



themelios

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DESCRIPTION

Themelios is an international evangelical theological journal that expounds and defends the historic Christian faith. Its primary audience is theological students and pastors, though scholars read it as well. It was formerly a print journal operated by [RTSF/UCCF](#) in the UK, and it became a digital journal operated by [The Gospel Coalition](#) in 2008. The new editorial team seeks to preserve representation, in both essayists and reviewers, from both sides of the Atlantic.

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The book review editors generally select individuals for book reviews, but potential reviewers may contact them about reviewing specific books. As part of arranging book reviews, the book review editors will supply book review guidelines to reviewers.

EDITORIAL

— D. A. Carson —

D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

In many parts of the evangelical world, one hears a new debate—or, more precisely, new chapters in an old debate—regarding the precise place that “deeds of mercy” ought to have in Christian witness. I am not talking about the perennial debate between left-wing and right-wing economic solutions, that is, between those who think there will be more social justice and less poverty if the government takes a greater share of the nationally produced wealth and distributes it more equitably, and those who think there will be more social justice and less poverty where government legislation offers carrot-and-stick incentives to help people get off welfare rolls and become less dependent on initiative-killing generosity, while providing a safety net for those truly incapable of helping themselves. I am talking, rather, about the debate between those Christians who say that we should primarily be about the business of heralding the gospel and planting churches, and those who say that our responsibility as Christians extends to the relief of oppression, suffering, and poverty in all their forms.

Both sides cite impressive historical precedents. Under the ministry of Howell Harris, George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and those associated with them, the gospel, faithfully preached, transformed the *social* face of England. What receives the most press is the work of Wilberforce in driving through parliament legislation that shut down the slave trade and eventually abolished slavery throughout the British Empire. But movements led by Methodist converts also formed and directed trade unions that tamed the ugliest aspects of the Industrial Revolution, passed legislation that reformed prisons (not least the notorious debtors prisons), drove up the minimum age at which children could work (which took five-year-olds out of the mines), and took the first steps toward universal literacy. For about sixty years, the movement accomplished an astounding amount of social good, *while preserving the primacy of preaching the gospel and winning converts.*

On the other hand, the experience of many churches in the West from about 1880 to 1925 provides another trajectory that many thoughtful Christians today fear. The gospel came increasingly to be identified with progress; the gospel itself was progressively diluted. At least until the outbreak of WWI, the optimism was contagious, intoxicating, and naive. Christian mission, increasingly understood in an expansive fashion, eventually started *replacing* the preaching of the gospel with deeds of mercy (or, from the perspective of those adopting this stance, the gospel was increasingly redefined). To preserve a show of unity, the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 simply didn’t bother with tough-minded and biblically-framed notions of the gospel. Unity was preserved; substance was lost. Once the confessional evangelicals picked themselves up and reorganized, many of them vowed not to make the same mistake again. They tended to underline the proclamation of the Word and downplay or, in some instances, disown the responsibility to engage in deeds of mercy in Christ’s name.

That, at least, is the way the story is regularly told. Recent studies both in the UK and the US modify the account somewhat. Apparently, a disproportionate number of conservative evangelicals give their time to organizations such as UNICEF, World Relief, and Save the Children, so when it comes to actual boots on the ground, the polarity between conservatives and liberals is not, in practice, what is often portrayed.

Recently these and related matters were discussed over three days by a group of about fifty pastors. These pastors approached the subject out of the conviction that gospel proclamation must occupy pride of place in our priorities, but they represented quite different positions on what follows from this, some of them hoping for a new Evangelical Awakening and others fearful of a new round of gospel-destroying liberalism. A fair bit of time was then devoted to scanning relevant biblical passages: the parable of the good Samaritan, serving as salt and light in a world that is both corrupt and dark, doing good to all people (especially those of the household of faith), and so forth. And finally, there was, I think a broad consensus that Christians who understand the priority of preparing people for eternity must also help people here and now, and that gospel proclamation must not be set antithetically against deeds of mercy. Far from it: many of the pastors and the Christians they served were heavily involved in an array of strategic ministries. It was, of course, immediately recognized that *how* one discharges such responsibilities will vary enormously from community to community, from country to country, for the needs vary hugely, almost beyond comprehension. Still, we returned again and again to this pointed question: *Granted that we ought to be engaged in acts of mercy, what safeguards can be set in place so as to minimize the risk that the deeds of mercy will finally swamp the proclamation of the gospel and the passionate desire to see men and women reconciled to God by faith in Christ Jesus and his atoning death and resurrection?*

Two stood out.

First, it is helpful to distinguish between the responsibilities of the church *qua* church and the responsibilities of Christians. Some writers flip back and forth between references to “Christians” and references to “church” as if there is no difference whatsoever. But many Christian thinkers, from Kuyperians to Baptists, have argued that if the church *qua* church is responsible for some of these substantial works of mercy, such works of mercy ought to come under the leaders of the church. It is very difficult to find any warrant for that step in the New Testament. Even before there were pastors/elders/overseers, the apostles themselves, according to Acts, recognized that they should not be diverted from the ministry of the Word and prayer, even by the inequities of food distribution among the faithful, so they saw to it that others were appointed to tackle the problem. Ministers of the gospel ought so to be teaching the Bible in all its comprehensiveness that they will be raising up believers with many different avenues of service, but they themselves must not become so embroiled in such multiplying ministries that their ministries of evangelism, Bible teaching, making disciples, instructing, baptizing, and the like, somehow get squeezed to the periphery and take on a purely formal veneer.

Second, one pastor astutely urged, “Preach hell.” Two things follow from this. (1) By adopting this priority we remind ourselves that as Christians we desire to relieve *all* suffering, from the temporal to the eternal. If we do not maintain such a panoramic vision, the relief of immediate suffering, as important as it is, may so command our focus that we fail to remind ourselves of Jesus’ rhetorical question, “What good will it be for you to gain the whole world yet forfeit your soul?” Read the closing lines of Revelation 14 and Revelation 20 when your vision becomes myopic. (2) As long as you are prepared to plead with

men and women to be reconciled to God and to flee the coming wrath, you are preserving something that is central in the Bible, something that is intimately and irrefragably tied to the gospel itself—and those who want to shunt such themes aside and focus *only* on the relief of present suffering will not want to have much to do with you. Thus you will be free to preach and teach the *whole* counsel of God and to relieve *all* suffering, temporal and eternal, without being drawn into endless alliances in which people never focus on anything beyond threescore years and ten.



MINORITY REPORT

The Second Most Important Book You Will Ever Read

— Carl Trueman —

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and Professor of Historical Theology and Church History at Westminster
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In the lounge next to my office hang the portraits of a number of the founding faculty of my institution, Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. There is one of John Murray, the dour-looking Scotsman with the glass eye. Legend has it that you could tell which eye was the real one because that was the one which did not smile. There is one of Ned Stonehouse, whose good looks in early faculty photos would seem more appropriate to a Hollywood heart-throb of the 1930s than a learned professor of New Testament. Then above the fireplace, now somewhat moth-eaten and in need of restoration, is the magnificent portrait of the founder of the Seminary, the great J. Gresham Machen, a name synonymous with both exacting orthodox scholarship on the New Testament and, more than that, valiant struggle for the truth in both church and seminary.

Machen had a stellar academic background: he studied at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, then Princeton Seminary under the great B. B. Warfield, and also in Germany where his mind was set on fire by the passionate liberalism of the wild yet brilliant Wilhelm Herrmann. Yet in the 1920s and '30s he became a passionate advocate for Christian orthodoxy amidst the conflicts that were shaking both Princeton, where he was a professor, and the Presbyterian Church of which he was a member and an office-bearer. The result of these conflicts was the founding of (1) Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929 as an institution committed to continuing the teaching of theology according to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms and (2) the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936 as a church committed to maintaining biblical church standards in doctrine and life.

Machen also possessed a key quality which is evident in many of the great church leaders throughout history: the ability to write and communicate at both a high scholarly level (as in his book on the virgin birth) and at the level of the ordinary (if there is such a thing) believer in the pew, and to do the latter in a manner which is not condescending or patronizing. His was a rare gift indeed. Among the greatest examples of this in the Machen corpus is his remarkable little book, entitled simply *Christianity and Liberalism*, a book still kept in print by Eerdmans, the American publisher.

The thesis of the book is devastatingly simple: Christianity, built on the authoritative, divinely-inspired, inerrant revelation of God in Scripture, embodying a robust supernaturalism, and focused on the exclusivity of salvation in the person and work of Christ, is a different religion to that liberalism that repudiates each of these things.

In an age like ours, of course, where fuzzy boundaries, vagueness, doubt, and caution are supreme virtues, Machen's thesis is likely to appear both arrogant and overstated. But, as Machen himself says in the opening paragraphs, "In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight." There is insight here. Before we see Machen as too intolerant, too much a man of a bygone age, let us reflect on the fact that we live in an age that is remarkably certain and intolerant on a whole host of fronts, from racism to poverty to cruelty against animals to homophobia. Regardless of where we come down on each of these issues, very few of us will be indifferent on them, or particularly laissez-faire towards those with whom we disagree on these matters.

Thus, it is not really that Machen is a man of a bygone, intolerant age which makes this little book so offensive to modern ears. We should not flatter our own enlightened times so easily, for it is not the reality of intolerance in itself that has changed. Rather, it is that we now have a different set of issues that arouse intolerance, and this change reflects not only shifting values in society but also in the church, to the extent that she no longer stands intolerantly for her truth as she once did. The question is thus not whether we are intolerant: we surely are. The question is rather: Are we intolerant of the right things? As the value of religious truth has become negligible, so the passions aroused by such in the wider world have died down. That we do not fight over these things is not a virtue; it is rather be a sign that we just do not care about them any more, and that is the result of the downgrading of the Bible in our thinking. We no longer look on it as a book of divine truth and thus of almost unbearable importance; it is now a ragbag of disparate religious reflections, or a collection of texts reflecting on religious psychology, or simply a cacophony of ancient near-eastern tribal mythology.

For Machen, however, the Bible contains truth, and as such is ineradicably doctrinal. Indeed, one overarching concern in *Christianity and Liberalism* is simply the vital importance of Christian doctrine to the church: doctrine, he makes clear, is the very heart of Christian testimony. Claiming to honor the Bible without synthesizing the Bible's teaching into doctrine, into systematic theology, is not really honoring the Bible at all, for the Bible teaches truth, truth which is coherent and can be articulated; and regarding with indifference those things which the Bible clearly sees as important is, in some sense, the worst sin of all. In a memorable passage, Machen discusses how it was a tragedy that Luther and Zwingli fell out so badly over the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, but how it would have been an even greater tragedy had they simply agreed to differ on the grounds that the matter was of no importance.

Given this doctrinal concern, those who follow Machen in this regard are unlikely to win many friends or influence people in today's Christian world, where the great doctrines of the faith are often considered less significant than positions on social issues, whether it be the current conservative passion for Christian and home schooling, or the left's zeal for issues of social justice. Pragmatics—what we do, what results we achieve—has real priority over what we believe and stand for every time. Yet for those who wish to stand within the stream of historic, biblical Christianity, Machen's book represents a clarion call to action: Christians must realize the essentially doctrinal core of their faith and fearlessly stand upon such without compromise.

The book is also full of pithy sayings that repay careful reflection. Here are a few examples:

"Christ Died"—that is history; "Christ died for our sins"—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity (27).

When it is once admitted that a body of facts lies at the basis of the Christian religion, the efforts which past generations have made toward the classification of the facts will have to be treated with respect (46).

The modern liberal preacher reverences Jesus; he has the name of Jesus forever on his lips; he speaks of Jesus as the supreme revelation of God; he enters, or tries to enter, into the religious life of Jesus. But he does not stand in a religious relation to Jesus. Jesus for him is an example for faith, not the object of faith (85).

[L]iberalism within the “evangelical” churches is inferior to Unitarianism. It is inferior to Unitarianism in the matter of honesty. In order to maintain themselves in the evangelical churches and quiet the fears of their conservative associates, the liberals resort constantly to a double use of language (111).

Narrowness does not consist in definite devotion to certain convictions or in definite rejection of others. But the narrow man is the man who rejects the other man’s convictions without first endeavoring to understand them, the man who makes no effort to look at things from the other man’s point of view (160).

These are typical of the sentiments throughout the book. My own copy has barely a page without some paragraph, sentence, or clause underlined. It is refreshing to read a book that is as clearly thought out as it is written. But the bottom line is not Machen’s style or his logical precision or the passion of his rhetoric. It is his basic point: Christianity and liberalism are two different religions. The difference between them is not a quantitative one, of a system of 100% truth over against a system of 75% truth; rather it is a qualitative one of truth to falsehood, of worship to idolatry, of that which brings blessing to that which ultimately brings only a curse.

That is a crucial message for the church today, particularly for those involved in academic study. Certainly Christianity is no excuse for obscurantism. It is important—indeed, it is a Christian imperative—that we understand and treat fairly the views of opponents, whoever they may be. Intentionally to distort the views of an opponent in order to win an argument is a breach of the ninth commandment and not an option for a disciple of Christ. Nor is Christianity an excuse for being rude and curmudgeonly towards those with whom we disagree. But let us be clear: the supernatural Christianity of the authoritative and divinely inspired Scriptures stands in opposition to all other religious systems, even those that use Christian jargon while yet denying the faith’s basic foundations.

Study can be seductive. The realization that professors who spend their days undermining the faith are actually pretty decent people, interesting and delightful company, loving to their wives and children, and often more likeable than their orthodox counterparts, can produce crises of faith among students more often than many would imagine. The attractive power of real learning should never be underestimated. What Machen’s argument makes clear, however, is that truth is not personal. It is truth, and conformity with such is what is important, not whether we like the people advocating it or not. That Christ has died is fact. That he died for my sins is doctrine. That the person telling me this might be less likeable than that really decent and friendly professor who denies the resurrection is irrelevant.

Theological students should reach for Machen’s little book every year to remind themselves that orthodoxy does not equate to obscurantism, but that there is something really at stake here in the struggle between orthodox, supernatural Christianity and everything else. Indeed, I would venture to say that this is the second most important book that theologians could ever read. As to the first: well, if you don’t know what that is, read chapter four in *Christianity and Liberalism*, and hang your head in shame!

Salvation History, Chronology, and Crisis:¹ A Problem with Inclusivist Theology of Religions, PART 1 OF 2²

— Adam Sparks —

Dr. Sparks completed his PhD (Theology of Religions) at Bristol University in 2007, under the supervision of Professor Gavin D'Costa. He has been a part-time tutor at Bristol University and is currently a part-time sessional lecturer at the University of London (Birkbeck College). This article is an updated section of his thesis.

Abstract

A fundamental requirement in an inclusivist understanding of the relationship between Christianity and other religions is evidence of God's salvific activity outside of any knowledge of Christ. Evidence for such redemptive activity is commonly identified (rightly) in the people of Old Testament Israel. On this basis an analogy (the 'Israel analogy') is drawn between these Old Testament believers and contemporary followers of other religions. The Israel analogy relies on a correspondence between what is chronologically pre-messianic (Israel) and epistemologically pre-messianic (other religions), and in so doing considers the 'B.C. condition' to continue today. This two-part essay maintains that the analogy undermines the significance of the Christ-event in the unfolding plan of redemption by failing to appreciate the decisive effect of this event on history. The Christ-event is the midpoint of salvation history and is of universal significance for all space and time and for all people living both before and after the Christ-event itself.

Introduction

A fundamental requirement in an inclusivist understanding³ of the relationship between Christianity and other religions is the evidence of God's salvific activity outside of any knowledge of Christ. Evidence for such redemptive activity is commonly identified (rightly) in the people of Old Testament Israel. On this basis an analogy (hereafter referred to as the 'Israel analogy') is drawn between these Old Testament believers and contemporary followers of other religions. The Israel analogy, briefly stated, suggests this:

¹ I use the term 'crisis' in the sense of 'a crucial stage or turning point in the course of something, esp. in a sequence of events' (*The Collins Concise Dictionary*).

² Part 2 of this article will be published in *Themelios* 33:3 (2008).

³ Inclusivism affirms the ontological necessity of Christ for salvation, but disavows the epistemological necessity of *knowing* Christ for salvation.

Because God has clearly worked redemptively in the people of Old Testament Israel, who had no direct knowledge of Christ, we can analogically assume he is also at work redemptively in the people of other religions now who have no knowledge of Christ.

Closely related is the parallel argument in fulfilment theology: Because Christ fulfils the Old Testament, he can also be seen as the fulfilment of other scriptures and other faiths. This also requires an analogical application of the relationship between Old and New Covenants to other religions. A leading proponent of such a view is the Roman Catholic theologian Jacques Dupuis. He believes we should consider whether

the history of other peoples cannot play for them, in the order of salvation, a role 'analogous' to that played for the Hebrew people by the history of Israel, as comprising historical events whose divine salvific significance is guaranteed by a prophetic word. . . . Israel and Christianity obviously represent a singular case, owing to the unique relationship existing between the two religions; however . . . it may furnish, *mutatis mutandis*, an emblematic model for the relationship between Christianity and other religions.⁴

For Dupuis the relationship between Judaism and Christianity serves 'as a catalyst for the reorientation of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions.'⁵

Thus, the Israel analogy and fulfilment model rely on a correspondence between the chronologically pre-messianic (Israel) and the epistemologically pre-messianic (other religions), and in so doing consider the 'B.C. condition' to continue today (at least for certain groups of people). However, I suggest that the Israel analogy and fulfilment model undermine the significance of the Christ-event in the unfolding plan of redemption by failing to appreciate the decisive effect of this event on history and the nature of existence. In a similar way, the fulfilment model views fulfilment as an ongoing process continuing after the Christ-event. It considers the historical and teleological relationship between the Old and New Testaments to be less than fully decisive in how fulfilment can be interpreted. It does not require there to be a historical or chronological relationship between what is fulfilled (the contemporary religion) and the fulfiller (Christ) and therefore undermines the radical transition from 'B.C.' to 'A.D.' In this article I will argue that the Christ-event is the midpoint of the unfolding salvation history and is of universal significance for all space and time and for all people living both before and after the Christ-event itself.

⁴ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 219f, 229.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 233. Other theologians who adopt this Israel analogy include the Roman Catholic theologians Jean Daniélou, and Karl Rahner, the Protestant theologians J.N. Farquhar, and Carl Braaten, and the Evangelical theologians Clark Pinnock and Terrance Tiessen. Key works include Jean Daniélou, *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*. trans. Felix Faber (London: Longmans, 1957), 4–7, 18–19. Jean Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), 35. Karl Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,' in *Theological Investigations*. Vol. 5, (London: DLT, 1966), 121. Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,' 125–126, 130. Farquhar, John N. *Papers Submitted to Commission Four of the World Missionary Conference*, Edinburgh, 1910, # 153, 17, quoted in Paul Hedges, *Preparation and Fulfilment: A History and Study of Fulfilment Theology in Modern British Thought in the Indian Context*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001), 286n347. John N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 53–55, 457–58. Carl Braaten, *No Other Gospel!* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 69. Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 21, 91–92, 105, 161, 163. Clark Pinnock, 'Religious Pluralism: A Turn to the Holy Spirit,' *Evangelical Theology Society 2002 Conference Paper Transcript* (2002), 5–6. Clark Pinnock, 'An Inclusivist View,' in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralist World* ed. by D. Okholm and R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 115. *Ibid.*, 133, Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 123–125, 155, 167–168, 198.

Therefore, the concept of a continuing ‘pre-Messianic’ condition or state is seriously flawed, and should not be employed in developing an understanding of the relationship of other religions to Christianity.

This essay has two parts. Part 1 expounds the Christological orientation of salvation history, and part 2 assesses the implications of this salvation-historical approach for the analogy made between the chronologically pre-messianic and epistemologically pre-messianic.

1. Christ Is the Midpoint of Salvation History⁶

1.1. An Eternal Purpose and a Mystery Revealed in the Fullness of Time

The concept of Salvation History or the History of Redemption (*Heilsgeschichte*) is accepted in Reformed theology as an important framework for understanding the continuity of Old and New Testaments and the progressive nature of revelation.⁷ The approach is characterised by its emphasis on the historical and theological continuity of the Testaments.⁸ Such continuity and unity does not preclude elements of discontinuity and diversity, but the diversity that exists is complementary to that unity.⁹

The times and ages of redemptive history have been ordained by God from eternity in his divine decree.¹⁰ This decree establishes God’s ultimate intention for the world and his means of accomplishing this, thus giving a fundamental unity to the plan of redemption, for the whole created order ultimately serves this purpose.¹¹ Ephesians 3:11 refers to this ‘eternal purpose’ (πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων) with an adjective in the genitive case, indicating that there was never a time when God’s plan with all of its parts was not fully determined.¹² The same verse states that this eternal purpose is realized in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:9). ‘Here we learn that God’s eternal plan, which governs *all* his ways and works in heaven and on earth, he *purposed* to fulfil in Christ. Christ, as God’s Alpha and Omega, is at the beginning, the center and the end of his eternal purpose.’¹³ The outworking of God’s eternal purpose is governed by his providential superintending activity over the created order and history, bringing creation to its divinely determined goal. All God’s providential work is mediated through Christ (Col 1:16–17; Heb

⁶ I adopt the term ‘midpoint’ from Oscar Cullmann. It should be noted that the term does not imply an equal period of time both before and after this point. Cf. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), which sees Jesus’ ministry as the ‘centre of time’. R.T. France describes Jesus as ‘the turning point of time’. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 197.

⁷ G. E. Ladd writes, ‘There is a widespread recognition that revelation has occurred in redemptive history, and that *Heilsgeschichte* is the best key to understanding the unity of the Bible’ (*A Theology of the New Testament* [rev. ed.; Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1993], 4).

⁸ David Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*. (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 241.

⁹ Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 243.

¹⁰ For a helpful introduction to the topic of the divine decree, see John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 501–36. Cf. Paul Helm, ‘Of God’s Eternal Decree’, in *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective* (ed. Lynn Quigley; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006), 143–161.

¹¹ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 343. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 3.1: ‘GOD from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established’.

¹² *Ibid.*, 463.

¹³ *Ibid.*

1:3).¹⁴ From the very beginning God has ordered events toward Christ and his redemptive work. Indeed, the covenant of redemption precedes even the fall.¹⁵

Christ is the midpoint of the history of redemption. His death and resurrection are the unsurpassable and unrepeatable point of crisis, the ‘omega-point.’¹⁶ This historical reality has enormous theological import, for all history is to be understood and judged in light of this crisis. The centre of redemption in the period before the Christ-event is the future hope of the promised Messiah, and the centre of redemption after Christ’s death and resurrection is the past event. Therefore, the Christ-event is of constitutive significance for all history and time. What was achieved by Christ through his life, death, and resurrection cannot be divorced from what came before or after it. In any theological scheme therefore, the historical unfolding of events must be respected because these events follow a course decreed by God from eternity and each is but a part of the one overarching purpose.¹⁷

The death and resurrection of Christ is the centre of redemptive history inaugurating a period of radical newness which cannot be overstated, for the Christ-event is the ultimate eschatological event.¹⁸ Jesus is the mediator of a divine act of redemption, the Centre and End of all history, because in him the eternal God has entered time, and in so doing has revealed the ‘mystery’ of the ages (Rom 16:25–26; Col 1:26; 2:2–3; Eph 1:9–10; 3:4–5; 1 Cor 2:7; 2 Tim 1:9–10; Tit 1:2–3). This ‘mystery’ (μυστήριον) should not be understood as a secret revealed to a few intimates, but rather ‘in connection with the hidden counsel of God in relation to his redemptive work in history.’¹⁹ David Wells explains:

¹⁴ While a distinction between ordinary (common or general) and special providence (or special grace) exists, care needs to be taken not to interpret these two kinds of providence to mean that God is conducting two works alongside each other with no relationship between them. Ordinary providence serves special. *Ibid.*, 399f.

¹⁵ Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 531–36. Cf. Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 379, 401. Within Reformed theology, a debate exists between those who support *supralapsarianism* and those who support *infralapsarianism*. ‘The difference concerns what happened in God’s mind before the foundation of the world. It does not concern something that happened in time, but rather the *logical* order of God’s thoughts. The question is whether, in logical order, (a) God decided first that he would *save some people* and second that he would *allow sin* into the world so that he could save them from it (the *supralapsarian* position), or whether it was the other way around, so that (b) God first decided that he would *allow sin* into the world and second decided that he would *save some people* from it (the *infralapsarian* position’ (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Leicester: IVP, 1994], 679n12). However, both positions maintain that the covenant of redemption precedes the fall.

¹⁶ The ‘omega-point’ is a term Richard B. Gaffin uses to describe the death and resurrection of Christ (*By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006], 6).

¹⁷ Thomas Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 1. As Torrance argues, in every aspect of a theological account of God’s interaction with us in the world, time and space constitute the orderly medium for divine revelation to man and human knowledge of God. Cf. Eric Rust, *Salvation History: A Biblical Interpretation* (Richmond: John Knox, 1961), 127. Here, Rust highlights the meta-historical plan of redemption: ‘On the Biblical view, the time process must be measured in terms of the mighty acts of God and not of the evolutionary development of man. . . . The phrase *preparatio evangelica* has come of recent years to be coloured with an evolutionary significance, imposing on the situation the false category of progress rather than the Biblical conception of crisis. . . . The Biblical faith is based on the conviction that God is the Lord of history, able to control its events and movements in the interest of His purpose.’

¹⁸ While the term ‘eschatology’ is commonly employed to refer to the ‘last things,’ this excludes much that falls within the scope of the term. I use the term ‘eschatological’ here and throughout this essay in its broad sense, as defined by F. F. Bruce: Eschatology ‘may denote the consummation of God’s purpose whether it coincides with the end of the world (or of history) or not, whether the consummation is totally final or marks a stage in the unfolding pattern of his purpose’ (F. F. Bruce, ‘Eschatology’, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [ed. by Walter Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 362).

¹⁹ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard De Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). Cf. D. A. Carson, ‘Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul’s Understanding of the Old and New’, in *The Paradoxes of Paul*, vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), see esp. 413–25.

In the New Testament, ‘mystery’ is typically associated with what is revealed and proclaimed (1 Tim. 3:9), never with what is obscure and unknown. The chief mystery is Christ (1 Cor. 2:2), promised long ago (1 Cor. 1:19), by whom the Gentiles now gain access to the Father (Eph. 3:14–15), and to whom Paul was bound in service (1 Cor. 9:16). To associate this mystery with the unknown rather than the known would be . . . to render God unthinkable.²⁰

Thus, in addition to the noetic aspect, there is a historical connotation to the mystery revealed. It is that which for a time had not yet appeared, but is then made known.²¹ The dawning of the messianic age in the ‘fullness of time’ (πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, Gal 4:4, cf. Eph 1:10), also testifies to the important historical transformation that occurred with the Christ-event. The fullness of time centres on Christ as Messiah. When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son. At the appropriate moment the old age ended and the new age was ushered in. The age of the Law had run its course to be superseded by the age of the Spirit, inaugurated by the accomplishment of Christ’s redemptive work.²² The term ‘fullness’ suggests, states A. A. Hoekema, the thought of fulfilment, of bringing to completion: ‘from the Old Testament perspective, the New Testament era is the time of fulfillment.’²³ This fulfilment is not only historical but profoundly teleological. As Herman Ridderbos asserts, it is ‘not only the maturation of a specific matter in the great framework of redemptive history, but the fulfillment of the time in an absolute sense.’²⁴ The new age actually arrives in Christ as the first fruits of a full cosmic salvation.²⁵

Similarly, Geerhardus Vos observes that the fullness of time means more than that the time was ripe for the introduction of Christ into the world: ‘the fullness of the time means the end of that aeon and the commencement of another world-period.’²⁶ This new ‘world-period’ is unfolding in two stages: (1) the present age, starting with the resurrection, and (2) the age to come, consummated by Christ’s return. However, the two stages should not be seen as separate, for the New Testament’s outlook is that the Messiah’s coming is one (eschatological) coming which unfolds in two episodes, one already having happened, and one still to come. However, the Age-to-Come had already dawned.²⁷

The Messianic Age is divided into two parts—the first supervening upon and overlapping the historical process, and ushered in by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the second, the

²⁰ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 132n122.

²¹ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 47. Herman Ridderbos emphasises this historical revelation: ‘The revelation of the mystery is nothing other than that which the fullness of the time brings to view; it is the fulfillment of the eschatological promise of redemption in the times appointed for it, its “own times”, that is denoted in this fashion.’ Ridderbos points out that Paul is echoing what Jesus proclaims as the ‘fulfillment of time’ (Mark 1:15) (48).

²² F. F. Bruce, ‘Salvation history in the New Testament’, in *Man and His Salvation* (ed. Eric Sharpe and John Hinnells; Manchester: MUP, 1973), 82.

²³ A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 17. Hoekema supports this assertion with reference to 1 Cor 10:11; Heb 9:26; and 1 John 2:18.

²⁴ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 44.

²⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *When The Time Had Fully Come* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 48. ‘This is the new, overpowering certainty, that in the crucified and risen Savior the great turning-point has come. This is the main theme of Paul’s ministry and epistles. “Old things are passed away; behold they are become new” (2 Cor 5:17). . . . And of the “fullness of the times” (Gal 4:4), of this now of the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2), Paul is the herald (Eph 3:2ff.)’

²⁶ Geerhardus Vos, ‘The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit’, in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*; ed. by Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1980), 93.

²⁷ Rust, *Salvation History*, 158. Cf. Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future*, 18–20.

eternal and otherworldly consummation of what has already been begun, ushered in by the second advent of the exalted Messiah who had been appointed by God to judge the quick and the dead.²⁸

The eschatological in-breaking has commenced, and with it there is not only a horizontal/chronological transformation, but also one that Michael Horton describes as vertical/cataclysmic.²⁹ The resurrection is the crucial sign that the 'last days' are here.³⁰

According to Richard Gaffin:

The clearest, most explicit biblical warrant for this fundamental redemptive-historical, history-of-revelation construct is the overarching assertion with which Hebrews begins (1:1–2a). . . . 'Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.'³¹

Therefore, the manifestation of Jesus Christ is not in the first place made known as a 'noetic piece of information, but has happened as an historical event.'³² For that reason it should not be construed primarily as an existential matter but an historical-eschatological event with cosmic significance.³³ This fact will be seen to be of decisive significance for this article as it proceeds.

1.2. Cosmic Atonement

The works of God-in-Christ in the creation and in the new creation are necessarily cosmic in extent. So too, I suggest, is Christ's atonement: his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Herman Bavinck rightly argues that if Christ is the incarnate Word, then the incarnation is the central fact of the entire history of the world, and it must have been prepared from eternity and have its effects throughout eternity.³⁴ Similarly, Ridderbos contends that in Paul's theology resurrection is nothing less than the counterpart of creation. The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the new and final world-order, an order described as spiritual and heavenly. It is the dawn of the new creation, the start of the eschatological age. In terms

²⁸ Rust, *Salvation History*, 138

²⁹ Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 40.

³⁰ John Frame, 'The Doctrine of the Christian Life,' *Reformed Perspectives Magazine*, 7:47 (2005), 262. Cf. Richard B Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (2d ed.; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 91–92, 116. Gaffin states that the resurrection and ascension are separate occurrences, but the resurrection is integral to his subsequent mode of existence. What Christ is and continues to be he became at the resurrection and at no other point. His resurrection marks the completion of the once for all accomplishment of redemption.

³¹ Gaffin, *By Faith*, 6f; cf. 7. Here Gaffin notes how this declaration, which embraces the entire message of Hebrews, captures three interrelated factors concerning God's 'speech': '(1) Revelation is expressly in view as a historical process. (2) The diversity involved in this process is accented, particularly for old covenant revelation . . . by the two adverbs, translated "at many times and in various ways," at the beginning of the construction in the Greek original. . . . (3) Christ is the "last days" endpoint of this history, the nothing-less-than eschatological goal of the entire redemptive-revelatory process.'

³² Ridderbos, *Time Fully Come*, 50.

³³ Ridderbos writes, 'When the approach is made from man, then it is no more the analysis of the history of redemption in Jesus Christ which reveals the real existence of man, but it is the analysis of man in his actual situation that serves as the criterion for what is acceptable in the history of salvation' (ibid., 59).

³⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:274.

of the conceptual framework with which Paul view the whole of history, it is the commencement of the 'age-to-come'.³⁵ Nothing is the same after the cross. Karl Barth appreciated this:

The human speaking and acting and suffering and triumphing of this one man directly concerns us all, and his history is our history of salvation which changes the whole human situation, just because God himself is its human subject in His Son.³⁶

A distinction between creation and redemption must be preserved, but because God's purpose from before the foundation of the world is one and the same purpose, it is important not to completely dissociate redemption from creation.³⁷ Bavinck rightly maintains that the incarnation, aside from its rootedness in the Trinity, also has its presupposition and preparation in the creation.³⁸ Oliver O'Donovan highlights the cosmic reach of redemption, seeing it as the recovery of something given and lost:

At the same time, however, we must go beyond thinking of redemption as a *mere* restoration, the return of a *status quo ante*. The redemption of the world, and of mankind, does not serve only to put us back in the Garden of Eden where we began. It leads us on to that further destiny to which, even in the Garden of Eden, we were already directed. For the creation was given to us with its own goal and purpose, so that the outcome of the world's story cannot be a cyclical return to the beginnings, but must fulfil that purpose in the freeing of creation from its 'futility' (Rom 8:20).³⁹

This eschatological transformation 'is neither the mere repetition of the created world nor its negation. It is its fulfilment, its *telos*, or end'.⁴⁰ Therefore, while a fundamental connection between creation and redemption is recognised, aspects of continuity and discontinuity must both be acknowledged. They are inseparable, for Christ is the agent of creation and new creation (Eph 1:10, Col 1:15–20). Creation itself has a Christological focus, and it anticipates a *telos*.⁴¹ The plan of God the Father involves Jesus the Son as the cosmic redeemer. The Garden of Eden is a prototype of the world planned by God, and the new creation will be superior to the original creation. Christ is the very purpose of God's creation, and the incarnation was in view when God created the world. Creation is therefore the beginning or the preamble of the history of redemption. As O. Palmer Robertson explains:

The very words that pronounce the curse of the covenant of creation also inaugurate the covenant of redemption. From the very outset God intends by the covenant of

³⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 90.

³⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4:2:51, quoted in Bruce Marshall, *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 162. Cf. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 15.

³⁷ Daniel Strange argues that overstressing continuity undermines the need for incarnation and atonement: 'If the cross is not the source of God's saving grace, then why is it needed? Does it effect salvation or does it merely reveal (albeit normatively) something already presupposed? Is it representative or constitutive?' (*The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002], 207).

³⁸ Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*, 277.

³⁹ O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 55 (emphasis in original)

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1988), 62.

redemption to realize for man those blessings originally defaulted under the covenant of creation.⁴²

The impact of the incarnation and resurrection is not limited to a small section of time and space but is of universal significance. As Thomas Torrance states,

Through Jesus Christ there takes place a restoration of man's proper interaction both with the Creator and the creation, for in Christ a creative centre of healing and integration has been set up within the structure and destiny of human contingent being, which cannot but affect the whole created order with which man has to do.⁴³

Indeed, such is the significance of the incarnation and resurrection, that they can be equated to the act of creation itself. In the incarnation, God the creator, the transcendent one, has himself become a creature within time and space.⁴⁴ Jonathan Edwards describes the incarnation in these terms:

Christ's incarnation was a greater and more wonderful thing than ever had yet come to pass. The creation of the world was a very great thing, but not so great as the incarnation of Christ. It was a great thing for God to make the creature, but not so great as for the Creator himself to become a creature.⁴⁵

In a similar way, the resurrection signifies an event which even surpasses God's original creative activity. The resurrection is also the work of the creator, now himself incarnate and at work in fallen creation. It takes place in space and time, in physical and historical existence. However, the New Testament indicates, states Torrance, that it is

not merely a great event upon the plane of history, but an act that breaks into history with the powers of another world. It is akin to the creation in the beginning; and the Gospel is the good news that God is creating a new world. . . . Such a resurrection of the incarnate Word of God within the creation of time and space which came into being through him is inevitably an event of cosmic and unbelievable magnitude. So far as the temporal dimension of creation is concerned, it means that the transformation of all things at the end of time is already impinging upon history, and indeed that the consummation of history has already been inaugurated. And so far as the spatial dimension of creation is concerned, it means that the new creation has already set in, so that all things visible and invisible are even now in the grip of the final recreation of the universe. The resurrection of Jesus heralds an entirely new age in which a universal resurrection or transformation of heaven and earth will take place, or rather has already begun to take place, for with the resurrection of Jesus that new world has already broken into the midst of the old.⁴⁶

⁴² O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 91.

⁴³ Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 136. Cf. Rust, *Salvation History*, 148–49.

⁴⁴ Thomas Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), 21.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 1:573.

⁴⁶ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*. Torrance is quoting A. M. Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (1945), 31. Cf. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 32–35.

Thus, the renovation of the entire universe is grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ. In this once-for-all triumph of the cross, a new situation has been created objectively in history, independent of the circumstances of individuals.⁴⁷ The decisive battle has been fought and the ultimate outcome is sure.⁴⁸ The resurrection is a deed 'so decisively new' that the whole of creation existing both before and after the cross is affected.⁴⁹ It has a 'creative and constitutive character, and as such cannot but transform our understanding of the whole relation of God to the universe of things visible and invisible, present and future.'⁵⁰

1.3. Historical Atonement

To present the Christ-Event as an event of cosmic and eternal significance should not be interpreted as portraying the historical dimension as less important. There is a profound paradox at the heart of this matter. The eternal, transcendent God enters time and space at a particular place and time, but in such a way that affects all time and space.⁵¹ Reformed theology recognises both the eternal and historical dimensions of the atonement. The drama of redemption began in eternity, before history (2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:5–8; Heb 2:17; 5:5–6).⁵² Christ was our mediator even before his condescension in human form, but his saving work was not accomplished until the cross. It is his death that is atoning.⁵³ John Murray declares that the incarnation and the redemption wrought are both historical events. The atonement is historically objective in character, it is not 'supra-historical nor is it contemporary.'⁵⁴ However, Murray rightly recognises that Jesus Christ is above history 'as regards his deity and eternal

⁴⁷ However, I accept that it is not entirely clear how exactly this new universal situation actually changes the circumstances of individuals who are unaware of Christ.

⁴⁸ Rust, *Salvation History*, 214.

⁴⁹ The effect of the atonement is of such proportions that all benefit from it. John Murray, a prominent defender of limited atonement also argues that 'The unbelieving and reprobate in this world enjoy numerous benefits that flow from the fact that Christ died and rose again. The mediatorial dominion of Christ is universal. Christ is head over all things and is given all authority in heaven and in earth' John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), 61. Cf. Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 183; Henri Blocher, 'The Scope Of Redemption and Modern Theology', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 9, 1 (1991)101. Here Blocher says 'Calvinists who hold to a particular atonement can add that Christ died, in some respects, 'for all human beings,' even for the reprobates: he did not settle their juridical debt, but he secured for them the benefits of this earthly life (the reprieve which God grants to the 'old' sinful world logically depends on redemption), and his sacrifice validly grounds an offer of salvation which they could receive – if only they wanted to'. Cf. Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*, 470–475. 'The Universal Significance of Particular Atonement'.

⁵⁰ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 36. Cf. 58. Here Torrance declares Jesus Christ was 'none other than the Creator Word of God come as a creature within the world he had made. In the resurrection of Jesus we see that the saving act of God in the expiation of sin and guilt, in the vanquishing of death and all that destroys the creation, is joined to God's act of creation. Redemption and creation come together at the resurrection.....The vast significance of the crucifixion and resurrection emerges only as we see that here *redemption and creation come completely together*, in such a way that they gather up all the past and proleptically include the consummation of all things at the end' (emphasis original). Cf. Thomas Torrance, 'The Atonement, The Singularity of Christ, and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order', in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* ed. by Nigel M. De S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 234.

⁵¹ Marshall, *Christology in Conflict*, vii.

⁵² Donald G Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Saviour and Lord* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 161.

⁵³ Ibid. Bloesch notes that the suffering of Christ during his life was also atoning but only in an anticipatory sense (Heb 5:8–9).

⁵⁴ Murray, *Redemption*, 52.

Sonship.⁵⁵ He is eternal and transcends all conditions and circumstances of time. But the atonement was made in human nature and at a 'particular time in the past and finished calendar of events.'⁵⁶

History with its fixed appointments and well-defined periods has significance in the drama of divine accomplishment. The historical conditioning and locating of events in time cannot be erased nor their significance under-estimated.⁵⁷

The cross is the intersection of the divine and the human, the eternal and the temporal. Although it was a once-and-for-all particular event in the space-time continuum, it was also a once-and-for-all event in an absolutely decisive sense. The cross derives from and is grounded in the eternal love of God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.⁵⁸

Therefore, the effect of the atonement cannot be limited to one strand of subsequent history, namely that which is coextensive with the Church or knowledge of the gospel. Redemption has been accomplished concretely through the objective act of Christ crucified and raised. It is a historical reality, and not one that occurs contemporaneously through an existential encounter with the gospel.⁵⁹ The ontological basis for all salvation is the grace 'given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time' but revealed historically in his incarnation (2 Tim 1:9–10; Titus 1:2). The work of Christ has a 'timeless efficacy that renders its benefits potentially and retroactively operative for all people of true faith, whatever their time or place.'⁶⁰

Torrance helpfully elucidates the relationship of the eternal and the historical, the divine and the human, atonement and incarnation:

[W]e must think of the incarnation as the eternal Word and the eternal Act of God become human word and human act without ceasing to be divine, moving and operating creatively and redemptively within the space and time of our world in the acutely personalised form of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is surely in this way that we are to understand the teaching of the New Testament that the Lord Jesus Christ *is himself* our justification, redemption, mediation and propitiation; he is himself the resurrection and the life—he who is, who was and who is to come, the incarnate *I am* of the ever-living God. His incarnate life as the one Lord and Saviour of the world and his atoning work on the cross and in the resurrection cannot be separated from one another. Incarnation and atonement intrinsically locked into one another constitute the one continuous

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 52–53.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁸ Torrance, 'The Atonement', 234–235. 'It is the oneness of the sacrifice of God the Father with the sacrifice of his incarnate Son that stamps the cross with its decisive and ultimate finality. It was at once eternal and historical in its once-for-all character—that is why the New Testament can speak of the Lamb of God who bore our sins on the cross as slain before the foundation of the world.'

⁵⁹ However, redemption is *applied* contemporaneously (see below).

⁶⁰ Daniel Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords: Christianity Encounters World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 125. The Westminster Confession of Faith (8.6) succinctly articulates this great truth: 'Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world.'

movement of God's saving love for the world. Therein lies the absolute singularity of Christ, but therein also lies the absolute finality of the Cross.⁶¹

Therefore, the Christ-event is of constitutive significance for the atonement. It is not merely a demonstration of God's redemptive will, but the means of redemption. As Calvin put it, the love of the Father is the 'efficient cause'; the obedience of the Son, the 'material cause'; and the illumination of the Spirit (i.e., in faith), the 'instrumental cause.'⁶²

Because the incarnation is of constitutive significance for the atonement, it follows that Christ's redemptive work is finished: τετέλεσται (John 19:30). All that was necessary to reconcile humankind to God has been accomplished. Reconciliation is already achieved and enjoyed.⁶³ In Romans 5:10–11, reconciliation is spoken of as a work achieved decisively by the one act of Christ's death.⁶⁴ Alan Stibbs notes that in contrast to this position on the finished work of Christ, some maintain that Christ's incarnate work

was but an expression in time or history of something which happens only fully in eternity; and that the eternal Son of God is, therefore, to be thought of as continually offering Himself to God in order to secure our acceptance in God's presence.⁶⁵

However, Stibbs responds to such views by contending that Christ's atoning work has to deal with the effects of sin which are exposure to divine wrath and exclusion from the divine presence, and 'Such consequences demand for their remedy a single decisive action rather than a continuous and eternal one.'⁶⁶ This is of significance for the issues addressed in this chapter because it helps to substantiate the

⁶¹ Torrance, 'The Atonement,' 233 (emphasis in original).

⁶² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3.14.21.

⁶³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* (London: Collins, 1948), 86. Forsyth writes, 'Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work. . . . He preached something done once for all—a reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconcilment. . . . What the Church has to do is to appropriate the thing that has been finally and universally done.' Cf. Jonathan Edwards: 'Christ finished the purchase of redemption while in his state of humiliation here on earth' (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards: A History of the Work of Redemption* [ed. John F. Wilson; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], 9:333).

⁶⁴ Alan Stibbs, *The Finished Work Of Christ* (London: Tyndale, 1952), 38–40.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9. Cf. Murray, *Redemption*, 11ff. Murray considers why the atonement was necessary and suggests there are two main answers to this question. The first he calls 'hypothetical necessity': God could forgive sin and save the elect without atonement or satisfaction, but he chose to do it through the vicarious sacrifice of his son because this is the way in which 'the greatest number of advantages occur and the way in which grace us more marvellously exhibited' (11). The second is termed 'consequent absolute necessity': God's choice to save some was consequent since it was his free choice and not of absolute necessity; it is absolute in that having elected some to salvation, there was the necessity to accomplish this purpose through the sacrifice of his Son—a necessity arising from the perfections of his own nature. '[W]hile it was not inherently necessary for God to save, yet, since salvation had been purposed, it was necessary to secure this salvation through a satisfaction that could be rendered only through substitutionary sacrifice and blood-brought redemption' (12). Cf. Stibbs, *The Finished Work of Christ*, 9. Stibbs draws on the work of Oscar Cullmann's *Christ and Time* here. 'Here,' he says, 'in the final analysis lies the "offense" of the primitive Christian view of time and history, not only for the historian, but for all "modern" thinking, including theological thinking: the offense is that God reveals Himself in a special way, and effects "salvation" in a final way, within a narrowly limited but continuing process' (23). Also: '... all points of this redemptive line are related to the one historical fact at the midpoint, a fact which precisely in its unrepeatable character, which marks all historical events, is decisive for salvation.'

central assertion that atonement occurred in space and time as a single historical event forming the midpoint of salvation history and having an impact on all time and space.

The preceding discussion has highlighted the historical and objective nature of the atonement. However, there is also a subjective dimension to atonement.⁶⁷ Christ's work of redemption is accomplished already, but it is only in the subjective experience of faith in Christ that the atonement is appropriated by the individual.

The saving effect of Christ's redemptive work only becomes effective in the life of a person, however, when it is appropriated by faith. The faith that unites people to Christ is itself a fruit of Christ's saving work, distributed to the elect by the Spirit of God.⁶⁸

The seventeenth century Protestant expression '*Dempta applicatione, redemption non est redemption* [sic]' (without application redemption is not redemption), succinctly expresses this.⁶⁹



This fact is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (32f). Again, this idea of a 'kairos,' or definite point of time especially favourable for an undertaking, and central in the divine plan of salvation, is found connected with the work which the incarnate Christ performed not only in the subsequent faith of the Church. 'Rather,' says Cullman, 'Jesus Himself, according to the Synoptic witness, characterizes His passion as His "kairos"' (30–41). Similarly, 'in the numerous Johannine passages in which Jesus speaks of His "hour" . . . in every case the hour of His death is meant' (43f.). So Oscar Cullmann would have us realize on the one hand, that Jesus really 'regarded His own death as the decisive point in the divine plan of salvation,' (148f) and, on the other hand, that what he calls the one great Christological heresy both of ancient and modern times is that wider Docetism, which has at its root 'the failure to respect the historically unique character of the redemptive deed of Christ' (127). Stibbs, *Finished Work*, 9f., quoting Cullmann, *Christ and Time*.

⁶⁷ See for example, Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 162.

⁶⁸ Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 257.

⁶⁹ Cited by Gaffin, *By Faith*, 20. Note: *redemption* should be *redemptio*.

“Work Out Your Salvation”: Conduct “Worthy of the Gospel” in a Communal Context

— Paul Hartog —

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Commentators have customarily interpreted Phil 2:12 as a reference to “working out” one’s personal salvation.¹ For this reason, the verse became a flashpoint between Roman Catholic advocates who emphasized the “working out” of personal salvation and Protestant apologists who emphasized the “working out” of personal salvation (i.e., “progressive sanctification”).² On a lexical level, the Greek verb of this phrase (κατεργάζεσθαι) can mean “to accomplish,” “to bring about,” “to subdue,” “to cultivate,” “to prepare,” “to produce,” or “to complete” (see Rom 1:27; 2:9; 4:15; 5:3; 7:8–20; 2 Cor 4:17; 5:5; 7:10; Eph 6:13; Jas 1:3; 1 Pet 4:3).³ “This does not mean that [the Philippians] are to earn their salvation,” explains Jerry Sumney. “Rather, the sense is similar to that expressed in 1:27, where they are exhorted to ‘live worthy of the gospel.’”⁴ Sumney then turns in a fresh interpretive direction:

It is significant that the verb and the reflexive pronoun that modify σωτηρία are plural. This shows that the call to live out their salvation is a call to the Philippians as a community and anticipates that the matters to be raised in the following verses involve relations within the community.⁵

Sumney’s additional material with its stress upon the “community” does not address the traditional Catholic-Protestant debate, but rather touches upon interpretive questions raised during the last century.

¹ “Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

² Cf. the translation “work for” in the JB and NJB (Roman Catholic translations). By contrast, J. Warren (an evangelical) highlighted a passage in Strabo that describes the Roman imperial exchequer’s “working out” the Spanish silver mines, in the sense of operating, not acquiring (J. Warren, “Work Out Your Salvation,” *EvQ* 16 [1944], 125). Warren further argued that the “out” prefix (κατά) does not refer to “exteriority” but to “thoroughness,” as in wearing “out” a coat, tiring “out” a horse, or burning “out” a candle (*ibid.*, 128).

³ BDAG; *EDNT*; MM; *PGL*; *TDNT*. See especially the six-fold, consistent use in Rom 7:8–20.

⁴ Jerry L. Sumney, *Philippians: A Greek Student’s Intermediate Reader* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 53. See also Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* (SP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 94.

⁵ Sumney, *Philippians*, 53.

Σωτηρία as Corporate Health or Well-Being

In 1924, J. H. Michael published an influential article that argued that the σωτηρία of Phil 2:12 does not refer to personal salvation in any sense but to the corporate “health” or “well-being” of the believing community.⁶

An effective divine energy is at work in the community and if the Philippians only avail themselves of its presence, cooperate with it, and permit it to express itself in their working, the inevitable result will be not only the willing, but also the achieving, by them of the salvation of the community.⁷

Michael’s “communal” approach was adopted by Loh and Nida, Martin, Bonnard, Collange, Gnilka, Hawthorne, and Bruce. For example, Ralph Martin maintained, “There cannot be an individualistic sense attached to salvation here since Paul has the entire Church in view.”⁸ In a later work, Martin reiterated that the “salvation” of Phil 2:12 should not be interpreted in “personal terms,” but “in regard to the corporate life of the Philippian church.”⁹ Paul urged his readers to “work at” matters “until the spiritual health of the community, diseased by strife and bad feeling, is restored.”¹⁰

According to I-Jin Loh and Eugene Nida, “It is not an exhortation to the Philippian Christians to accomplish the personal salvation of the individual members. Paul is rather concerned about the well-being of their common life together in community (cf. 1.28; 2.4).”¹¹ Gerald Hawthorne concurs, “Paul is not here concerned with the eternal welfare of the soul of *the individual*. . . . Rather the context suggests that this command is to be understood in a corporate sense.”¹² “The entire church, which had grown spiritually ill (2:3–4), is charged now with taking whatever steps are necessary to restore itself to health, integrity, and wholeness.”¹³ F. F. Bruce agrees, “In this context Paul is not urging each member of the church to keep working at his or her personal salvation; he is thinking of the health and well-being of the church as a whole.”¹⁴

These scholars have assembled an array of evidences for their interpretive position. First, such a call to corporate health is exactly what the Philippian situation required, since apparently the church lacked full unity (Phil 2:2–4; 2:14; 4:2–3).¹⁵

⁶ J. H. Michael, “Work out Your own Salvation,” *Expositor* 12 (1924): 439–50. Michael acknowledges that he was not the first to argue against an individualistic interpretation of Phil 2:12 (*ibid.*, 440). For example, the year before Michael’s article was published, J. H. Burn (himself borrowing from others) argued that the interpretation of Phil 2:12 as an exhortation to “promote earnestly the welfare of each other” deserved “more attention” (J. H. Burn, “Philippians ii.12,” *ExpTim* 34 [1922–23], 562).

⁷ Michael, “Work out Your own Salvation,” 23.

⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 102.

⁹ See *idem*, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 115.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ I-Jin Loh and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook of Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1977), 67.

¹² Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1983), 98 (*italics original*).

¹³ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (rev. and expanded by Ralph P. Martin; WBC; Waco: Word, 2004), 139.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* (NIBCNT; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 81.

¹⁵ “The state of the Philippian church needed just this call” (Martin, *Philippians*, 103).

Second, the wider context of Phil 1:27–2:18 emphasizes the communal nature of the directive. Conduct “worthy of the gospel” includes standing firm together in one spirit, striving for the faith of the gospel with one mind (1:27). Such conduct entails mutual love and concord, humility, and unselfishness (2:2–4). Rivalry, conceit, and self-interest are to be avoided, as well as grumbling and complaining (2:3–4, 14).

Third, Phil 2:12–13 consistently uses the plural.¹⁶ Paul addresses the ἀγαπητοί (“beloved,” plural). He entreats them that as “you [plural] have always obeyed” in the past, so now “you [plural] work out your [reflexive plural] salvation.”¹⁷ Paul reminds them that God is the one working “in/among you [plural].”¹⁸ “Once again,” claim Hawthorne and Martin, “there is the strong indication that the exhortation is not to individual but to corporate action, to cooperative effort in the common life together as community.”¹⁹

Fourth, a concern for individual salvation would not be proper after the explicit command not to think of one’s own personal interests but rather those of others (Phil 2:4; cf. 2:19–21).²⁰ “Hence,” explains Hawthorne, “it is highly unlikely that he here now reverses himself by commanding them to focus on their own individual salvation.”²¹

Fifth, the suggestion that humans complete their own “theological” salvation contradicts Paul’s understanding of such salvation as the divine work of God.²²

Sixth, “with fear and trembling” speaks of human-ward attitudes, as in other Pauline texts (including 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15; and Eph 6:5). Martin therefore renders the import of Phil 2:12 as “Let the Philippians have a healthy respect for one another in the resolving of their differences.”²³

Seventh, ἐν ὑμῖν in Phil 2:13 should be translated as “among you” (corporately) rather than “within you” (individually). Thus, according to Hawthorne and Martin, “there is ‘among them,’ rather than ‘within them,’ an energizing force that is no less than God himself.”²⁴

Eighth, σωτηρία and σώζειν (“salvation” and “to save”) are commonly used in the LXX and the Greek papyri to convey the ideas of health, wholeness, or well-being.²⁵ These words are also used in “non-theological” ways in some New Testament texts: Mark 3:4 (preserving physical life); Acts 4:9 and 14:9

¹⁶ Sumney, *Philippians*, 53.

¹⁷ Bruce describes “the reflexive pronoun of the third person being extended to do duty for the second person” (*Philippians*, 83).

¹⁸ See the discussion on ἐν ὑμῖν below.

¹⁹ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 140. Michael even claims that it would be “singularly inappropriate” for a passage emphasizing one’s personal salvation to come immediately after 2:5–11 (Michael, “Work Out Your Own Salvation,” 444; cf. Martin, *Philippians*, 103).

²⁰ See also G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison* (New Clarendon Bible; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 125.

²¹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 98.

²² Loh and Nida, *Translator’s Handbook*, 67.

²³ Martin, *Philippians*, 103.

²⁴ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 142. Hawthorne’s original edition had “among them and within them” (Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 100).

²⁵ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 140. Cf. MM, 622; *NewDocs* 1 (1981), 10, 14, 56, 57. “Salvation” in the New Testament most commonly refers to God’s rescuing sinners from the penalty, power, and ultimately presence of sin. The term and its cognates, however, can be used of physical healing and physical deliverance from trouble. See Loh and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook*, 42.

(physical healing); and Acts 27:34 (physical strengthening). These scholars contend that an application to corporate “well-being” is the most appropriate reading in the wider context (cf. Phil 1:19; cf. 1:28).

Σωτηρία as Individual Sanctification

Other scholars, especially Moisés Silva and Peter O’Brien, have criticized this corporate interpretation of Phil 2:12. Silva has dubbed the corporate view “the new view” and the “*sociological*” interpretation, and he has contrasted it with his own “*strictly theological*” one.²⁶ O’Brien employs this same dichotomized labeling: “Numbers of writers since the late nineteenth century . . . have contended that σωτηρία is being used in a *sociological* rather than a *strictly theological* sense to describe the spiritual health and well-being of the entire community at Philippi.”²⁷ O’Brien insists that the arguments assembled for the “sociological” or “corporate” interpretation “do not dislodge the view that v. 12 speaks of personal salvation.”²⁸ Silva concurs that the reasons for the “new view” “utterly fail” to convince.²⁹

In fact, Silva fears that the “sociological view” easily lends itself “to a remarkably weakened reading of a remarkably potent text.”³⁰ He situates the text’s “potency” in its description of the human and divine activity in the *total* work of personal salvation, including personal sanctification.³¹ He fears that the “sociological” emphasis upon the community’s well-being to the exclusion of the personal element may be an attempt to deny or resolve the human activity—divine grace tension.³² “The text itself, by its very juxtaposition of those two emphases, cries out loudly against any such attempts at resolution,” explains Silva. “And the point here is not merely that both the human and the divine are stressed, but that in one and the same passage we have what is perhaps the strongest biblical expression of each element.”³³

O’Brien and Silva have assembled their own litany of arguments, which are arranged here to parallel the eight contrary arguments assembled above:

²⁶ Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (2d ed.; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 118–19 (italics added). According to Martin’s revision of Hawthorne, Silva “omits a third option, i.e., the ‘ecclesiological’ reference, which is to be preferred, given the context of the passage” (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 140). Martin, however, does not produce a sustained explanation or argument for this “ecclesiological” view.

²⁷ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 277 (italics added).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁹ Silva, *Philippians*, 120.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Silva quotes Calvin’s interpretation “that *salvation* is taken to mean the entire course of our calling, and that this term includes all things by which God accomplishes that perfection, to which He has determined us by His free election” (*ibid.*, 121). “Gott wirkt nicht nur den Anfang, sondern auch den Fortgang im Christenleben” (Wolfgang Schrage, *Die konkreten Einzelgebote in der paulinischen Paränese: Ein Beitrag zur neutestamentlichen Ethik* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1967], 72).

³² Silva, *Philippians*, 121; cf. also 121n4. Silva declares, “The conceptual tension between verse 12 and verse 13 seems unbearable—apparently, an extreme formulation of the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility” (*ibid.*, 118). Craddock highlights the divine grace/human activity parallel of 1 Cor 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians* [IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1985], 46; cf. Frank Stagg, “The Mind in Christ Jesus: Philippians 1:27–2:18,” *RevExp* 77 [1980], 346). Eph 1:19 and 3:7 also accentuate God’s power at work (ε□νεργει□ν) in the believer by grace.

³³ Silva, *Philippians*, 122.

First, Gospel-worthy conduct “clearly involves them in responsibilities to one another,” yet “their responsibilities to one another or to the outside world (e.g., Phil 2:15–16) are not to be confused with the context of the eschatological salvation itself.”³⁴

Second, the context in Phil 1:27–2:18 certainly accentuates community-oriented injunctions, “But the contextual argument per se does not inform us of the content of ‘complete your salvation.’”³⁵ Rather, “an eschatological motivation has been set before them that will result in their heeding the apostolic injunction, that is, of pursuing unity through humility and doing everything without grumbling or arguing.”³⁶

Third, the plurals in Phil 2:12–13 do not signify communal life, but indicate that “*all* the believers at Philippi are to heed this apostolic admonition.”³⁷ O’Brien concludes, “ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε is an exhortation to common action, urging the Philippians to show forth the graces of Christ in their lives, to make their eternal salvation fruitful in the here and now as they fulfill their responsibilities to one another as well as to non-Christians.”³⁸

Fourth, carrying out one’s personal salvation does not conflict with the condemnation of minding one’s own interests (2:4), since “concern for one’s soul” is not a form of selfishness or self-absorption.³⁹

Fifth, although Phil 2:12 describes humans “carrying out” their own salvation, the balanced tension that follows in 2:13 reiterates that salvation is the sovereign and gracious act of God.⁴⁰

Sixth, “with fear and trembling” is directed God-ward, and “denotes an awe and reverence in the presence of the God who acts mightily.”⁴¹

Seventh, Silva argues (based upon 2 Cor 4:12) that ἐν ὑμῖν with the verb ἐνεργέομαι should be translated as “in you” rather than “among you” in Phil 2:13 (cf. 1 Cor 12:6; Rom 7:5; Col. 1:29).⁴² O’Brien adds that “God’s inward working in the believer is a recurrent theme in Paul’s letters.”⁴³

Eighth, O’Brien responds that Paul normally uses σωτηρία of personal, eschatological salvation (including, he argues, in Phil 1:19 and 1:28).⁴⁴ Silva also highlights the characteristic Pauline usage of σωτηρία: “out of nearly twenty occurrences of this noun in the Pauline corpus, not one instance requires the translation ‘well-being’; the vast majority require—and all of them admit—the theological sense.”⁴⁵

³⁴ O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 280.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 279.

³⁸ Ibid., 280.

³⁹ Silva, *Philippians*, 120; cf. Gal 6:1–6. As pointed out to me by David R. Bickel, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* asserts that the free reception of the forgiveness of sins is actually a form of worship.

⁴⁰ See Silva’s relevant comments above.

⁴¹ O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 280.

⁴² Silva, *Philippians*, 119.

⁴³ O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 287 (cf. 1 Cor 12:6; 15:10; 2 Cor 3:5; Col 1:29; 1 Thess 2:13).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 278–79.

⁴⁵ Silva, *Philippians*, 119–20. Although Silva concedes that a “nontheological” sense of “deliverance” is possible in Phil 1:19, even there an insipid “well-being” is not possible (ibid., 120). Cf. O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 278–79.

The Quest for Middle Ground

Some of the leading advocates of the competing positions have, at times, taken a step back and have acknowledged that a false dilemma may be created in the minds of some. For example, although Silva contrasts a “sociological” reading and a “strictly theological” one, he ultimately concedes that a complete distinction between “the well-being of the community” and “the question of individual salvation” is simply impossible.⁴⁶ He adds, “. . . one must again underscore that the personal salvation in view manifests itself primarily in healthy community relationships.”⁴⁷

A few scholars have attempted to mediate between the so-called “sociological” interpretation and the so-called “theological” interpretation. Markus Bockmuehl maintains that “it is best not to reduce the term *salvation* too readily either to the individual and spiritual or to the corporate and social realm.”⁴⁸ Although “the individual concern is safeguarded,” “the corporate dimension is clear.”⁴⁹ “Three facets must be affirmed together,” insists Bockmuehl. First, the New Testament notion of salvation “encompasses deliverance from all forms of evil.” Second, salvation “directly addresses both individuals and the body of Christ which together they constitute and to which they belong.” Third, God’s work of salvation includes present and future aspects.⁵⁰

Gordon Fee asserts, “There has been considerable, and probably unnecessary, debate over whether *salvation* in this passage refers to the individual believer or the community of believers.”⁵¹ “But that is a false dichotomy,” he retorts.⁵² Fee asserts that O’Brien and Silva “are basically (correctly so) critiquing a view that waters down the term *salvation* somewhat to be more sociological.”⁵³ “Unfortunately,” continues Fee, “their rebuttals tend to place more emphasis on the individual than the context [in Philippians] seems to warrant.”⁵⁴ Fee insists that this is an “ethical” text that concerns “working or carrying out in their corporate life the salvation that God has graciously given them.”⁵⁵ He concludes that the passage

⁴⁶ Ibid., 118–19; cf. 119n2.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 120. “The translation ‘your own salvation’ for verse 12 is quite proper,” acknowledges Silva, “though I would not argue against such a rendering as ‘your common salvation,’ since there is no denying that Paul has the community, not isolated individuals in mind” (ibid., 119n3). Silva complains that Fee has characterized his view as “a case of ‘either/or’ (i.e. either individual or community)” (ibid., 119n2). Pedersen also concludes that since Paul does not separate the collective from the individual, the question is irrelevant (Sigfred Pedersen, “Mit Furcht und Zittern,” *ST* 32 [1978], 29n74). Yet, when interpretive push comes to positional shove, Pedersen espouses the collective understanding.

⁴⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: Black, 1998), 151.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians* (IVP New Testament Commentary; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 102–3 (italics original). See the similar sentiments in Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 234–35.

⁵² Ibid., 235.

⁵³ Fee, *Philippians*, 103. Cf. also Fee, *Paul’s Letters to the Philippians*, 235n23.

⁵⁴ Fee, *Philippians*, 103.

⁵⁵ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 235. Although “people are saved one by one to be sure,” acknowledges Fee, “they are saved so as to become a ‘people for God’s name.’”

is “a call to individually *work out* our common salvation in our life together.”⁵⁶

Ben Witherington argues for an “eschatological reality” behind Phil 2:12, but one that may also include “a social dimension or implication.”⁵⁷

In short, the appeal to unity is based on what God has already done and is doing in them and in their midst to bring about their salvation. Working out salvation means, among other things, continuous strenuous effort working harmoniously together as the body of Christ.⁵⁸

Carolyn Osiek similarly contends that “salvation” “is certainly not to be understood only in the eschatological sense,” “yet that dimension must be included.”⁵⁹ “Paul is speaking of their total well-being, including their spiritual prosperity now and in the future.”⁶⁰ “It is not so much individual salvation as communal eschatological success that is envisioned. This is not to deny the individual aspects of the concept, but neither Paul nor his contemporaries thought primarily in individual terms. The collective good is the principal referent.”⁶¹

The Apostolic Fathers

It seems that the strong points of the so-called “sociological” view are the recurring plural verbs and pronouns, but especially the wider communal situation and corporate context of Phil 1:27–2:18. On the other hand, the strengths of the so-called “theological” view are its insistence that seeking personal salvation is not inherently “selfish,” the divine orientation of “fear and trembling” within the argument of Phil 2:12–13, and especially the customary “theological” sense of σωτηρία/σώζειν within Pauline thought.⁶² Might it be possible to combine some of the insights of the two views and form a coherent understanding of Phil 2:12 within its wider context? Can the σωτηρία/σώζειν word group be used in ways that are *both* theological *and* community-oriented?

Although Michael, Hawthorne, and Martin cite uses of σωτηρία and σώζειν as references to well-being and physical health in the New Testament, the LXX, and in the Greek papyri, they do not cite pertinent uses of the word group in the Apostolic Fathers.⁶³ Perhaps these overlooked materials reveal a weakness in a *purely* “sociological” view: a “health or wholeness” of the community *disengaged* from a

⁵⁶ Fee, *Philippians*, 104. Fee continues, “This is therefore not a text dealing with individual salvation but an ethical text dealing with the outworking of salvation in the believing community for the sake of the world. That they must comply with this injunction at the individual level is assumed, and that their final salvation will be realized personally and individually is a truth that does not need stating, because that is not at issue here. The present concern is with their being God’s people in Philippi, as 2:15 makes certain” (ibid., 104).

⁵⁷ Ben Witherington, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 71.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 70.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “One will have a hard time defending that [sociological] understanding of this word on the basis of Pauline usage (as Hawthorne’s resorting to some papyrus uses indicates)” (Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 235n23).

⁶³ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 140.

“theological” understanding of “salvation.”⁶⁴ At times, the Apostolic Fathers use σώζειν and its cognates in manners that are clearly mutual/reciprocal or corporate/communal, yet still manifestly “theological” as well (rather than mere references to physical health or “sociological” well-being).

A mutual/reciprocal use of σώζειν within the community of believers is fairly common in the Apostolic Fathers.⁶⁵ This emphasis of the Apostolic Fathers upon the mutual/reciprocal “saving” of others and the community-orientation of σωτηρία may seem rather foreign to Paul (or the New Testament in general) at first glance. But a quick perusal of Rom 11:13–14; 1 Cor 7:16; 9:22; 1 Tim 4:16; Jas 5:19–20; and Jude 22–23 readily reveals that Paul and other New Testament writers could speak of a mutual/reciprocal “saving” of others. Admittedly there are definite (and even significant) theological differences between Paul’s epistles and various Apostolic Fathers.⁶⁶ But this (later) linguistic evidence at least confirms that the σωτηρία/σώζειν word group could be used in ways that were *both* theological *and* other-oriented, at least in a mutual/reciprocal sense.

Two further examples in the Apostolic Fathers may cast additional light upon the interpretation of Phil 2:12. Both of these passages stress a “corporate” application of σώζειν, rather than merely a reciprocal/mutual use. First, Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians* (in a passage available only in a Latin translation of the original Greek) instructs the church to tend to a fallen elder and his wife: “As sick and straying members, restore them, in order that you may save your body in its entirety (*ut omnium vestrum corpus salvetis*). For by doing this you build up one another” (Pol. *Phil* 11.4).⁶⁷ A quick survey of modern English translations reveals a diversity of renditions, including “heal,” “make whole,” “preserve,” and “save.”⁶⁸ In any case, it should be noted that the idea of “saving” the body is explicitly tied to the concept of “building one another up” in Pol. *Phil* 11.4. Moreover, throughout Polycarp’s short epistle, this notion of “building up” carries the idea of “spiritual edification” in faith and truth (Pol. *Phil* 3.2; 12.2; 13.3). Thus “saving” the body in Pol. *Phil* 11.4 must include *both* a corporate reference *and* a theological connotation.

⁶⁴ In spite of the criticisms of opponents, it remains questionable whether any leading commentator holds a *purely* “sociological” view.

⁶⁵ See *1 Clem.* 2.4; *2 Clem.* 17.2; 19.1; *Ign. Pol.* 1.2; and *Mart. Pol.* 1.1–2 (which echoes Phil 2:4).

⁶⁶ Andreas Lindemann, “Paul in the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers,” in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (ed. William S. Babcock; Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990): 25–45. For example, the apostle would not have “signed off” on the theology of *2 Clement*. But the point here is simply that σωτηρία/σώζειν could be used in *both* a “theological” sense *and* in a community-oriented manner.

⁶⁷ English translation in Michael W. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 219. Pol. *Phil* 11 is only extant in Latin. A Greek σώζειν lies behind our Latin *salvāre*, as an examination of the Latin translation of the same Greek verb elsewhere reveals (Pol. *Phil* 1.3). Berding finds “a probable reminiscence of Paul’s body metaphor” (Kenneth Berding, *Polycarp and Paul* [Supplement to *VC*; Leiden: Brill, 2002], 114–15). This passage of Polycarp may also echo *1 Clem.* 37 (ibid.).

⁶⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1 (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 349; Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.-F. Marique, and Gerald G. Walsh, *The Apostolic Fathers* (FC; New York: Cima, 1947), 142; Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1 (LCL; London: Heinemann, 1919), 297; William R. Schoedel, *Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, Fragments of Papias* (vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*; ed. Robert M. Grant; London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 34; James A. Kleist, *The Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistles and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, the Fragments of Papias, the Epistle to Diognetus* (ACW; Westminster: Newman Press, 1948), 81; Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr. in *Early Christian Fathers* (ed. Cyril C. Richardson; LCC; Westminster Press, 1953), 136.

Second, *1 Clement* 36.1 declares, “This is the way, dear friends, in which we found our salvation (σωτηρία), namely Jesus Christ, the High Priest of our offerings, the Guardian and Helper of our weakness.” The next paragraph goes on to exhort,

Even the smallest parts of our body are necessary and useful to the whole body, yet all the members work together and unite in mutual subjection, that the whole body may be saved (εἰς τὸ σώζεσθαι ὅλον τὸ σῶμα). So in our case let the whole body be saved (σώζεσθω οὖν ἡμῶν ὅλον τὸ σῶμα) in Christ Jesus” (*1 Clem.* 37.4–38.1).⁶⁹

Ehrman’s recent English edition of *1 Clement* manifests the ambiguity of the verb σώζειν. In both occurrences, he provides alternative readings within the text itself: “But all parts work together in subjection to a single order, to keep the whole body healthy [*Or: safe*]. And so, let our whole body be healthy [*Or: be saved*] in Christ Jesus.”⁷⁰ Other English translations waver between “saved” and “preserved.”⁷¹

1 Clement 38.1–4 continues with this admonition:

And let each man be subject to his neighbor, to the degree determined by his spiritual gift. The strong must not neglect the weak, and the weak must respect the strong.⁷² Let the rich support the poor; and let the poor give thanks to God, because He has given him someone through whom his needs may be met. Let the wise display his wisdom not in words but in good works. The humble person should not testify to his own humility, but leave it to someone else to testify about him. Let the one who is physically pure remain so and not boast, recognizing that it is someone else who grants this self-control. Seeing, therefore, that we have all these things from him, we ought in every respect to give thanks unto him, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Thus the Corinthian recipients of *1 Clement* would “save” the corporate body (37.4–38.1), even as the individual members served one another (38.2). All the while they were to credit their strengths and “spiritual gifts” to God alone (38.3–4). Therefore, a theological foundation undergirded this corporately shared σωτηρία. God was at work among them, even as they worked out their corporate σωτηρία, a “salvation” that was ultimately centered in their mutual Savior, Jesus Christ (36.1).

False Dichotomies

We have attempted to establish that the σωτηρία/σώζειν word group can be used in ways that are both “theological” and community-oriented. We will later bring this evidence into the context of Phil 1:27–2:18 and nuance the insight by arguing that Paul focuses beyond the corporate “salvation” of the body (as in Pol. *Phil* or *1 Clem.*) by emphasizing the Gospel-centered salvation they shared together in Christ, both individually and communally. For Paul, “working out salvation” refers to conduct “worthy of the Gospel of Christ” in a communal context (1:27–28). But first, we must address other simplistic

⁶⁹ English translation in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 71.

⁷⁰ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, 103 (italics and bracketed materials are original). Ehrman cross-references the passage with 1 Cor 12:21.

⁷¹ Lake, *Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, 73; Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 61; Glimm, *Apostolic Fathers*, 39; Robert M. Grant and Holt H. Graham, *First and Second Clement* (vol. 2 of *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*; ed. Robert M. Grant; New York: Nelson, 1965), 66.

⁷² Cf. the use of σώζειν in the discussion of the “weak” in 1 Cor 9:19–22.

dichotomies that have obscured the interpretation of Phil 2:12, including the nature of “fear and trembling.”⁷³ Most interpreters choose sides between a God-ward fear combined with a “theological”/individual σωτηρία or a human-ward fear combined with a “sociological”/corporate σωτηρία.⁷⁴

Michael and Hawthorne argue that “fear and trembling” are human-ward attitudes in this specific context, since “working out” one’s salvation was tied to corporate health. Hawthorne maintains that “Paul is the only NT writer to use this phrase [“with fear and trembling”] and never does he use it to describe the attitude people are to have toward God—only the attitude they are to have toward each other or toward their leaders (1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15; Eph 6:5).”⁷⁵ Thus “with fear and trembling” in Phil 2:12 refers to the “healthy respect” the Philippians were to manifest toward one another in the resolution of their differences.⁷⁶

Silva and O’Brien, however, insist that the phrase “with fear and trembling” is a God-ward attitude, and they question the evidence for Pauline uses of the phrase in a human-ward fashion.⁷⁷ Paul described his preaching in Corinth as occurring “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Cor 2:3–4), but “not because he felt nervous before an audience or embarrassed by a lack of oratorical skill.”⁷⁸ Rather, “he was profoundly conscious of the divine Spirit within him and around him, which gave his preaching its power to awaken faith.”⁷⁹ Bockmuehl also maintains that “an ultimate reference to God or Christ is likely” in Phil 2:12, since the phrase “fear and trembling” is usually reserved for a “due reverence” manifested “in the presence of God and his mighty acts.”⁸⁰ The primary force of a God-ward view is

⁷³ Otto Glombitza’s attempt to attach a μή alongside “with fear and trembling” (thus, “not with fear and trembling”) has not won scholarly support. See Otto Glombitza, “Mit Furcht und Zittern. Zum Verständnis von Phil. 2.12,” *NovT* 3 (1959): 100–106.

⁷⁴ See O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 282; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 99–100. Cf. Jost Eckert, “‘Mit Furcht und Zittern wirkt euer Heil’ (Phil 2, 12): zur Furcht vor Gott als christlicher Grundhaltung,” in *Die Freude an Gott, unsere Kraft: Festschrift für Otto Bernhard Knoch zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Johannes Joachim Degenhardt; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 262–70. The believer is not enslaved by a dread of God (Rom 8:13–15), yet possesses the reverential fear of a son toward a Father (1 Pet 1:14–17; cf. 2 Cor 5:11).

⁷⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 100. Martin’s revision of Hawthorne’s commentary seems open to O’Brien’s interpretation of “fear and trembling” as “a sense of awe and reverence in the presence of God” (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 141; cf. O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 284). The expression “fear and trembling” is used in the Old Testament to refer to “the fear of human beings in the presence of God and his mighty acts” (O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 282; cf. Exod 15:16; Isa 19:16; Ps 2:11), but it is also used of the nations’ response to Israel because of her protection by God (Deut 2:25; 11:25). It can even be used of the natural response of the animals to the Noahic family (Gen 9:2), as well as David’s reaction to his unrighteous enemies (Ps 55:4).

⁷⁶ Martin, *Philippians*, 103.

⁷⁷ O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 283. Cf. Frank Thielman: “Moreover, in the three other occurrences of the phrase ‘fear and trembling’ in Paul’s letters, it is far from clear that a reference to God is not in view” (Frank Thielman, *Philippians* [NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 137).

⁷⁸ See Pedersen, “Mit Furcht und Zittern,” 17–21. Moreover, Eph 6:5 is connected with Phil 2:12 by the common subject of “obedience,” not necessarily by the object of obedience (since Eph 6:5 concerns the relationship of slaves with their masters). Cf. the association between “obedience” and “fear and trembling” in 2 Cor 7:15 as well.

⁷⁹ F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: Black, 1969), 90.

⁸⁰ Bockmuehl, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 153, with attention to 2 Cor 7:15 and Eph 6:5. Fee comments, “One does not live out the gospel casually or lightly, but as one who knows what it means to stand in awe of the living God” (Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 237). For Fee, “with fear and trembling” denotes the appropriate recognition of “defenselessness” or “vulnerability” related to “existence vis-à-vis God” (Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 236). Fee counsels, “Thus working out the salvation that God has given them should be done with a sense of ‘holy awe and wonder’ before the God with whom they—and we—have to do” (Fee, *Philippians*, 105).

its recognition of the logical flow between Phil 2:12 and the explicit reference to God which follows in Phil 2:13: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.”⁸¹ F. W. Beare, therefore, contends that “with fear and trembling” speaks of “the awe inspired by a true sense of the divine presence.”⁸²

Nevertheless, the construction of only two contrasting options (corporate σωτηρία with human-ward fear *or* individual σωτηρία with God-ward fear) is simply a false dilemma. God-ward fear and trembling are perfectly compatible with a communal emphasis in Phil 2:12. By O’Brien’s own acknowledgement, “the readers are to fulfill the injunction to work out their own salvation with the utmost seriousness, precisely because God is mightily at work *in their midst*.”⁸³ Witherington combines a God-ward orientation with a communal outlook by noting that “God will hold them accountable for their behavior and social relationships.”⁸⁴ Witherington does not provide any parallel examples, but 1 Cor 3:17 seems to be illustrative. 1 Corinthians 3 examines ministry in the context of the corporate assembly, which it describes as “God’s temple” (3:16). Paul then warns: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you [plural] are that temple (1 Cor 3:17).”⁸⁵ Marion Soards comments, “This verse is often contorted and applied merely to matters of personal piety, but the concern is much larger than with the fate of an individual or some individuals. This ‘warning’ has implications for the life of the individual believer, but never outside the context of the community of faith.”⁸⁶

One can certainly manifest a proper awe and due reverence for the living, holy God because of his righteous oversight of the community as well as the individual. From this standpoint, Paul beseeches the Philippians: “Complete your [shared, common] salvation ‘with fear and trembling’ [of the God who watches over his community], precisely *because* it is God who is at work among you [plural], both to will and to work for [his] good pleasure.”⁸⁷ In this manner, a logical coherence between verses 12 and 13 is readily demonstrable.

⁸¹ See O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 284. The inclusion of echoes from Deut 32 also argues for a God-ward orientation (see below).

⁸² Beare, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, 91.

⁸³ O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 284 (italics added).

⁸⁴ Witherington, *Friendship and Finances*, 72. Bruce also combines a communal interpretation with a God-ward “fear and trembling” (Bruce, *Philippians*, 82).

⁸⁵ Commentators regularly highlight the use of the second person plural pronouns throughout 1 Cor 3:16–17. Cf. Paul’s stern warnings against destroying one’s brother through one’s actions and thus destroying “the work of God” in Rom 14:15–21. “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom 14:19).

⁸⁶ Marion Soards, *1 Corinthians* (NIBCNT; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 78.

⁸⁷ I have taken the definite article before εὐδοκία as a possessive (“his,” i.e., God’s), since “God is the subject of the sentence and the most probable reference must be to him” (Bockmuehl, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 154; cf. Loh and Nida, *Translator’s Handbook*, 68–69; Bruce, *Philippians*, 83; Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 239). The New Testament can clearly employ εὐδοκία as a reference to God’s good pleasure and purpose (cf. Matt 11:26; Luke 10:21; Eph 1:5–9). Εὐδοκία, however, does refer to human goodwill in Rom 10:1 and Phil 1:15; cf. 2 Thess 1:11. Sumney finds the arguments for εὐδοκία as a reference to “God’s good purpose” to be “plausible but not decisive” (Sumney, *Philippians*, 54). He concludes, “The context tends to favor seeing it as a reference to human disposition, since it stands at the beginning of a section on community relations” (ibid.). Some scholars interpret εὐδοκία as “that ‘goodwill’ that Paul desires the Philippians to attain and that should be the hallmark of any Christian community” (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 143). They interpret the ὑπέρ in this verse as introducing that which one wishes to achieve, rather than meaning “according to,” “in conformity with,” or “in harmony with.” See Jean-François Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians* (trans. A. W. Heathcote; London: Epworth, 1979), 111. But cf. O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 288–99.

The verses that follow may reinforce this community-oriented interpretation.⁸⁸ “Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14–15). Unlike the Israelite community in the wilderness wanderings, the Philippians were not to murmur and dispute among themselves (cf. Exod 15–17; Num 14–17; 1 Cor 10:1–13).⁸⁹ If they refrained from such grumbings and quarrels, they would become (γένεσθε) “blameless,” “flawless,” and “faultless” children of God.⁹⁰

Paul adds that the Philippians were to “shine” as pure lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil 2:15). This verse echoes the rebuke of Israel in Deut 32:3–5:

For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.⁹¹

Deuteronomy continues with descriptions of Yahweh’s judgment: “The LORD saw it and spurned them” (Deut 32:19). The Holy One promised to “heap disasters” upon Israel (Deut 32:23). “So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deut 32:21). As the people of God, therefore, the Philippians were to approach their communal relations, including the tendency to grumble and quarrel, “with fear and trembling” before the LORD who heaps disasters” upon his disobedient children.

Furthermore, a complete severance between God’s working “in” and “among” the Philippians may be another cul-de-sac on the dead-end street of over-simplification.⁹² “If God operates τὸ θέλειν ‘within the community,’” queries T. J. Deidun, “how else could he possibly do so than by intervening in the hearts of individuals?”⁹³ Silva inquires how “God works in the midst of people if not through personal transformation. To state that the passage refers *not* to individual sanctification but to the church’s well-being already assumes a conceptual dichotomy that is both false and lethal.”⁹⁴ One might add, in turn, that if God works within individual “hearts,” such work will inevitably manifest itself in the communal life of the ἐκκλησία as well.

Finally, associating the “eschatological” quality of σωτηρία with individual salvation alone does not fully capture Pauline theology either (Rom 5:9). “The salvation of which he speaks is here, as always, the eschatological fulfillment of the hope of the gospel, the winning through to the goal, the attainment of final blessedness,” insists F. W. Beare.⁹⁵ But then Beare adds, “Paul is not speaking here of individual

⁸⁸ Notice the parallel between Phil 2:16 and 1 Cor 3:5–15.

⁸⁹ Since the Israelites murmured against Moses specifically, Silva wonders whether the Philippians were complaining against their appointed leaders (Silva, *Philippians*, 124).

⁹⁰ Each of the three words begins with the same sound by using the α-privative (ἀμειπτοι, ἀκέραιοι, and ἀμωμα); see Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 145.

⁹¹ Michael discussed echoes of Deut 31–32 within Phil 1–2 (Michael, “Work out Your Salvation,” 448–50).

⁹² F. F. Bruce maintained that ἐν ὑμῖν in Phil 2:13 implies “not only in you individually but among you collectively” (F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 57).

⁹³ T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul* (Analecta Biblica; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 66.

⁹⁴ Silva, *Philippians*, 119.

⁹⁵ Beare, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, 90.

salvation; as throughout the epistle, he is concerned with the Philippian church in its corporate life and its corporate activity.⁹⁶ According to Phil 1:27–28, “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” becomes a sign of “your [plural]” salvation, “and that from God.”⁹⁷ This contending together for the Gospel would also be a sign of their opponents’ ultimate “destruction,” thus highlighting an eschatological perspective (Phil 1:28; cf. 3:18–19). In the mean time, the Philippian believers were to anticipate the eschatological coming of their mutual Savior, who would transform their humble bodies and conform them into his glorious body (Phil 3:20–21).

Conclusion

Gordon Fee remarks that Phil 2:12 “has long been a difficult passage,” especially to those who “tend to individualize Paul’s corporate imperatives.”⁹⁸ Our examination of this “difficult passage” has revealed that “salvation” can be both “theological” and at the same time community-oriented. And the Apostolic Fathers can be called to the dock as the first witnesses. Moreover, a strict divorce between the “working out” of personal salvation in individual sanctification and the “corporate health” of the believing community tears asunder what Paul has wed together.

According to Richard Melick, “the individuals of the group were to live consistently with their salvation. If they did so, the group problems would be solved.”⁹⁹ But the apostle probably did not see the individual-communal connection as blandly as Melick implies. The community can be a sanctifying means of God’s transformation of the individual; the individual is to be concerned for the “completion” of his or her own salvation but also that of others in the community; the individual personally is to become more Christ-like, and so is the body corporately as a whole. Salvation is necessarily and vitally personal yet simultaneously shared in common with the body of fellow-believers. As G. B. Caird quipped, “Salvation in the New Testament is always an intensely personal, but never an individual, matter.”¹⁰⁰

This reading makes sense of the wider discussion of Philippians 1:27–2:18. Paul deftly weaves this paragraph together, so that a thematic thread links conduct “worthy of the Gospel” (1:27), standing firm in unity for the faith of the Gospel (1:27), the humble consideration of others in unifying love (2:1–4), the humble obedience of Jesus (2:5–11), the required Philippian obedience in Paul’s absence (2:12), and the “working out” of their common salvation (2:12).

“Completing” or “carrying out” salvation includes communal conduct built upon the common foundation of salvific blessings in Christ (Phil 2:1–2). Using a series of first class conditionals, which assume the protasis for the sake of argument, Paul refers to the Philippians’ “encouragement in Christ,” “comfort from love,” “participation in the Spirit,” and “affection and sympathy” (Phil 2:1).¹⁰¹ The Philippians were to move from this foundation of shared salvific blessings to the goal of “being of the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 91. Cf. Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 140; Bockmuehl, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 51–52.

⁹⁷ “Salvation” in this verse might best be taken as the eschatological deliverance (presently grasped in faith and hope), common to the community of all believers and participated in by each individual believer. Martin believes that “the salvation of the Christian community as a whole” is in view in Phil 1:28 (Martin, *Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 116).

⁹⁸ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 231.

⁹⁹ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 111.

¹⁰⁰ As quoted in Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 235n23.

¹⁰¹ Stagg, “Mind in Christ Jesus,” 339.

same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Phil 2:1–2). By doing so, they would “make full” (πληρώσατε) Paul’s joy (Phil 2:2).

This community orientation continues into the subsequent verses: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3–4). Paul then introduces Jesus himself as a *paradeigma* of humble, self-giving love (2:5–11). The “kenosis” passage reminded the Philippians that the kerygmatic truths of the Gospel not only motivate a grateful response but also actively shape the believer’s other-oriented, cruciform life. Therefore, “the behavior which is required of those who are in Christ and who wish to be like him conforms to the attitude which *he* showed in becoming like us.”¹⁰²

Moreover, the apostle commences the entire discussion of Phil 1:27–2:18 by thematically urging, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27a).¹⁰³ The material immediately following this paraenetic injunction establishes the communal context of such Gospel-worthy conduct: “so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents” (1:27b–28). The following verse describes a two-fold effect: “This is a clear sign to them [their opponents] of their destruction, but of your [plural] salvation, and that from God” (1:28). If the Philippian believers stood firm together as a community, their unity would become a public testimony of the eschatological salvation that they would share in common (1:28; cf. 2:14–15). At the same time, the living and holy God who watched over their affairs was the same God who would bring eschatological destruction upon their adversaries (1:28).

In the material following the exhortation to “work out your salvation,” Paul exhorts the Philippians to do all things without complaining or arguing (2:14).¹⁰⁴ As a result, they would be “blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (2:15).¹⁰⁵ This text seems to echo Paul’s introductory prayer that the Philippians would be “pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (1:10). Paul accordingly urged them to hold fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ he might boast that he had neither run in vain nor labored in vain (2:16).¹⁰⁶ The apostle desired that the Philippian community would shine as a bright testimony through their irreproachable conduct, which would be made fully manifest in the *eschaton*, when he would stand before the tribunal of Christ to give an account of his Gospel stewardship (2:15–

¹⁰² Morna D. Hooker, “Interchange in Christ and Ethics,” *JSNT* 25 (1985), 10. Cf. Stagg, “Mind in Christ Jesus,” 343.

¹⁰³ The verb πολιτεύεσθαι speaks of behaving as a citizen and thus carries communal connotations (cf. Phil 3:20). See PHEME PERKINS, “Philippians: Theology for the Heavenly *Politeuma*,” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 1 (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 89–104.

¹⁰⁴ The words in Greek are plural: “without complaints and arguments” (see Silva, *Philippians*, 131).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 163–64. The verb φαίνεσθαι (“shine”) may be translated as either an imperative or an indicative (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 145–46). The word κόσμος in “lights in the world” may refer to the “universe,” i.e., “lights in the sky” or “stars” (see Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 146).

¹⁰⁶ Λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες may refer to “holding fast the word of life” or “holding forth the word of life” (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 146). If one adopts “holding forth,” then the participial construction could be interpreted instrumentally (“you appear as lights in the world by holding forth the word of life”). See Silva, *Philippians*, 126–27.

16).¹⁰⁷ Paul thus aspired to receive a positive verdict upon his apostolic ministry (cf. Isa 49:4 LXX).¹⁰⁸ Even if great sacrifice were required,¹⁰⁹ Paul rejoiced, and he urged the Philippians to share in his joy (Phil 2:17–18; cf. 2:2).¹¹⁰

Through it all, God’s gracious initiative was at work in and among the Philippians, both in their believing and suffering (1:29) and in their willing and acting (2:13). Therefore, the sovereign God who was ever at work was to be contemplated in reverent fear and holy trembling (2:12). The result would be the “working out” of the salvation they shared together in Christ, through a manner of life “worthy of the Gospel” in a communal context (1:27–8; 2:12–13).¹¹¹



¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 3:5–4:5. For Pauline references to his converts as his “boasting” in the day of Christ, see 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thess 2:19; cf. Phil 4:1. For his fear that his ministry might be in vain, see Gal 2:2; 1 Thess 3:5.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. also 1 Cor 9:24–27; Gal 2:2; 4:11; Phil 3:12–13.

¹⁰⁹ Paul uses a word denoting “pouring out” a drink offering (σπένδομαι) in Phil 2:17: “Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith” (see Silva, *Philippians*, 128; cf. Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 148–49; 2 Tim 4:6).

¹¹⁰ Hawthorne and Martin note the combination of “joy/rejoice” and a συν-compound, two of the key word groups of the epistle (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 149–50). See also 1 Cor 12:26.

¹¹¹ I wish to thank Alan Clifford, who directed the early formation of this material within my Th.M. thesis (“Ethics, Sanctification, and Assurance: Studies in Paul, Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans,” St. Andrew’s Theological College, 2007). I also wish to thank Tyndale House for kindly allowing me to be a reader while working on this and other studies in the summer of 2007.

The Longing of Love: Faith and Obedience in the Thought of Adolf Schlatter

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Despite a small flurry of attention over the past decade, Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938), Tübingen professor of New Testament and author of more than 440 written works, remains one of the most neglected yet illuminating theological voices of the past one hundred years.¹ This paper seeks to be one small window into his thought by explicating Schlatter’s understanding of a critical topic in Christian theology and living: the relationship between faith and obedience.

The Value of Studying Schlatter

In spite of some valid criticisms of his work, both in his day and ours—his prose, for example, is often frustratingly prolix²—Schlatter is valuable on a number of fronts. I will explore just one and mention a few others before getting on with the immediate purpose of this essay.

First, Schlatter conscientiously confronted the rationalist-idealist framework dominant since Kant instead of getting swept along in its current, choosing a hermeneutic fueled by empiricism, realism, humble perception (*Wahrnehmung*), and, fundamentally, a willingness to accept the historical veracity of the biblical text. He believed observation (*Beobachtung*) must inform judgment (*Urteil*), not vice

¹ Recent attempts to redress this dearth include: Stephen F. Dintaman, *Creative Grace: Faith and History in the Theology of Adolf Schlatter* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Schlatter Reception Then: His New Testament Theology,” *SBJT* 3 (1999): 40–51, who also translated Schlatter’s NT theology text (see below); and Werner Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian* (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). Neuer has also produced a more comprehensive biography: *Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1996). Siegfried S. Schatzmann has translated Schlatter’s *Romans: The Righteousness of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), and Peter Stuhlmacher is frank about his debt to Schlatter: “Adolf Schlatter’s Interpretation of Scripture,” *NTS* 24 (1978): 433–46; *Historical Criticism and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993). Gerhard Maier is an example of a modern New Testament scholar working in the tradition of Schlatter, as evidenced in his *Biblical Hermeneutics* (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough; Wheaton: Crossway, 1994). Yarbrough himself has done as much as anyone in recent years to promote the relevance of Schlatter for current New Testament studies; aside from translating Neuer’s shorter biography and Maier’s work, a few of his contributions to Schlatter studies include “Adolf Schlatter’s ‘The Significance of Method for Theological Work’: Translation and Commentary,” *SBJT* 1 (1997): 64–76; “Biblical Authority and the Ethics Gap: The Call to Faith in James and Schlatter,” *Presb* 22 (1996): 67–75; and “A Milestone in the History of New Testament Research: Review Essay,” *JETS* 46 (2003): 299–308.

² See, e.g., William Baird, *History of New Testament Research, Volume Two: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 374.

versa. In this Schlatter sought to critique German contemporaries whose critical presuppositions fueled a view of the Bible not as divine revelation but, by separating theology from history, as another example of the human spirit constructing its own conscience-alleviating faith system. J. P. Gabler, William Wrede, and Ernst Troeltsch, for example, each in his own way, rejected the idea that a coherent New Testament “theology” was even possible.³

Seeking to navigate the Scylla of blind naiveté and the Charybdis of critical unbelief—both equally haunted by contaminating presuppositions—Schlatter employed a methodology that included both open-minded historical investigation (against the biblicists of his day, who viewed him as suspiciously scientific) as well as respect for and submission to Scripture (against the critical academic establishment, which viewed him as suspiciously ingenuous).⁴ While the latter earned him no small amount of academic ostracism during his most fruitful years, the courage and fortitude with which Schlatter stood for the veracity of Scripture and the historical claims in which it is rooted must not only be admired from a distance but emulated in our own day. For while twenty-first-century skepticism no longer emerges from the rationalism of the Enlightenment and scientific method of Modernism but rather from the experience and relevance coveted in Postmodernism and Post-postmodernism, both cultural frameworks downplay the Bible’s historical testimony—the former because it is unreliable, the latter because it is irrelevant.⁵

Other strengths of Schlatter could be mentioned: (1) a conviction ahead of his time that Paulinism is rooted fundamentally not in Hellenism but Judaism;⁶ (2) a reformational worldview (opposite Barth’s increasingly influential exclusive focus on the person of Christ in humanity’s redemption) that saw all of creation as included in God’s redemptive scope;⁷ and (3) a submissive humility to match his penetrating intellect—a reverence for God and his Word that was not muffled by but rather flourished in the demands of academic labor.⁸

In short, Schlatter provides fresh yet levelheaded insight into current New Testament studies, a world of exploding scholarly proliferation and specialization that quickly produces a bewildering sense of academic vertigo for aspiring *neutestamentlers* seeking to get their bearings.⁹ Our own concern

³ Troeltsch in particular seems to be in view in Schlatter’s celebrated piece “Atheistic Methods in Theology” (trans. David R. Bauer in Neuer, *Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian* [211–25]). For Schlatter’s interaction with Wrede, see Robert Morgan, *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter* (London: SCM, 1973), and Yarbrough, *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 83–117.

⁴ See Stuhlmacher, “Schlatter’s Interpretation of Scripture,” 434, 444.

⁵ Particularly helpful in this regard is the work of Edgar V. McKnight (*Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1988], 79–87), who examines Stuhlmacher’s realistic hermeneutics, drawing on earlier insights of Schlatter.

⁶ W. Ward Gasque, “The Promise of Adolf Schlatter,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 4 (1980): 26; Yarbrough, “Adolf Schlatter,” in *Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices* (ed. W. A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 68–69; Köstenberger, “Schlatter Reception Then,” 48; Neuer, *Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian*, 109; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 360–61.

⁷ Dintaman, *Creative Grace*; Yarbrough, “Adolf Schlatter,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Bible Interpreters* (ed. D. K. McKim; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 522–23.

⁸ Gasque, “Promise of Schlatter,” 28–29; Yarbrough, “Schlatter” in *Bible Interpreters*, 67–68; Köstenberger, “Schlatter Reception Then,” 49.

⁹ On which see Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

is to explore the connection between coming into relationship with God utterly apart from human contribution, yet in such a way that a changed life inevitably emerges. How do a new creed and a new ethic coalesce? Robert Yarbrough writes that Schlatter “carefully criticized post-Reformation theology for succumbing to intellectualism and failing to move beyond the admittedly all-important doctrine of faith alone to the equally crucial ethical results of vital faith.”¹⁰ My goal here is to ask how Schlatter did this without overreacting and falling into a moralism unfaithful to the appropriately cherished Reformation cry of *sola fide*.¹¹

We begin with some straightforward statements by Schlatter on the strong union he sees between faith and obedience, probing the various ways he united these two aspects of Christian experience. This will climax in a discussion of what Schlatter held to be fundamental in the connection between being saved apart from works and yet never without them. The primary text on which we depend throughout is Schlatter’s two-volume New Testament theology,¹² written at the pinnacle of an industrious teaching career stretching across one hundred consecutive semesters.

Perspectives on the Unity of Faith and Obedience

Schlatter speaks of the confluence of faith and obedience in various ways, time and again hammering home the organic connection between the two. To get at his thought, we will categorize these under the following rubrics: general unity, salvation-historical unity, canonical unity, authorial unity, existential unity, and supernatural unity.

1. General Unity

Schlatter explicitly connects faith and obedience in comments he makes on no fewer than seven key New Testament figures: Jesus, Paul, John, Peter, Luke, James, and the writer to the Hebrews. We begin, then, by simply noting *that* (not how) Schlatter persistently sought to unite faith and obedience.

Jesus called people to obedience, though without eradicating the calling to receive rather than earn one’s place in God’s kingdom. He invited people to become his disciples by extending both promise and demand.¹³ He ought not to be seen as an ethical teacher only; rather, “the founder of the formula ‘*sola fide*’ is Jesus; he said: ‘only believe’ (Mark 5:36); but we do not properly understand his call to faith if we mean that he expected nothing from people, and that nothing worked in them besides pure faith.”¹⁴ Paul agrees. Because a believer is one who has exchanged fear for faith, says Schlatter of Paul’s theology of justification, “he runs toward the goal with all his energy, because the grace that now justifies him grants him what is perfect, running, not plagued by doubt, but in the assurance that Christ’s death and life are available for him.” Faith that does not express itself in ethical action is not faith. Hence Paul refused to allow God’s grace and our faithfulness to be viewed as if one could thrive in the absence of the other.¹⁵

¹⁰ *Bible Interpreters*, 65.

¹¹ Schlatter was explicitly aware of this danger. See his *The History of the Christ* (trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 158.

¹² *History of the Christ; The Theology of the Apostles* (trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). These were originally published in 1923 and 1922, respectively.

¹³ *History of the Christ*, 311; see also 237; *Theology of the Apostles*, 32.

¹⁴ *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1927), 99.

¹⁵ *Theology of the Apostles*, 287.

John too weds faith and obedience. “By assigning to faith the power to make someone a child of God,” says Schlatter of John’s thinking, “faith is not made the sole act of the community so that it does not need to obey, love or keep Jesus’ commandment but instead must merely believe. The idea that there was a legitimate devotion which consisted merely in believing did not exist for Jesus’ disciples and would have separated them from him completely if it had entered their minds.”¹⁶ Peter too joins the chorus of those refusing to detach belief from the will. “There is no felt tension between faith and works” in 1 Peter, says Schlatter.¹⁷ “Since the community only believes in Jesus when it also obeys him, Jesus’ words are passed on to it in order that it may live as he demanded.”¹⁸ Luke agrees by arranging his material in such a way that one detects an underlying unity between going to Christ for forgiveness and going to him for guidance in dutiful living.¹⁹

No discussion of this topic is complete, of course, without the witness of James, for whom Schlatter felt a special fondness. Since James “conceives of faith as confidence in God that has become assurance and conviction, faith exists for him only when it controls a person’s actions.” The epistle to the Hebrews concurs—this document “lacks the occasion to expose the contrast between faith and works. Rather, it is the remarkable quality of faith that it provides man’s entire conduct with its rightness, because it grounds it in the divine activity.”²⁰

Schlatter clearly saw biblical unity between trusting in God for salvation and living a certain way, detecting such unity in several New Testament writers. Yet how did he substantiate such harmony? This brings us to our second rubric.

2. Salvation-Historical Unity

Faith and obedience have been linked throughout the story of God’s redemptive acts on behalf of his people. It is not a unity introduced in the New Testament.²¹ In *The History of the Christ*, Schlatter describes the work of the disciples in the wake of Jesus’ death: “If a new community should be established apart from Israel, free from any doctrine of merit, by the proclamation of divine rule brought to all, the question immediately arose whether God’s will had changed and whether his Law was subject to alteration.” Schlatter answers in the negative: “Jesus did not speak of two wills of God, of which the one required obedience from Israel while the other permitted sin for Christianity. Rather, now and in the future, God’s grace would reveal itself in the same unity with righteousness.”²²

In both the Old Testament and the New, God manifests himself in mercy and holiness, calling his people to receive grace and to live in light of this grace. God has always called people to changed lives and he has always rooted such change in his own unilateral mercy. This *heilsgeschichtliche* harmony

¹⁶ Ibid., 148.

¹⁷ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹ Ibid., 332; see also 88–89.

²⁰ Ibid., 350; see also 346.

²¹ In the generation after Schlatter, Oscar Cullmann in particular picked up on *Heilsgeschichte* as a controlling hermeneutic, an interpretive framework that can be traced back beyond Schlatter to J. C. K. von Hofmann. See Cullmann’s *Christ and Time* (trans. Floyd V. Filson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) and *Salvation in History* (trans. Sidney G. Sowers; New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

²² *History of the Christ*, 332–33.

is conspicuously distinct from the salvation-historically disjunctive sentiment of Luther, according to whom

the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises. Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability. That is why they are called the Old Testament and constitute the Old Testament. . . . [T]he promises of God belong to the New Testament. Indeed, they are the New Testament.²³

3. Canonical Unity

Schlatter sees unity within the biblical text not only in moving from one testament to another but in moving from one biblical witness to another. Without muting the various individual emphases of the biblical teachers, he detects throughout Scripture a unity of concern that belief and ethics stay together.

Jesus and Paul, for example, share a fundamental conviction on this issue. Did Jesus preach a message of obedience and Paul one of faith? No, says Schlatter. For both Jesus and Paul, “the perfection of divine forgiveness is expressly attested by both the removal of guilt and the establishment of a will that is subject to God.”²⁴ Jesus and John the Baptist, too, are of one mind. The two “remained in close agreement,” since for both, “justice and grace [are] united in God’s rule.”²⁵ The Gospel writers cohere among one another as well, despite emphases distinct to each. For instance, as in Matthew, “in John, too, faith determines an individual’s ethical conduct and following Jesus entails the forsaking of evil, even though John does not use the term ‘repent.’ If that were taken to show that Jesus actually never called to repentance, so that faith should perhaps replace Jesus’ moral demands, this would be a gross distortion of his word.”²⁶ And the apostles? Both John and Paul “unite with the perfection of divine grace the inviolability of ethical norms, thus uniting with assurance the ethical claim that requires from the believer attention to his conduct.” And John agrees not only with Paul but with Peter.²⁷ As he looks from one New Testament author to another, then, Schlatter finds that they unite faith and obedience in their various contexts in ways that show consistent underlying cohesion.

4. Authorial Unity

Schlatter also explores the thought-world of each canonical writer as a literary entity in himself to ask what sort of unity was thought to exist between trusting God for salvation and obeying him. John

²³ “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (ed. Timothy Lull; 2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 395–96. For an engagement by Schlatter with the alleged dualism of Lutheranism, see his *Das christliche Dogma* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1977), 224–25.

²⁴ *Theology of the Apostles*, 295; see also 291; *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 395–97.

²⁵ *History of the Christ*, 99–100; see also 127.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 202. Repentance is critical to Schlatter’s understanding of authentic faith—see, e.g., *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 331–69.

²⁷ *Theology of the Apostles*, 179, 61.

serves as an example. Observing carefully Jesus' interactions in the third and fourth chapters of his Gospel—with Nicodemus in John 3 and with a Samaritan woman in John 4—Schlatter sees these two stories working together to show the inseparability of word and deed in the life of the believer. Jesus called Nicodemus to repentance because “he did not do the truth he knew. By requiring obedience for truth to be present, Jesus lent profound and clear expression to the concrete call to repentance that demanded from the individual the entire will that turned into action.”²⁸ Nicodemus needed to add appropriate obedience to belief. The woman, on the other hand, was in need of proper belief: “You worship what you do not know,” Jesus told her (4:22). And so in the course of the conversation, Jesus revealed to the woman who he was.²⁹ She was mistakenly directing her faith on the *place* of worship rather than the *person* to be worshipped (4:20). The Pharisee lacked proper works, the Samaritan proper faith. In this way Schlatter sees John commending a discipleship in which belief and obedience feed one another.

The Tübingen professor detects a similar authorial union in Matthew, as miracles and teaching conspire together to join the object of one's faith with the manner of one's life, respectively. “While the Sermon spells out Jesus' demands, Jesus' signs portray what Jesus grants. Jesus' aim in the Sermon was the disciples' complete obedience; his signs call for complete faith.”³⁰

5. Existential Unity

Having seen Schlatter's union of faith and obedience through salvation history, the New Testament canon, and individual New Testament authors, we turn from the text to the individual. We consider faith and obedience first from our point of view (existential unity), then from God's point of view (supernatural unity). Regarding the former, Schlatter says this of Jesus' message:

The relationship between faith on the one hand and conversion and obedience on the other was . . . firm, since Jesus granted unconditional validity to the demand for repentance. If this requirement was rejected, faith was impossible, since the one who disputed his demand could not trust him. He could trust only by agreeing with Jesus when he rejected his own conduct and by seeing in his offer of repentance the extension of divine grace.³¹

Here we come to an important theme in Schlatter. In yielding oneself to Jesus for forgiveness, one necessarily yields oneself to a new kind of life. To trust Jesus *is* to obey him, in the sense that if one is “trusting” him to save from judgment without a life of repentance and ethical transformation, it is quite plain that one is not in fact trusting him. This is particularly clear in Jesus' relations with his disciples as he called them to himself, a calling that included both forgiveness and attendant labors. Schlatter resists the notion that faith comes first and then leads subsequently to obedience. Rather, though growth in godliness will be gradual, both exist right from the start. Faith and obedience are two dimensions of a single gift.³² Schlatter sees this existential unity in other New Testament writers, too, such as Peter, for

²⁸ *History of the Christ*, 139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Theology of the Apostles*, 68.

³¹ *History of the Christ*, 201–2.

³² *Ibid.*, 107; see also 334.

whom “celebration and labor are one.”³³ As with Jesus, faith and obedience do not coalesce simply by virtue of logical order.

I underscore this because it does not fall neatly in line with what we find in much Reformed dogmatics. John Murray, for example, writes:

When we think of the application of redemption we must not think of it as one simple and indivisible act. It comprises a series of acts and processes. To mention some, we have calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification. These are all distinct, and not one of these can be defined in terms of the other.³⁴

Schlatter, on the other hand, insists that the turning of the self over to God concomitantly includes not only the object of one’s trust but also the direction of one’s will. Schlatter confounds our Protestant sensibilities time and again, such as when he says that it is only those who obey who can exercise faith (rather than the other way round).³⁵ Concerning the interplay between justification and sanctification—and unveiling a possible influence on the later writings of Käsemann, Stuhlmacher, and Jüngel—Schlatter says:

Paul’s juxtaposition of justification and reconciliation with God’s sanctifying work does not suggest that he conceived of the divine gift as divided in parts, such as that justification made help possible without actually granting it, so that it required sanctification as the second exercise of divine grace in order to make that grace effective. Paul sees in God’s justifying verdict that divine will that removes everything that separates us from God and grants as our aim everything that is assigned to us.³⁶

Schlatter resists traditional reformed categories and sequences. Justification, he says, is not a verdict relevant only for one’s status before God; it is a reordering, energizing reality, which itself “produces obedience.”³⁷ For Schlatter, “faith always entails obedience, not in such a way that it results as its consequence, but such that man subjects himself in faith to the truthfulness and righteousness of God.” A person is able, consequently, “through his false attitude of the will, to prevent faith in himself and to be unbelieving.”³⁸

We are almost ready to turn to the fundamental reason Schlatter is able to say this. But one more important nexus of unity still remains—this time one that does indeed stand in the stream of Reformed thought over the last half millennium.

³³ *Theology of the Apostles*, 57.

³⁴ *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 79–80. Cf. also, e.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 536; W. Robert Godfrey, “Faith Formed by Love or Faith Alone?” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 274.

³⁵ *History of the Christ*, 89. Murray, conversely, states that sanctification “finds its basis in justification.” He later comments, “Sanctification is not the first step in the application of redemption; it presupposes other steps such as effectual calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption” (*Redemption*, 104–5, 177). Schlatter feels no compunction to follow a traditional *ordo salutis*. See, e.g., *Theology of the Apostles*, 251.

³⁶ *Theology of the Apostles*, 248.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 249; see also 229.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

6. Supernatural Unity

What I am calling supernatural unity is close to existential unity, but whereas the latter looks at faith and obedience from a human perspective, the former does so from a divine perspective. We might call existential a sensible or rational unity (though difficult to fully comprehend) and supernatural an internal or mysterious unity (though coherent). Supernatural unity brings faith and obedience together due to God's spiritual operation on the human heart.

Schlatter speaks of the way Jesus grounded his ethical exhortations not in an external motivation but by "God's gift."³⁹ Interpreting Paul, Schlatter pinpoints God's union of the believer with Christ as a key to understanding this supernatural unity of faith and works. "Through union with Christ, the ethical question has already been determined."⁴⁰ A life-giving bond has been created between Christ and the Christian: "God in the creative power of his grace unites the believer with himself."⁴¹ Ethical transformation is consequently inevitable. Stated differently, grace itself informs ethical practice. With James, for example, grace is "that will of God which determines his entire dealings with us. For this reason, not in spite of it, ethical norms become absolute, so that there is no part of God's promise where they are not in operation."⁴²

John too unites trust and obedience due to supernatural working, pointing to the very nature of God and the resultant nature of the Christian.

Through what God *is*, Christian existence likewise takes on the mark of perfect *being*. But in both instances this does not result in a depreciation of action. Action rather becomes significant because the nature given to the believer effects corresponding actions and preserves them. The Christian's sin does not disregard merely a commandment; it severs the real union in which he stands with God. Therefore it results in death. Likewise, love is rooted in the effective union with God in which the believer lives, and because love preserves this union, it grants him eternal life.⁴³

Throughout the New Testament, then, the vital connection between the believer and God renders impossible a faith in him void of moral transformation. When faith came, so too did a will that loves God and hates evil.⁴⁴ Yet even in this last statement on John, Schlatter speaks of something other than faith or obedience that flows from and connects us with God, and here we pinpoint the fundamental link between faith and obedience in the thought of the Tübingen professor.

The Linchpin of Love

Each of the above loci of unity move us along the road of understanding Adolf Schlatter on faith and obedience. Yet none has brought us to the final destination. Here we come to the crucial link in the unification of trusting God to save one from judgment and hell utterly apart from our obedience, on

³⁹ *History of the Christ*, 239; see also 361.

⁴⁰ *Theology of the Apostles*, 312. Union with Christ is a pervasive theme throughout this volume (see also, e.g., 229, 235, 245, 248, 312, 320).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 95; see also 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 147 (emphasis original). See also *History of the Christ*, 253.

⁴⁴ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 367–69.

the one hand, yet living with moral responsibility on the other. This link, I propose, is love, by which Schlatter refers neither solely to emotions nor the will, but to both.⁴⁵

He sees this all through the New Testament. “When Jesus spoke out against the concept of merit,” he says, “he did not attack God’s commandment. He fought the notion of merit *because and to the extent it distorted love* and intermingled it with selfishness, not because he denied the will or depreciated ethical obligations.”⁴⁶ Love is the bottom line in New Testament ethics, yet not only in ethics—also in broader questions of soteriology and the relation between faith and works.⁴⁷ This is echoed in the testimony of the beloved disciple himself. “The means by which the ethical result is reached and resistance against evil is achieved is in John precisely one’s position of faith.” Yet this faith is then couched in terms of love:

When he presented Jesus’ preaching of repentance simply by revealing why faith became impossible for Israel, this was not because his ethical will was weaker, his rejection of sin set aside, or the sanctity of the divine will obscured in his view of God. It was due rather to the fact that, for John, Jesus linked separation from evil and grounding in love directly with the existence of faith.⁴⁸

Faith and obedience are both established in the new impulse of love, directed up to God and out to others.⁴⁹ Faith without love is not true faith.⁵⁰ And obedience that is loveless, external conformity is not obedience. Consequently, neither faith nor obedience, conceived in isolation, exhausts what Jesus taught it meant to follow him.

The piety Jesus gave to his disciples did not merely consist of receiving or of working but of both, and this in such a way that one was conditioned by the other. Only by what the disciple received was he able to do his work, and only by doing his work did he possess what he received.⁵¹

Again, love is the key: “Thus he acted according to the great commandment.”⁵² For Peter, too, love is foundational. First Peter “takes as its theme that the community is to exercise love even in the face of suffering. It is impossible to separate the doctrinal element from the epistle’s ethical pronouncements.”⁵³

⁴⁵ *Theology of the Apostles*, 399–400.

⁴⁶ *History of the Christ*, 154 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ See Baird’s comments in *New Testament Research*, 376.

⁴⁸ *History of the Christ*, 202.

⁴⁹ On self-love (“*die Eigenliebe des Menschen*”), see Schlatter’s *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament: Band 7: Die Briefe an die Galater, Epheser, Kolosser und Philemon* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1963), 23; idem, *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament: Band 8: Die Briefe an die Thessalonicher, Philipper, Timotheus und Titus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1964), 92.

⁵⁰ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 371.

⁵¹ *History of the Christ*, 238.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Theology of the Apostles*, 62.

What then about Paul? “Will grounded in faith is love,” says Schlatter.⁵⁴ The Christian life is typified by “that faith which lives by his grace and that love which does all for him.”⁵⁵ Paul refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of a faith that lacks love.⁵⁶ Perhaps Schlatter’s crucial statement on love’s supreme role is this:

Paul related love to Christ and God with the same determination that he did faith. Love’s desire is to live for him. It is erroneous to consider only faith to be the decisive religious phenomenon in Paul, while assigning love to ethics. To the contrary, Paul entirely preserved Jesus’ concept of love. . . . In Paul, too, love determines a person’s entire conduct both toward God and toward one’s neighbors.⁵⁷

Saving faith animates the whole being, the entire inner life, such that one’s newfound desire is to live for God. Schlatter had made the same point elsewhere: “the longing of love was fulfilled simultaneously with the desire of obedience.”⁵⁸ Here we have come to the heart of Schlatter’s understanding of faith and obedience in the life of the Christian. “Love’s desire” or “the longing of love” is the key to why faith and obedience can never be divorced without proving to be false. If one has been brought to trust savingly in Christ for forgiveness, the love with which this faith has emerged is the love that energizes transformed living.

Many more statements could be drawn upon for further support of this conviction of Schlatter’s. Love is the ethical umbrella to all virtue in Colossians and Ephesians, says Schlatter, as well as in Romans and Galatians.⁵⁹ And love provides the key to Schlatter’s reconciliation of Rom 3 and Jam 2. Romans portrays God alone as responsible for every dimension of salvation, yet James complements this by insisting that faith alone is not our righteousness if we count on inactive faith to save. Faith must be lived out in “obedience and love.”⁶⁰ How then do belief and action relate?

Perfect love is generated by the collaboration of both movements of the will. . . . This love protects the gift of the one to whom it yields, praises his goodness, and rests in it, while simultaneously providing our will with the full power for giving everything we are and have to him.⁶¹

In short, the reason faith and obedience can never be separated is not because faith causes obedience (for Schlatter it is just as true that obedience causes faith) but rather because each is rooted in joy-filled love. The movement of the heart in which one casts oneself on God for acquittal from guilt is the same movement of the heart that simultaneously lives no longer in self-directed interest but other-directed love toward God and others.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 237.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 261.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 281–82.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 282; see also 200, 292.

⁵⁸ *History of the Christ*, 292; see also 294, 360.

⁵⁹ *Theology of the Apostles*, 312.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 99–100.

⁶¹ Ibid., 100. See also *History of the Christ*, 245.

Tweaking the Reformation?

Schlatter empathized with, and was a son of, the movement sparked by Luther. He was no Catholic. Yet he believed the reformers—particularly Luther—did not go far enough.⁶² Schlatter appreciates and appropriates the Lutheran revivification of the justification of an individual solely by God’s grace and mediated solely through faith, but sees this as problematic if not further filled out. While the reformers assiduously affirmed that a life of obedience necessarily accompanies true saving faith, Schlatter tended to think this was underemphasized. Luther’s distaste for the epistle of James exemplifies this, a letter for which Schlatter possessed a special affinity. Dintaman argues that Schlatter felt an uncomfortable tension between his soteriology and that of the Reformation, and Luther in particular, believing that Luther’s emphasis on the unilateral initiative of God’s grace in justifying “had the effect of overemphasizing the passivity of the believer in faith and the Christian life. He saw a tendency in Luther toward an egoistic perversion of faith where the justification of the individual is made the center of personal and theological concern.” Schlatter himself, writes Dintaman, “believed the New Testament went on to see the fulfillment of the Christian life in the Spirit’s creation of a community of love and service.”⁶³

Benjamin Schliesser comments similarly that for Schlatter, faith

is not to be associated with quietism or tranquility, that would result in the inclination to withdraw from own [*sic*] thinking, willing, and doing. . . . Schlatter seeks to correct a misunderstanding of Reformation theology that originated—in Schlatter’s perception—already in Luther’s own faith: the one-sided emphasis on the calming, salvation-giving function of faith, which does not release adequately its active component.⁶⁴

In other words, the Reformation reclaimed the receptive dimension to faith without equally realigning the attendant reality of the active dimension to faith—a forgivable error, perhaps, in light of the excesses of sixteenth century Catholicism, but an imbalance nonetheless.

There is an important insight here for twenty-first century Protestantism. While the Reformation was desperately needed to recover the truth of justification before God utterly apart from human performance, this may have had the accompanying negative effect of reinforcing a conceptual distinction between trusting God to forgive and trusting God with one’s actions. For the New Testament and for Schlatter, one either trusts God or does not. This eases consternation over biblical statements such as exhortations to “obey the gospel” (Rom 10:16; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17), in which obedience and God’s good news to sinners might appear to be awkwardly fused—awkward, that is, if (as Schlatter suspects) we are unduly influenced by an unhealthy post-Reformation impulse to shave the “gospel” down to a word of love-vacuous pardon only. In New Testament Christianity, Schlatter suggests, to love God’s

⁶² Schlatter, *Rückblick auf meine Lebensarbeit* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1977), 174–75; Yarbrough, “Ethics Gap,” 72–75. Cf. Schlatter, *Das christliche Dogma*, 599–600.

⁶³ *Creative Grace*, 152.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith in Romans 4: Paul’s Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15:6* (WUNT 2/224; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2007), 15. We remember, however, that it was Luther himself who insisted, in the preface to his Romans commentary, that faith “changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them” (*Luther’s Works* [ed. Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960], 35:370).

mercy is to love and embody mercy itself; to love God's grace is to love and embody grace itself; to love God's patience is to love and embody patience itself.

Yarbrough makes the point with verve, locating Schlatter's critique of the Reformation in the centrality of love.

As a New Testament scholar and incisive analyst of intellectual history, Schlatter argued that the Protestant Reformation had not gone far enough. It correctly repudiated the merit theology of medieval Roman Catholicism. But it failed to move far enough in the positive direction of full-orbed love for God, a love that expressed itself in joyful, and where necessary costly, obedience.⁶⁵

In the reformers' striving to rectify the self-focused merit-theology of Catholicism, they may have replaced it with an equally self-focused mercy-theology of Protestantism. Merit-theology focused on human performance; mercy-theology focused on human need; both focused on humanity. Schlatter calls us to a God-directed soteriology in which grace not only forgives (negatively) but empowers (positively). Sin, on the other hand, renders love impotent by instilling fatal self-consciousness.⁶⁶ One does wonder, however, if Schlatter would have experienced an equal level of discomfort with Calvin, instead of interacting primarily with the Lutheran strand of the Reformation.

Kennen Wir Jesus? (Do We Know Jesus?) was the last work Schlatter produced and is helpful at this point. Reflecting on the call of Galatians 5:6 to exercise "faith working through love," he asks, "Can it be of significance to us if we appropriate what the Reformation brought to the church?" Schlatter concedes: "Certainly, if Luther assists us in coming to faith." But he then qualifies this concession:

But why is faith all that matters to God? It is not simply that faith makes us confess true belief, nor is it that faith fills us with great joy and lifts us to praise of God. Rather, faith makes us active. In what way? It turns us aside from what we ourselves are and do. It is the repudiation of our own work and the renunciation of our sinful desire. If faith were any less powerful, it would have no saving force. It makes us active by combining with love, and if love is in us, it governs what we do.

Consequently, "Christ recognizes faith as valid when the believer acts in such a way that it is clear he is being directed by love."⁶⁷ This is why, according to Schlatter, Paul called love greater than faith in 1 Corinthians 13:13, and it also prompts Schlatter to define sin in terms of lovelessness.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Yarbrough, "Ethics Gap," 72.

⁶⁶ *Das christliche Dogma*, 223.

⁶⁷ *Do We Know Jesus?* (trans. A. J. Köstenberger and R. W. Yarbrough; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 516. Cf. Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus* (FRLANT 87; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 97.

⁶⁸ *Theology of the Apostles*, 237. For an extended discussion of God's love, see Schlatter's *Das christliche Dogma*, 195–198. Augustine, too, as is well known, makes love the key to keeping faith and obedience together (*On Faith and Works* [trans. G. J. Lombardo; ACW 48; New York: Newman, 1988], 28–29).

Faith and Obedience: Inseparable yet Distinct

Are we left, then, with a works-plagued gospel after all? Is not making active love necessary in justifying faith precisely what compromises the good news and its unmitigated exclusion of human performance? It may at first seem so, an accusation that is not helped by Schlatter's conspicuous lack of reference to the aid of the Holy Spirit in obedience. While he does address the Holy Spirit at the end of *The Theology of the Apostles*, he gives this important topic a paltry five pages.⁶⁹

Schlatter recognizes the danger of a works-infected gospel—even if that work is love—and avoids it. In a particularly illuminating passage concerning the relation of love to justification, he clarifies that love in no way contributes to the *ground* for justification.⁷⁰ Love is essential to the faith that justifies, yet it is simply this faith *as faith*—that is, the outward bent of the heart divested of every trace of personal moral contribution, even that of love—that justifies. “[R]epentance requires that we consider not our love, but rather our faith, to be our righteousness.”⁷¹

More broadly, it will be comforting to those who consider themselves heirs of the Reformation to know that Schlatter at times sounds quite Lutheran indeed. With the coming of Christ, he says, “The divine demand and the divine gift, and the Law and the Christ are distinguished as never before, and the distinctives of faith over against work and of believing over against seeing and knowing reveals its profundity.”⁷² Paul and Peter therefore agree that the Mosaic law must no longer control their relationship to God.⁷³ Rather, candid acknowledgment of need is the only prerequisite for the reception of grace.⁷⁴ Paul in particular drew out the distinction between faith and obedience; he knew that he had received divine mercy only by faith,

because it is solely in Christ that he has everything, that is, God with his righteousness is interceding for him and his life granted to him. From now on, he recognizes a clear contrast between Christ and the Law. . . . As a result, faith and works are separated, and an intermingling of both became inconceivable for him.⁷⁵

While Schlatter could say in one breath, “Paul never conceived of the Christian solely as believer but always also as the one who loves, knows, works, suffers, and hopes,” he never neglected the truth arising from Luther’s ardent desires and importunate beatings against Paul that “the distinction between faith . . . and works is nowhere blurred.”⁷⁶ Luther’s ghost is not wholly banished in the writings of Adolf Schlatter. Lest we see Schlatter as neglecting appropriate distinction between faith and obedience in his

⁶⁹ Ibid., 368–372. Maier concludes that Schlatter did indeed neglect the Holy Spirit (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, 355). The Spirit is given a more prominent role in the believer’s faith in *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament* (e.g., 365), but even there the treatment is not adequately integrated.

⁷⁰ *Theology of the Apostles*, 237–38.

⁷¹ Ibid., 238 (my translation).

⁷² Ibid., 28.

⁷³ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁴ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 352–55, 394–97.

⁷⁵ *Theology of the Apostles*, 298; cf. 411. See also the strong statements made in Schlatter’s comments on Phil 3:4b–8 (*Thessalonicher, Philipper, Timotheus und Titus*, 91).

⁷⁶ *Theology of the Apostles*, 320. See also, e.g., the very Lutheran-like statements in his lay-level exposition of Gal 1 (*Galater, Epheser, Kolosser und Philemon*, 24, 28).

zeal to emphasize the union of these two elements—as some recent writers appear to have done⁷⁷—let us note the valid distinction of which Schlatter repeatedly speaks. Faith and obedience are inseparable, yet not indistinct.⁷⁸ Schlatter did not lose sight of *sola fide*. Rather, he reminds us that the *fides* that saves is of a very particular (living) quality—namely, it loves.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The dissemination of Schlatter’s influence was stunted with the thousands killed in the wars of the first half of the twentieth century who had sat under his teaching, but recent interest has begun to bring his writings back from the grave. One reason to be thankful for this is the centrality of love in the writings of this theologian. For Schlatter, “the longing of love” weds faith and obedience, yet without compromising the reformers’ rightly ardent concern to protect justifying faith from any encroaching human contribution.

But this is more than an academic question. If the Church is to fulfill its commission, Schlatter’s “agapocentric” vision must be resurrected no less than the Lord whose rising rendered such love possible. This was the conviction of Paul, who declared to a mightily gifted church that “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13); of John, who pronounced that “anyone who does not love does not know God” (1 John 4:8); of James, who made loving one’s neighbor equivalent with fulfilling the whole law (Jas 2:8); of Peter, who exhorted his readers that they “above all, keep loving one another earnestly” (1 Pet 4:8); and of Christ himself, who proclaimed that the greatest commandment was that of love (Mark 12:28–31).⁸⁰



⁷⁷ E.g., Victor Paul Furnish, *Ethics and Theology in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 184–85; Don B. Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (WUNT 79; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994), 18–19; Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 122, 138.

⁷⁸ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 381.

⁷⁹ A point made repeatedly by St. Augustine (e.g., *On Faith and Works*, e.g., 37, 45–46).

⁸⁰ I am grateful to Dr. Hans Bayer for his helpful interaction on an early draft of this paper.

The Ethnic Enemy—No Greek or Jew . . . Barbarian, Scythian: The Gospel and Ethnic Difference¹

— Keith Ferdinando —

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Defining Ethnicity

Whatever ‘globalisation’ may be, it has been accompanied by insistent and sometimes violent affirmations of ethnic identity. Such a phenomenon may be paradoxical, but is nevertheless comprehensible: the homogenising dynamic unleashed by globalising tendencies, reinforced by the creation of multinational political entities such as the European Union, more or less inevitably arouses a movement in the reverse direction, whose purpose is to reassert and defend traditional identities.² However, while apparently self-evident, the notion of ethnicity is not a simple one, and definition is problematic. A minimalist approach might identify an ethnic group as simply ‘a social group which shares a culture’,³ but this does not do justice to the complexity of the concept. More satisfying is the definition offered by Hutchinson and Smith, who isolate a cluster of components that might generate a sense of ethnic identity: ‘A named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members.’⁴ Ethnic identity would not necessarily depend on the presence of all six of the elements specified, but at least some of them would be present, the significance attached to each varying according to the particular ethnic group concerned and perhaps the period in history.

The notion of ethnicity is evidently close to that of nationality. Differentiation between a nation and an ethnic group is again problematic and even somewhat arbitrary since words are defined by their use and these words are used in different ways according to preference. Nevertheless, a nation might be understood as an ethnic group which has, or seeks, political autonomy or statehood: ‘if an ethnic group wishes to rule itself it needs to start calling itself a nation.’⁵ However, and especially in view of the

¹ An earlier version of this work appeared in *At the Crossroads*, edited by Craig Smith and published (2008) by OMF Literature Inc., PO Box 2217, 1062 Manila, Philippines (www.omflit.com).

² Cf. D. Hughes, ‘Ethnicity and Globalisation’, lecture given at the Global Connections Conference, ‘One World or Else?’, Swanwick, 3–5 July 2002, 10, at <http://www.globalconnections.co.uk/pdfs/owethnicityhughes.pdf>.

³ M. G. Brett, ‘Interpreting Ethnicity: Method, Hermeneutics, Ethics’, in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. M. G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 9.

⁴ J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

⁵ S. Fenton, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 52.

existence of *multiethnic* states, 'nations' as political entities may seek to detach themselves from any sort of ethnic identification and 'stress civic rather than ethnic criteria' for membership. Belonging to the nation would thus be a matter of citizenship rather than ethnicity.⁶ As a result of significant immigration since the Second World War the British 'nation' currently faces dilemmas of this kind as it seeks to clarify the notion of 'Britishness'.

If the meaning of ethnicity may sometimes come close to that of nationality, it is certainly remote from the concept of race. Race theory, as developed especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sought to define and distinguish human groups in biological and genetic terms, and claimed to identify a limited number of discrete human 'races'. Human difference, in terms of behaviour, ability, temperament, and morality, was then explained in 'racial' terms, and historically such phenomena as colonialism and slavery as well as the condemnation of 'racially mixed' marriages (*miscegenation*) were justified on the basis of a supposed hierarchy of races. While racial approaches to the study of humanity have claimed 'scientific' status, being purportedly based on empirical, observable phenomena, they are now discredited as pseudo-science,⁷ although not eliminated from popular thinking where they may continue to play a role in ethnic self-identification. Indeed, the discourse of 'race relations' may unintentionally give credence to such ideas.

More complex than the issue of definition is that of the essential nature of ethnic identity. Where does it come from? Why have human beings tended throughout history to identify themselves in ethnic terms? A contested issue here is the distinction between primordialist and instrumentalist approaches, which has been expressed as follows:

The primordialists believe that ethnic identity is of the essence of what human beings are. It is not something humans create but a given, the assumption on which they build their lives. The instrumentalists argue that ethnic identity is a human creation. It is something which societies construct to pursue political or economic ends.⁸

Dichotomising in this way certainly helps to clarify the distinction, but may risk oversimplifying a complex issue. As Fenton observes, two issues are actually at stake in the debate. First, there is the question whether ethnic groups are 'real' or 'socially constructed'; and second, whether human beings are attached to ethnic groups out of calculation of personal interest (in which case they are instrumental) or out of deeply rooted feeling and sentiment (in which case they are primordial).⁹ In response to the first and utilising Hutchinson and Smith's definition cited above, there is clearly a significant degree of social construction in the notion of ethnicity. Ethnic groups give themselves names and perpetuate them; share myths of origin and historical memories; shape a common language and culture of which religion or worldview is a fundamental constituent; and foster a sense of common identity—of belonging. They are imagined communities fashioned and perpetuated by their members. Their life span may be curtailed or their numbers diminished as individuals, or indeed the group as a whole, choose to identify themselves in alternative terms, whether ethnic or otherwise. Ethnic identity has a fluid quality and is subject to transformation and renegotiation. Nevertheless, this does not mean that ethnic groups are not 'real'. They are certainly 'real' to those who belong to them and real too in the sense that they are

⁶ Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 52–53.

⁷ See the 'American Anthropological Association Statement on "Race"' (May 17, 1998), at <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racep.htm>.

⁸ D. Hughes, *Castrating Culture* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 32–33.

⁹ Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 74.

rooted in tangible realities including language, territory, history, and religion, which somehow come together, variously combined, in the collective imagination to forge and sustain a sense of identity.

Furthermore, the socially constructed nature of ethnicity does not mean that human beings attach themselves to their groups for reasons of rational calculation—‘to pursue political or economic ends’. On the contrary, the ethnic bond is profoundly affective: it is in this sense *primordial* rather than instrumental or contractual. This is expressed by Geertz:

By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’—or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’—of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. . . . [F]or virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachment seems to flow more from a sense of natural—some would say spiritual—affinity than from social interaction.¹⁰

Geertz’s analysis recognises both the socially constructed nature of ethnicity (‘the *assumed* “givens”, i.e., the role of language, custom, social practice) and also its ‘ineffable’, ‘overpowering’, and coercive nature, which constitutes its primordality. However, the question remains: Why should human beings feel this way? How are we to understand the object (ethnicity) that arouses emotions of such immense power? At least part of the answer lies in the force of kinship obligation, as Geertz indicates. Attachment to kin is itself to some degree socially constructed, its exact nature and orientation varying from one culture to another, but it is rooted in the profound objective realities of family, however family may be conceived. Ethnic attachment may then be seen as the extension of family attachment and obligation to kin beyond—even far beyond—visible and experienced family members. It is family imagined at its fullest extent. Thus a nation ‘is a group of people who feel that they are ancestrally related. It is the largest group that can command a person’s loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is, from this perspective, the fully extended family.’¹¹ In reality, of course, ethnic groups absorb those who have no biological relationship with the community as a whole, and some with an immigrant background may even have a stronger sense of ethnic identity than the indigenous population they have joined. In this sense the group is socially constructed and imagined: ‘it is the *belief* in common origin, not any objective common ancestry, which is socially persuasive.’¹² However, the basis on which it is imagined is the sense of family connection, which remains powerful even though sober reflection indicates that it may not be true in any literal sense. It is about ‘putative descent’.¹³

¹⁰ C. Geertz, ‘Primordial Ties’, in Hutchinson and Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*, 41–42.

¹¹ W. Connor, ‘Beyond Reason: The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond’, in *Ethnicity* (ed. Hutchinson and Smith), 71.

¹² Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 62, expounding the approach of Max Weber (1864–1920), the German scholar generally considered to be one of the fathers of modern sociology.

¹³ D. Conversi, ‘Autonomous Communities and the Ethnic Settlement in Spain’, in *Autonomy and Ethnicity: Negotiating Competing Claims in Multi-Ethnic States* (ed. Y. Ghai; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134–35; quoted by Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 21.

The intensity of a sense of ethnic identification varies considerably, both from one group to another and within the same group across time. It may lay dormant for long periods of time, only to re-emerge and express itself with explosive force, as seems to have been the case in the recent history of Yugoslavia and its successor states. The mobilisation of ethnic feeling may be due to many factors, immigration and the tensions it creates being among the most important. However, it is also here that the instrumental dimension comes into play: elites may exploit the sense of ethnic obligation to advance their own interests. This does not mean that they are *constructing* ethnic identity; an already existing ethnic attachment—albeit one that may have been largely passive—is the *presupposition* of their political manipulation. This brings us to consider the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic division in Rwanda, which both illustrates some of the issues raised here and demonstrates how complex issues of ethnicity can become.

Rwanda and Ethnic Conflict

Since 1994 much has been written about the Rwandan genocide and its background. It is undisputed that there are three distinct named groups in Rwandan society (Hutu, about 84% of the population; Tutsi, 15%, and Twa, 1%), but certainty and agreement evaporate beyond that point. This is partly the result, no doubt, of the lack of significant literary remains through which to investigate the pre-colonial Rwandan past, but testimony also to the extent to which Rwandan history has become the muddy battleground of rival apologetic concerns, especially since the genocide.¹⁴

A preliminary issue concerns the time at which each of the three groups first appeared in ‘the land of a thousand hills’. An earlier consensus assumed that they arrived at different times; Hughes reiterates this approach when he suggests that the Twa were in Rwanda by about A.D. 1000, the Hutu by 1500, and the Tutsi between 1600 and 1900.¹⁵ An alternative view is that both Hutu and Tutsi ‘are descended from farmers who began cultivating the region 2,000 to 1,500 years ago.’¹⁶ There is in fact little firm empirical basis for the hypothesis of ancestral migrations (although much is known of nineteenth and twentieth century migrations, especially into the Kivu provinces of eastern Congo), and agnosticism is probably the only reliable conclusion: ‘there is still no consensus amongst historians and anthropologists on the origin of the Batutsi.’¹⁷ Nevertheless, the issue is not an indifferent one. During the genocide, ‘Hutu power’ extremists ‘killed Rwanda’s Tutsis and sent their bodies “back to Ethiopia” via the Nyaborongo and Akagera rivers.’¹⁸ The notion that the Tutsi were relative latecomers, even if they had come some hundreds of years earlier, had immense ethnic significance in the context of bitter economic and political rivalry, and it was used to justify their annihilation and the repatriation of their corpses.

A further issue is the nature of difference, particularly between Tutsi and Hutu. Traditionally it has been understood in ethnic terms with the two groups identified as African ‘tribes’. The theory that each group arrived in Rwanda at different times is consistent with this ethnic interpretation. Moreover, it was certainly the view taken by early European explorers and assumed in the German and Belgian colonial

¹⁴ See especially J. Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), which focuses on the ideological motivations underlying some post-genocide narratives of Rwandan history.

¹⁵ Hughes, *Castrating Culture*, 196–97.

¹⁶ J. Reader, *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 302–3.

¹⁷ M. Mamdani, ‘From Conquest to Consent as the Basis of State Formation: Reflections on Rwanda’, in *New Left Review* 216 (March/April 1996), at <http://www.newleftreview.net/IssueI212.asp?Article=01>.

¹⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 9, 22.

administrations from the late nineteenth century. However, for them the difference went beyond simple ethnicity, and was absolutised through the imposition of racial categories which drew on theories current and widely accepted at the time. Thus, the Hutu were identified as an inferior and uncivilised Bantu people who had been subjugated by the racially and indeed militarily superior Hamitic Tutsis on their arrival in Rwanda. The Tutsis themselves allegedly came from Ethiopia according to the theory of the British explorer John Hanning Speke and others after him. Speke ‘decided without a shred of evidence, that these “carriers of a superior civilisation” who were ancestors of the Tutsi were the Galla of southern Ethiopia.’¹⁹ Meanwhile, empirical evidence of Tutsi superiority was supposedly found in their physical and intellectual attributes, as well as their distinctive customs and way of life. Consequently the Belgian colonial authorities conferred political and social privileges on the Tutsi minority whom they associated closely with their administration. In the words of Pierre Ryckmans, a Belgian administrator of the 1920s, ‘The Batutsi were meant to reign. Their fine presence is in itself enough to give them a great prestige *vis-à-vis* the inferior races which surround.’²⁰ The privileged position accorded the Tutsi was of course much to the detriment of the Hutu, and it fostered resentment on the one side and assumptions of natural superiority on the other, which would express themselves—even before the Belgians left—in bitter and violent conflict.

However, was the division between Hutu and Tutsi indeed an ethnic one, let alone racial? The position of much recent scholarship is that it should rather be seen in social terms and that it was the imposition of racial categories by the Europeans along with their theories of Tutsi migration and conquest that reshaped a harmonious Rwandan society along bitterly divisive ethnic lines. ‘What had been social classes, the Bahutu, Batutsi and Batwa, were gradually transformed into ethnic groups.’²¹ (Some have even compared Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa with Indian castes.²²) Thus, protagonists of this approach point out that Hutu and Tutsi shared a common language and religion; they intermarried and lived side by side in the same villages; they had the same culture, the same social organisation rooted in the clan, and the same mythology and values. Nevertheless, this analysis is also contested. Similarity of religion and culture does not exclude the possibility of ethnic difference; groups may indeed closely resemble each other while simultaneously maintaining distinct ethnic identities.²³ Moreover, while not denying the grievous consequences resulting from the imposition of European *racial* constructs, some argue that Tutsi and Hutu were ethnic categories in pre-colonial times, at least from the second half of the nineteenth century following the expansionist policies of king Rwabugiri and his extension of the institution of *uburetwa* (forced labour) to his Hutu, but not his Tutsi, subjects.

For the period up to 1860, it is correct to say that historians know next to nothing about how these terms ‘Twa’, ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ were used in social discourse: whether these terms denoted social or physical classifications, for instance, is simply unclear. From about 1860, however, when Rwabugiri expanded the sphere of domination

19 R. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst, 1995), 7. Nevertheless, on account of their supposedly distinctive physical features, Prunier himself argues ‘that the Tutsi have come from outside the Great Lakes area and that it is possible they were of a distinct racial stock’ (16).

20 Quoted in Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 11.

21 T. Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology in the Rwandan Crises 1900–1994* (Milton Keynes: Regnum, 2005), 8–9.

22 R. Kapuscinski, *The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life* (London: Penguin, 2002), 165.

23 Cf. A. Giddens, *Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), 242–46.

and influence of the Tutsi royal court, the situation becomes clearer. As research has revealed, Rwabugiri began, or consolidated, a process of ethnic polarisation.²⁴

The question is clearly not simple, and more detailed analysis would be beyond the scope of the present discussion. However, from the perspective of post-1994 Rwandan politics, what is at issue is the vital matter of ultimate responsibility for genocide and the history of ethnic tension and violence that preceded it. If Rwanda was an essentially harmonious and ethnically united country before European colonisers introduced their racial ideology, then the ultimate source of genocide was not a longstanding Hutu-Tutsi division, but rather the colonial imposition of a false consciousness which created that division; and the present goal of government policy must be to bring about a return to the pristine ethnic unity of the pre-colonial Banyarwanda. Such an approach would also mean that Rwanda has been the 'victim' of Western interference with all that that may imply in terms of the imputation of responsibility and guilt. If, however, ethnic divisions existed before colonisation, that would suggest that there were already potentially serious fault lines within the structure of Rwandan society, although it would still be the case that colonial racism made the situation much worse. However this may be, certainly by the middle of the twentieth century Hutu and Tutsi may be regarded as rival ethnic groups, each possessed of a name and each characterised by a sense of solidarity, by shared historical memories and myths of origin (even if some of the myths were imported), and by associations (albeit increasingly contentious) with the same territory.²⁵ Ethnic identity rooted in strong emotions of kinship had been constructed, even if such construction was due, at least partly, to external intervention.

Nevertheless, to speak of the genocide in ethnic terms alone would also be an oversimplification. Certainly the major fault line in 1994 was ethnic: in large measure Hutus massacred Tutsis along with those of their own number who seemed to be betraying the cause of their brothers. But the origins of genocide cannot be found in ethnicity alone. It is rather the case that one particular Hutu elite exploited feelings of ethnic identity 'to pursue political or economic ends' of their own. The events of 1994 illustrate not only the primordial nature of ethnicity—its 'coercive' and 'ineffable' character—but also the instrumental and very calculated ends to which it may be invoked and manipulated by those in a position to do so. To see the explosion of violence as just another irrational tribal spasm at the centre of the 'heart of darkness' would be naïve and dangerously simplistic.

In 1959, just three years before the departure of the Belgians in 1962, a Rwandan social 'revolution' took place, and Tutsi hegemony was replaced by that of the Hutu. It was accompanied by considerable violence, and as many as 300,000 Tutsis fled, many of them to Uganda, where others steadily joined them in subsequent years until the Tutsi refugee diaspora had risen to as many as 600,000. While there were outbreaks of ethnic violence on a number of occasions after 1959, especially under the first president, Grégoire Kayibanda (1962–73), there was nothing on the scale of the events of 1994, and across much of Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi lived amicably together. Indeed, according to Pottier, for much of his presidency Juvénal Habyarimana (1973–94) sought to diminish ethnic tensions within Rwanda.²⁶ However, numerous factors had brought Rwanda and its government to a perilous condition by the early months of 1994, and the Habyarimana regime and its extremist allies exploited the ethnic issue

24 Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 12–13; cf. 110–23.

25 Nevertheless, the International Criminal Tribunal apparently found the term ethnic 'troublesome' as a means of categorising the Tutsi. Cf. V. Keating, 'Ethnicity and the Rwandan Genocide', 4, available at <http://myweb.dal.ca/vkeating/Rwanda.pdf>.

26 Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 34–35.

as the most promising strategy for survival, if also a very high-risk one. It was also, needless to say, unspeakably cynical and wicked.

First among these factors, and most fundamental of them all, the country was overpopulated. From two million in 1940 the population had risen to over seven million by 1991.²⁷ Prunier therefore argues that ‘at least part of the reason why [the genocide] was carried out so thoroughly by the ordinary rank-and-file peasants . . . was feeling that there were too many people on too little land, and that with a reduction in numbers, there would be more for the survivors.’²⁸

Second, from the late 1980s, Rwanda faced a calamitous economic recession. The economy depended heavily on exports of coffee, but in 1989 international coffee prices dropped by over 50%, while mechanisms within Rwanda to stabilise incomes and protect agricultural smallholders were breaking down. The economic and social consequences were dire and entailed correspondingly dangerous political implications as well. ‘The collapse sentenced many poor to unprecedented levels of despair, making them vulnerable to manipulation by politicians in search of extreme solutions to their country’s (and their own) growing insecurity.’²⁹ It was from such people that the *interahamwe* militias were recruited. Meanwhile, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a predominantly Tutsi organisation founded in 1985 and composed of refugees and their descendants living just across the border in Uganda, attempted their first invasion in 1990–91. Although it was frustrated, albeit only with the aid of French and Zairian forces, the international community put pressure on Habyarimana’s government to agree to power sharing with the other Rwandan political parties, including the RPF, a process which led eventually to the Arusha accords of August 1993.

The invasion, however, enabled the government, and especially Hutu extremists associated with it, to invoke the spectre of a return to the old Tutsi domination of the colonial period and before. Such propaganda was the more compelling when the first democratically elected president of Burundi, Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu, was assassinated on 21 October 1993 not long after taking power, in a coup carried out by Tutsi soldiers. The event provoked massacres of large numbers of Burundians on both sides of the ethnic divide, and the flight of about 300,000 Hutu refugees to the bordering countries, mainly Rwanda. Within Rwanda Ndadaye’s death strengthened the hand of those calling for drastic solutions to the ‘Tutsi problem’ and gave them credibility in the eyes of the dormant Hutu majority: ‘the hysterical choice of kill-first-not-to-be-killed could be developed into a general feeling shared by large sections of the population.’³⁰

It was in these conditions that extremist Rwandan news media, the *Kangura* (‘Wake it up!’) newspaper, begun in May 1990 and run by Hassan Ngeze, and *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM), which was opened in July 1993 by Jean Bosco Barayagwiza, were vigorously disseminating virulent anti-Tutsi propaganda and stoking the paranoia. Behind them stood powerful forces. The source of *Kangura*’s funding has never been established, although at Ngeze’s trial some witnesses claimed that

²⁷ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 20.

²⁸ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 4.

²⁹ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 21.

³⁰ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 200.

the state intelligence services were involved.³¹ With regard to RTLM there is little doubt: ‘The president [Habyarimana] was the largest shareholder in the venture: he held a million shares.’³²

While the government of Rwanda was ostensibly in the hands of the Hutu majority, it was in fact one particular Hutu political elite that held power and used it in its own interests. It was associated especially with the northwest of the country—and even more specifically with the family of the president’s wife, Madame Agathe (*le clan de Madame*). However, the huge economic problems it was confronting were leading to a haemorrhaging of support. It was also faced with the imminent necessity of sharing power, both with representatives of other parties including the Tutsi RPF, and also with the despised south-central regions of the country with which there had been a relationship of animosity going back to the 1920s when the Tutsi monarchy, aided by the Belgian administration, brought the northwest under its control.³³ So, the ‘little house’ (*akazu*)³⁴ engaged in the diversionary tactic of exploiting latent ethnic animosities, reminding the Hutu of their historical ‘memories’ and myths and thus mobilising opinion against the traditional Tutsi ‘oppressors’ in order to retain power for itself. It was a classic example of the instrumental manipulation of ethnicity by an elite for its own political ends and recalls Fenton’s analysis of ethnic ‘action’: ‘we would caution against being misled into thinking that, because something called “ethnic groups” are involved, the action, conflict and social relations are primarily determined or ‘driven’ by ethnicity.’³⁵

Indeed, the genocide ‘grew out of an explosive struggle for resources which embattled politicians *ethnicised* to their advantage, if only fleetingly. A crisis rooted in class and regional interests was turned into a conflict for which an ethnic minority, “the Tutsi”, was held responsible.’³⁶ Thus, Alison des Forges wrote in the *Washington Post* soon after the beginning of genocide:

Politics, Not Tribalism, Is the Root of the Bloodletting. . . . As the piles of bodies mount in Rwanda, commentators are pulling out their generic analyses of violence in Africa: anarchy and/or tribal conflict. Content with ready-made explanations, they overlook the organized killings that opened the way to what has become chaos.³⁷

The regime’s genocidal self-defence had indeed been long prepared, and the assassination of Habyarimana on 6 April 1994 was only the trigger that set the whole strategy in motion. Preparations had begun at least two years earlier with the distribution of guns throughout Rwanda, and the training of the *interahamwe* militias by the army. When the killing began, the earliest victims were significant political opponents of the regime, including the prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who was a Hutu and member of the Mouvement Démocratique Républicain, a rival of Habyarimana’s Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement, along with other opposition members of the cabinet.³⁸ Eventually at least 800,000 would die in this ‘pre-planned attempt by the Hutu *akazu* to put

³¹ D. Temple-Raston, *Justice on the Grass* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 114–15.

³² Temple-Raston, *Justice on the Grass*, 49.

³³ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 35.

³⁴ ‘Little house’ (*akazu*) was the name given to the inner circle of the court in pre-colonial Rwanda. Cf. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 85.

³⁵ Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 7.

³⁶ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 31.

³⁷ Alison Des Forges in the *Washington Post*, 17 April 1994, quoted by Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 66.

³⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 30.

an end to the threat to their monopoly of power.³⁹ Unknown numbers of Hutu would also perish during the RPF's invasion and conquest of Rwanda in those same months (which brought the genocide to a halt), and their subsequent invasion of Zaïre and attack on the refugee camps in Kivu (1996–97), where *génocidaires* had taken refuge.

A Biblical Perspective on Ethnicity

At the time of genocide, Rwanda was ostensibly a 'Christian country'. Of course, classifying a nation in those terms is problematic, but the vast majority of the population certainly identified itself as Christian, while the churches held a position of influence within society. However, churches demonstrated an almost supine reverence towards the Habyarimana regime, and few Christian voices were effectively raised against the corrosive atmosphere of ethnic hatred. The churches were, in Gatwa's telling phrase, 'a quiescent presence' as the storm gathered and finally broke around them.⁴⁰ Nor, sadly, was complicity confined to silence alone. In the words of one Roman Catholic bishop, 'We have to begin again because our best catechists, those who filled our churches, were the first to go out with machetes in their hands.'⁴¹ Nevertheless, at the same time there were outstanding examples of love and faithfulness to the gospel and to brothers and sisters on the opposing side of the ethnic barrier, a continuing fruit of the Rwandan revival that had begun in the 1930s.

Many factors contributed to the failure of the Rwandan church of the late twentieth century to address the most critical issue of their own time and people - that of ethnicity.⁴² One factor, however, was a failure to grapple with biblical perspectives on ethnicity, let alone allow them to challenge and transform ingrained attitudes and reflexes, to penetrate deeply held cultural values. It was a failure of contextualisation, of relevant discipleship, of bringing the eternal word of God to bear on the changing world of men and women in all its particularity. Right action begins with right belief: minds must be renewed if believers are to conform no longer to the pattern of this world—including the pattern of misdirected ethnic loyalty (Rom 12:2). Where this does not happen and worldview is not touched, 'the pattern of this world' continues simply to assert itself and to drive thinking and behaviour. And, in consequence, in Rwanda 'the blood of tribalism' remained 'deeper than the waters of baptism.'⁴³ It is a sobering manifestation of the failure, first of all, of theology. However, the failure is not peculiar to Rwanda.

Missiologists have developed theologies of 'ethnic evangelism', but few missiologists are developing a theology of 'ethnicity' itself. This task is becoming increasingly urgent because the demands of ethnicity will probably dominate the world's agenda at least in the opening decades of the new millennium.⁴⁴

³⁹ D. Hughes, *God of the Poor* (Carlisle: OM, 1998), 230.

⁴⁰ Gatwa, *The Churches and Ethnic Ideology*, 107.

⁴¹ Quoted by J. Martin, 'Rwanda: Why?', *Transformation* 12.2 (April/June 1995), 1.

⁴² See, for example, several articles in the issue of *Transformation* 12.2 (April/June 1995), referred to in the preceding footnote, or M. Guillebaud, *Rwanda: The Land God Forgot?* (Mill Hill: Monarch, 2002).

⁴³ Martin, 'Rwanda: Why?', 2.

⁴⁴ D. Jacobs, 'Ethnicity', in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (ed. S. Moreau; Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 323.

What follows is scarcely a comprehensive theology of ethnicity, but an attempt briefly to suggest something of the shape that it might take.

1. Creation

The doctrine of creation affirms the unity as well as the dignity of all humanity. All are created in the image of God. There are not multiple human *races*, but just one human *race*. This is foundational to any theological approach to ethnicity, for it relativises every human difference—social, ethnic, economic, and so on. A persistent tendency of the racism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism that consistently scar human relationships is the denigration of the ‘other’ as somehow less than human, especially when compared with ‘us.’ For many years leading up to 1994 the Tutsi had been loathed as ‘cockroaches’ (*inyenzi*), a term of abuse that effectively dehumanised them and made the slaughter psychologically that much easier. It is the truth of creation that stands as a bulwark against every attitude of this kind.

But if creation entails unity, does it imply ethnicity? Clearly the ‘table of the nations’ in Genesis 10 indicates the existence of ethnicity at that stage in human history, reaffirming also the essential unity of human beings, as all are descended from Noah and so are members of one family. The issue is whether the ethnic diversity here exists as a sorry consequence of the fall or is integral to human existence as such. The answer seems to be that ethnic difference is entailed implicitly and inevitably by the so-called cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26–28, repeated later in slightly different terms (Gen. 9:1–17). “Be fruitful and increase in number; *fill the earth and subdue it.*” The growth of the human race and its dispersal across the globe would necessarily create the conditions in which ethnic difference would emerge. The encounter with different environments and ecologies must produce diverse cultures; varied journeys would similarly mean different histories; scattering would lead to the forming of many communities, each bound together in mutual kinship, each naming itself and developing its own sense of identity.⁴⁵

It seems that the very diversity is a *good*, intended from the beginning by a creator who is the source of a multiplicity of species of animal and plant, fish and bird, and that it flows from the creativity bestowed on his human creation. Thus the primeval command to fill the earth unavoidably entails a degree of ethnic diversity, somewhat as it has been defined in the preceding discussion. Similarly, at the end as at the beginning, the climactic vision of the consummation of creation may suggest a continuation of ethnic diversity, when a multitude ‘from every nation, tribe, people and language’ (Rev 7:9) gather around the throne, while the infinitely varied riches of the nations are brought into the new Jerusalem: ‘the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. . . . The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it’ (Rev 21:24, 26).

Nevertheless, ethnic difference is also relativised in Revelation. The great emphasis is on the constitution of the *new* people of God drawn *from* the nations,⁴⁶ rather than the preservation of the old ethnic categories. The renewed unity of humanity is the greater truth and, if ethnicity survives, it is as a relatively minor theme in a much bigger reality. Similarly, the reference to the nations in Paul’s speech before the Areopagus, while it confirms divine intentionality in the formation of nations, also suggests a degree of provisionality in human ethnicity: ‘From one man he made every nation of men, that they

⁴⁵ Mitchel, *Evangelicalism and National Identity in Ulster 1921–1988* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62, suggests to the contrary that the nations were ‘created out of an act of judgement after Babel’.

⁴⁶ N. Summerton, ‘Identity Crisis?: The Nation-State, Nationality, Regionalism, Language and Religion’, *Themelios* 21 (1996), 18.

should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live' (Acts 17:26). The fluidity and even the ephemerality of ethnic identity have been noted above; Paul suggests here that this reflects God's providential purpose. Nations are 'contingent cultural expressions of human history'⁴⁷ and have no absolute or immutable character, which in turn challenges every tendency towards the ethnic idolatry that has characterised some peoples and epochs.

2. Fall

As with every facet of life, the fall and the corrupting effects of sin have seriously impacted human experience of ethnicity. Not the least dimension of this is the greatly enhanced tendency of ethnic diversity to produce hatred and violence. In part this simply reflects the social consequences of the fall which are visible in all other areas of human community as well. It is not just inter-ethnic relationships that tend to become envenomed, but class and gender, too.

In the case of ethnicity, however, the situation is aggravated further by a deepening of the gulfs that separate ethnic groups. For example, one of the great determinants of ethnic difference is culture. At the heart of culture is worldview, and central to worldview is religion. A fallen world in which human beings are alienated from God, and in which ethnic groups will consequently tend to pursue *diverse* religious visions, is a world in which ethnic division is entrenched to a far greater extent than would be true if all united in the worship of the one sovereign Creator, the possibility of conflict being therefore enormously enhanced. Similarly, insofar as the confusion of languages was a judgement for human disobedience rather than a necessary condition of human variety, rebellion resulted again in a far deeper chasm of ethnic difference. Inter-ethnic communication and the possibility of mutual comprehension are thereby constantly frustrated, with obvious negative consequences for inter-ethnic harmony.

There is thus an ambivalence about ethnicity for a humanity that is alienated from its Creator. On the one hand, it expresses the Creator's intention and is a source of rich blessing for human beings. Thus, first, insofar as ethnic identity is somehow rooted in a sense of kinship, it is an expression of natural and legitimate human affection and community, and its suppression is a deviation from the order God has established. Accordingly, as he prayed for their salvation, Paul expressed his love for his own people, significantly identifying them not simply as fellow Jews—members of the same nation—but as brothers: 'I could wish that I myself were cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel' (Rom 9:3).

Second, ethnicity answers to the profound human need for identity, belonging and security. This is again a significant biblical value, expressed in the Old Testament through the experience of Israel as a nation, whose identity is fostered through many of the characteristic markers of ethnicity, including land, history and the story of their origin. Moreover, the law and prophets demonstrate a particular concern for aliens, whose ethnicity and consequent identity have been compromised by separation from their own people and land: 'the alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as you love yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the lord your God' (Lev 19:34). 'Strangers' are to be welcomed into the community as kin, thereby implicitly affirming that while ethnicity may be rooted in kinship, ethnic bonds are fluid and negotiable, and not always strictly biological.

Third, ethnic diversity offers a context for the flowering of human creativity. Not the least dimension of the *imago Dei* is the human capacity for creation after the pattern of the Creator. The cultural

⁴⁷ W. Storrar, "Vertigo" or "Imago"? Nations in the Divine Economy, *Themelios* 21 (1996), 4.

variety fostered by a multiplicity of peoples channels the creative impulses of humanity into numerous and widely diverse streams. Consequently ethnic difference is a potential source of plentiful mutual enrichment.

Finally, the multiplicity of peoples serves providentially to contain human pride and evil on a global scale and has done so throughout history. Over-powerful, totalising regimes are restrained and brought down by other peoples, either alone or in combination, who are threatened by and stand up to them. Ethnicity thus serves as a brake on certain forms of human sin and their potential to cause limitless evil.

However, just as sin tends to corrupt every good gift of the Creator, so ethnicity is compromised by human rebellion and becomes other than he intended. The Bible itself records incidents of attempted genocide carried out against the Israelites by Egypt and Persia, and of fratricidal—even genocidal—ethnic conflict among the tribes of Israel themselves (Exod 1:15–16; Esth 3:6–15; Judg 12:4–6; 20–21). The most obvious distortion of ethnicity is the way in which identification with one’s own people is translated into hostility towards other ethnic groups: being ‘for us’ transmutes into being ‘against them.’ Miroslav Volf terms such hostility ‘exclusion’—‘a powerful, contagious and destructive evil’⁴⁸—which expresses itself in three principal ways. Exclusion by elimination may take place in acts of genocide or, less brutally, the assimilation of another ethnic group. In exclusion by domination ‘we are satisfied to assign “others” the status of inferior beings,’⁴⁹ resulting in discrimination or segregation, as in apartheid or the caste system. Exclusion by abandonment means indifference to the situation and fate of other peoples: ‘we simply cross to the other side and pass by minding our own business.’⁵⁰ The outstanding example in recent times was the inaction of the international community, including the United Nations, as Rwandan Tutsis were being annihilated, an example which is being rerun at this moment in Darfur.

Moreover, and sometimes driving such policies of ‘exclusion,’ ethnic identity can become the idolatrous centre of human devotion. Indeed, it has been argued that this is the constant tendency of a humanity that has lost its true focus of identity by virtue of its rebellion and alienation from the Creator, and so inevitably tends to confer an ultimate authority on alternative sources of identity:

in a fallen world human beings, in their search for lost identity and security, have a constant tendency to accord to their autonomous governmental / national / communal collectivity an idolatrous commitment, and human governors / leaders have a constant tendency to demand it.⁵¹

It is simply one more way in which human beings worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). Such idolatry underlay, for example, the nationalist philosophy of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), who helped lay the ideological basis of German National Socialism and for whom religious faith was a function of ethnic, or racial, character: ‘In the want of a true religion springing from and corresponding to our individuality I see the greatest danger for the future of the

⁴⁸ M. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 30.

⁴⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 75.

⁵⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 75.

⁵¹ Summerton, ‘Identity Crisis?’, 18.

Teuton.⁵² His philosophy is chillingly echoed in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and his exploitation of ethnic solidarity to mobilise the German people for war and genocide:

What we must fight for is to safeguard the existence and reproduction of our race and our people, the sustenance of our children and the purity of our blood, the freedom and independence of the fatherland, so that our people may mature for the fulfilment of the mission allotted to it by the creator of the universe.⁵³

It is sobering to remember how such thinking penetrated German Protestantism in the 1930s, finding voice in the nationalist ideology of the German Christian Movement: 'We want to bring the reawakened German sense of life to bear in our Church and to fill our Church with vitality. In the fateful struggle for German liberty, and the German future, the Church has turned out to be too weak in its leadership.'⁵⁴ Ethnic idolatry may take forms less obviously toxic, but it is present whenever 'loyalty to the nation overrides all other loyalties'⁵⁵ and finds expression in attitudes of arrogant superiority towards and outright violence against other ethnic groups.

3. Redemption

The gospel addresses every area of human and cosmic dislocation resulting from sin. The vertical dimension of reconciliation with God is necessarily accompanied by the horizontal restoration of human community which finds expression in the church, the body of Christ. All that divides humanity is transcended through this radical inclusion in Christ, who 'understood his mission, in response to the coming reign of God, as forming an alternative community with remarkably different values. . . . In this new community allegiance to kinship and ethnic groups was not the main source of a person's identity.'⁵⁶

This new, ethnicity-transcending reality is displayed at Pentecost, when the gift of tongues symbolically reverses Babel's confusion of language which had led to the dispersal of the peoples. Now through the Spirit they are brought together into the unity of God's people as barriers of language—crucial markers of ethnic difference—are vanquished in a proleptic act. It is present again when the Spirit teaches Peter that no nation is unclean and Cornelius is brought into the fellowship of God's people (Acts 10:28). Paul in particular stresses fact that 'in Christ' the divisive effects of gender, socio-economic class, and ethnicity are transcended, for 'Christ is all and in all' (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

This does not mean that ethnic difference is obliterated. It is self-evidently true that gender and social differences do not as such disappear through belief in Christ, and ethnic difference also remains in terms of language, for example, culture, and sentiments of affinity. Indeed, a critical issue for the New Testament church was that of dealing with the tensions produced by the existence of ethnic diversity among believers, demonstrated, for example, by the incipient conflict in the Jerusalem church over alleged favouritism in the charitable distribution of food to widows (Acts 6:1–7). Had ethnicity simply

⁵² H. S. Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the 19th Century* (2d ed.; London: John Lane, 1912), 258–59.

⁵³ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (trans. Ralph Manheim; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 214.

⁵⁴ Principles of the religious movement of 'German Christians', June 1932.

⁵⁵ A. D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 149; quoted by Mitchel in *Evangelicalism and National Identity in Ulster*, 63.

⁵⁶ A. Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 47.

disappeared the issue would not have arisen, but ethnic difference remained an issue. It is rather the case that ethnic identity is radically and completely transcended through the gospel. On the one hand, the believer's highest allegiance is now owed to Christ as Lord, and every other loyalty, including ethnic, is thereby totally subordinated. Anything short of this amounts to ethnic idolatry. On the other hand, baptism into Christ makes all believers members of the same body, and therefore brothers and sisters. As part of a new creation they are the people of God first (1 Pet 2:9–10) and members of their particular ethnic groups second. 'We, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' (1 Cor 10:17). So, while ethnic identity is not eliminated, it is radically displaced in the face of the new identity of the believer in Christ with all that that implies. There is a separation, and even an alienation, from the allegiances of the past, as people of faith live now in the world as aliens and strangers, for 'here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come' (Heb 13:14). Volf's reflection on the pilgrimage of Abraham expresses this so well:

The courage to break his cultural and familial ties and abandon the gods of his ancestors (Joshua 24:2) out of allegiance to a God of all families and all cultures was the original Abrahamic revolution. . . . The narrative of Abraham's call underlines that stepping out of enmeshment in the network of inherited cultural relations is a correlate of faith in the one God. . . . To be a child of Abraham and Sarah and to respond to the call of their God means to make an exodus, to start a journey, to become a stranger (Genesis 23:4; 24:1–9). It is a mistake, I believe, to complain too much about Christianity being "alien" in a given culture⁵⁷

Exploring the issue further, Volf uses the metaphor of distance to articulate the changed relationship of Christians with their ethnicity. They do not deny their cultural or ethnic identity, but it no longer defines them. They are distanced precisely from its totalising propensity, while still characterised by the distinctiveness that it gives. Thus they are able to be discriminating and discerning in their appreciation of their own ethnic group, ready to expose all in it that is evil or morally compromised, while appreciating also all that is good among those of different ethnicity.

The New Testament wrestles constantly with the implications of this. On the one hand, Paul conforms to the cultures of his hearers and does not seek to decontextualise them as they respond to the gospel and seek to live it (1 Cor 9:19–23). Christian faith is to be expressed in the particularity of every ethnic group, to be incarnated among every people. On the other hand, the church must truly comprehend all ethnic groups, and it is most significant that, in the face of the ethnic tensions that arose within the primitive church and to which the New Testament bears abundant witness, the apostles never resorted to the easy solution of creating separate ethnic churches. The 'dividing wall of hostility' has been broken down, and Christ has created 'in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace' (Eph 2:14). This is a vital element of the gospel, and for New Testament believers the truth of which the words speak had to be visibly lived out before the unbelieving world. It was not simply a 'spiritual truth' that could subsist without empirical expression, but a reality to be concretised in the experience of believers and in the lives of their churches. Otherwise stated, a gospel that did not in practice bring reconciliation to human beings who had been alienated from one another by, among other things, ethnic division, was no gospel at all, 'for anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen' (1 John 4:20). The reality of reconciliation with God, the very power of the gospel, was

⁵⁷ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 39.

to be demonstrated precisely by visible unity in the body of Christ, notwithstanding all the problems that that might entail.

Moreover, this partial, imperfect transcending of ethnic division in the church is an anticipation of the final realisation of the purpose of God in creation and redemption. In the church, even now, the eschatological vision of a people of God drawn ‘from every nation, tribe, people and language’ (Rev 7:9) should be visible as barriers are overcome and unity is realized among enemies. It is this which makes the church resemble heaven, and it is its absence which fatally compromises its testimony.

Loving the Ethnic Enemy

Theology, then, is of no purpose unless it translates into reality, and in this case that reality is the expression of love for ethnic enemies. How does this take place?

It is rooted, first of all, as has been suggested, in a deep apprehension of the biblical approach to humanity and ethnicity. It flows from the knowledge that all people are created in God’s image; that sin engenders in us all a distorted consciousness and an allegiance to false gods and thereby mars human relationships, especially with those who are ‘other’; and that in Christ there is a new creation where all things become new. The transforming power of truth through the work of God’s Spirit is critical to the creation of renewed attitudes and restored community, but it must be brought to bear on the concrete realities that people live. Thus the story of the Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) confronts and subverts the *particular* ethnic prejudice of Jesus’ own hearers. Its message is so easily reduced to banality today, but in its context it was ‘radical and upsetting’ and was doubtless heard in stunned silence as it challenged—almost scandalously so—the deepest assumptions of the original audience.⁵⁸ It continues to demand a fundamental change of values, a seismic transformation of attitude and act: ‘loving one’s neighbour is to transcend all racial and cultural boundaries.’⁵⁹

Second, loving the ethnic enemy means confronting and dealing with the pain of history. The Samaritan parable would itself have evoked partisan memories of injustices committed, memories which would go on sustaining the cycle of inter-ethnic hatred, violence, and revenge unless somehow redeemed. Of course, current reflection on the Rwandan past indicates how problematic history can be and indeed how it can be manipulated in the interest of one side or the other. Nevertheless, the gospel call for repentance demands recognition of what has happened, and of complicity—active or passive, individual or communal—in all that has ‘excluded’ the ethnic other. This implies confession by the oppressors and forgiveness by the victims, both of which stand in radical contradiction to natural and entrenched human impulses to self-justification or revenge. But if the gospel has any response to ethnic hatred, it is surely here. Confession and forgiveness are integral to its very nature, essential to reconciliation and the restoration of community, and indispensable if victims and oppressors alike are to be freed from the pain, bitterness, and guilt of history. And they are possible for those who know that Jesus Christ has both atoned for the sin of the guilty and borne the pain of the victim.⁶⁰ ‘The only way to

⁵⁸ J. D. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Leicester: Apollos, 2003), 171.

⁵⁹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 170.

⁶⁰ Cf. E. Spruyt, R. Lloyd, R. Schudel, ‘The Cross of Christ In Debriefing and Ethnic Reconciliation’, in *Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices From Around the World* (ed. K. O’Donnell; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002), 505–8.

redeem the past is through the healing of memories, thereby putting to rest that which can only foster bitterness and revenge.⁶¹

Third, love has to be worked out in the course of human life: ‘Forgiveness is . . . not the culmination of Christ’s relation to the offending other; it is a passage leading to embrace.’⁶² And in the light of the remembered past, the ‘embrace’ may not only be difficult, but also dangerous. Something of this is again evident in Jesus’ parable: rejecting the role that both Jews and other Samaritans would have assigned to him, the Samaritan traveller acted in grace and compassion towards his neighbour, binding his wounds and making provision for his continuing care. Such profound disregard for the bitterly ethnocentric values of two cultures invited both Samaritan *and* Jewish suspicion and placed the Samaritan in danger of exclusion by everybody. The love that God demonstrated in Christ also involved precisely such sacrifice of self-interest for the well-being of the other, and a conscious refusal to take the path of safety. Amid all the horror of mass slaughter, demonstrations of this sort of love were not lacking during the Rwandan genocide:

Even in 1994 where the process of genocide was so seriously organised, motivated and achieved, many individuals and groups sacrificed their lives to safeguard innocents. In Muhima, Kigali and Rugarika groups of converts have refused to separate while praying and have been killed together.⁶³

By contrast, and at a different level, the dangerously self-sacrificial denunciation of the manipulation of ethnicity by Habyarimana’s ‘little house’ was the path that the churches of Rwanda should have taken, but did not.

Love of the ethnic enemy—of every enemy—is what must characterise the church as the body of those who were themselves enemies of God and were reconciled through his love precisely when they were enemies and as enemies, in order that they should be enemies no longer (Rom 5:10). Having received that love and experiencing now its transforming power, God’s own people can and must demonstrate it in the quality of their common life and in their engagement with a world of ethnic discord. Such love demonstrates grace and pardon. It pursues truth, justice, and peace across ethnic divides in society as well as in the church and personal relationships. It is radically countercultural—and dangerous. It is not natural but extraordinary and an affront to conventional human wisdom, exactly as the Samaritan’s love was, and the Father’s. But it is that very outrageous and supernatural character which brings conviction and the only true and lasting hope of communion beyond ethnicity, for ‘by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ (John 13:35).



⁶¹ J. W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (London: SCM, 2002), 178.

⁶² Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 126.

⁶³ T. Gatwa, ‘Revivalism and Ethnicity: the Church in Rwanda’, *Transformation* 12.2 (April/June 1995), 6.

PASTORAL PENSÉES

Barack Obama: The Quandary of “Selective Invisibility”

— Bruce L. Fields —

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I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

—The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:22b¹

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*²

Though his primary concern was how to persuade people from diverse backgrounds to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 9:12, 23), Paul, nonetheless, embodies a principle common to all who would provide leadership to a community comprised of a multiplicitous collection of rigid truth claims and behaviors. A leader must construct bridges both of understanding and of persuasion in such settings. Paul, however, does not want to engage in matters that “don’t count.”³ For him the gospel was central, and he would not become involved with anything that would hinder the persuasive power of the gospel. By implication, he shows something else foundational to effective leadership: core convictions. A leader must be proved to understand the views of others and to learn of them with a sensitive ear. In such a way, the power to persuade is enhanced. The leader, nevertheless, does not exercise a capacity to lead

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952; repr., New York: Random House, 1994), 3.

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 431.

in a conviction vacuum.⁴ Just as in Paul's example, listening to others does not inculcate a dismissal of what are core beliefs. David E. Garland correctly observes that Paul's

accommodation has nothing to do with watering down the gospel message, soft-pedaling its ethical demands, or compromising its absolute monotheism. Paul never modified the message of Christ crucified to make it less of a scandal to Jews or less foolish to Greeks. The preacher of the changeless gospel could adapt himself, however, to changing audiences in seeking their ultimate welfare, their salvation.⁵

My immediate focus in this reflection is Senator Barack Obama, Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States. There are relevant questions to ponder on the matter of the possibility of him becoming the first African American president of the United States and providing leadership for the diverse people groups that make up this nation.

Not least because I am an African American, I perceive that the commentary of Ellison has great relevance to this possible scenario. In terms of the story, to have the hope of balance in life, Invisible Man must declare and act in accordance with his own identity as a member of the black ethnicity. His invisibility is the product of no one seeing him, but seeing only someone else. As it relates to Senator Obama, I intend no claim suggesting that Obama personifies all that could be considered African American whereby we can easily measure levels of invisibility. What I am saying is that depending on the lenses through which people look at him, they may see only what they want to see. They may not see what they need to see. Some may not look at him at all. Must an African American have some degree of invisibility in order to succeed? Who, or what then, is this man, if that can be accurately determined?

What is at stake is identifying what constitutes this man who is in danger of being "invisible." At this juncture, I will offer a general definition of being an African American. It is a matter of being a person of African descent, but it is also being a person affected by the totality of African American tradition and what is often labeled as the "African American experience." I am not claiming to be knowledgeable of and in communion with all aspects of African American tradition and experience, nor am I claiming, as above, that Obama embodies or does not embody all such tradition and experience. My argument is much more modest particularly in reference to Senator Obama. I believe that some constituencies in the United States want to make "invisible" certain elements of what makes up African American totality, and it is this selective invisibility that must be in place if Obama is to be elected as the first African American president of the United States. Different elements must be "invisible" to those of a conservative orientation while others must be "invisible" to those of a liberal orientation. There are certain characteristics of being African American that must be hidden at times and revealed in others in order to construct a critical mass of votes to win the presidency. A relevant question in the midst of this tension is "What defines Barack Obama?"

In the context of African American tradition and experience, what then must be "invisible" to whom and why? What must be deemphasized to conservatives are those policies that do not reflect "traditional values," namely, certain understandings of the Christian faith, family, a pro-life agenda, limited government, and protection of American interests. The liberal camp emphasizes more "openness"

⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton alludes to this when he writes, "there are limits to what we should understand by 'accommodation'" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 706–7).

⁵ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 435.

to certain understandings of the Christian faith,⁶ family (understood as undergoing some transition), the advancement of a woman's right to choose, more involvement of government in the life of the public realms of the nation. The conservative camp is concerned about any solutions to the needs of the nation, as well as the needs of various communities within the nation, that do not focus on government as the major contributor to proposed solutions.

A major tension in walking the thin red line between the camps is that invisibility before either orientation may put Obama on a collision course with what it means to be an African American man, one who is affected and shaped by African American traditions and experience in the United States. For the sake both of brevity and for comparison in this piece, I will focus on one essential element of the African American experience: a rather conservative biblical tradition.

Conservatives and “Invisibility”

Conservatives may be bothered by some of senator Obama's positions such as his understanding of the nature of interpreting the Constitution: “Ultimately, though, I have to side with Justice Breyer's view of the Constitution—that it is not a static but rather a living document, and must be read in the context of an ever-changing world.”⁷ Conservatives who happen to be conservative Christians also may be troubled by his position of civil unions for gays as this in turn relates to how he reads Scripture:

I am not willing to have the state deny American citizens a civil union that confers equivalent rights on such basic matters as hospital visitation or health insurance coverage simply because the people they love are of the same sex—nor am I willing to accept a reading of the Bible that considers an obscure line in Romans to be more defining of Christianity than the Sermon on the Mount.⁸

I am aware of one issue in particular that has drawn a great deal of attention from the conservative elements of the media, namely, Obama's perceived position on national security. Could the senator be considered, with the utmost of reliability, willing to protect the people and interests of the United States? Though the implications of Obama's relationship with Dr. Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, are more complex than the single point I am going to discuss, concerns have been voiced about Obama's lack of devotion to the United States. If such devotion can be legitimately questioned, this could then have significant ramifications on the matter of national security under Obama's legitimately anticipated presidency. From firsthand experience, I became aware of conservative attempts to press a desired invisibility of African American tradition.

Some may want to interpret my subsequent points as an endorsement of Reverend Wright. It is not intended as such. It is only an observation arising from an opportunity I had earlier in this year to appear on the Fox channel cable program “Sean Hannity's America.” My twenty-second appearance spoke of the nature of Black Theology. This was the duration of the material taken from fifteen minutes of dialogue

⁶ I will not be able to delineate the similarities and dissimilarities on matters of the Christian faith here. At the risk of being dangerously simplistic, I would say that conservatives are more concerned about the sovereignty of God evident in the maintenance of the status quo as well as a great concern with the guardianship of orthodox confession. The more liberally orientated may be more open to truth being found in other religions with the Christian faith being “living” and thus capable of some metamorphosis.

⁷ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown, 2006), 90.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

on the subject in the local studio. The rest of the program involved an exploration of Reverend Wright's "God damn America" sermon, his sympathy with Black Theology, and his sympathy (believed to be linked through Black Theology) to Marxist regimes in South and Central America. Reverend Wright, mentor to Barack Obama, condemned the United States, and this was enough to begin to challenge Obama's capacity to be a strong protector of the American people.

In African American tradition, both religious and secular, there has always been a particular brand of anti-Americanism. One does not have to dwell on connections with Marxist regimes to find it. It is not a blanket curse of the United States; it involves a reaction against a particular caricature of the United States. That caricature is the view entertained by some in the past and in the present, namely, that the nobility and power of the country is pure, without blemish, whereby all that the United States has done and does, is right. In the African American experience, we can find condemning voices like David Walker (1875–1930):

I hope that the Americans may hear, but I am afraid that they done us so much injury, and are so firm in the belief that our Creator made us to be an inheritance to them forever, that their hearts will be hardened, so that their destruction may be sure.—This language, perhaps is too harsh for the American's delicate ears. But Oh Americans! Americans! I warn you in the name of the Lord, (whether you will hear, or forbear,) to repent and reform, or you are ruined!!!!!! Do you think that our blood is hidden from the Lord, because you can hide it from the rest of the world by sending out missionaries, and by your charitable deeds to the Greeks, Irish &c?⁹

Though he is not speaking from a Christian tradition, but from the context of the Muslim faith, consider another example from Malcolm X (1925–65):

Before your pride causes you to harden your heart and further close your ears, and before your ignorance provokes laughter, search the Christian Scriptures. Search even the histories of other nations that sat in the same positions of wealth, power, and authority that these white Americans now hold . . . and see what God did to them. If God's unchanging laws of justice caught up with everyone of the slave empires of the past, how dare you think White America can escape the harvest of unjust seeds planted by her white forefathers against our black forefathers here in the land of slavery!¹⁰

The prophetic dimension of African American preaching and teaching can be interpreted as anti-American, but when handled properly, it is actually part of the pathway to true reconciliation. This tradition is not accidental to African American tradition and experience. Such an element does not legitimate perpetual resentment on the part of African Americans, nor does it legitimate our occasional failures as a people to achieve all we can be and do. It is simply something that is always there in the consciousness of the African American community, and there is still healing that needs to take place. Ignoring this persistent reality, however, does not advance needed healing either.

⁹ David Walker, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of Religion," in *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (ed. Milton C. Sernett; Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 197–98.

¹⁰ Malcolm X, "God's Judgment of White America (The Chickens Come Home to Roost)," December 4, 1963; available at www.malcolm-x.org/speeches/spc_120463.htm# (accessed July 15, 2008).

Liberals and “Invisibility”

Liberals prefer a two-way program of selective invisibility. When it is regarded as gaining a political advantage, they want people to remember that Barack Obama is an African American. When there is a danger of the arousal of racial discomfort, they want to remind people that he would be a president for all people, as if the influence of his background would just disappear. Obama would be well received in a political community that advances the role of government, as if the African American community “needs” government to survive and possibly prosper. The liberal wing would be discomforted by a message, also found among the honored in the African American community, of self-reliance and self-determination. Such a message would have to be rendered “invisible.”

I find it striking that a champion of a more independent African American community, Malcolm X, would dismiss the categories of “Republican” and “Democrat.” He would prefer terms used often in public discussions today, namely, “conservatives” and “liberals.” He certainly had nothing good to say about conservatives, but what is worthy of note is this comment about liberals:

The white liberal differs from the white conservative only in one way: the liberal is more deceitful than the conservative. The liberal is more hypocritical than the conservative. Both want power, but the white liberal is the one who has perfected the art of posing as the Negro’s friend and benefactor; and by winning the friendship, allegiance, and support of the Negro, the white liberal is able to use the Negro as a pawn or tool in this political “football game” that is constantly raging between the white liberals and white conservatives.¹¹

This statement is, of course, extreme and should not be attributed to all people who consider themselves to be more liberal in their political orientation. There are multitudes of such people who have admirable intentions and actions, not only towards African Americans, but other minority communities in the United States. The statement does raise an interesting question in terms of what is needed to ultimately bring about African American empowerment and full, equal status in all spheres of American life.

The liberal wing tolerates a certain brand of religion. This is a matter of direct importance to the identity of African Americans. Religion is a matter permissible to the public servant’s private life, but it must not be seen as “intruding” into the public sphere. Religion must not be assessed as having a possible negative influence in the formulations of public policies and laws. This is a difficult dichotomy to maintain, at least traditionally, in the African American community, where religion and public stances on issues have had a long and mutually pervasive relationship. This returns us to a core question: What is core to Obama’s belief system that certainly has a theological fabric? Related to this question, however, is another question: What informs or defines his theological fabric? I ask the question in light of a statement he made in his book *The Audacity of Hope*: “This is not to say that I’m unanchored in my faith. There are some things that I’m absolutely sure about—the Golden Rule, the need to battle cruelty in all its forms, the value of love and charity, humility and grace.”¹² I can engage only one issue here with the intent of considering his defining theological core that would give definition to these terms. This issue is his advocacy of a woman’s right to choose to terminate a pregnancy.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, 224.

I can remember a time during the late sixties and early seventies when a major concern of numerous black radicals was the possibility of “black genocide.” One statement demonstrates the concern for black genocide:

The enslavement of black people from the very beginning of this country, the genocide practiced on the American Indians and the confining of the survivors on reservations, the savage lynching of thousands of black men and women, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and now the cowardly massacre in Vietnam, all testify to the fact that toward people of color the racist power structure of America has but one policy: repression, genocide, terror, and the big stick.¹³

In subsequent years, much has been done to allay such fears among minorities, particularly African Americans, in the United States. Still, it is ironic that presently the U. S. Center of Disease Control reports that of the approximately 4,000 abortions that are performed daily in the United State, 35% of these procedures abort African American babies. African Americans make up 12% of the United States population and provide 35% of the abortions.¹⁴ Under the advocacy of “a woman’s right to choose,” Obama and many others are supporting self-genocide. If attempted during the days of the Panthers, the African American community supposedly would have fought desperately against such genocidal proportions.

Conclusion

As a prospective presidential candidate, Senator Obama must be able to appeal to many different people groups with their accompanying ideologies. He is presenting himself as one who would be able to accomplish this through a process of “selective invisibility.” He must present himself as an African American in a way that hides elements of its root characteristics and beliefs. This could have devastating effects on the African American community in the long run.

Forms of accommodation are essential for building needed levels of consensus. The Apostle Paul understood this, though he maintained core beliefs. The matter of core beliefs is so foundational in the matter of “seeing” Barack Obama. I believe that observing what he has done and is doing in the public sphere is the surest indicator of the theological informing system that resides behind his policies. As far as I can see, this informing system is something other than the biblically conservative tendencies of the traditional African American Church.



¹³ “Executive Mandate Number One Statement by the Minister of Defense, Delivered May 2, 1967, at Sacramento, California, State Capitol Building,” in Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 162. Eldridge Cleaver demonstrates a similar concern: “The American racial problem can no longer be spoken of or solved in isolation. The relationship between the genocide in Vietnam and the smiles of the white man toward black Americans is a direct relationship. Once the white man solves his problem in the East he will then turn his fury again on the black people of American, his longtime punching bag” (*Soul on Ice* [New York: Dell, 1992], 149).

¹⁴ John J. Raphael, “Silent No More: A Major Crisis in the African-American Community,” available at www.nbcongress.org/features/abortion_silent_no_more_01.asp Accessed 9/3/2008.

Book Reviews

— OLD TESTAMENT —

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- Stuart Weeks. *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xii + 260 pp. £58.00/\$110.00. 75
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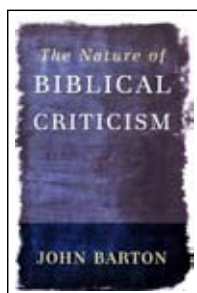
C. J. Mahaney, ed. *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*. 116
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— OLD TESTAMENT —

John Barton. *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. 206 pp. £13.99/\$24.95.



Barton seeks to defend traditional biblical criticism from the prevailing notion that it is an antiquarian discipline. His primary contention is with biblical conservatives (who claim that it is positivistic, reductive, and religiously skeptical) and postmodernists (who contend that it rife with false objectivity and, therefore, cannot be taken seriously).

In the introductory chapter, Barton argues that biblical criticism, when carried out properly, is ‘a productive and mature discipline, which sets itself the task of understanding the biblical text’ (pp. 7–8), and, furthermore, points of commonality show that the rift between the various methods of biblical studies is exaggerated. For him, biblical criticism is essentially concerned with the ‘plain sense’ of the text, which are summarised in ten theses that may be paraphrased as follows (pp. 5–7):

1. Biblical criticism is a literary operation that is focused on the semantics of words, sentences, and whole texts.
2. Biblical criticism is only incidentally concerned with questions of ‘Introduction’ (e.g., date, authorship, composition, etc.) and history. Understanding, not reconstruction, is the aim.
3. Biblical criticism can be traced back much further than the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, which suggests that the contrast between critical and precritical interpretation is flawed.
4. Biblical criticism is not reductive or skeptical, but seeks out the ‘deeper meaning’ and possibly multiple meanings in a given text.
5. Biblical criticism is not so much the application of ‘scientific’ methods to the Bible as much as science shares with it a common concern for evidence and reason.
6. Biblical criticism does not rule out the question of the truth of a text before reading it, but uncovers its semantic possibilities before determining whether what it asserts is true.
7. Biblical criticism is not the only worthwhile way to read biblical texts, and liturgical or devotional readings are not precluded.
8. Biblical criticism is ‘liberal’ in that it recognises the validity of secular reasoning, but it is not tied to ‘theological liberalism’ (e.g., Gerd Theissen).
9. Biblical criticism aims to be ‘objective’ insofar as it attends to what the text actually says and does not import alien meanings into it.
10. Biblical criticism is concerned with the ‘plain’ sense of texts (not to be confused with the ‘original’ sense—what the text ‘meant’ as opposed to what it ‘means’ now).

Barton proceeds by addressing the perception that biblical criticism is concerned primarily with difficulties, inconsistencies, and irregularities in the text (chap. 2). He responds to this by pointing out that the identification of difficulties in the text and attempts to deal with them are not a ‘modern’ practise as evidenced by Origen’s basis for the Hexapla and Augustine’s treatment of discrepancies

between the Gospels. For him, the observation of difficulties in the text is not characteristic of biblical criticism. Rather, biblical criticism is ‘an inquiry into the biblical text that takes its starting point from the attempt to understand, a desire to read the text in its coherence and to grasp its drift’ (p. 30). Thus, contrary to Augustine’s attempts to ‘harmonise’ the Gospels, a purely critical approach would allow inconsistencies to stand.

In chapter 3, Barton argues that the ‘historical-critical method’ and biblical criticism are not the same. That is, the essence of biblical criticism is not concerned with the history of the biblical text, nor is it a methodology. It is *critical*, however, in that it seeks literary coherence and unity, ‘driven by a particular attitude toward texts and textual meaning’ (p. 68). He concedes on several occasions, however, that some practitioners indeed focus on history, matters of ‘Introduction’, or methodology (cf. pp. 26, 41, 44, 70, 80).

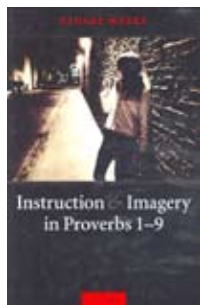
The heart of the book is chapter 4, which is his defence of the ‘plain sense’ as the primary concern of biblical criticism. He begins by distinguishing ‘plain sense’ from what it is not—‘original sense’, intended sense, ‘historical sense’, or ‘literal sense’. Each of these ‘senses’ are dealt with in detail. Not surprisingly, he concludes, ‘biblical criticism, in its quest for this plain sense, is a semantic or linguistic and a literary operation’ (p. 101), and any interest with the original, intended, historical, or literal meaning is only ‘indirect’. ‘The Origins of Biblical Criticism’ (chap. 5) is somewhat redundant as he traces the origins of biblical criticism beyond the Enlightenment and as far back as the patristic literature.

The final chapter, ‘Biblical Criticism and Religious Belief’, is perhaps the most fascinating and provides a helpful framework for further discussion. In it he examines the relationship of biblical criticism (as he defines it) with ‘religious belief’. He begins by presenting the arguments against traditional biblical criticism: the canonical approaches of Childs, Seitz, Moberly and Watson, ‘Advocacy’ readings and feminist criticism, and even from within the critical community itself (e.g., Eichrodt and von Rad). He responds by arguing that biblical texts must be read in two stages: first, ‘the perception of the text’s meaning’ and, secondly, ‘an evaluation of that meaning in relation to what one already believes to be the case’ (p. 159).

As with most of Barton’s volumes, this is a clear, well written book that is both accessible and thought-provoking. It provides much needed clarity and direction for further discussions on biblical criticism, theology, and hermeneutics. If there is a weakness, it is Barton’s tendency to generalise and overstate some of his points in his attempt to defend biblical criticism. His insistence, for example, that biblical criticism is not concerned primarily with matters of history or method is not entirely convincing. Also, Barton’s discussion on ‘commitment and neutrality’ (pp. 173–75), an important question to those of ‘confessional’ backgrounds, is brief and leaves the reader wanting. These minor points notwithstanding, it is a thorough and insightful book. Whether or not one agrees with his theses, it should be welcomed by scholars and pastors alike.

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Stuart Weeks. *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xii + 260 pp. £58.00/\$110.00.



For all interested in what has been described as the Hebrew Bible’s most “practical” book, Stuart Weeks’ recent monograph on Proverbs 1–9 is welcome reading. Weeks’ quite plausible central thesis is that these chapters comprise not so much a collection of originally independent wisdom poems as “a single composition, with a more-or-less coherent viewpoint” (p. 1). As his title suggests, Weeks argues this thesis by focusing first on genre-affinities between Proverbs 1–9 and ancient Near Eastern, especially Egyptian, “Instructions” and, secondly, on the challenging and sophisticated imagery of Proverbs 1–9.

Weeks devotes his initial two chapters to the genre issue. Chapter 1 describes the character and provenance of ancient Near Eastern “Instructions,” which Weeks links with funerary inscriptions, and chapter 2 explores the implications of this comparative material for Proverbs 1–9. The next three chapters examine the distinctive imagery, figurative language, and motifs of Proverbs 1–9. His argument in chapter 3 is two-fold: “that Proverbs 1–9 develops an elaborate and distinctive set of motifs, and that the significance of some elements only becomes clear through a recognition of their place” in the unit as a whole (p. 67). Chapter 4 is more specific, focusing *inter alia* on the key concept of the “fear of Yahweh,” which he takes to be “the first product of knowledge,” rather than the “*basis* of knowledge/wisdom” (p. 118). Here I wonder whether one might find a place for both notions.

Chapter 5 explores the significance of path imagery and the “foreign woman,” noting with respect to the latter that many commentators rightly reject “specific, limiting identifications” and adopt a “more literary and symbolic” understanding (p. 135). While appreciative of recent studies that seek to understand the “foreign woman” emphasis against the backdrop of a “post-exilic campaign against marriages to foreign women” (p. 135), Weeks observes that the *biblical* warnings against intermarriage suggest not some “exclusivist agenda” (p. 141), but rather a concern over the religiously corrupting influence of associating with foreigners (e.g., Deut 7:1–5). This being so, one wonders if the repeated warnings in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Kings, etc. against intermarriage with the non-Yahwist inhabitants of Canaan (ably summarized by Weeks on pp. 137–41) do not loosen the post-exilic grip on the “foreign woman” motif.

His sixth and final chapter tackles such standard questions as Proverbs 1–9’s authorship and provenance (more on this presently) and its seeming disinterest in history. On the history question, Weeks insists that it is not “quite true to say that Proverbs 1–9 shows no interest in national history,” but in any case its main interest is “in talking about individuals and their decisions, rather than about the people as a whole” (p. 169). The book concludes with a very useful “Annotated Translation” of Proverbs 1–9, a bibliography of works cited, and the expected indices.

The brief and selective summary above cannot do justice to the range and depth of Weeks’ discussion, but it may at least give an idea of the general shape of his book. Readers will benefit from Weeks’ immersion in the literature and will be grateful for the ample documentation provided in footnotes. If they are like the present reviewer, they will find much in the monograph to provoke their thinking. They may also be left with some questions—perhaps not inappropriate in a book dealing with wisdom literature.

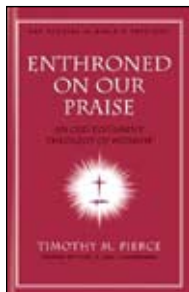
As examples of my questions/concerns, I shall mention just two. On the issue of authorship, Weeks observes that instruction literature is characteristically, though not universally, associated with “a particular individual, whose prosperity in life confirms its value” (p. 10). He then raises the *possibility* that settings and attributions “may have symbolic rather than historical significance” (p. 14). This possibility then quickly moves towards certainty, with Weeks asserting that “the strong tendency to link the setting of the instructional speech with some famous individual from the past” is “a narrative device, and should not be considered an authorial attribution in the modern sense” (p. 16). Having thus concluded that most ancient Near Eastern instructions are pseudepigraphic, Weeks opines that he does not believe there to be “any persuasive grounds for taking the composition to be genuinely Solomonic, although that view is still defended in some quarters” (p. 156). For this opinion to become persuasive to the yet undecided, Weeks would need to cite and actually engage with those who, even very recently and dealing with the same data, have argued against the pseudepigraphic view and in favour of Solomonic authorship (e.g., Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 31–36).

My second question has to do with Weeks’ observation that Proverbs 1–9 “lays a strong emphasis on the need for instruction, but offers very little instruction itself.” The “instruction” in view, according to Weeks, must be “the Jewish Law, the instruction *par excellence*” (p. 126), and it is this Law that must be internalized as “a prerequisite for an understanding of God’s will, and for protection against the temptations of sin” (p. 175). While not wishing to exclude Weeks’ emphasis on Law entirely, I wonder if the common understanding of Proverbs 1–9 as a “prologue” to the collections of aphoristic instructions found in Proverbs 10ff. does not obviate the *necessity* of looking beyond the book of Proverbs for the “instruction” the poet of Proverbs 1–9 has in view.

Such questions and quibbles notwithstanding, Weeks’ central thesis that Proverbs 1–9 is not simply a collection of wisdom vignettes, much less an exhibition of “pedestrian didacticism,” but “is in fact a very ambitious work of poetry, which employs extended imagery and allusion to convey a deeper understanding of its message” is convincing (p. 175). By offering expert guidance into this “rich and intricate” poetry, Weeks has put many readers in his debt.

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Timothy M. Pierce. *Enthroned on our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008. xiv + 256 pp. £10.17/\$19.99.



This helpful volume is a study published in NAC Studies in Bible and Theology as a new series whose “resources are aimed primarily at church leaders and those who are preparing for such leadership” (p. xii). Given this significant target, Pierce, with his wealth of experience from both the academic and church settings, looks at the theme of worship as one of the intriguing debated topics among educational institutions as well as churches (p. 1). Reading Ps 23:3, the author notes “what true worship is—the enthronement of God” (p. 1). One should observe here the origin of the first part of the title of the author’s book.

In writing his book, Pierce's intention "is not to propose a specific style of worship (the topic will barely be broached) but to suggest that the relational God who is presented in the Bible has expressed who He is and how our relationship with Him should manifest itself in worship" (p. 3). He does this by providing an understanding of the theology of worship that is found in each Hebrew canonical division of the Old Testament. His focus on the OT is justified by the fact that "there are elements about mankind's relationship to God that we cannot find anywhere except in the OT" (p. 6). According to him, an implementation of these important elements "will positively affect the way we worship the God we serve today" (p. 6). His methodology (a) "recognizes that specific practices within the OT and the Bible may change, but the underlying principle behind those activities remains constant and something on which present action can be established" and (b) "recognizes the truth of both the biblical audience's experience and our own" (p. 7).

In addition to the eleven pages of introductory matters, Pierce's meticulous work is divided into five chapters: (1) The Primeval Prologue: Relationship in Worship; (2) The Pentateuch: Foundations of Worship; (3) The Former Prophets: Patterns of Worship; (4) The Latter Prophets: Attitudes in Worship; and (5) The Writings: Expressions of Worship. Each chapter examines a section of the OT and its relationship to worship. However, because of the nature of this book as a Christian enterprise, Pierce wraps up each of his chapters by presenting how the worship themes detected within are taken up in the New Testament (cf. p. 11).

The term "worship" is understood in this work as "the relational phenomenon between the created and the Creator, which find expression in both specific events and lifestyle commitments" (pp. 3, 13). Given this definition, the author takes a thorough linguistic and exegetical analysis of various concepts related to the theme of worship in each of the five aforementioned chapters. He discovers an important connection between worship and right living as a lifestyle. His findings lead him to conclude his work with a question: "Where do we go from here?" (pp. 265–69). Answering it, one hears Pierce's last words with significant impact as he wishes his targeted audience to "enter into more meaningful worship as both a lifestyle and an event" (p. 269).

The author's work contains several strengths. A few of them are worth mentioning. First of all, it must be pointed out that the book provides a thorough survey of the concept of worship within the whole OT. Every important Hebrew term (e.g., *kippūr* from *kāpar* for "atonement") portraying the theme of worship is analysed in depth. This, together with the twenty pages of its selected bibliography, makes Pierce's work as an important tool for anyone desiring to understand "the biblical theology of worship from a Christian perspective" (p. 75).

Not only its wealth of research needs to be mentioned here, but also the significant insights one gains throughout the book. These bring clarity over some topics that were either misunderstood or given unhelpful connotations by earlier interpretations. For instance, the author discovers that the account of God's grace in the Bible precedes the fall (pp. 21, 29–30, 43–46). This understanding has significant implications for our worship of God. In this manner, the OT is brought to life for the church today.

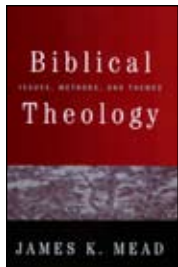
Besides the great value of its content outlined above, the author's work, like any other enterprise, is not immune of some weaknesses. One of them has to do with the author's writing style that is sometimes unclear. For instance, Pierce fails to put the acronym "HCSB" in his list of abbreviations. Yet he uses it on more than one occasion. This element alone, to begin with, can become a bump that slows down any reader unfamiliar with various acronyms used for different versions of the Bible. In addition to this,

the author sometimes gets into too much linguistic and exegetical analysis to the point that he fails to provide a useful synopsis to aid in the application of his exegetical outcomes.

Putting aside these flaws, however, this book is a tremendously useful tool for the improvement of the quality of worship in our modern world, whenever and wherever. It is also appropriate for anyone teaching (or intending to teach) a biblical theology of worship, as well as anyone familiar with the Hebrew language.

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James K. Mead. *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes*. Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2007. viii + 328 pp. £15.29/\$19k.77.



The purpose of this book is not to develop or present a biblical theology in particular, but to orient the reader to the field of biblical theology in general. To that end, it addresses five main topics that make up the first five chapters of the book.

Chapter one discusses the challenges of defining biblical theology in the first place. According to Mead, this a challenge “because the language of definitions lacks clarity, because we ourselves approach the task with a wide range of experiences and understandings, and because biblical scholars disagree over the precise nature, scope, and purpose of theological interpretation” (p. 3). Despite these challenges, Mead does offer a working definition of biblical theology: “Biblical theology seeks to identify and understand the Bible’s theological message, that is, what the Bible says about God and God’s relation to all creation, especially to humankind” (p. 2).

With this provisional definition in hand, Mead turns in the second chapter, “The History of Biblical Theology,” to provide the historical backdrop to the discussion. He does this by asking a series of questions, in chronological order, that give an overview of biblical theology’s development (p. 14):

1. What kind of biblical theology existed before the disciplines of that name arose?
2. Under what circumstances did the discipline of biblical theology develop?
3. Why did the division in the treatment of the testaments occur?
4. What intellectual movements influenced the methods of nineteenth century biblical theology?
5. What is the difference between the history of religions and biblical theology?
6. Why is the middle of the twentieth century thought of as a great age of biblical theology?
7. What new developments arose in the closing decades of the twentieth century?

In the third chapter, “The Issues Raised in Biblical Theology,” Mead addresses eight different key issues that come up when discussing biblical theology. These are helpfully grouped under three larger umbrellas: issues related to the scope of biblical theology (such as the relationship of the Old and New Testaments); issues related to the methods of biblical theology (such as the relationship of history

and theology); and issues related to influences on biblical theology (such as modern and postmodern influences).

Mead switches to the related area of methodology in the fourth chapter, “The Methods Used in Biblical Theology.” Nine different methodologies are discussed here, again helpfully grouped into three categories: those that focus on content (such as systematic or doctrinal approaches), shape (such as the tradition history approach), and perspective (such as existential or experiential approaches).

In the last major chapter, “The Themes Developed through Biblical Theology,” Mead turns his attention to various biblical themes. Once more, these are grouped into three areas: the God attested in biblical theology; living in relationship with God; and living in relationship with human beings (p. 171). This chapter has a different feel to the ones that preceded it. Chapters 2–4 focused more on presenting the major figures in biblical theology and the contribution that they made. In this chapter Mead is not simply describing the approaches of others; he is laying out his own understanding of the various themes that are most central to biblical theology itself.

The book concludes with a brief chapter (7 pp.) that considers various prospects related to each of the five main topics discussed above.

Positively, Mead demonstrates a very thorough knowledge of the field of biblical theology. His book is an impressive summary of multitudes of the most central figures in the history of the discipline. In further keeping with his stated goals (p. vii), he also presents these figures and their views with fairness and objectivity. As a result of these factors, the book has the potential to orient readers well to the field of biblical theology.

The book’s comprehensive scope, however, is also a potential weakness, for the simple reason that some chapters (particularly 2–4) are so rich in details that beginning students might have a difficult time grasping the forest for the trees. To his credit, Mead compensates for this as best as possible with clear section headings and helpful groupings where possible, but spending more time on fewer authors might have made this book even more accessible to novices in the field.

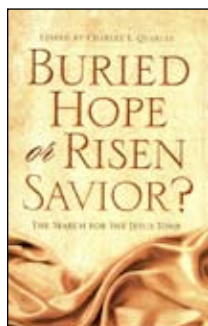
Ironically, another possible weakness of the book is the definition of biblical theology itself (see above). Positively, Mead’s definition allows for—even assumes—a level of continuity in the text. Negatively, it is so broad that it is not clear how biblical theology differs from other disciplines, most notably, systematic theology. Granted, Mead will discuss the differences between biblical theology and systematic theology elsewhere (e.g., pp. 95ff.), but the lack of contrast early on prevents a level of sharpness (or perhaps a “narrowness” he is trying to avoid?) that many would find helpful.

In sum, this is a very comprehensive introduction to the field of biblical theology. At the least, this book would serve as a helpful resource for the student (or teacher!) who wants to quickly place an individual biblical theologian in historical and methodological context. At the most, this book could serve to introduce a student to the field of biblical theology as a whole, though the student would probably need a fairly thorough background in biblical studies for the book to achieve this goal well.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Charles L. Quarles, ed. *Buried Hope or Risen Savior? The Search for the Jesus Tomb*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008. x + 243 pp. \$24.99.



In late winter of 2007, news services around the world broke the story of the supposed discovery of Jesus' family tomb, complete with ossuaries with inscriptions identifying them as once containing the remains of "Jesus son of Joseph," his mother Mary, another Mary whose DNA was unrelated to that of Jesus (his wife, Mary Magdalene?), a son of Jesus named Judah, Matthew, and a space for a missing ossuary believed to be that of Jesus' brother James. A week later, the Discovery Channel televised a documentary about this astonishing find, followed by a Ted Koppel special with the two main promoters of the story and three professors of theology or biblical studies, including evangelical Darrell Bock, who responded to the alleged discovery. About the same time, a book entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb* was released, authored by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino.

As it turned out, the hoopla was much ado about very little, other than the disturbing ability of creative media manipulators to attract enormous attention to a story undeserving of it and to mislead a biblically illiterate public into believing views endorsed by almost no *bona fide* scholars. Now, with this volume, we have an outstanding anthology of essays demonstrating in detail how vacuous the original claims were.

The editor, Charles Quarles, academic vice president and New Testament professor at Louisiana College, has gathered a stellar cast of contributors. After Quarles retells the story of the events that led to the media's incredible claims and to the composition of this volume, Steven Ortiz discusses "the use and abuse of archaeological interpretation" in the documentary and accompanying book. One can virtually guarantee that something is badly awry every time a new writer who is not a trained archaeologist claims to overturn all previous views on a subject by a "new find," complete with a detective-like movie made by a crew conveniently present for the "discovery," which has actually been known about for some time, already discussed in the standard scholarly circles, and not found to be significant in the way the new claim insists that it is.

Craig Evans follows by putting this tomb in the East Talpiot "suburb" of modern Jerusalem in its proper historical context. The tomb was actually discovered in 1980; it reflects the walk-in "mausoleum"-like structure that only the wealthy could afford; the Hebrew inscription for "Jesus" is not at all clear or certain; and the decorative symbols on the tomb and ossuaries are pre-Christian Jewish in nature. The missing ossuary cannot be the James ossuary because the latter is a different size than the space left vacated by the former.

Richard Bauckham proceeds to analyze the names on the ossuaries in considerable detail. There is no reason to think that a "Mathia" (Matthew) belonged to Jesus' family. "Maria" was a common transliteration back into Hebrew of the Greek form of the common name Mary, but Mary the mother of Jesus, as an indigenous Israelite, would have been called "Mariam." There is no good reason to think that Mary Magdalene was ever called "Mariame," as on the ossuary where the DNA does not match up

with that of “Jesus,” and there is no evidence of any kind from antiquity to suggest that Jesus of Nazareth was ever married.

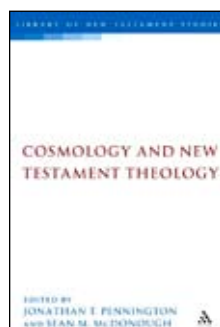
In possibly the most important chapter in the book, mathematicians William Dembski and Robert Marks highlight massive problems with the simplistic formulas used to compute the probabilities cited in *The Jesus Family Tomb*. Even if we estimate the average-size family very conservatively at ten persons each, the odds are that thirty families in Israel (who all could have made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and conceivably had a tomb there) from the mid-first century B.C.E. to the mid-first century C.E. (the dates of the ossuaries) had the combination of names that coincide with those we know belonged to Jesus’ family.

Gary Habermas next shows the plethora of New Testament and other historical evidence that contradict the suppositions that go into the Talpiot tomb hypothesis, while Michael Licona shows why Paul, especially in 1 Corinthians 15, should not be understood as claiming that the resurrection body is an immaterial one. Darrell Bock concludes the volume by summarizing each essay in some detail and by showing how the general public, in this age of instant internet claims never subjected to peer review, must learn to be patient with claims about new historical finds and allow the process of scholarly vetting to take place over a number of months (if not even longer) before arriving at confident verdicts.

So kudos to Quarles, his team of authors, and B & H Publishing for producing this high-quality scholarly vetting in barely over a year from the original “breaking news.” It is by far the most thorough and definitive rebuttal to date of the Jesus family tomb hypothesis, which should be laid to rest once and for all.

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Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, eds. *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*. London: T&T Clark, 2008. x + 213 pp. £65.00/\$130.00.



That the New Testament authors had their own preconceived notions about how the physical universe came to be and how it is structured (i.e. ‘cosmology’) is hardly contestable. But if the books of the New Testament are studied with a view towards how this drives the plot of the story or rhetoric of the argument, then one can observe the use of cosmological language to ‘inform and affect the author’s theological point(s)’ (p. 4). This collection of essays commences with this approach in mind. One author articulates this well by pointing to the difference and yet the close relationship between *Weltbild* (how the universe is depicted) and *Weltanschauung* (the ‘worldview’ based on the *Weltbild*). In eleven formative chapters, then, the books of the New Testament are investigated with a view towards discerning how cosmology informs theology. A preliminary chapter on ‘Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology’ by Edward Adams sets the backdrop for the discussion. The biblical contributions include essays by Michael F. Bird (Mark), Steven Walton (Luke/Acts), and Jon Laansma (Hebrews) as well as a number of other budding scholars.

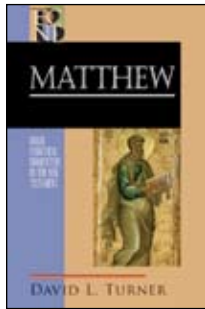
In such a short space, a detailed review of the essays is not possible. Here it will suffice to note several interesting commonalities among the chapters. In the first place, it becomes clear that the cosmology of the Old Testament and early Judaism appears to be more influential to the particular beliefs and symbolic world-constructs of the New Testament writers than that of the Graeco-Roman world. The Old Testament texts themselves, as it were, appear to be the largest fund of cosmological symbols. Flowing from this, several contributors make connections to Jewish protology and especially echoes of the Genesis account of creation (see, e.g., pp. 39, 172). This fits nicely as well with the close relationship between cosmology and eschatology (which often is expressed in neo-protological terms like ‘new creation’ [p. 103]). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a consistent Christocentrism detected in New Testament cosmology where Jesus is creator, the redeemer of the world (*kosmos*), the portal between heaven and earth, the victor over malevolent cosmological powers, and the one whose death and resurrection apocalyptically transformed every square inch of the universe.

Though the theological insights in this book are numerous, several questions came to mind as I progressed through it. In terms of methodology, it appears a bit vague as to what the limits of the meaning of ‘cosmology’ are. Does cosmology refer to just physical inanimate elements (i.e., heavens, earth, underworld), or should we include supernatural beings (such as demons and angels)? On methodology, I would have enjoyed some reflection on whether or (perhaps more properly) *how* genre affects the theological import of cosmological language. In terms of prominent themes, I was particularly impressed by those who pointed to the connection between cosmology and cult (especially so-called ‘temple cosmology’; see pp. 53–55 [Gospel of Mark], 129 [Hebrews]). Is this significant elsewhere in the New Testament as well? Also, what is the role of the Holy Spirit vis-à-vis the redemption of the cosmos and new creation? Collections of essays of this sort tend to be thick with description and thin with synthesis and analysis. Though I was encouraged by the presence of a concluding chapter that attempted to find the golden threads running through the chapters, I think more could have been done in a final review of the essays.

This very timely book draws attention to a yet under-explored area and comes a long way in filling the gap. As researchers continue to plumb the New Testament books’ cosmological depths, this well written resource will offer much guidance.

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David L. Turner. *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. xx + 828 pp. \$49.99.



David Turner has been authoring articles on Matthew with some frequency for nearly two decades, and this excellent commentary shows the great benefit derived from decades of familiarity with primary and secondary literature.

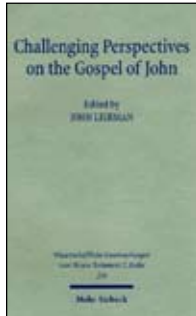
Perhaps more so than most commentaries, the author's theological convictions are worth noting, as they reflect recent shifts in American Evangelicalism and on occasion come to bear on the commentary in important ways. Turner writes from the so-called 'progressive dispensational' perspective. Matthew was a favorite fount for older dispensationalism, and almost all of his interaction with previous dispensational interpreters challenges their previous exegetical tenants. He cites and discards such dispensational staples as a 'future-only' interpretation of Matthew 24–25 and a strong conceptual distinction between kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven. He acknowledges that for Matthew the church consists of Jews and Gentiles (pp. 516–18) and takes the Sermon on the Mount as normative for Christian ethics rather than only for first-century Jews or for the post-rapture period. Turner rejects traditional dispensational approaches to Matthew 25:31–46 and appreciates the present reality of the kingdom along the lines of already/not yet eschatology (p. 43), though I am not aware of any amillennialists who 'tend to think of the kingdom as the present rule of Christ' more or less exclusive to a future component of that rule.

In this reviewer's opinion, the results of such a shift away from classic dispensationalism are salutary from an exegetical standpoint and greatly encouraging with respect to the future of evangelicalism. One hopes that such a volume can aid in moving Christian scholarship, congregations, and institutions beyond certain ecclesial and eschatological divides of previous generations.

The bibliography is not comprehensive (works omitted include published dissertations by J. Gibbs on the Eschatological Discourse and *Themelios* review editor Alistair I. Wilson on Matthew 21–25; both might contribute to a slightly different take on Matthew 24–25), discussions of the Greek text are not always full, and Turner generally avoids source criticism and synoptic dependence. Yet this is in the end perhaps a help rather than a hindrance to the use of the text, which is far more accessible than its companion in the BECNT on Luke and many other Matthew commentaries; Turner is content to abbreviate arguments or even simply cite contradictory studies without picking page-eating exegetical fights. This reviewer has not always enjoyed the BECNT layout, but it works well in this text. In many respects the utility of Turner's work and insights therein (especially for pastors and teachers) competes favorably with the best commentaries on Matthew. Graced with many nice quotes from other authors and Turner's own pleasant prose, this commentary will greatly aid those engaged in the construction of preaching outlines and assembling of exegetical insights. Finally, this marvelous commentary is also all but error-free.

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John Lierman, ed. *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*. WUNT 2. Reihe 219. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006. xii + 369 pp. £69.00/\$125.00.



This book is a collection of twelve essays on the Gospel of John, originally presented as papers at the 2002 New Testament study group of the Tyndale Fellowship in Cambridge. Besides David Wenham's introductory essay that refers to the questions related to the historical tradition in John and to the context in which John's tradition originated, there are several particular contributions in the essays contained in this book. For example, they show the following:

1. Jesus' words in John indeed represent the ministry of the historical Jesus.
2. It is Luke who has drawn on John rather than *vice versa*.
3. There does not seem to have been a *phobia* over John's Gospel in the second-century orthodox tradition, for there was a consistent use of the Gospel in the church and in Gnostic circles, although read with a critical and polemic purpose.
4. In spite of its portrayal of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God, John's theology portrays through its narrative form primarily God as the Father who is more relational or filial than legal.
5. The narrator describes, within the category of 'metanarrative,' the vision in the *monogenes theos* of the invisible God in whom lay threat and unpredictability as well as grace and truth (cf. Exod 34:6–7).
6. John's 'prophetic revelation,' which is accessible by the endowment of the Spirit, includes faith, right confession of Christ, and ethical transformation, which is a mark of John's discipleship template.
7. Whether we read Nicodemus narrative positively as an 'insider' or negatively as an 'outsider' to Jesus, both readings persuade the audience in their own ways to become devoted disciples of Christ.
8. Read against the backdrop of the emperor cult prevalent in the first century, one can see an implicit polemic against the claims of the imperial cult in John's presentation of Jesus as the divine Christ, the true representative of the one God, and as the true giver of life and peace.

Various issues emerge from the reading of this book:

An examination of Daniel 9:25, which refers to the coming of 'an anointed one, a prince' (Dan 9:25 LXX), would have further supported Bauckham's study of the belief on the Messiah in the pre-70 Judaism. Köstenberger's study, which seeks to interpret John's Gospel against the background of the Second Temple Judaism, has not probed into such key motifs as glory, sacrifice, seeing God, and communion with God—all integrally related to the Temple theme. The Merkabah mystical background of the Fourth Gospel and the implied polemic in John against the Jewish mystics of that time can hardly be ignored in a study on John and the Second Temple Judaism. The study of John Lierman also fails to identify the Merkabah mysticism practised in the first and late second centuries as the probable background against which Jesus' kingship in John can better be understood.

The parallelism drawn by Andrew Gregory between Luke 24:12 and John 20:3–10 is not convincing enough to argue for Luke’s literary dependence on John. The limited parallels shown do not necessarily imply that one used the other. In this study, John 8:1–11, which contains several Lukan languages, goes unnoticed.

Stibbe, in his presentation of John’s Gospel as narrative theology, seems to be closer to the point of dichotomizing God the Father and the Son who came to reveal the Father as well as the Father’s love relationship and his justice, while the Johannine narrator sees both the Father and the Son, who indwell one another, as one.

Gary Burge, in his essay, seems to read from the Spirit-Paraclete passages more than what the text itself says. In spite of the fact that the Spirit will declare what he hears from the Father and the Son from whom he proceeds and by taking what is Christ’s, Burge maintains that the Spirit will open up ‘new truths not seen before.’ John does not seem to present the Spirit mainly as the aide who will bring clarity to incomprehension, but as the *parakletos* who will transform human life and who will lead the disciples by teaching and guiding. It is Jesus’ glorification on the cross, and not the ‘new comprehension’ by the Spirit, which is the focal point in John.

Gabi Renz’s study allows both the positive and negative readings of Nicodemus narrative in John with the note that both readings do ‘persuade the audience to become devoted disciples of Christ.’ However, her study begs the questions: would John have left his audience to be so ambiguous that they could not grasp *his* mind correctly? Would this ambiguity not encourage a non-believing recipient to choose to be a mere sympathizer, rather than to become a devoted disciple, of Jesus and a believing recipient to be content with living in two worlds at the same time?

In sum, the book has drawn our attention to important themes that are in current research and has made an impressive contribution to Johannine study. But at the same time it raises several issues that certainly lead us to study further on the themes accommodated in this book.

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J. Julius Scott Jr. *New Testament Theology: A New Study of the Thematic Structure of the New Testament*. Scotland: Mentor, 2008. 368 pp. \$29.99.



Scott, now professor emeritus of biblical and historical studies at Wheaton College and Graduate School, taught an undergraduate “New Testament Survey” course from 1970 to 2000. This book originated from that class to fill a gap: “I looked in vain for a survey of New Testament teaching somewhere between the elementary level and that of a specialized, technical New Testament theology” (p. 7). Scott wrote the first draft of this book in 1993–94 and continued to tweak it after his retirement in 2000 (p. 7).

New Testament Theology (henceforth *NTT*) is a basic introduction to the NT with a biblical theological method. *NTT* is intentionally simple: “Keeping in mind the audience I envision, I have chosen to focus primarily upon the surface meaning of the text” (p. 23; cf. p. 25).

NT theologies generally approach the topic in one of two ways:

1. An analytic approach traces themes in units of the NT, grouping corpora such as the Synoptic Gospels, John's writings, Paul's letters, etc. (e.g., George Ladd, Leon Morris).
2. A synthetic or thematic approach traces themes throughout the entire NT, organizing the book by those themes and then tracing those themes throughout units of the NT (e.g., Donald Guthrie, Thomas Schreiner).

Frank Thielman's recent "canonical and synthetic approach" combines both approaches, tracing the distinctive themes in each book of the NT one at a time (hence, "canonical" or analytic) but also including summaries that demonstrate a unity amid the diversity (hence, "synthetic" or thematic).

Although the book's back cover suggests that Scott's *NTT* is a *via media* between an analytic and thematic approach, it is another thematic approach that attempts to answer what Scott sees as the seven major questions with which the NT is preoccupied: (1) Who is Jesus? (2) What must I do to be saved? (3) How should the Christian live? (4) What is the church? (5) What is the church's relation to society? (6) How shall it end? (7) What does the NT teach us about God? The answers to these questions "comprise the basic message of the New Testament, the central New Testament themes, and the foundational elements of New Testament teaching" (p. 21).

Scott answers these seven questions by usefully organizing the biblical data. For example, he answers the question "What must I do to be saved?" under the following headings: (1) the need for salvation; (2) the ministry of Jesus: the provision of salvation; (3) the proclamation of the early church: the exposition of salvation; (4) the vocabulary of salvation: some terms used by NT writers to describe various aspects of the effects of the work of Christ; (5) the work of the Holy Spirit: the application of salvation (pp. 95–130). It is evident that Scott has spent decades studying and communicating the NT's message.

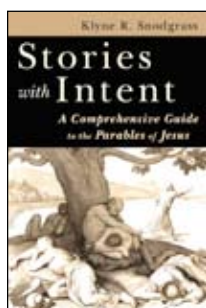
NTT has some drawbacks:

1. *NTT* displays an unusual number of typographical errors, especially in the bibliography.
2. The layout feels cramped, and the headings are not always intuitive or logically parallel (e.g., 27–32). Some headings lack parallel headings altogether.
3. *NTT* avoids taking positions on several controversial issues, instead laying out the options and presenting a least-common-denominator theology. (A notable exception is his preference for what he calls "chiliasm" as "a working hypothesis" [p. 327].) For example, Scott's views are unclear regarding the continuance of sign gifts (pp. 206–8), complementarianism vs. egalitarianism (pp. 223–25), church government (pp. 225–26), and baptism and the Lord's supper (pp. 248–55). Some might view this as an advantage, but I would prefer a robust, respectful defense (albeit brief) of a position with which I disagree than a general non-committal spread of options.
4. *NTT* feels like a patchwork of course lectures combined into a single volume. The tone ranges from conversational to formal, and the method varies in the level of detail from chapter to chapter. Some sections are relatively specific (e.g., the introduction briefly surveys Greek verbal aspect theory! [p. 24]) while others are disappointingly vague (e.g., his definition of the church [p. 199]).
5. Its research is dated. It interacts only sparsely with secondary literature, and its conversation partners include venerable but less recent authors such as Oscar Cullmann, George Ladd, and Donald Guthrie. One particularly glaring omission is any discussion on the new perspective(s) on Paul.

Nevertheless, Scott's thematic approach is creative, and his tone is that of a warm-hearted, seasoned scholar, not a cold or stuffy one. He patiently explains ideas with minimal jargon, and he consistently upholds conservative, orthodox doctrines.

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Klyne Snodgrass. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xviii + 846 pp. \$50.11.



This major work is mainly a study of the parables of Jesus themselves, introduced by two relatively brief introductory chapters, and concluded with 279 pages of appendices, notes, and indices.

The first chapter sets the scene, discussing the nature of parables: they are 'stories with intent.' They need to be interpreted accordingly within the context of Jesus' teaching and Jesus' world. While recognizing that the parables have been arranged and shaped by the evangelists, Snodgrass is unashamed in his historical confidence that the parables have been faithfully preserved and give us access to Jesus' teaching.

He usefully discusses different types and then features of Jesus' parables: this is helpful and insightful, even if his comment that 'a few . . . may have christological reference' seems less than generous (p. 20); arguably most of the parables are directly or indirectly christological. He discusses 'How Should Parables Be Interpreted,' giving eleven very useful guidelines. Among other things he reminds us that Jesus' parables will have been repeated frequently in different contexts and with variations; he warns against overinterpreting details and against scholars' attempts to extract the parables from their gospel contexts and to reconstruct hypothetical originals. He vigorously rejects the view that parables cannot be interpreted!

The introduction is clear and to the point, and compared to the whole book it is brief. It does not attempt to say everything or to give a history of the interpretation of parables, but it (with the extensive footnotes) makes all sorts of pertinent points well. I like the author's robust rejection of various widely held views, as well as his adapted quotes on parables as 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' (!), and on parables as indirect communication that 'finds a way in a back window and confronts what one thinks is reality' (p. 8). The second chapter looks at parables in the ancient world, showing that Jesus' parabolic teaching was not unique, but that there is no evidence of anyone who used parables so much and so well as Jesus.

Snodgrass looks at the parables under the following headings: grace and responsibility; parables of lostness; the parable of the sower and the purpose of parables; parables of the present kingdom in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 13; parables specifically about Israel; parables about discipleship; parables about money; parables concerning God and prayer; parables of future eschatology. In discussing each of the main gospel parables, the author looks at the form of the parable, at issues requiring attention (e.g., is this parable authentic teaching of Jesus? Does it teach works-righteousness?), at helpful primary source material (i.e., OT and NT material that may relate, Jewish writings, Greco-Roman writings). He

then looks at textual features (e.g., how the parable fits in its context) and at cultural background. This leads into the most important and extended section, where he explains the parable and addresses the issues it raises. He then has a brief discussion of how the parable may be applied today and suggestions for further reading.

The book is a model of clear and sane discussion and a great resource. He explains scholarly views succinctly and well, offers persuasive criticism where this is in order (of liberal and more conservative scholars), and is equally persuasive in most of his own explanations. He is a good guide around the teaching of Jesus, and his comments about 'adapting the parable' for today are brief but helpful.

It is not possible to describe all or even many of his conclusions. He reflects usefully on the difficult sayings of Mark 4:10–12, seeing the key in the prophetic words of Isaiah 6:9–10: Jesus sees a correspondence between his ministry and Isaiah's hyperbolic and challenging description of the people's hardness of heart. Mark does not see Jesus' parables as designed to prevent hearing, but they do both hide and reveal: they seek response, but 'where there is no response the message is lost'. Snodgrass finds the interpretations of the parables of the sower and of the tares to be genuine teaching of Jesus. He guides us with a sure touch through the minefield of the parable of the unjust steward, rejecting attempts to whitewash the steward and seeing the parable as an urgent call to practical discipleship, especially in relation to the use of money: 'the church should . . . demonstrate by its use of the money the reality of the gospel' (p. 418). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is not a literal or detailed portrayal of the afterlife, but it is real judgment and about the seriousness of just relationships. Snodgrass comes over as a little uncomfortable with the parabolic pictures of judgement, but he affirms the importance of the theme. He argues that parables such as the good and bad stewards, the talents, and the wise and foolish virgins do refer to Jesus' parousia (not to some more immediate coming as suggested by Tom Wright, nor to the coming of God if this is distinguished from the parousia). He differs from many scholars in arguing that the parable of the sheep and goats is about compassion broadly conceived, not just about mission or the response to the gospel. The parable does not teach justification by works, but 'We cannot separate our relation with God from our relation with people. To experience the compassion of God makes one a medium of compassion. . . . For those in Christ the origin and recipient of every act is Christ himself' (p. 562).

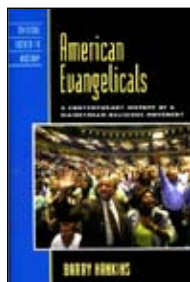
Even a book as big as this cannot do everything. It is (refreshingly) about Jesus, not about the history of scholarship, nor primarily about the evangelists. So far as the evangelists are concerned, the specific contribution of each is mentioned piecemeal rather than treated systematically. I suspect that Luke would have seen connections between the extravagant love of the enemy portrayed in the Good Samaritan and the extravagant love of the Father in the Prodigal Son and the forgiving love of Jesus on the cross towards his executioners and the repentant criminal. I am not sure that I agree with Snodgrass that all attempts to find Jesus mirrored in the parable of the Good Samaritan are 'illegitimate allegorizing' (p. 356), or that there is no justification for seeing the cross somehow reflected in the parable of the prodigal son, who is brought from death to life by his father's undeserved love. I wonder if Paul is making such connections in Romans 5:8–10 and Ephesians 2:4–13. I wonder also if Paul understood the parable of the wise and foolish virgins as having something to say to the Thessalonians about those who have 'fallen asleep' in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4), an interpretation that Snodgrass dismisses so far as Matthew and Jesus are concerned.

Snodgrass has an enviable grasp of the secondary literature on parables. He omits to mention my *Parables of Jesus*, which comes to many similar conclusions as his book, maybe because it is at a more popular level. The dissertation of Ramesh Khattry from Nepal on *The Authenticity of the Parables of the Wheat and the Tares and Its Interpretation* is another omission. But it would be unfair to Snodgrass to conclude a review on anything but a very positive note: this is an excellent book, not for the beginning student perhaps, but for anyone wanting a highly informed and trustworthy guide to the most important stories ever told.

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— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Barry Hankins. *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement*. Critical Issues in History. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. xiii + 205 pp. \$34.95.



As Americans prepare for another presidential election, scores of journalists, pundits, and scholars continue to speculate about the role that evangelicals and other “values voters” will play in the results. Such prognostications have been standard fare since the mid-1970s, though they have reached a fevered pitch in the early twenty-first century. It seems that everyone is trying to define terms like “evangelical” and “evangelicalism,” understand common evangelical beliefs and practices, and determine the degree of evangelical cultural influence. Sociologists and historians in particular have devoted numerous monographs and scholarly essays to American evangelicalism over the last generation, especially the last decade. Several of those works have been written by Barry Hankins, a professor of history and church-state studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Hankins’s most comprehensive work to date is *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement*, part of Rowman & Littlefield’s Critical Issue in History series. Following scholars like Alan Wolfe and Laurence Moore, Hankins argues that evangelicals are both mainstream Americans in how they order their lives and religious outsiders by virtue of many of their core convictions (p. x). With this understanding in mind, Hankins’s book is intended to be an introduction to the evangelical movement, including its history, distinctives, and contemporary practices. The intended audience is primarily non-evangelicals who are curious about a movement that seems narrow enough that the media (simplistically) considers it a monolithic voting bloc, but diverse enough to include Christians from numerous theological traditions with varied beliefs and emphases.

Hankins structures his study into eight chapters, all of which either help define the nature of evangelicalism or provide insight into the ways evangelicals have historically engaged several hotly contested cultural issues. Chapter one discusses the origins of American evangelicalism as a multid denominational movement shaped by religious awakenings and focused on experiential religion. Following Scottish historian David Bebbington, Hankins argues that the four core convictions of

evangelism are biblicism, crucicentrism (cross-centeredness), conversionism, and activism, all of which have been shaped by a revival tradition dating to the First Great Awakening. Chapter two rehearses the rise of modernist theology and its role in dividing evangelicals into fundamentalist and liberal camps. Hankins contends, “the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was not just about saving evangelical Protestantism, it was a full-scale war to save American culture” (p. 31).

Chapter three recounts the history of evangelical engagement with science, with special emphasis on the conflict with biological evolution. Hankins argues that an initial evangelical openness toward at least some forms of evolution was eclipsed during the twentieth century by activist support for the Creation Science and Intelligent Design movements, respectively. Chapter four describes the rise of premillennialism, especially dispensationalism, among American evangelicals. Hankins shows how works like *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the *Left Behind* novels have popularized dispensationalism in evangelical folk theology, though he also helpfully reminds readers that most evangelicals are not obsessed with end times speculation. Hankins’s fifth chapter is devoted to evangelical debates about gender and sexuality, which can be traced back to the revivals themselves. Hankins argues that as American culture became gradually more open to women’s rights, the divide between complementarian and egalitarian evangelicals was only furthered, though he also believes that practice is often not as far apart as theory in gender matters. Hankins notes that most evangelicals reject homosexuality as an unbiblical option.

Chapter six discusses evangelical political engagement, a theme that emerges in almost every chapter and is one of Hankins’s academic specialties. Hankins focuses upon the rise of the Religious Right in the last quarter of the twentieth century, though he also discusses historical precursors to the Religious Right as well as less conservative evangelical political activism. Chapter seven is devoted to evangelical engagement of the academy. Hankins notes the influence of popular thinkers like Francis Schaeffer, but focuses most of his attention on the ideas of evangelical historians who have weighed in on the relationship between faith and scholarship, especially Mark Noll and George Marsden. Chapter eight is a brief conclusion where Hankins revisits his contention that evangelicals are quintessentially American, often to the chagrin of some within the movement.

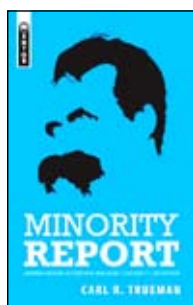
American Evangelicals serves as a helpful introduction to evangelicalism. Because of its introductory nature, Hankins’s book is mostly a synthesis of standard works in the field over the last generation or two rather than a constructive history of evangelicalism. Hankins tries to be fair to each of the individuals, sub-movements, and issues he discusses, even those with which he obviously disagrees. One of his aims is to show that American evangelicals are not as odd as outsiders sometimes think, and though Hankins possibly overemphasizes the mainstream nature of evangelicalism at times, he does a fine job of correcting some common misperceptions about evangelicals.

Despite the book’s commendable even-handedness, many evangelical readers will quibble with some of Hankins’s interpretations. One suspects that many theologically conservative evangelicals will think Hankins has overemphasized diversity, while some theologically progressive readers will claim there is not enough emphasis on diversity. Insiders and adherents will likely argue that Hankins misses the point in his discussions (and sometimes mild criticisms) of dispensationalism, complementarianism, the Religious Right, and especially the Intelligent Design movement. But Hankins is writing primarily for non-evangelicals, and readers will be hard-pressed to find a more sympathetic treatment of American evangelicalism that is aimed for those outside the movement.

American Evangelicals would be an excellent textbook for classes in American religious history or introductory Christianity courses. Pastors and other church leaders will find the book to be a useful resource for understanding the basic history of evangelical distinctives and debates. The book is popularly written, so it would also be appropriate for local church reading groups, Sunday School classes, or a short Christian education course.

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Carl R. Trueman. *Minority Report: Unpopular Thoughts on Everything from Ancient Christianity to Zen-Calvinism*. Scotland: Mentor, 2008. 221 pp. \$17.99.



Does Carl Trueman ever write anything that is boring? He definitely does not write like typical professors of historical theology and church history (no offense to those many fine history professors!). This second volume of his collected essays follows in the train of his first: *Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historic and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Scotland: Mentor, 2004). Trueman's combination of his first-class intellect, British sensibilities, Westminster Seminary tradition, and cultural preferences is an unusual package that is provocative, humorous, wry, clever, engaging, and thought-provoking. He writes with a wit and verve that is delightful and entertaining.

This volume collects twenty of Trueman's essays, many of which are short articles published at www.reformation21.org. They address the following themes (my categories, not Trueman's):

1. Defending the discipline of church history: "Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light," a revision of Trueman's inaugural lecture as professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in 2005, is a manifesto for teaching historical theology and church history in seminary, particularly against the challenge of postmodernism. "Breeding Ferrets on Watership Down" is a shorter apologetic for teaching history. "Leadership, Holy Men, and Lessons from Augustine" (which also fits in the next paragraph) demonstrates the value of knowing the church fathers by using them to expose problems with evangelical leaders in light of Ted Haggard's scandal.

2. Critiquing American evangelicalism: "Uneasy Consciences and Critical Minds" draws self-critiquing insights from Carl F. H. Henry and Edward Said. "It Ain't Over Till the Fat Lady Sings" respectfully and strongly disagrees with Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom's *Is the Reformation Over?* "A Good Creed Seldom Goes Unpunished" tactfully defends the value of creeds for the church. "Is the Devil Really in the Details?" and "Thoughts on the Return to Rome of Professor Beckwith" critically reflect on the high-profile conversions of Joshua Hochschild and Francis Beckwith from evangelicalism to Roman Catholicism. "Escaping Vanity Fair: A Word of Encouragement from Nietzsche" challenges evangelicals to critique themselves.

3. Critiquing culture (esp. American culture): "The Age of Apathy" analyzes our apathetic culture and demonstrates how that mindset destroys Christian living. "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues" reflects on how quickly our culture has openly accepted homosexuality. "American Idolatry" pokes fun at and draws insightful lessons from the popular TV show *American Idol*. "The Theater of the

Absurd” explains why Trueman blogs with a facetious edge. “Death, the Final Boundary,” which pastors could profitably utilize in funeral sermons, considers how dramatically sex and death have switched places as cultural taboos in Western society. “A Dangerous Gift for My Wife” hilariously reflects on women’s anti-ageing products and the cult of youth.

4. Critiquing human nature: “The Banality of Evil: From Eichmann to the iPod Generation” agrees with Hannah Arendt’s account of Adolf Eichmann’s trial as a Nazi war criminal: evil is banal. “Zen-Calvinism and the Art of Motorvehicle Replacement” is an apologetic for “Zen-Calvinism,” a label for shock effect that refers to Trueman’s practical Calvinism.

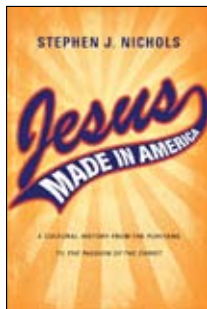
5. Critiquing poor theology: “Beyond the Limitations of Chick Lit” notes similarities and differences between Protestants and Catholics. “Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Missing Book” is a masterful, hilarious-yet-sobering parody of a Sherlock Holmes case; the problem that this case analyzes is the disappearance of John’s gospel among so-called evangelical scholars writing about Christ.

6. Promoting the use of Psalms in church worship: “Where Is Authenticity to Be Found?” persuasively expands on his previous proposal (“What Do Miserable Christians Sing?”) to recover Psalm-singing; like our singing, our teaching of theology must express God’s truth in the multiple literary ways that God has revealed it. “Zen-Calvinism and the Art of Motorvehicle Replacement” likewise extols the use of Psalms in worship.

The circulation of these essays in this accessible format will no doubt incite and infuriate even more readers, many of whom will let Trueman know this in rather rude ways. Thankfully, this will not deter him, for he marvels, “Christians do write the most spectacularly humorless hate-mail; what motivates people to waste their time in this way is a mystery to me, but such letters and e-mails do perversely encourage me to continue rattling cages” (p. 10).

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Stephen J. Nichols. *Jesus Made in America: A Cultural History from the Puritans to the Passion of the Christ*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 237 pp. \$24.95.



While driving to my office at Southern Seminary the other day, three bumper stickers caught my attention. One was adorned with a peace symbol and read, “Jesus was a liberal.” A second was black with green letters made to look like spray-painted graffiti and read, “Jesus is my homeboy.” A third obviously was adorned with the Promise Keepers logo and read, “Real Men Love Jesus.” Three vehicles, three bumper stickers, and three different messages about Jesus.

It seems that Jesus is on the minds of an unprecedented number of people in the West today, and Stephen Nichols, research professor of Christianity and Culture at Lancaster Bible College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, takes note of the trend of popularizing our Lord and traces its development in *Jesus Made in America*.

Nichols argues what the bumper-sticker culture seems to confirm: in the United States, Jesus has become as uniquely a part of the American brand as baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and the stars and stripes. The Jesus that has emerged in twenty-first-century America, however, barely resembles the Incarnate Son of God, the second Person of the Godhead who emerges from Scripture, the Lord who was worshiped by our Puritan forbears.

Nichols accomplishes his task by unfolding the way in which Jesus was perceived and expressed in the popular culture throughout American history. His journey with Jesus begins with the founding fathers of our democracy; Thomas Jefferson crafted his own Jesus by taking a pair of scissors and literally snipping away the offensive parts of the New Testament, parts that made Jesus appear unloving according to Jefferson's sentimental definition of love. As Nichols puts it, the Jesus who survives Jefferson's cutting exercise as well as the Jeffersonian era was a Jesus who "is a fine purveyor of morality and virtue. He is humble and meek, industrious and honest." In the popular mind, the four Gospels were seen as a fine guide to private devotion and piety.

Next, Nichols walks with Jesus through his Victorian makeover period; here Jesus becomes meek and mild, the friend of children. This version of Jesus met his match later, however, in the late-19th and early-20th century when two basic manifestations emerged: the "good man" of liberal pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick and the "man's man" of Billy Sunday. J. Gresham Machen emerged onto the scene and called for a recovery of the Puritan and biblical Jesus.

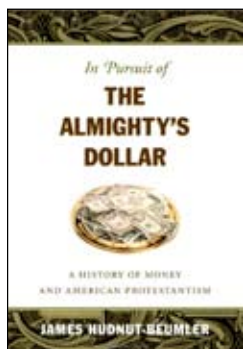
Nichols then traces Jesus in his various American modes during the twentieth century: Jesus as the peace-loving man of the Jesus People, Jesus the big-screen draw of Hollywood motion pictures, and the consumerist Jesus of the Madonna videos and the "WWJD?" Movement. Finally, Nichols concludes by showing how Jesus has been politicized by quasi-evangelical groups such as the Moral Majority and the Republican Party.

All in all, Nichols clearly and vigorously defends his thesis. He provides overwhelming anecdotal documentation of the way in which Jesus has been commandeered by the changing cultures of America. The work compellingly argues that the Jesus who has arrived on the American stage in twenty-first century America is sadly a Jesus who is foreign to the New Testament Gospels, a Jesus who would scarcely be recognized by Jonathan Edwards and those of his theological tradition.

As with all of Nichols's works, *Jesus Made in America* is written in a lively style, one from which the author's voice clearly and uniquely rings. His case is compelling and his argument is one that needs to receive a wide reading in evangelical churches. May Nichols's work cause evangelicals to rediscover the robust Jesus of Holy Scripture.

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James Hudnut-Beumler. *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. xx + 268 pp. \$29.95.



Weekly offerings and giving envelopes are nearly as common as the weekly sermon in contemporary Protestant churches. However, as in other aspects of church life, what is now seen as tradition was once new and innovative. James Hudnut-Beumler retells the advent of these practices and many more as he traces the history of fundraising and spending in American Protestantism (mostly in mainline denominations) from 1750 to 2000. He draws most heavily from numerous books about church finance and fundraising, but also utilizes denominational annual records and minutes, census data, sermons, diaries, account books, and architectural blueprints to tell the story of how American Protestant churches have raised, spent, and been shaped by money. *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar*

focuses on three aspects of church finance: (1) fundraising appeals, (2) fundraising methods, and (3) the way Protestants have spent money—specifically on buildings and ministerial labor.

Following the First Great Awakening and the American Revolution, church competition and disestablishment resulted in a massive shift from public to private support of religion. This shift, which turned every pastor into “a development officer among his own people” (15), birthed unique and voluminous literature on church finance and fundraising. Hudnut-Beumler examines this literature, telling the story of the strategies and terms religious leaders have used to inspire giving. For example, the term “systematic benevolence” became popular in the years leading up to the Civil War as Protestant leaders called on Christians to give in a planned and proportional way to support the churches and to fund the multiplying benevolent and mission agencies of a booming Protestant culture. Post-Civil War America witnessed the publication of many books advocating tithing as an act of obedience to God. Hudnut-Beumler argues that the tithe did not become common until late in the nineteenth century as more and more leaders spiritualized giving and focused on biblical principles rather than mere institutional needs. Appeals to “stewardship” began in earnest during the Progressive Era, largely among Social Gospel advocates like Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden. Nearly all segments of Protestantism in the past one hundred years have adopted the concept of “stewardship” to encourage everything from environmental care to family budgeting.

In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar also tells the story of fundraising methods, arguing that developments in method have often been more tied to cultural trends and pragmatic considerations than to theological concerns. In many churches, methods used during the establishment era—such as pew rentals, poll taxes, and property taxes—were still used for much of the nineteenth century. These methods eventually died out as churches opted for a completely voluntary system, more in step with the free-market nature of American religion. Weekly offerings became normal in most churches by 1890, and unified church giving was proposed as a solution to the problem of competing needs in nineteenth-century Protestantism. The Every Member Canvass, annual pledge cards, and the divided offering envelope are just a few of the methods popularized in the mid-twentieth century as technique and businesslike precision began to supplant appeals to biblical stewardship as the dominant emphasis in church fundraising. While professional technique has been on the rise, Hudnut-Beumler argues that

the twentieth century has witnessed a tension between biblical motive and professional technique in Protestant approaches to fundraising.

Four chapters break up the main narrative of this book by outlining how Protestants have spent money on church buildings and ministerial labor. Hudnut-Beumler argues that church buildings have taken on new forms as the vision of what a church should be has changed. For example, the small church buildings of early America—good for meeting and preaching—gave way to larger buildings, as programs and staff were added to meet more needs of congregants and the community. The chapters on ministerial pay and experience (including a chapter on the experience of ministers' wives) tell a story of decreasing income and status, which has intensified over the past thirty years.

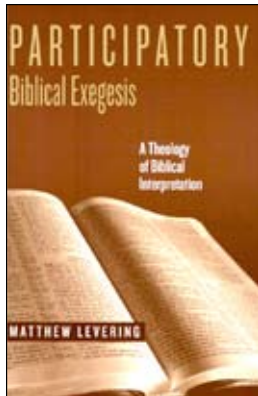
This book is not a comprehensive economic history. The author's choice to focus more narrowly on church fundraising enables him to provide a concise and lucid narrative of this neglected but important topic. However, his narrow focus in other areas proves a weakness in at least two important ways. First, Hudnut-Beumler, dean of the divinity school at Vanderbilt University, chooses to study mainly upper-class, mainline denominations. Therefore, he gives little attention to large segments of Protestantism, such as Baptists and Methodists in the nineteenth century and Pentecostals in the twentieth century. The result, then, is that the reader gets a well-researched description of Social Gospel attitudes toward money and a careful interpretation of the economic woes of late-twentieth century mainline denominations. The book would have been even more helpful if it provided an equally thorough description of rural church fundraising or the ways in which booming evangelicalism funded itself in the mid-twentieth century. Second, the author's narrow focus on economic factors leads to some less-than-satisfactory interpretations—especially of the past 50 years. Rather than taking divergent theological beliefs into account, Hudnut-Beumler explains the decline of mainline Protestant churches and the parallel rise of conservative churches almost exclusively by economic and social causes.

Despite these imbalances, *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar* is still an important book for any pastor, church administrator, or student of American religion. It provides both a compelling, well-researched history and significant insight into contemporary giving and fundraising practices.

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

Matthew Levering. *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008. 310 pp. \$25.00.



New methods in biblical interpretation have become something of a staple in the theological diet over the past decade, but the subject is so vast that a different angle is always possible, and Matthew Levering offers us just that. In this book, he explores the thesis that the interpretation of Scripture followed a particular path of development up to the late thirteenth century, when it suddenly diverged into something much more academic and distant from the life of the church. Dr Levering calls this earlier pattern ‘participatory’, by which he means that readers and preachers of the sacred text felt that they were part of the community being addressed. As we would say today, they applied the words of the Bible to their own lives without much sense of historical or cultural difference between it and them. As later generations became more aware of what we would call ‘cultural conditioning’ or perhaps ‘contextualization’, they discovered difficulties in the Bible that had not been apparent to their ancestors.

Not content with mere theory, Dr Levering earths his thesis in a historical study of how John 3:27–36 has been interpreted through the centuries. As he sees it, Thomas Aquinas represents the climax of the ancient hermeneutic, after which there was a steady transformation whose most recent manifestation can be seen in the commentary of Raymond Brown. Dr Levering writes as a Roman Catholic, and although he mentions Protestant scholars from time to time, it is on his fellow Catholics that he concentrates his attention. The great sixteenth-century commentator is therefore Erasmus, not Calvin (whom he ignores), and when Protestant exegesis makes its appearance, it is in the liberal form commonly adopted by contemporary Catholic scholars. As so often in works of this kind, Protestantism is equated with liberalism and therefore caricatured, although Dr Levering does not do this with any hostile intent. The irony is that he ends with a quotation from Markus Bockmuehl, an evangelical Protestant, which he regards as programmatic for a recovery of the participatory biblical interpretation of the church fathers!

By its very nature, Dr Levering’s thesis is a broad one which will require (and perhaps eventually receive) any number of qualifications, but this should not blind us to the fact that he has blazed a trail in the historical interpretation of the Bible that we would do well to take seriously. The life of the church and the academic study of the Bible both suffer when they are divorced from one another, and recovering their unity is essential for the health of the body of Christ. Many people across the theological spectrum have become aware of this in recent years, and Dr Levering’s book should be seen as a further contribution to that process. If it raises awareness of the need to reassess pre-modern Biblical exegesis and appropriate what is of permanent value in it, then it will have succeeded in its aims and made a real contribution to the development of biblical studies generally.

Nearly half the book is taken up with endnotes and bibliography, both of which are very extensive. Readers for whom footnotes are the stuff of life will be delighted by this and spend many happy hours discovering their riches, though others may think that more of this material should have gone into

the main text. Either way, there is a great deal here to ponder and meditate on. Dr Levering is to be congratulated for making his research publicly available and encouraging us to broaden our own horizons of biblical study to include the ‘participatory’ exegesis of the text that is so often dismissed as unscholarly and irrelevant.

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David Albert Jones. *Approaching the End: A Theological Exploration of Death and Dying*. Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 241 pp. £55.00/\$99.00.



This book is an admirable effort to discover the riches of the Christian tradition in thinking about death and to apply them to contemporary controversies. Author David Albert Jones is Professor of Bioethics, Academic Director of the School of Theology, and Director of the MA Program in Bioethics at St. Mary’s University College, Twickenham, United Kingdom. His perspective is Roman Catholic, and he represents Christianity as a whole with great sensitivity and skill.

Although death is universal in human experience and has been with us from the beginning of our history, the opportunity and the need to make decisions about life prolonging technologies is quite recent. The public debate about end-of-life decision-making from both moral and legal perspectives has been dominated by the disciplines of psychology and philosophy, but believers need the direction of Christian theology as well. This is true because we need guidance in sorting various psychological and philosophical theories within each discipline and because there is tension between the advice generated by these two sources. A theological account of death can help unite the more clinical or pastoral concern of the psychologist and the more doctrinal or normative perspective of the ethicist.

Jones develops his systematic theological account of death by offering chapter-length treatments of four theologians of different ages, “each of whom developed a distinctive and influential theological account of human death” (p. 2). They are Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Rahner. Despite their temporal distances from one another, there is so much continuity between them that they “constitute a single extended argument on the theology of death” (pp. 7, 187). This does not mean that they offer a uniform account, but that each develops themes in the thought of his predecessors. Although Ambrose is credited with developing “an explicitly Christian account of death” (p. 187), his Platonism inclined him to view the death of the body and the separation of body and soul as “something in every way good in itself” (p. 187), because it enables the body to rest while remedying the punitive hardships of post-Fall existence, as well as freeing the soul. Augustine cannot conclude that death is a good thing because of his higher estimation of the body, and he declares that body and soul are in a natural union. Aquinas was able to develop this theme more fully, having access to Aristotle, who teaches him that death is natural. Rahner, making use of existentialist and post-Kantian thought, emphasizes “the distinctively human character of death as the end of our earthly pilgrimage” (p. 189).

Jones applies the Christian understanding of death to the issues of grief, hope, killing, suicide and martyrdom, assisted suicide and euthanasia, withholding and withdrawing treatment, and sustaining the unconscious. Jones criticizes the tendency of Christians to attempt to influence public policy by offering secular arguments and leaving Christian rationales unstated. The problems are that the secular arguments may be in fact weaker than the religious ones, that secular interlocutors will suspect hidden agendas in believers, and that secular people will misunderstand the religious reasons that actually do motivate Christians. Jones cites as an example Glanville Williams who dismissed the Christian view of infanticide by implausibly alleging that early Christians condemned infanticide out of the fear that unbaptized infants would go to Hell. In fact, Christian condemnation of infanticide resembled that of contemporary Jews and predated infant baptism by centuries.

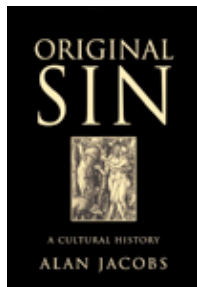
Jones summarizes the Christian perspective on end-of-life decisions by noting, “The Christian tradition, as represented in this study by Ambrose, Augustine, Thomas, and Rahner, is united in arguing that it is never legitimate to kill oneself or to kill another unless under the command of God” (p. 212). With regard to withholding and withdrawing treatment, Jones points out that “neither in the case of one’s own life, nor in the case of the life of another, can there be an absolute obligation to preserve or extend life at all costs” (p. 213). He proposes using the category of extraordinary care, that is, care that is either futile or unduly burdensome in light of expected benefits, and ordinary care, in which burdens are outweighed by clinical benefits. Extraordinary care is not morally obligatory either to provide to others or to receive, but ordinary care must be given and received. In addition to that distinction, Jones insists on the importance of intention. “It is never right to withhold or withdraw treatment in order to bring about someone’s death” (p. 214).

In the vexing matter of supplying artificial nutrition and hydration (ANH) to persons in persistent vegetative states, such as the U. S. case of Terri Schiavo and Tony Bland in the U.K., Jones cites with approval Pope John Paul II’s 2004 declaration that such treatment is ordinary care, to be withheld only in exceptional circumstances. He raises some doubts about the reliability of such diagnoses and supports maintaining the permanently unconscious by ANH because of its symbolic value as basic human care, as an affirmation that the unconscious are not beyond human care, even if they cannot experience it, and because it cannot be deemed futile unless one were to claim that such lives are worthless. Readers who are not Roman Catholic, as well as many who are, will find this troubling, since many have believed for some time that ANH need not be given nor received for those in PVS. The issue remains controversial among evangelicals. (See Dr. Robert Cranston’s guide to the issues at http://www.cbhd.org/resources/endoflife/cranston_2001-11-19.htm).

This is a fascinating treatment of four foundational thinkers in the Christian tradition, important not only for Roman Catholics but for all Christians and those who live among them. Jones’ writing is a model of clarity and readability, and his critical interaction with the four thinkers is skillful. Jones ably demonstrates the relevance of theology to contemporary issues and of the past to the present.

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Alan Jacobs. *Original Sin: A Cultural History*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008. xviii + 286 pp. \$24.95.



How can we explain the great cruelty of humanity? Parents know that however lovely their children may be, one inclination does not have to be taught them: wrongdoing. Whether it be the great evils of our history, from the Gulag to the Holocaust, the killing fields, the monstrous tyrants, or the more ordinary, but yet hurtful kinds of hatred between neighbors and relatives, sin is an all-but-undeniable-reality. How did it happen? Or, put the question more the way Alan Jacobs does in his wonderful book: First, why is it that every time we feel a vision for the moral greatness of humanity, we are soon confronted with equally powerful evidence for its depravity? Second, is there any way to return to a state of innocence without reckoning with inherent, universal sin?

Many treatises have been written on original sin. Most systematic theologies devote an important section to the topic. Inevitably they wrestle with passages such as Genesis 3 or Romans 5, and interact with theologians who have defined the territory, including Augustine, Calvin, Edwards and Bavinck, and, more recently, Reinhold Niebuhr, John Murray and Henri Blocher. Alan Jacobs comes at the subject in a fresh way, one that to my mind is more likely to persuade a contemporary audience than even the meticulous work of fine professional theologians. To be fair, Jacobs is thoroughly familiar with the great theologians, and he interacts carefully with several, including Augustine, Pascal, Whitefield, and Edwards.

But it is clear that his first love is literature. Even when he discusses, say, Augustine or Whitefield, he is fascinated by their biography and by the discussions they held with interlocutors, such as Pelagius or Benjamin Franklin. And when he goes directly to Scripture, the ultimate authority for him, he does so with the eye of a *littérateur*, finding patterns and complexities through the stories that are told there.

Clearly, stories are at the heart of Jacobs' approach. Not the relativist escape from truth that plagues some lovers of the story. But the use of story to compel us into the way things are, across the wide field of human experience. Indeed, the first chapter contains six tales, very different, yet linked, which introduce us powerfully to the dilemma the book is written to explore: how can there be such evil, when our very sensing of it tells us there is something else, our nobility, even our hope? As soon as you come to these accounts, you are hooked, at least I was, so well are they rendered. First, the tale of the curse of Ajax on the Locrians. Next, the crime of the Titans, especially as discussed by Plato. Third, a very poignant retelling of the story of David and Bathsheba. Fourth, the rise of Confucianist thought, and its attenuation by Mencius and then Xún Zì. Fifth, the fascinating tale of purchasing a Nigerian wood carving of a Crucifixion with Mary depicted as a Yoruban woman beating yams (which struck his students as comical because in African myth the pounding of yams created such a noise that the Creator-god withdrew from his world!). And finally the story of the Urapmin from New Guinea, who discovered that their conversion to Christ did not rid them of their sinfulness.

The chapters that follow introduce us to a cataract of personages and events, generally following a chronological thread, but lively, insightful, always *feeling* the pull from both sides, our nobility and our corruption. We meet the young Augustine, not so much driven by lust in the usual acceptance, but perplexed by his helplessness to overcome his proclivities. We discover Milton's view of paradise, Odilo of Cluny's discipline of prayer, Rabbi Morteira's puzzlement at Spinoza's optimism, and many, many

others, right into modern times. Jacobs pauses extra long over William Shakespeare, Blaise Pascal, John Bunyan, and Jonathan Edwards. He also deftly brings us into the contemporary era where Jean-Jacques Rousseau set the stage, and then the optimists, such as Agassiz and various evolutionists. He carefully pits them against the realists, Dostoyevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Edmund Burk, and the like. And the walk-on parts are a treat: Robert Owens, C. S. Lewis (who is often cited), Franz Kafka, and Muddy Waters!

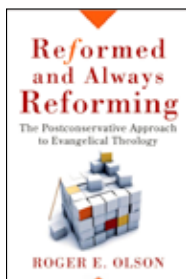
This book is a feast. Well, a very sober feast, since the subject it treats is a dark one. Ultimately, it is a defense of the Augustinian view. One of Jacobs' gifts is to convert his great learning into unpretentious prose. We never sense he is coercing us into his point of view, nor standing on high moral ground. Yet, the persuasion of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. He goes for a long time without telling you in so many words what he is arguing. And then he pauses to do so. For example, p. 200, in the midst of a discussion of racism, he asserts that, "a belief in original sin serves as a kind of binding agent, a mark of the 'confraternity of the human type' . . ." without such a doctrine we can never really explain how we can be such divided selves, and then, ultimately, how reparations can be effected.

I have very few quarrels with this marvelous book. I suppose each reader will have wished for a stronger emphasis here, less there. Perhaps walk-ons for Flannery O'Connor? Miroslav Volf? Of course, one virtue of the book is the choice *not* to include everybody! One area for further consideration: Jacobs quickly runs past the Protestant Reformation to the post-sixteenth century discussions on both sides of Christendom's Western divide. He states that the Reformation brought little new thought of any substance to the table (p. 106). I am not sure about this. Calvin may appear simply to reiterate Augustine, but in fact he goes much further. His teachings on the sinfulness of sin reveals an unprecedented sensibility of the horror of not conforming one's whole life to the glory of God. His understanding of concupiscence, for example, is far more comprehensive than that of any of his predecessors. I guess you would expect such a suggestion from this Huguenot descendant.

I plan to read this book several more times. The witty skeptic Alan Wolfe endorses the book this way: "I do not believe in original sin. I do believe in Alan Jacobs." Well, this reviewer believes in both!

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Roger E. Olson. *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology*. Edited by Craig A. Evans and Lee Martin McDonald. Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. 247 pp. \$19.99.



There seems to be a growing recognition that the evangelical world is deeply fragmented. Some have even gone as far as to say that the word "evangelical" has lost any discriminating force, that it no longer identifies a homogenous movement. Olson agrees with the diagnosis of the fragmentation, but argues that the movement has in fact always been inherently at conflict with itself. The historical root of this specific make-up is the twin inheritance of Puritanism, with its accent on right belief, and Pietism, stressing spiritual experience. The present outgrowth of that tension is reflected in

the intense and sometimes unfair debates between conservative and postconservative evangelicals. This book sets out to chart that tension, from the perspective of a postconservative.

Olson's thesis is that "it is possible to be more evangelical by being less conservative" (p. 7). He does not believe that conservative evangelicals have a monopoly on the essence of evangelical Christianity. In fact, their own manner of asserting a certain cognitive component of Christianity is tributary to a modernistic epistemology. On the other hand, postconservatives, without denying the importance of the cognitive, tend to see the enduring essence of evangelicalism, its contribution to world Christianity in its transformational vision. The latter see Christianity first and foremost as a religion of transformation. If doctrines are important, they are always secondary to the ongoing work of the Spirit, transforming the lives of people into the divine likeness.

The itching point in this conflict is how one conceives of the authority of the Word of God in relation to Scripture and whether theological revision is consistent with being an evangelical. Olson argues that conservatives are actually betraying the authority of Scripture when in practice they hang on to certain "classic" doctrines just because they are part of the "established evangelical position." Although sometimes they confess that their ultimate authority is Scripture, in practice they show almost no willingness to revise a theological position in light of what might be "fresh" understanding of Scripture, as Olson likes to describe it. On the other hand, postconservatives locate ultimate theological authority in God and the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the Scriptures. Olson is ambiguous on this score, since on the one hand he claims that he is ascribing more authority to Scripture than conservatives, but on the other hand he rejects an "unnuanced equation of Scripture with God's Word" (p. 108) and prefers to locate authority directly in the continuing work of the Spirit in the contemporary church *through* Scripture. As a result, the past is binding, but not in the sense that it has to be repeated. Rather, theological construction is free to be creative, to draw on the truth that is found in culture, to use its imagination in order to re-perform (Vanhoozer) the script that is found in Scripture. However, the bottom line for Olson, as for many postconservatives, is that if Scripture is authoritative, it is only by its being included in an ongoing drama of redemption, which began at creation and is presently unfolding towards its eschatological consummation.

Although the essence of evangelicalism is experience rather than right doctrine, orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, Olson insists against popular misconception that doctrine remains important for postconservatives. But doctrine is a second-order reflection upon the experience of the church. Of course, once one puts it like that one must also be ready to explain why this is not Schleiermacherian liberalism. It is common place that Schleiermacher made the starting point of theology a universal human experience. The difference, Olson contends, is that postconservative theology appeals to a particular and supernatural, rather than a universal and natural, experience of being saved and being constituted into a redeemed community by the Holy Spirit.

The reason that it is possible, therefore, to be more evangelical by being less conservative lies precisely in the second-order nature of theology. If theology is subservient to an experience, then what is primary is the authenticity of that experience. What distinguishes evangelicals is not primarily right doctrine, but having one's life centered on Jesus Christ, experiencing spiritual transformation after his own image through the power of the Spirit. Olson explains this by arguing that evangelicalism is a centered set rather than a bounded set. What defines it is its experience of the risen Christ, rather than boundary-setting right doctrines.

It is hard to do justice to such a wide-ranging book in such a short space. It is even more difficult to properly critique it, since restraint due to space might be mistaken for hurried dismissals. It is rather clear that American evangelicalism is facing years, possibly decades of intense theological debate and perhaps confrontation. This is what I believe will, or should, set the agenda of those conversations.

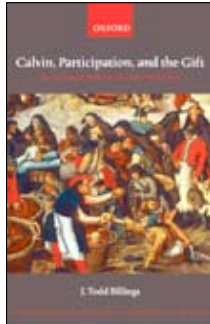
First, Olson makes a compelling point about the inherently unstable nature of evangelicalism. I am not sure that can be resolved short of a magisterium that legislates what belongs and what does not. I think more work needs to be done on the understanding of the cohesion between Puritanism and Pietism, as well as other influences that have contributed to the development of modern evangelicalism, including modernity and postmodernity. But sociological designators are themselves inherently unstable. There are no universal encyclopedias to tell us what the essence of an evangelical is. At the same time, I found Olson's identification of the essence of evangelicalism with an experience to be only a partial description of its contribution, as long as no mention was made of justification by faith. If one were to use a classic pair of concepts, Olson does tend to place the emphasis more on sanctification than on justification, when in fact a creative dialectic should be preserved between them.

A second issue that Olson leaves pretty much hanging is the relation between the cognitive-propositional and the transformational aspects of revelation. Although he does acknowledge that there are propositional aspects to revelation, he does not seem willing to allow them to carry through into doctrine so that there might be certain doctrines which are epistemically primary, so to speak. This becomes even more important given his acceptance of holism (not a very nuanced one, for that matter), which in its more extreme forms holds that any belief whatsoever can be abandoned in the face of compelling evidence or for the pragmatic purpose of keeping the balance of the system. But if any belief can be relinquished, in what sense does it continue to speak of the authority of the Holy Spirit that speaks through the Scriptures? Moreover, and this pertains to his set analogy, how is it possible to even identify the center apart from some description of circumference? Unless we speak of circumference, even if we allow variation in distance from the center, what we will have identified is not a center, but simply a dot, a point in space. However, it is analytic to a point being a center that it is in some relation to circumferences.

Finally, Olson's understanding of the role of tradition is somewhat self-contradictory. On the one hand he does relocate theological authority from the past (Scripture) into the present (continuing work of the Spirit), by circumventing tradition, but he seems not to realize that this present is precisely tomorrow's tradition! He forgets that Eastern Orthodox Christianity views tradition as precisely the life of the Spirit in the church. So the direction in which I can see more research being done is the relationship between Scripture, the Great Tradition, and the epistemic relevance of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, much evangelical theology is pneumatologically underdeveloped, but it remains to be seen whether compensating for that weakness should lead precisely in the revisionist direction favored by Olson.

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J. Todd Billings. *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. vii + 230 pp. £50/\$120.00.



This fine study locates Calvin's theology of participation in Christ in the context of contemporary systematic theologies of the 'Gift'. These theologies have become significant, drawing as they do 'upon an interdisciplinary discussion of gift giving to reconfigure the relation of divine giving (in creation and redemption) to human giving (self-giving love)' (p. 2). Within such discussions, Calvin has figured prominently because his view of God is taken to be 'the textbook example of a "unilateral gift"—a one sided gift that evacuates human agency as it claims the receiver' (p. 2). Such critiques of Calvin often overlap with corresponding critiques of Calvin by Eastern orthodox and feminist theologians. Billings engages the challenges head-on by providing an extremely well-informed exposition of Calvin's doctrine of participation and its vital relationship to the activity of those united to Christ.

The book consists of six chapters. The first chapter delineates the nature of the criticisms laid at Calvin's door by the 'Gift' theologians. The interdisciplinary nature of the case is explained, with insights coming from Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida to create different portraits of 'the Gift' which have been taken up into theological discourse. 'Radical Orthodoxy' features prominently here, with leading figures such as John Milbank and the rejection of a concept of 'free' or 'unilateral' gift of 'excess'. Such conceptuality in the theological realm 'is said to demean human agency and reciprocity; in a word, it undercuts human *participation* in the divine gift' (p. 8). It is in this light that Calvin suffers severe criticism from Milbank: his theology of imputation and his forensic account of justification 'undermines the "active reception" that constitutes a soteriology of participation in which human beings actively reciprocate' (p. 9).

The next four chapters provide us with a reading of Calvin which responds to the critiques. Chapter Two gives an account of Calvin's training and context, as well as placing him in broad continuity with the Fathers on the theme of participation in Christ. Chapter Three traces Calvin's actual language of 'participation in Christ' from 1536 through to the final 1559 edition of the *Institutes* with attention given to the highly significant structural influence of his Romans commentary on his developing thought, as well as to the controversies of the 1550s. Chapter Four in many ways functions as the heart of the book with a clear explanation of a *duplex gratia* ('double grace') motif in Calvin's thought: justification (first grace) and sanctification (second grace) function as distinct yet utterly inseparable aspects of union with Christ. Billings traces the influence of the *duplex gratia* on Calvin's theology of prayer and the sacraments to show that at times even in the first grace, and invariably always in the second, the human agent is not best described as passive and unreceptive. Chapter Five explores Calvin's theology of the law in relation to participation in Christ and argues convincingly against Milbank that 'love is placed at the very centre of Calvin's view of the Christian life' (p. 184). In the concluding chapter, Billings shows how his material answers seven main criticisms levelled against Calvin by 'Gift' scholars. Here the biblical and catholic promise of Calvin's position is outlined.

The book succeeds admirably as a response to the critiques of Calvin made by 'Radical Orthodoxy' and by others such as Stephen H. Webb. It does so not because Billings always aims to show Calvin as equal to their criticisms on their terms, but because he rightly points out that there is often a 'hidden ledger' for evaluating Calvin: a Thomist account of 'participation'; or a Byzantine concept of 'deification';

or a Maussian/Derridean concept of ‘reciprocity’. ‘In general, there is imposition of external criteria upon Calvin’s theology, and Calvin is found to fall short of the standard at hand’ (p. 15). Billings lets Calvin speak on his own terms so as to contribute something distinctive to the discussion; by exploring his thought so carefully in different polemical as well as historical contexts, Calvin’s doctrine of participation is seen to be theologically rich, nuanced, and not quite what many of his critics think it is.

Billings shows that ‘Calvin’s theology of participation emerges from a soteriology which affirms a differentiated *union* of God and humanity in creation and redemption’ (p. 16). Calvin has an account of divine agency which ‘enables, rather than undercuts, human agency in sanctification’ (p. 17). As part of this, Billings mediates well between competing interpretations of Calvin which set the forensic elements of his thought against the organic images of participation, adoption and engrafting. Instead of the false antithesis, we see that Calvin holds a forensic account of justification in perfect harmony with the transformative images of justification’s effects. Another excellent part of Billings’ case is his treatment of the criticisms of Calvin’s ‘negative anthropology’ (p. 43). These are shown to rest on misunderstandings of Calvin as much as anything else. Calvin’s account is biblically grounded in the fall so that for him the *substance* of human nature as created by God is good, while it is the corruption *accidental* to human nature which draws his negative language. Useful explanations like this recur throughout the book.

There are a number of ways in which this book might have strengthened its argument. First, there is always a danger in a study such as this of imposing foreign categories on Calvin’s thought so as to use it for ends other than Calvin intended. Billings himself is alive to the issue (pp. 18–19); indeed, so much so that overall his work is a sound model of how to contextualize Reformation theology in a contemporary context so that the latter appropriates meaning from the former instead of attributing meaning to it. Nevertheless, to handle themes from, say, Calvin’s *Institutes*, and to use them in a way which is a step removed from the *structural argument* of the *Institutes* as a whole is potentially precarious. For example, the use of the *duplex gratia* concept, with the repeated refrain of ‘first grace’ (justification) and ‘second grace’ (sanctification), faithfully renders aspects of Calvin’s *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). There is no discussion, however, of the striking fact that in Book 3 of the *Institutes* Calvin actually treats sanctification *before* justification, precisely because it is a situated argument against Rome about the very nature of faith itself. The scholastic distinction between the *ordo salutis* and the *ordo docendi* (order of teaching) enables us to see that Calvin’s argument here points in a very particular direction, even while he maintains a causal relationship between justification and sanctification. This structural fact in itself might contribute nuance of a different kind than Billings provides when we speak of human agency in Calvin’s understanding of sanctification. And it might also strengthen Billings’ case by showing, from a different angle, the inseparability of justification and sanctification in Calvin’s thought.

Second, the brief discussion of the *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* distinction is too brief to be convincing. Billings states that ‘this formal distinction is explicitly rejected by Calvin’ (p. 33), but others have argued in great detail that what Calvin rejects is not actually the distinction itself but rather one form of it (cf. Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, pp. 312–46).

Third, given that Billings rightly follows Muller in seeing the massive influence of Calvin’s Romans commentary on his ‘Pauline-ordered approach to the *loci* of theology’ from 1539 onwards (p. 77), it would have been fruitful to interact with Stephen Edmondson’s recent work. Edmondson has argued that Muller’s Pauline *ordo* needs to be aligned with a recognition of the structural influence on Calvin’s theology of his commentaries on the Old Testament and Gospels published throughout the 1550s.

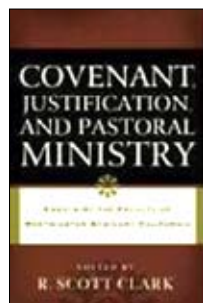
(Edmondson makes this case in his *Calvin's Christology*, pp. 43–48, but see also ‘The biblical historical structure of Calvin’s *Institutes*, *SJT* 59:1 [2006]: 1–13). This work might supplement Billings’ clear reliance on a Pauline-influenced form of the participation theme with the significant Johannine (and other) influences on the theme that must have been present in Calvin’s development. It is because Billings is so attentive to historical development and interdependence in Calvin’s thought that this point deserves some consideration.

Finally, it should be noted that Calvin’s doctrine of predestination and election affords an opportunity to strike right at the presuppositional heart of the Calvin criticisms which this book deals with. Billings sees that in many of the critiques there are echoes of the old ‘predestination-as-central-dogma’ charge against Calvin (p. 2), and it is Calvin’s ‘doctrines of imputation and, by extension, predestination’ which are alleged to render the human agent passive (p. 12). This study is restricted largely to the *loci* which explicitly make use of *participes* terminology and should not be criticised for that—one book simply cannot cover everything. But Calvin’s doctrine of election is replete with the conceptuality of participation—see, for instance, his commentary exegesis of John 16:27; 17:3, 23. As Billings records, many pit a transaction by God carried out on our behalf against incorporation into the Son to achieve reconciliation with the Father (p. 10), but a reading of Calvin on these verses shows that union with Christ shines brightly in the very domain regarded as the nadir of his thought. Further, in his comments on Ephesians 1:4, the *duplex gratia* is clearly at work when Calvin says it is ‘wicked to separate holiness of life from the grace of election’, and the former has to be seen to flow from and be the fruit of the latter. The doctrine of election itself is full of organic images and transformative metaphors which for Calvin adequately ground human agency.

None of these comments undermine Billings’ work. They are highlighted here to show the overall cogency and even wider ramifications of his argument. This book deserves wide circulation and will repay careful consideration across different fields of study.

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R. Scott Clark, ed. *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007. 465 pp. \$24.99.



This volume is a series of essays that stemmed from a conference organised by Westminster Seminary, California—all of the contributors hold faculty positions at that institution. The volume interacts with the ongoing discussion over justification raised by the New Perspectives on Paul and the Federal Vision.

The essays are divided into four areas: Orientation, Exegetical and Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, and Pastoral Ministry. As with any multi-author volume it is difficult to summarise.

The opening section involves two essays orientating the reader to the current situation. This involves description of the two main groups in view—the New Perspectives on Paul and the Federal Vision—and specific individuals such as N. T. Wright and Norman Shepherd. We see within

the opening chapters an occasional tendency to orientate the debate over confessions of faith; this is seen in other later essays. That is of course a reasonable discussion to have, but when a confession has been drawn into question by someone's exegesis, it is the exegesis that must be debated.

It is exegesis that occupies the second section of the book with essays particularly focussing on the covenant of works and the presence or absence of 'covenantal nomism' in Moses and Paul. There are helpful and convincing arguments made, especially in the essay by Steven Baugh which points out some of the methodological errors of the New Perspective and argues for justification solely on the basis of Christ's act of righteousness for us.

The involved nature of the discussion is seen in these essays though. For example, Iain Duguid argues against covenantal nomism from God's commitment to his covenant despite disobedience that results in the exile. However, one can argue for a version of covenantal nomism precisely because of the punishment of the exile; there is a clear biblical strand that sees Israel as being put out of the covenant. The question is how one puts this together with God's gracious promise to restore a remnant and to introduce a new covenant. Overall, however, it robustly defends the traditional position.

The third section focuses on systematic theology. The prelapsarian covenant of works, the traditional understanding of the *pactum salutis*, and the imputation of Christ's active obedience are all defended. Michael Horton's essay is one of the best in the book in showing how both the New Perspective and Federal Vision have a mono-covenantal approach that does not do justice to the biblical data and does not appreciate the subtlety of the position of the Reformers. On occasion in this section, one feels that the authors have not always appreciated the position of their opponents and so respond with a blunt instrument, but many careful and helpful points are made.

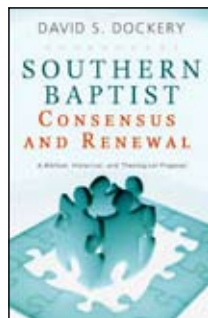
The fourth section looks at the implications for pastoral theology. This is probably the weakest section of the book in that several essays go back over arguments and positions previously established earlier in the book to the extent that they cease to be focused on pastoral implications. However, helpful directions are set in the pastoral implications of this foundational theological topic.

In summary, this is a very helpful book defending the traditional position on justification. Its strengths are the variety of perspectives and in-depth arguments made, and it deserves to be read by all involved in the ongoing discussion on understanding Paul.

Readers may be interested to know that a targeted response has been published primarily by those holding to some version of the Federal Vision ('A Faith That Is Never Alone: A Response to the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California').

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David Dockery. *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008. xvii + 238 pp. \$9.99.



David Dockery, President of Union University in Jackson, TN, has all the necessary qualifications to write a book with the purpose that his title suggests. Dockery has served as a pastor, Bible college professor, seminary professor, editor at a denominational publishing house, and academic Vice President and Dean of the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist theological Seminary, all before coming to his present position. He has known personally many of the previous generation's architects of the Southern Baptist Convention, has interviewed them about theology and Convention politics, and has been active for several years in seeking to create lines of communication for the variety of theological viewpoints still present in the Convention. In addition, Dockery has published widely in areas of history, theology, and biblical studies both as an editor, involving a large number of contributors, and as a writer.

The book contains an introduction, six chapters of analysis and proposal, a glossary, a name index, and a scripture index. Each chapter ends with bibliography "for further reflection."

The introduction has a brief historical characterization of Southern Baptists from 1845 to 1925 and then from 1925 to 1979. In 1979, a controversy arose over biblical authority and denominational cooperation. Dockery identifies two major groups that divided into at least seven sub-groups each that vied with each other for the right to propose the agenda for the Southern Baptist future, namely, to define the nature of the missionary program in theory and personnel and to define the doctrinal stance of theological education. With the withdrawal of most of the "moderate" groups, the Southern Baptist Convention, though not necessarily the individual State conventions, was left in the hands of a more doctrinally conservative contingent. Dockery divides this group into seven sub-groups with short definitions as well as several sub-sub-groups that constitute these seven. Dockery identifies them as Fundamentalists, Revivalists, Traditionalists, Orthodox Evangelicals, Calvinists, Contemporary Church Practitioners, and Culture Warriors. Dockery attempts to encourage these seven types of Southern Baptists with their several constituent groups to work toward finding sufficient common ground in both theology and mission to establish a unified denominational purpose.

Chapter one includes a discussion of Scripture in which Dockery affirms its inerrancy while showing a thorough grasp of the issues of literary genre, language theory, and the abundance of literature on the subject. Beyond inerrancy, Dockery contends that "confessional convictions and confessional boundaries" also are necessary for effective cooperation. "What is needed," Dockery asserts, "is a holistic orthodoxy, based on a high view of Scripture and congruent with the Trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church" (p. 34). He also introduces the idea of "primary," "secondary," and "tertiary" doctrinal issues (p. 36). He revisits this concept throughout the book (e.g., pp. 70, 144). Also the relationship between truth and unity receives important analysis.

Chapter two presents an exposition of the doctrines essential for a healthy consensus on the gospel. Dockery gives a biblical overview, a historic overview, and a theological exposition of the leading ideas of the gospel. He works very hard to clarify a centrist position, using language that, if not scrutinized with too great severity, could be affirmed by Calvinists and non-Calvinists. His hopes for this exposition are high. "What follows," he explains, "is a brief biblical and historical survey followed by a theological

exposition of the Gospel message, which I trust can be foundational for taking the good news to a lost world” (p. 62). Again he urges that we must “not think that this variety is without boundaries or without a core. There is a center that is non-negotiable” (p. 68).

Chapter three presents a historical overview of the variety of traditions in Baptist worship, a survey of contemporary practices, and suggestions for renewing Baptist worship today. Dockery promotes three principles: (1) emphasis on the word of God both in preaching and reading; (2) a high degree of congregational involvement; (3) “a view of the ordinances that affirm[s] their mystery and values for spiritual formation” (p. 124).

Chapter four discusses Baptist education and raises the question as to whether denominational commitments can co-exist with the desire to produce a top-tier academic institution. Again Dockery emphasizes the necessity of confessional fidelity, shows the value of maintaining a close connection to the churches, and the relation of these commitments to academic freedom. College and seminary education receive separate treatment.

Chapter five revisits the theological issue among Southern Baptists but with a special concentration on the issue of Scripture as treated by different theologians and other writers throughout Southern Baptist history. While reissuing his call for a Baptist identity rooted in the “*consensus fidei* of the Christian church” (p. 195), he stresses continually the centrality of Scripture: “A commitment to a completely truthful and fully authoritative Bible is the first step toward healing the sickness in today’s theological and ethical trends that threaten the very heart of the Christian faith and message” (p. 196).

Dockery’s final call in chapter six is for a leadership that is at once committed to confessional conviction, denominational consensus, collaborative cooperation, and spiritual renewal.

While many will be encouraged by Dockery’s commitment to robust confessionalism, his concern about the potentially divisive power of what he terms “secondary” or “tertiary” doctrine may well pinpoint the most difficult challenge to his grand and worthy paradigm for renewed denominational consensus.

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Eric C. Redmond. *Where Are All The Brothers?: Straight Answers To Men’s Questions About The Church*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 112 pp. \$9.99.



This book is a delicate hard-hitting manual that reads like a devotional. Redmond is obviously well acquainted with his audience (African American men) and the issues they have with the Church “scene.” His no-nonsense patient confrontation depicts not only his knowledge of the subjects he deals with, but also demonstrates his pastoral experience.

Where Are All the Brothers? seeks to answer the frequently asked questions regarding the absence of African American men from one of the core institutions of the community, the Church. Redmond deals with what many would simply call

excuses, but in fact many of them are legitimate and accurate. Redmond's interactions are provocative for he is not satisfied with the traditional pithy responses or with playing the blame game. He handles each issue honestly, forthrightly, and best of all, he pulls no punches. He simply asks the reader to give him ten minutes a day for nine days, which amounts to the approximate time it would take the average reader to get through each chapter of the book. Each day's reading is a response to a question that many—not just African American—men would like to ask regarding Church. Redmond's candid and well informed answers bring the reader eagerly back to the book for the next day's personal Q and A. The reader soon discovers in Redmond a respectful, truthful, and straightforward practitioner who has an apparent gift for delving into the tough stuff with the ease of one who has spent a lot of time thinking through these challenges.

Redmond obviously spent a considerable amount of time choosing the nine questions to which he would respond. The questions cover a large spectrum of issues regarding hypocrisy, authorship of the Bible, feminization of the Church, money matters, Islam's supposed better offer for black men, the deity of Christ, the role and character of the preacher, and the necessity of "organized religion." *Where Are All The Brothers?* is not nor does it claim to be an exhaustive treatment of every concern that men in general and black men in particular have with the Church, but there is certainly enough in it to get a very long and much needed conversation started. For example, on Day 3, Redmond responds to this question: "Isn't the Church geared toward women?" This is indeed a major dilemma facing the Church in general and the Black Church in particular. Redmond's thoughtful response will be referred to for years to come. He first of all admits the truthfulness of such an assessment and says that the questioner has put his finger on "something true, real, and skewed." Then, like the theologian he is, he demonstrates with reference upon reference the priority the Bible places on the building up of strong male leadership in the home and in the Church. This chapter alone is worth the cost of the book.

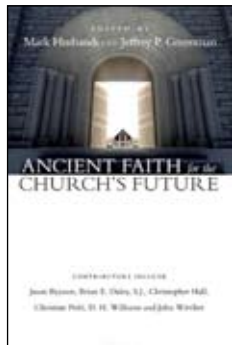
The book closes with two appendices. In the first appendix, Redmond gives a summary of New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ. Here again we see the knowledge the author has of his readers. Appendix A is his final call for an acceptance of the veracity of Scripture. Redmond demonstrates that the core of every question asked is the reliability of the Bible to answer such questions as the final authority. Appendix B is a lucid treatment of the subject of homosexuality and the Church. In it Redmond sets the record straight on many fronts. He has, to put it mildly, "let the cat out of the bag" regarding homosexuality, the African American community, and Church. Although the subject is delicate in some circles, Redmond handles it with the precision of an experienced physician of the soul. He is not going to let the culture get away with treating homosexuality like something other than sin, nor will he allow the culture to dictate to the Church her position. "Those with homosexual behavior may be received into the Church after a profession of Christ that is accompanied by a complete break-repentance from a lifestyle of homosexuality," says Redmond. The Church has standards for membership that cannot be shaped by the standards of popular culture. The Church is not responsible for setting her own rules; the one true God makes the rules and sets the standards. From the outset of the book, the author begins earning the right and respect of his readers, which allows him to end with such a bold statement.

Overall, I am grateful to the Lord for Redmond, *Where Are All the Brothers?*, and Crossway Publishers. It is quite refreshing to pick up a book written by an African American pastor who holds to the truths of biblical historic Christianity, displays such adherence in his writing, and can authentically speak to some of the clear and present dilemmas that affect the witness of the Black Church and indeed

the Church of Christ at large. Redmond in one small volume has given us such evangelistic wisdom and instruction that we can now go forth and indeed be as wise as serpents, but as gentle as doves.

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Mark Husbands and Jeffrey Greeman, eds. *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 271 pp. \$29.95.



The later years of the twentieth century saw evangelical theology beginning to remember the importance of the church's tradition and, in doing so, to engage in its own form of *ressourcement* theology (*La nouvelle théologie*). As Mark Husbands contends in the introduction to *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*,

[I]t is evident that if contemporary evangelical theology aspires to help the church engage the contemporary world in a faithful and persuasive fashion, it would do well to recover the best conversation partners it can find, even if this means reaching back a thousand years or more. . . . Standing in the shadow of Lubac, we believe that Christianity cannot meet the challenges

of modernity and postmodernity without returning to the tradition of the early church (p. 12).

In light of this trend, the 2007 Wheaton Theology Conference sought to demonstrate the 'viability and promise of engagement with the early church,' and the present volume contains the papers from that meeting.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one explores the underlying rationale and attendant challenges of an evangelical *ressourcement* theology. The essays by Christopher Hall and D. H. Williams are particularly good. Hall's piece, the keynote address for the conference, argues that the Bible must be read with the church fathers based on the substantial difference between the doctrine of *sola scriptura* and what he considers a common 'yet confused' appeal to *nuda Scriptura*, 'a view of the Bible in which no ecclesial context is thought to bear on the meaning of the text.' Aware that evangelicals are susceptible to an overly romantic reading of the church fathers, Williams provides some helpful balance (and greatly serves the volume as a whole) by offering caution: 'In order for the appropriation of the early fathers to become more than another trend among others within the history of evangelicalism, we must be aware not to create the early fathers in our own image' (p. 70).

The essays in part two consider the challenge and promise of patristic exegesis. Michael Graves, Peter Leithart, and Nicholas Perrin each offer their own proposals and warnings. Many contemporary evangelicals, schooled in the Enlightenment methods of modern biblical scholarship, will find Leithart's contentions particularly provocative. He argues,

Modern interpretation fragments the Scriptures as it scratches about for evidence of sources and symptoms. . . . Modern Biblical scholarship, moreover, pries apart theological inquiry from religious devotion in an effort to conform biblical study to the standards of objective scientific pursuit (p. 116).

The third section of the book focuses on the social ethics and practices of the early church. Christine Pohl gives her attention to the practice of hospitality, George Kalantzis to the Eucharist, and Alan Kreider to the quality of the church's common life. Kreider's essay, 'They Alone Know the Right Way to Live,' is a welcome corrective (although not explicitly) of the proliferation of programs, seminars, and marketing on evangelism in the contemporary church scene. Citing the complete absence of missionaries and seeker-sensitive worship services, the ancient church grew in its first centuries, argues Kreider, 'because it was attractive. People were fascinated by it, drawn to it like a magnet' (p. 170). The reasons Kreider cites for their attractiveness are worth considering: spiritual power, their ways of addressing common problems in society (such as abortion), and their common life as resident aliens.

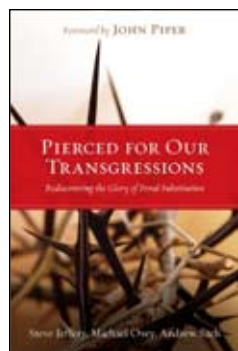
Part four examines early Christianity in terms of its theology of worship. Noteworthy here is Paul Kim's contribution, '*Apatheia* and Atonement: The Christology of Cyril of Alexandria and the Contemporary Grammar of Salvation.' In light of the ongoing debate regarding the nature of the atonement and God's capacity to suffer, Kim returns to patristic sources to demonstrate why the majority opinion on divine suffering is mistaken (contrast D. B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* [Eerdmans, 2003], pp.155–67, 354–60).

Jason Byassee concludes the volume with an assessment of the Emergent movement that includes both some measured criticism and praise. Though measured, his appraisal of Doug Pagitt and Mark Driscoll is quite stinging, using both Pagitt and Driscoll as examples of what he finds to be a thoroughgoing sickness within the Emergent Movement: pride. On the other hand, Byassee finds much to commend itself within the movement. 'Emergent's genius,' he believes, is its ability to recover 'ancient resource[s] for a new day' and 'its willingness to experiment liturgically and practically' (p. 257).

Those interested in what prospects evangelical theology has for the new millennium should not overlook the growing *ressourcement* movement represented within this volume. It is because of trajectories such as this, in fact, that I am more hopeful than ever.

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Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach. *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*. Nottingham, England/Wheaton: IVP/Crossway, 2007. 384 pages. \$25.00.



Pierced for Our Transgressions (POT) is a welcome contribution to the evangelical response to both Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's *The Lost Message of Jesus* and N.T. Wright's approval of such a work.

The thesis of POT is that penal substitution is clearly taught in scripture, that it has a central place in Christian theology, that a neglect of the doctrine will have serious pastoral consequences, that it has an impeccable pedigree in the history of the Christian church, and that all the objections raised against it can be comprehensively answered (p. 31).

The authors define penal substitution (PS) as follows: “God gave himself in the person of his Son to suffer instead of us the death, punishment and curse due to fallen humanity as the punishment for sin” (p. 21). PS is *not* the only aspect of the cross (pp. 33–34), and it is moreover the foundation of the other aspects of the cross (pp. 138ff.).

The authors of this work were at the time of publication a student, the principal, and a former student from Oak Hill Theological College in London. The theological outlook of Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach clearly stands in continuity with the Anglican evangelicalism of Leon Morris, John Stott, and J.I. Packer. The intent of the authors is twofold: first, to examine the exegesis and biblical theology related to Christ’s penal and substitutionary work accomplished in the cross; and second, to engage the purported biblical and cultural arguments for rejecting the doctrine of PS. Therefore, this work has two parts.

The first part of *POT* (“Making the Case”) argues primarily for the veracity of penal substitution in the Old and New Testaments, its practical usefulness, and the centrality of the presence and character of PS in the theology of major historical figures. Following a brief introduction to the present state of the issues (chapter one), “Part One: Making the Case” begins in chapter two by arguing for the presence and primacy of PS on the basis of the following passages or entire books: Exod 12, Lev 16, Isa 52:13–53:12, the gospels of Mark and John, Romans, Gal 3:10–13, and 1 Pet 2:21–25 and 3:18. Chapter three is a very introductory work on a theological framework for apprehending and interpreting penal substitution. Chapter four outlines some pastoral implications of penal substitution, such as “the assurance of God’s love,” “confidence in God’s truthfulness,” “passion for God’s justice,” and “realism about our sin.” Chapter five is a historical survey of PS in the theology of prominent theologians across the ages. The persons in mind include, among others, Justin Martyr, Eusebius of Caesarea, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Owen, John Stott, and recent statements of faith by evangelical fellowships such as the Evangelical Alliance. Drawing together much of the work in the chapters preceding it, this chapter tries to prove a point made at the book’s outset: “That the Lord Jesus Christ died for us—a shameful death, bearing our curse, enduring our pain, suffering the wrath of his own Father in our place—has been the wellspring of the hope of countless Christians throughout the ages” (p. 21).

The second part of *POT* (“Answering the Critics”) is a response to various objections to penal substitution. An introductory chapter (chapter six) outlines their methodology used to counter popular contemporary arguments against PS: they listen to an objection to PS and then respond by using the Bible, metaphysics, and illustrations from everyday life. The objections to PS and the responses are grouped into themed chapters. Chapter seven, “Penal Substitution and the Bible,” deals with the role of PS in the Bible. Chapter eight, “Penal Substitution and Culture,” interacts with questions such as those relating to metaphors and cultural relevance. Chapter nine, “Penal Substitution and Violence,” addresses the violent nature of the cross and includes a section dealing with the charge of PS as “cosmic child abuse.” Chapter ten, “Penal Substitution and Justice,” counters objections to the fairness of PS. The doctrine of God is treated in chapter eleven, “Penal Substitution and Our Understanding of God.” Chapter twelve engages issues revolving around “the Christian life” such as PS and the responses to evil and oppressive regimes. Chapter 13 will strike a deep note within most readers as it deals with both the “Vague Objection” and the “Emotional Objection” to PS. These are probably the most popular objections that many of us encounter. This chapter is carefully written and provides great examples of each approach and thoughtful responses. The Appendix, “A Personal Note to Preachers,” is also excellent. It explores the problems inherent in many preaching illustrations that relate to PS and proposes seven points to keep in mind when preaching on the atonement.

Positive aspects of this book include the following:

1. The courage to engage a live and difficult issue: The authors model for us a theology of engagement with the world and the church. This work is not shrinking evangelicalism; rather it is an engagement that requires their sleeves to be rolled up for hard work and their backs to be stiff and thickened in order to bare the inevitable criticisms that will come their way.

2. Well rounded aim: *POT* successfully attempts to put forward a biblical case that is reflected by establishing PS in biblical theology and the great figures in history. PS can be discussed healthily in the contemporary setting and also has clear practical outworkings in the lives of Christians. This is a great aim!

3. Biblical foundations: Biblical exegesis and the narrative of scripture are taken as foundational to the resolution of central Christian questions. This is a healthy methodological reminder to all Christians dealing with difficult issues in a hostile contemporary setting.

Negative aspects of this work:

1. The first ten pages consist of repetitive recommendations for the book. Though this may be a feature of Crossway's marketing strategy, these recommendations also play another subtle yet more significant role. The recommendations tell the reader that the "who's who" of the conservative evangelical world approves of this work, and thus there is a significant community that would expect a fellow orthodox evangelical to arrive at similar conclusions to theirs. The danger of this situation is that *POT* may be treated more as an evangelical manifesto and less as a scholarly work, and therefore it will probably receive less scrutiny by fellow evangelicals than it deserves.

2. Though there are disclaimers about the multi-faceted nature of the atonement, the authors do not show how PS is foundational to other aspects of Christ's work. Therefore, the systematic case for the centrality of PS is undermined. As evangelicals we must recognize that there is a difference between biblical theology and systematic theology. Though systematic theology takes a step beyond biblical theology, it is right to do so, and we must be brave enough to do so for the sake of a vital faith in the church and the clarity of its mission in the world. *POT* does not sufficiently take these steps with regards to penal substitution.

3. The doctrine of God is treated in chapter eleven, "Penal Substitution and Our Understanding of God." This is perhaps the weakest chapter of the book as it strays into a reductionist form of Trinitarian theology that does not in practice take into account either (1) the tempering effect the incarnation has upon what we may say of intra-Trinitarian relations with reference to the cross or (2) the fact that in the Bible's treatment of the cross, the stress lies *primarily* in that it is an event that takes place between the one, Triune God and the Messiah. Given the strict biblicism that governs this book, speculation about intra-Trinitarian relations is quite surprising and seems at odds with the remainder of the book.

4. The appeal to history is superficial and circular. It is superficial because the authors do not sufficiently address the real issue with regards to the historical centrality of PS in Christian theology: the issue is the dogmatic weight that PS had or did not have in the theologies of great Christians over time. The presence of the doctrine in a person's theology is not sufficient to show that their theology held PS as a, or the, central locus of the work of Christ. The appeal to history is circular because what the authors are in effect doing is (1) selecting persons of varying theological acuity who held to PS, (2) stating these people are major historical figures, and (3) concluding that we have evidence for the centrality of

PS throughout time. Historical figures who were omitted from this list yet who merit discussion in an honest evangelical work must include Martin Luther and Karl Barth, who does not even make it into the bibliography.

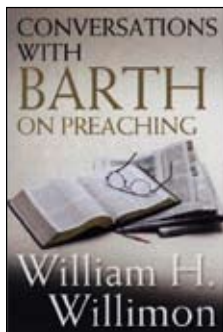
5. Though the purpose of *POT* is clear, the audience of this work is not. Is it a popular book, or should this work be treated as a scholarly work and thus bear the scrutiny such a status rightly deserves? Unfortunately, the answer lies somewhere in between. The authors are to be commended for trying to pitch this book at a wide audience, however, just as a broadly pitched sermon will not meet specific needs, neither does this broadly pitched book. This means *POT* will be an unsatisfactory treatment of PS for many readers.

POT has many admirable features that deserve to be heard in the present debate, but it also leaves something to be desired on other important fronts. It can be read profitably as an introductory work to more substantial treatments of the topic such as Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006) and *The Glory of the Atonement*, edited by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Leicester: Apollos, 2004).

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— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

William H. Willimon. *Conversations with Barth on Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006. 324 pp. \$23.50/£12.99.



What Barth has to say to the Church as a preacher and as an educator of preachers has largely been left unexplored. This present volume is a welcome way in for both theologians and preachers. But this is no academic study. In this book we discover as much about Willimon the preacher as we do Barth. At the outset Willimon's claim is that 'my subject is the proclamation of the Church rather than Karl Barth' (p. 3), and in this study we see how this respected preacher-theologian has interacted with Barth and appropriated some of his insights into his own preaching ministry. It is no small claim that Barth 'gave me something to say as a preacher, and, later, gave me a way to say it' (p. 1). Yet Willimon is no 'Barthian' and can be openly critical in his analysis, writing in such a way as to invite us—and contemporary homiletics—into the same conversation. This stems from a sincere conviction that Barth really does have much to say by way of encouragement and empowerment for today's preachers.

Barth's fundamental conviction is that God wills to be known, and so he speaks—lots. He is not a *Deus absconditus*. God is the subject who speaks to us through his objective Word. These two must be considered together. The tendency is to so rely on the objective that we negate the subject who speaks through his Word. At the extreme this challenges our ability to communicate. Is communication through preaching a real possibility? If we hold to the subject of a speaking God we can have great

confidence not only in its possibility but in its reality. From this arises what some might feel to be Barth's overconfidence in the ability of the gospel to communicate itself.

Willimon helpfully unpacks how such confidence in a loquacious God might impact upon the character of our own preaching. The texts of various sermons are interspersed in each chapter, and these help us to appreciate the extent—and in what ways—Willimon is himself indebted to Barth. These reflect Willimon's preference for narrative story form over proposition. However, he recognises that this is not the only form the sermon can take. One criticism he levels at Barth is not utilising the rich array of literary forms which Scripture itself uses to present the gospel.

An early chapter in the book provides a well-written overview of the history of epistemology, which is valuable in its own right. This might seem better placed as an appendix, but Willimon's rationale for embodying it in the main text surely rests on the centrality of epistemology in Barth's theology. Barth views sin and evil as noetical phenomena and as such faith tends to equate to 'correct hearing' in his thought. If we view Barth's theological enterprise as one in the service of preaching (his own claim), epistemology is key. Hence Barth sees the preacher as a 'herald of God'. He makes two difficult assumptions: one with regard to the preacher, the other the hearer. The preacher becomes an unnoticeable vessel—'the messenger who is transparent to the message' (p. 191). The hearer is one already reconciled to God in Christ, only without knowing it. So what is needed is a restatement of the gospel, not justification. Barth's problem here is not so much his confidence in the gospel as his overconfidence in the ability of the herald to communicate the gospel affectively.

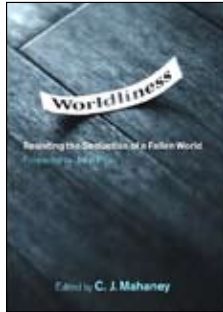
It is clear that Willimon is not with Barth in the above. Yet a problem that many theologians and preachers have today when it comes to appropriating Barth is simply not having read enough of him! On reading this book—which can be quite involved in places—it is not always apparent where Willimon is endorsing an insight of Barth or where he would counsel us to exercise caution. More is assumed than perhaps intended. Willimon has, after all, read and re-read Barth.

The conversation is at its most interesting when we engage Barth's thought on apologetic preaching. It is here that many will part ways. But Willimon has already presented much of Barth's general, overarching vision of preaching by this stage, which provides much food for thought—and a challenge. For those who take the task seriously, there is always the danger of producing sermons and talks which are so carefully polished, so well reasoned and complete in themselves that there is little left for God to do when we stand to preach. Willimon appreciates the danger but does not stand with Barth in response. Barth's own strongly anti-apologetic stance is not reflexive but rather rooted in both his epistemology and attitude to natural theology. Yet many today preach in a climate where appreciating and addressing objections to the gospel is central to their proclamation, and with them Willimon himself sees reasons and defences working to both clarify and confirm, especially among those who already believe.

This book encourages us to begin a conversation with Barth, a conversation in which Willimon is still engaged. 'Barth may not be as helpful to us as a homiletical role model than as an engaging and encouraging critic of our preaching' (p. 158). We are helpfully reminded in this conversation that preaching is not primarily teaching or catechesis, neither is it 'our assignment', but rather we look to God to raise the dead.

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C. J. Mahaney, ed. *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*. With a foreword by John Piper. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 191 pp. \$12.99.



C. J. Mahaney observes,

Some people try to define worldliness as living outside a specific set of rules or conservative standards. If you listen to music with a certain beat, dress in fashionable clothes, watch movies with a certain rating, or indulge in certain luxuries of modern society, surely you must be worldly.

Others, irritated and repulsed by rules that seem arbitrary, react to definitions of worldliness, assuming it's impossible to define. Or they think legalism will inevitably be the result, so we shouldn't even try (p. 29).

These two groups will react negatively to this book for different reasons. The former group will think that it is not strict enough (perhaps accusing it of libertinism), and the latter group will disparage it for so specifically “resisting” seductive “worldliness” (perhaps accusing it of legalism). The authors of this book wisely avoid and gently rebuke both of these extremes because they wrongly focus on externals. Its primary target audience is the latter group.

The book's five authors serve the church through Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM): C. J. Mahaney is president of SGM; Craig Cabaniss is senior pastor of Grace Church in Frisco, Texas; Bob Kauflin is director of worship development for SGM and a pastor and worship leader at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland; Dave Harvey oversees church planting and church care for SGM; and Jeff Purswell is dean of the Pastors College of SGM and a pastor at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. These authors are ideally equipped to address this subject because they model what is characteristic of SGM: humble, gospel-centered orthodoxy (accurate doctrine), orthopraxy (obedient living), and orthopathy (passionately engaged affections, i.e., loving God with one's entire being).

John Piper's foreword highlights the book's theme: “The gospel makes all the difference between whether you are merely conservative or whether you are conquering worldliness in the power of the Spirit for the glory of Christ” (p. 11). Every chapter climaxes by showing how the glorious gospel is central and essential to “resisting the seduction of a fallen world.”

Worldliness consists of six succinct chapters:

1. Mahaney challenges Christians to live as if 1 John 2:15–17 is really in their Bibles. He appeals to Demas' negative example (2 Tim 4:10), and warns, “Today, the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world” (p. 22). Worldliness “is a love for this fallen world,” which is “the organized system of human civilization that is actively hostile to God and alienated from God” (pp. 26–27). The root issue of worldliness is internal, not external (pp. 28–30).

The middle four chapters target specific hot issues (though I am surprised that it does not include an additional chapter on romance and guy-girl relationships by C. J. Mahaney or Josh Harris).

2. Media: Cabaniss focuses specifically on television and film media, although “the principles are relevant for evaluating all forms of media” (p. 39). “The risk [of legalism] doesn’t lie in having standards; it lies in our motivation. . . . [W]e can be legalistic about anything!” (p. 44). Cabaniss explains and pointedly applies Ephesians 5:1–14 to help Christians discern *if* they should view media, *what* media they should view, and *how* they should view it. Especially useful are his probing application questions regarding time, content, and one’s heart (pp. 57–59). Christians should view media proactively, accountably, and gratefully (pp. 60–67).

3. Music: Kauflin argues that music is God’s idea and that “no single genre of music is better than the rest in every way” (p. 70). Music profoundly affects us to various degrees depending on learned musical principles, attentiveness, volume, familiarity, background, and associations (pp. 72–73). Music conveys content (lyrics), context (the places, events, and people we connect with certain music), and culture (the values we connect with certain music) (pp. 73–81). Kauflin refuses to “suggest a list of artists or music styles that every Christian should either pursue or avoid” because it “doesn’t exist” and would not be helpful: “What’s appropriate for one person to listen to might be sin for someone else because of the differing associations we make” (pp. 80–81). Instead, he asks whether one’s music leads one to love Jesus more and value an eternal perspective (p. 81). He concludes with two practical sections: four signs that one is compromising in music listening and nine ways to use music to glorify God (pp. 81–89).

4. Stuff: Harvey begins with the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21) to illustrate materialism, which “is fundamentally a focus on and a trust in what we can touch and possess. . . . We have an inescapable tendency to link who we are with what we have. . . . [C]oveting is *desiring stuff too much* or *desiring too much stuff*. It’s replacing our delight in God with joy in stuff” (pp. 93–95, italics in the original). Four “covetous chains” enslave one to the world, namely, the lies that stuff makes one happy, important, secure, and rich (pp. 99–107). Harvey suggests six ways that Christians should guard against the idolatry of covetousness (pp. 107–14).

5. Clothes: Mahaney’s target audience is women, and he begins by describing the attitude and appearance of the modest woman (pp. 119–25). “Modesty means propriety. It means avoiding clothes and adornment that are extravagant or sexually enticing. Modesty is humility expressed in dress” (p. 120). He explains how men struggle to maintain pure thoughts around immodest women and directly challenges fathers to lead their wives and daughters to be modest (pp. 125–33). The two appendixes are related to women’s dress: “Modesty Heart Check” and “Considering Modesty on Your Wedding Day” (pp. 173–79).

6. Purswell closes the volume with a chapter provocatively titled “How to Love the World.” By this point in the book, the reader may feel like Christianity is a bunch of prohibitions. Purswell gives a holistic view of the Christian life, explaining the Bible’s storyline and how Christians should enjoy, engage, and evangelize the world at this stage in redemptive history.

The book concludes with fifty-three thoughtful discussion questions targeting three areas: one’s mind, heart, and life (pp. 180–87).

Worldliness is written in a way that will serve pastors and lay people, adults and teenagers. The authors use a colorful, conversational tone complete with incomplete sentences. Like this. So I suppose that even its style is as up-to-date as its many references to iPods, DVDs, satellite radio, and the Internet. *Worldliness* is a sensitive, practical, specific, relevant, pastoral, accessible, engaging, humorous, concise, clear, refreshing, wise, grace-motivated, biblical book—ideal for pastors to recommend to their flocks

and for small groups to study. It skillfully addresses controversial external issues by focusing on their root heart issues and then showing how the gospel is functionally central to every square inch of the Christian life.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —

Robert L. Reymond, *Faith's Reasons for Believing: An Apologetic Antidote to Mindless Christianity (and to Thoughtless Atheism)*. Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2008. 480 pp. £11.99/\$19.99.



Question: What do you get if you cross Gordon Clark's apologetic with Cornelius Van Til's apologetic and sprinkle it liberally (so to speak) with J. Gresham Machen's historical evidences? Answer: Something like the case for the Christian faith recommended by Robert Reymond in *Faith's Reasons for Believing*.

The subtitle gives a fair impression of its purpose and tone: 'An Apologetic Antidote to Mindless Christianity (and to Thoughtless Atheism)'. Reymond's goal is to counter not only the attacks of 'militant atheists' like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, but also the 'mindless Christianity' of believers who are unable or unwilling to offer any *reasons* for the faith they profess.

The book is adapted from lecture material originally prepared for a seminary course in apologetics and is therefore pitched at that level. Reymond identifies himself with the Reformed presuppositionalist school of apologetics, and the title of the book is designed to reflect that approach. According to this view, our method in apologetics should not be to start from a position of non-faith (i.e., doubt or suspension of belief) and then to use our reasoning, fuelled with empirical data, to construct a position of faith. Rather, we should unashamedly start from the position of the faith we already profess, and reasoning in a manner consistent with that faith, we should explain why it makes good sense to believe as we do.

The opening chapter defines Christian apologetics, reviews its biblical basis, introduces some of the major issues in apologetic method, and summarizes four different 'apologetic systems' (evidentialism, presuppositionalism, experientialism, and autonomous humanism). A passionate defense of Christian theology as an intellectual discipline follows in chapter 2, where Reymond gives five compelling reasons for Christians to engage in theology.

The third chapter is the most important of the book, given Reymond's view of the starting point and foundation for defending the faith. His argument for the inspiration of Scripture closely follows that of Gordon Clark and boils down to this: the Bible claims to be God's Word, and no one has proven its claim to be false; therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is God's Word.

In the following four chapters, Reymond defends the historicity of the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ, the virgin birth, biblical miracles (particularly those of Jesus) and the supernatural

conversion of Paul. Switching gears, chapter 8 returns the focus to questions of apologetic method with a critique of the evidentialist approaches of B. B. Warfield, R. C. Sproul, and E. J. Carnell. Reymond's main criticism is that these apologists have adopted a method whose assumptions about human knowledge and reason are at odds with their own Reformed theological convictions. Chapter 9 continues in similar vein with a critique of the traditional 'proofs' of God's existence.

Chapters 10 and 11 set out what Reymond understands to be the Christian view of knowledge, meaning, and truth. The Bible as God's Word is the only sure foundation for human knowledge and personal significance. Truth is essentially the correspondence between God's thoughts and our thoughts.

The final two chapters take a more practical turn. Chapter 12 argues that all secular ethical systems have proven to be failures; only biblical theism can explain why objective moral principles exist at all and why we ought to be good. Chapter 13 contends that Paul's 'worldview evangelism' at Athens remains as relevant and effective for reaching biblically illiterate unbelievers (including 'postmoderns') as it was in the first century.

Faith's Reasons for Believing is a lengthy book with copious footnotes, and it covers a lot of ground. It contains some extremely useful and cogently argued material, such as its treatments of the Bible's witness to its own inspiration and inerrancy, the formation of the New Testament canon, Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth, the theological significance of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and the apologetic significance of Paul's conversion. Reymond's uncompromising commitment to the Bible as God's Word and his reliance on careful biblical exegesis puts some other apologetics textbooks to shame.

Nevertheless, the book is not without its shortcomings and inconsistencies. I will mention only three here. In the first place, many readers will judge Reymond's central argument for the Christian faith to be unpersuasive and circular, despite his insistence to the contrary. His defense of the Bible's *claim* to be God's Word is solid enough, but very little positive argument is offered to bridge the logical gap between that claim and the conclusion (that the Bible *is* God's Word). Ironically, the sort of external considerations to which Reymond appeals (somewhat half-heartedly, one senses) are precisely those to which evidentialists routinely appeal, e.g., the general credibility of the Gospel writers, the moral character of Jesus, and the historical fulfillment of prophecy.

Second, it's remarkable that a book like this would include no discussion of the two most common objections wielded by today's skeptics against the reasonableness of the Christian faith: the problem of evil and the problem of religious diversity. A more substantial discussion of scientific objections would also have been welcome.

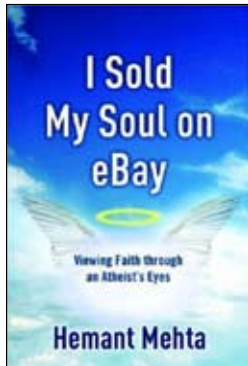
Third, I suspect those who locate themselves in the 'evidentialist' or 'classical' schools of apologetics (Reformed or otherwise) will complain that they have not been fairly represented at points and that the author has not considered the most refined versions of their arguments (e.g., for the existence of God). At times one detects double standards at play, for it isn't always clear that Reymond's own apologetic avoids the criticisms he levels at others. In reality, I suspect there is less distance between Reymond and, say, Sproul than his vigorous objections would suggest.

Faith's Reasons for Believing has many useful, insightful, and provocative things to say about both the biblical *foundations* for apologetics and the biblical *examples* of apologetics. One will learn from it almost as much about good exegetical theology as about the defense of the faith. In light of the book's

length, style, and choice of topics, I would not consider it a suitable introduction for lay readers who are unfamiliar with the broad landscape of Christian apologetics; and as I have indicated, there are some conspicuous holes in Reymond's overall case for Christianity. But I have no doubt that any student with a particular interest in apologetics will find much of benefit in this book.

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Hemant Mehta. *I Sold My Soul on eBay: Viewing Faith Through an Atheist's Eyes*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2007. 207 pp. \$13.99.



The unlikely combination of eBay, a 'friendly' atheist, and a former Christian pastor precipitated this ten-chapter book (with an accompanying discussion guide).

Chapters 1–3 describe how Mehta auctioned on eBay the opportunity for the winning bidder to send him to church, his journey from the *Jain* religion of his family into atheism, and the primary problems he has with what he describes as 'religious teaching'. He came to reject *Jainism* on the basis of his doubts about karma and reincarnation (p. 29) and the idea of eternity (p. 31), and he argues that he might have retained a belief in 'God' if those who advocated faith had appealed more directly to his intellect. This is one of Mehta's major criticisms throughout the book and although he uses 'religion', 'faith', and 'Christian' terminology interchangeably, he argues that anti-intellectualism characterises religious belief. Chapter 4, 'What the Nonreligious Believe', outlines Mehta's views on different issues from prayer to atheist minority status and the meaning of life.

Chapters 5–8 describe Mehta's experiences at fourteen different churches, categorised by their size. He visits a small church in downtown Chicago, the vast Willow Creek Community Church, and a selection in between, reflecting likes and dislikes about each. He explains both what it was like to meet the pastor as well as sit in the congregation. His most positive words are reserved for the mega-churches he visited with special praise for Rob Bell at Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan (pp. 117–22) and Joel Osteen at Lakewood Church in Texas (pp. 123–27). On the latter he comments, "I may be an atheist, but I love Joel. My mom is a Jain, and she loves Joel" (p. 123).

Chapter 9, 'What Works on a Sunday Morning and What Doesn't—Suggestions to Help You Reach Out to Non-Christians', is a synthesis of Mehta's post-experiment thoughts. Here he raises five categories for positive comment (pp. 140–46), and is critical of a further eight (pp. 148–57).

The concluding chapter 10, 'What It Would Take to Convert Me', is something of a catch-all for the elements of Mehta's thesis that he could not fit elsewhere in the book. He comments on a 'debate' he had with a church leader, his ideas about the concept of faith, and his objection to religious exclusivity, and he concludes with a statement and an appeal. He states that only a miracle will convince him that as an atheist he is wrong about God (p. 172), and he appeals that religious people should be more aware and more welcoming to atheists (p. 173).

In several ways this book is profoundly confusing. At one level, why would an atheist seek to “help Christians develop a clearer view of themselves and the way they come across to the people they want to reach” (p. 139)? Furthermore, why would Christians fund such an undiscerning survey and then seek to have the resulting views published for all to see? Mehta does speak warmly of some Christians he met, but I fear that it is misguided to ask one who denies the existence of God to pass judgement on his bride, an entity he simply cannot understand. This theological disconnect is, it seems, lost on those who advocate the church-growth/seeker-driven models of church, and, ironically, I think Mehta’s book exposes the folly of such a paradigm. Understanding, as he does, that he is their target audience, he is openly critical of those things that these churches do to impress the unbeliever (pp. 147–57), from filling in the blanks on a sermon handout (p. 103) to an over-emphasis on singing (p. 150).

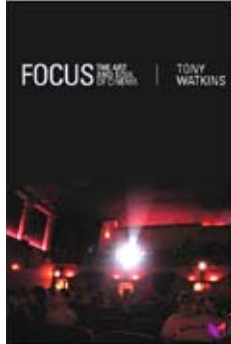
At another level Mehta’s book raises embarrassing questions for the churches he criticised. He makes repeated mention about how people treated him as a visitor and about church latecomers. He also commented on the failure of the preaching to engage him intellectually. If these reflections are true, and I have no reason to doubt him, then this ungraciousness and lack of engagement require repentance and a re-evaluation regarding the role and responsibility of both the pastors and the church members.

This review is written at a distance from the U.S context, but my final observation relates to the actual churches Mehta visited. Most of those listed are unknown to me, but of those I did know, I have questions about the theological trajectory of their ministries. I can only wonder how Mehta’s book might have read had he spent those weeks at a single church with an educated articulate pastor who engages culturally while allowing expository preaching to drive the ministry. The sustained exposure to both the word of God rightly preached and the people of God practically displaying, as they do in their multi-age/ethnic/socio-economic interaction and service, His glory may, had Mehta been given eyes to see, have borne a more fruitful outcome.

I Sold My Soul on eBay contains several brief summaries of atheism with all the frustrating inconsistencies that accompany such a worldview. It also makes some uncomfortable and some interesting observations about American evangelicalism, but as a model for how the Church should do evangelism, it falls short. How the project made it to print still baffles me.

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Tony Watkins. *Focus: The Art and Soul of Cinema*. Atlanta: Damaris, 2007. 248 pp. £8.99/\$14.99.



As the subtitle suggests, this book is concerned with exploring both the *art* and the *soul* of cinema. To that end, Part Two deals with the art of cinema, while Parts One and Three are taken up with analysing the soul of cinema. In Part Two, Watkins examines the process of filmmaking, looking at key players within the production of films such as the producers and editors, as well as exploring the narrative structure of films as they tell their story. All this is undertaken, not as an end in itself, but because it is Watkins's conviction that "as we become more proficient at understanding how a film is structured, we also get better at seeing how it communicates at a worldview level" (p. 120).

Here we come to the very heart of the book in Parts One and Three, where the soul of cinema is explored. Watkins main thesis about films is that they communicate "at the level of *worldviews*" (p. 26) and so must be studied at that level. To aid this, Part One examines the concept of culture from a biblical point of view and how worldviews are a part of that. A step-by-step guide to recognising, evaluating, and responding to worldviews is provided. Watkins builds his case cogently that films are an inherently religious medium, worthy of engagement as the cultural products of "rebellious image-bearers" (p. 15). Part Three is especially concerned with how "films explore some of humanity's deepest desires" (p. 152) and concludes with outlining the range of responses that Christians should make when watching films, including emotional, ethical, and aesthetic responses. Two appendices finish the book, one containing an extensive list of questions to bear in mind when watching a film and the other exploring the problems of unhelpful content within films. Ultimately, Watkins has written this book because

it is important for our ongoing Christian growth that we learn to watch films thoughtfully rather than let them wash over us, seeing them as mere entertainment. It is important for our ability to relate to our friends that we learn to understand the messages which films communicate and how they relate to the good news of Jesus Christ (p. xv).

Since "movies both reflect and shape culture" (p. 174), if Christians are serious in thinking about cultural engagement and transformation, they must be serious in thinking about film. This book is written to serve this end and to provide a starting point in this process.

One of the many highlights of this book is the chapter on film and culture. Using material from Genesis 1–3, Watkins exposes the two sides of culture: on the one hand, "culture is God's idea" (p.10), and on the other hand, "culture is dangerous since it is also bound up with our rebellion against God" (p. 11). This tension must be acknowledged when Christians consider films so that they avoid the dangers of escapism and uncritical acceptance. Watkins adopts a better approach, that of "positive critical engagement" (p. 17), which respects both the beauty and depravity within films. Films deal in worldviews and in this sense are a religious medium. As Christians engage with films, they should celebrate where there is truth and "evidence of the longing for God which is innate in every human being" (p. 43). As Christians engage with films, they should challenge idolatry as we see the "God-substitutes which people chase when they cannot or will not pursue a relationship with the creator himself" (p. 45). Films express the fundamental heart commitments of those who make them and so are ultimately concerned with who or what one worships. I think this chapter would have been slightly improved by

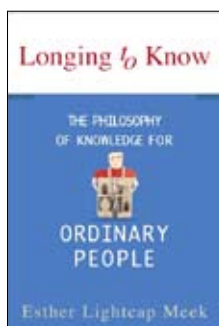
an explicit treatment of how general revelation provides non-Christians with the ‘raw-material’ for their cultural products including film. This theme is prominent in the work of Ted Turnau, and including this material would have further underpinned the theological rationale provided for Christian engagement with film.

Reading any *book* about *film* is bound to be a slightly frustrating experience due to the fact that film communicates visually whereas a book is a different medium. In addition, if the reader is unaware of a certain film, the impact of illustrations and examples may be lost. However, the fact that this book is full of varied examples, spanning many genres and decades, goes a long way to overcoming these inevitable limitations and provides connection points for as wide an audience as possible.

Overall, this book is an excellent resource and a welcome addition to the literature of Christian engagement with film. It is thorough, thoughtful, and above all, biblically rigorous. It provides practical help for Christians wishing to think about films. It will equip Christians to be aware of the potentially corrosive messages that films are communicating, to open up avenues into helpful conversations with non-Christian friends, and ultimately to declare the Lordship of Christ over every aspect of culture. This book should be essential reading for Christian film-studies students, for anyone who loves film, and for anyone who wants to think about how Christ relates to culture.

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Esther L. Meek. *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003. 208 pp. £12.99/\$18.99.



Allan Bloom opened his trenchant 1987 criticism of American higher education, *The Closing of the American Mind*, with the words, “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”

The roots of this condition are long and deep, as Bloom showed so memorably. Nor has higher education’s reigning philosophy altered much in the years since. If anything, caution at affirming truth has become more deeply woven into the spirit of the age and is the current orthodoxy. Even within universities or seminaries based in principle on a counter affirmation, students hesitate before a peer’s claims and may be content with “That’s what they believe.” Since students live in the world, they bring media and public school taboos to further education.

Esther Meek has written an unusual book to address the state of affairs. Meek believes that students can benefit from “epistemic therapy.” Epistemology is a word to strike fear into many undergraduates, but she uses no technical terms, and the book is so filled with clear prose and apt illustrations from everyday life that it will be valuable for second-year up to fourth-year students. Nor does she adopt an insider’s stance. The book provides a from-the-ground-up account of knowing by showing significant aspects of the knowing act that are tacit: taken for granted and usually overlooked.

If the last sentence rings a bell, it could be because recognition of “tacit dimension” was urged by Michael Polanyi, the Hungarian chemist-turned-philosopher, and was the title of one of his books. Knowing is always personal, but the commitment of persons in a kind of faith-act need not lead us to relativism nor limit the validity of the knowledge. Like Meek, who wrote her dissertation on Polanyi’s realism, Polanyi himself was concerned for a therapy, one for a European civilization riven by ideologies and successive world wars and without a basis for moral reconstruction. Unless the modern world could move past its limitation of knowing to the scientific method, civilization was in peril. Students live out the effects of reduced ideas of knowledge, and the therapy is still much needed.

Meek’s method is to expound a key statement: “Knowing is the responsible human struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern and submit to its reality,” and she divides the key statement into four parts. Part I, “Knowing,” explains the unreasonableness of modern limitations to knowing. Part II, “. . . Is the Responsible Human Struggle,” shows that a commitment of the situated knower is always a part of coming to know; faith is always inherent in an attempt to know. Meek surfaces tacit facets of knowing, facets taken for granted in a phenomenology of the knower’s attempt to know. Part III, “. . . To Rely on Clues,” highlights the inescapable human search for a coherent world and the role of clues for the knower who eventually pieces together a world. Part IV, “. . . To Focus on a Coherent Pattern and Submit to Its Reality,” finds confirmation of the approach in the deep explanatory power of the picture. We ought to seek contact with reality rather than seek the correspondence of words with things; we should accept confidence as a reasonable goal in knowing rather than aim for a certainty that has by now proven to be stultifying.

The beauty of Meek’s approach is that she teaches by everyday-life experiences. For instance, Meek uses her knowledge of a mechanic she rarely sees to illuminate trust and its practical confirmatory results in her old car. In the initial act of knowing, she depended on the authority of others to guide her to this mechanic. She shows how guides enable us to see things that otherwise we would miss. Coming to see is an active process, like the act of solving a Magic Eye puzzle; we must focus beyond or through the data to be able to see. Our stretching to know is like drawing a vector through a single piece of information, like “laying out” for a frisbee. Even the way that pregnant Meek’s periodic “gastro-intestinal pangs” led to her realization that a child was on the way is used to serve the reader.

Meek accounts for genuine knowledge as a system of clues. Her account of mistakes does not lean hard on our propensity to deceive ourselves, but she explains how we suppress clues to avoid the God who would give sovereign meaning to our lives. The book, however, will not be entirely satisfying to some theological readers. Meek admits that fallibility is a possibility we should learn to accept (chap. 20), but she does not square the admission with how Christ is to be proclaimed definitively as the way, the truth, and the life.

Despite this, the book is a superb work of apologetics. *Longing to Know* is a healing piece. Meek unlocks whole domains of experience that have been devalued in modernity. She restores the reader’s sense of the greatness and defensibility of being a Christian. The significance of beauty comes home. Meek speaks of the way students are liberated and transformed by a more whole understanding of knowledge, and I can well believe it. For epistemic therapy there is nearly nothing else so accessible.

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