaching fails. The stories look great on paper but aren't particularly engaging to the ear.
- Go ahead and photocopy his section on apostrophes (36-39) and distribute it to every burger joint, nail salon, and auto body in town whose outdoor changeable signage markets "double cheeseburger's," "pedicure's," and "15-minute oil change's." Eek!
- That is *eke* as in anxious fear, not *eke* like making something happen, just barely. For more of these, check out The Confusables chapter --as it includes: affect/effect, assure/ensure/insure, criterion/criteria, discreet/d iscrete, imply/infer, lay/lie/laid/lain, reluctant/reticent, than/then, and many other words that often get jumbled.
- If you enjoyed Mary Norris's 2015 *Between You and Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen*, you'll enjoy *Dreyer's English*. Her book is more narrative, while his comes in bullet points and lists.
- Don't purchase a copy of *Dreyer's English* for the publisher of your church bulletin or website (though I do wish they'd read it). My recommendation for church publications: less is more. More words means more content that is dated, unclear, and incorrect. I tend to prefer words over pictures for most things, but for volunteer-generated church-based content I'd go with pictures, which never have typos. Further, more words means more editorial time, which means less likelihood of finding others who have the time to review it, which means more errors. Or, you could pack your pews with people who could care less about spelling and grammar.
- I don't recommend doing that, however. Not to get preachy, but this is an important issue, especially for students entering the job market. As one CEO said, "[If it takes someone more than 20 years to notice how to properly use 'it's,' then that's not a learning curve I'm comfortable with.](#)"
- And because you are now wondering, Dreyer is fine with ending a sentence with a preposition.



Remembering Don Haymes (1940-2019)

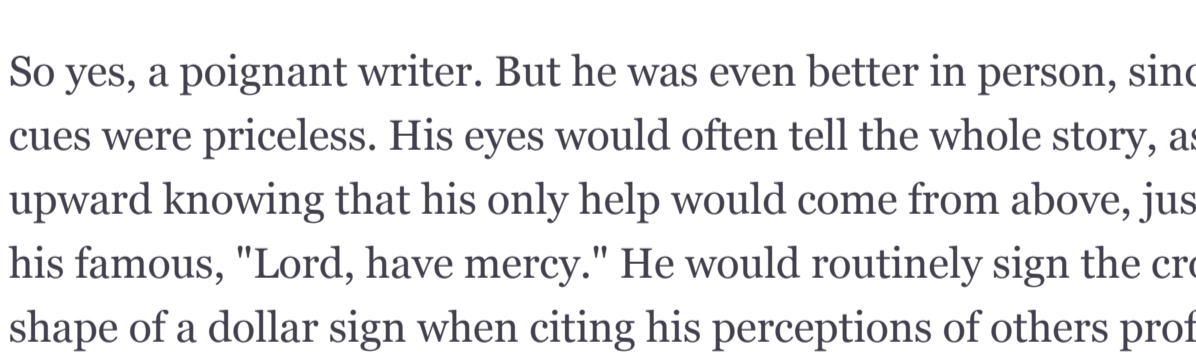
I was saddened to hear of the recent death of my friend Don Haymes (Donas Jackson Haymes, III).

Don's academic work included stops at multiple Christian colleges--before landing at Southwestern (now Rhodes College) and Harvard Divinity School. His professional work included social justice in New York and Memphis, in addition to academic work at Mercer University Press, Sewanee, the American Theological Library Association, and Christian Theological Seminary. Don would insist that his many stops around the academic globe reflected the fact that institutions didn't fully appreciate his genius. Many students have claimed this. In Don's case, he was probably right.

He was ahead of his time. He insisted that black lives mattered long before #BlackLivesMatter, and talked about gender before everyone knew of a few Churches of Christ in town who at least would entertain the question of gender inclusion.

He was a poet. Even though he often wrote without capital letters (like e e cummings), his words carried a certain bravado. He was a major source for my [oral history of Mission](#) that I published in 2017. He recited tales from 50 years ago as if they were recent. He even detailed meetings to which he was not invited (but when I confirmed his recollection with those who did attend, they conceded that his "memory" was accurate). Listening to him talk was like listening to a theological thesaurus mixed with an editorial from *Harper's* or *The Atlantic*. Every word was perfect--and every word begged for more elaboration, which he would soon provide.

His works in *Mission*, such as "Christ of the Gospels," *Mission 2* (1968) and "The Silence of the Scholars," *Mission 8* (1974) cemented his place as a gadfly of the Stone-Campbell Movement. But none of these written works carried the punch of the visual he produced in 1966, which established him as the *The Babylon Bee* before *The Babylon Bee*. I'm still not sure how anyone could produce something of this scale at the age of 26, given how many personalities are characterized. The whimsical quality of the sketch even includes naming himself as a sheep in wolves' clothing.



So yes, a poignant writer. But he was even better in person, since his nonverbal cues were priceless. His eyes would often tell the whole story, as he would look upward knowing that his only help would come from above, just before uttering his famous, "Lord, have mercy." He would routinely sign the cross, but in the shape of a dollar sign when citing his perceptions of others profiting on the gospel. He had a massive smile and his bellowing laugh usually echoed when he found himself incredulous, which was often. If you want to know more about him, check out [Restoring the First-Century Church in the Twenty-First Century: Essays on the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement in Honor of Don Haymes](#).

I appreciate the time he gave me and others, who would sit around and listen to him hold court on his favorite topics, such as the mix of conservative politics and religion, skepticism of the powerful, the ills of materialism, and recommendations of more articles than any of us could ever collect, much less read. And if you really wanted to get him going, just ask whether you should trash all of your print materials on the assumption that Kindle and Google Books would preserve all of them for the common good. That conversation would probably end with him signing the dollar sign cross.

I will miss his stories and his encouragement that we should pursue truth in all things. I will miss his integrity, and the way that a belief in the counter-cultural way of Jesus should be reflected in a life that is counter-cultural. I will miss his mix of reverence and resistance, always encouraging me to "continue your significant work with that irreplaceable, sacred collection at Hardly a Graduate School of Religion." I will mostly just miss him. Churches of Christ have been called a peculiar people. Don was peculiar in the best sense of the word.

Lord, have mercy.



A Few More Footnotes

1. Smith says a church into a neighborhood church? [C. Christopher Smith](#) says we need to emphasize proximity.
2. "It's about being entertained in the gathering." [Matt Chandler's diagnosis and cure](#) for the overstimulation (and under-discipleship) of the church.



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UPCOMING
June 17
My Own Hand, Part Two

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