



themelios

*An International Journal for Students of
Theological and Religious Studies*

Volume 34 Issue 1 April 2009

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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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REVIEWS

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 —

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In blogs, journal essays, and books, there has been quite a lot written recently about what “the gospel” is. In the hands of some, the question of what “the gospel” is may be tied to the question of what “evangelicalism” is, since “gospel” = εὐαγγέλιον = evangel, which lies at the heart of evangelicalism. People talk variously of the “simple” gospel or the “robust” gospel or the “pure” gospel—and doubtless a rich array of other adjectives. Some make a distinction between the gospel of the cross and the gospel of the kingdom. Technical New Testament studies in recent years have addressed the question of when “The Gospel According to Matthew [or Mark or Luke or John]” became “The Gospel of Matthew [or Mark or Luke or John],” for the former presupposes that there was one gospel with assorted witnesses, while the latter opens the possibility of having a distinct gospel for each community labeled by one of the four canonical gospels—though this latter view, still dominant, has come under severe criticism, not least in the light of Richard Bauckham’s edited volume *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Ironically, while Bauckham’s title nicely captures something true and important—viz., that our four canonical Gospels were not written for hermetically sealed off communities but for the widest circulation among Christians—it uses the plural form of the noun, “Gospels,” in a way which, as far as I know, is frankly anachronistic, for it does not seem to be duplicated anywhere else in the first century. A handful of other essays have noted the instance where the gospel is not “good news” for certain people, but a promise of terrifying judgment. The writers of these essays argue that εὐαγγέλιον may not mean “good news” but something like “great and important news”: whether it is good or bad depends on those who hear it.

A couple of these questions I hope to address shortly elsewhere. For the moment, however, I’d like to underscore another distinction that is still worth making. It was understood better in the past than it is today. It is this: one must distinguish between, on the one hand, the gospel as what God has done and what is the message to be announced and, on the other, what is demanded by God or effected by the gospel in assorted human responses. If the gospel is the (good) news about what God has done in Christ Jesus, there is ample place for including under “the gospel” the ways in which the kingdom has dawned and is coming, for tying this kingdom to Jesus’ death and resurrection, for demonstrating that the purpose of what God has done is to reconcile sinners to himself and finally to bring under one head a renovated and transformed new heaven and new earth, for talking about God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, consequent upon Christ’s resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and above all for focusing attention on what Paul (and others—though the language I’m using here reflects Paul) sees as the matter “of first importance”: Christ crucified. All of this is what God has done; it is what we proclaim; it is the news, the great news, the good news.

By contrast, the first two greatest commands—to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves—do not constitute the gospel, or any part of it. We may well

argue that when the gospel is faithfully declared and rightly received, it will result in human beings more closely aligned to these two commands. But they are not the gospel. Similarly, the gospel is not receiving Christ or believing in him, or being converted, or joining a church; it is not the practice of discipleship. Once again, the gospel faithfully declared and rightly received will result in people receiving Christ, believing in Christ, being converted, and joining a local church; but such steps are not the gospel. The Bible can exhort those who trust the living God to be concerned with issues of social justice (Isa 2; Amos); it can tell new covenant believers to do good to all human beings, especially to those of the household of faith (Gal 6); it exhorts us to remember the poor and to ask, not “Who is my neighbor?” but “Whom am I serving as neighbor?” We may even argue that some such list of moral commitments is a *necessary* consequence of the gospel. But it is not the gospel. We may preach through the list, reminding people that the Bible is concerned to tell us not only what to believe but how to live. But we may not preach through that list and claim it encapsulates the gospel. The gospel is what *God* has done, supremely in Christ, and especially focused on his cross and resurrection.

Failure to distinguish between the gospel and all the effects of the gospel tends, on the long haul, to replace the good news as to what God has done with a moralism that is finally without the power and the glory of Christ crucified, resurrected, ascended, and reigning.

MINORITY REPORT

A Lesson From Peter the Barber

— Carl Trueman —

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No doubt my two children would cringe at the title of this short piece. Indeed, I can hear their cries now, ‘Dad, barbers are soooo yesterday. Nobody has one of those anymore. It’s a hair stylist or personal grooming consultant you need today!’ Well, that’s a moot point. Age has certainly reduced my need for anybody other than my wife and a set of electric clippers to address my cranial thatch; and as somebody the wrong side of forty, I quite like to think of myself as ‘sooo yesterday,’ particularly in terms of tastes in rock music, movies, and worship styles. It is, after all, what I am: a yesterday’s man.

The Peter the Barber in the title is, however, even more ‘sooo yesterday’ than I am myself. He was none other than the hairdresser—or personal grooming consultant—of the most famous man in sixteenth-century Europe: Martin Luther. No doubt, there were those who would have paid Master Peter a hefty sum to have been a little more casual with the razor than he was. In fact, had Peter been less competent in his profession, he could certainly have altered the path of European history with the proverbial flick of the wrist.

But Peter’s significance lies not so much in his ability to style hair (contemporary portraits of Luther indicate a better cut than that sported by Donald Trump but nothing as suave as, say, a Clive Owen). No, his significance lay in the fact that he struggled to pray, and one day he shared his problem with his most famous customer. Despite the mountain of work which he typically faced, his most famous customer still found time to go home and write him a treatise on the same.

The incident is instructive for a whole host of reasons. Now I am not of the school that sees the need as constituting the call. Just because somebody approaches me with a problem does not mean that I am called upon to help them solve the problem. In some cases this might actually be a mercy to the one in difficulty: if anyone comes to me with a problem with their computer, car engine, or anything involving mechanical or technological skill, then I need to resist the temptation to help them as their condition at the end of my assistance will be guaranteed to be worse than it was at the start. No, the need does not necessarily constitute the call: that is crucial wisdom for anyone in any kind of leadership position, especially in the church, if they wish to retain their sanity and limit the damage which they do.

Yet the Peter incident reminds us that one key element of Christian leadership is caring about people, even those who might be considered ‘little people’ in the eyes of the world. Peter was a humble barber; he was not even a model citizen; but he was one of Luther’s parishioners, for whose soul Luther was supposed to care. Luther’s response—to write him a special treatise on prayer—speaks volumes of the true heart of a man who really cared for his people. Luther was without doubt one of the busiest

and most hard-pressed men in Electoral Saxony at the time, if not in the whole of Europe, and he had a million and one more important duties pressing in on him from all sides; but he found time to write a letter of spiritual counsel to this individual. All of Luther's learning, all of the things he had done, all of the adulation he received, all of the great and the good who called on him for advice—none of this distracted him from caring for the people in his congregation. Indeed, this is exactly what one would expect from a leader who tried (and on occasion spectacularly failed) to work in accordance with Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 1 and 2.

If the writing of the treatise speaks volumes about the heart of Luther for his people, then the content speaks volumes about Luther's theology. The treatise is short and rich, and nothing can substitute for readers looking at it for themselves, but I will summarise its central elements here. The whole is cast as advice to Peter based on Luther's own practice. When he becomes cold in prayer, he says, he flees to his room to read the Psalms or, if it is the right time, to church to hear the psalms sung and read. He also repeats to himself the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and sayings from Christ, Paul, or the Psalms. He also tries to frame the day with prayer: make it the first business of the day, he advises, and the last thing you do at night. Earthly callings must not be neglected by reason of prayer; but prayer must be the priority. Prayers should not be long and empty babbling; rather they should be structured around the Lord's Prayer and meditation upon the Ten Commandments (important for Luther as a reminder of our unworthiness and dependence upon Christ). All this Luther sees as warming the heart and moving us towards prayer that spontaneously cries out to God.

To anyone familiar with late medieval piety and, indeed, with Reformation practice, it is clear what Luther is doing. Medieval catechetical instruction was structured by the elements of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. Luther's answer to the heart grown cold is well-established and catechetical: return to the basics of the faith, and remind yourself of those. It is also rooted in the idea that prayer is not simply a spontaneous, emotional response to God; rather, it is an essential, imperative part of the Christian's walk. As a husband has no choice but to love his wife—it is a command, however he might feel about it at any given time—so the Christian has no choice but to pray, however cold his or her heart might be. And the best way to do that, if you lack enthusiasm, is the tried and tested approach of going back to the basics.

Another aspect of interest, however, is Luther's initial suggestion that, if the problem occurs at a time when the church is meeting, Peter should get himself to church. The corporate aspect of worship is important. Church is not somewhere where Peter should go once he has sorted out the problem of this lack of enthusiasm; it is the best place to go precisely to sort that problem out. Church, for Luther as for the other Reformers, was not simply a place to go and hear someone explain the Bible and then sing a few hymns or choruses. It was the place where the voice of God was heard in the reading and preaching of His word and where the believer, as part of the corporate body, responded by singing God's praises. Indeed, it was the primary focus of the Christian's life of worship. If Peter was struggling with prayer but was not present himself in church, then, guess what? He could expect prayer to be precisely the difficult chore which it had become.

I reread Luther's treatise on prayer regularly. It is part of a trend I have noticed in my own habits over recent years: the older I become, the more I appreciate the simple things in the Christian life. I was asked recently what I read to keep myself sane (if indeed I am such), and I responded that the Heidelberg Catechism, with its pastoral overview of the basics of the Christian faith, has become my constant companion over the years. As with Luther's suggestion to Peter, the Catechism covers the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. It is pretty basic material. It takes less than an

hour to read, but more than a lifetime to master. In fact, it seems to me as I look back over time that the more theology I have read and the more rarified the academic atmosphere in which I pursue my specific research interests, the more the basics have come to be significant in my daily life and the more I have come to realize that, far from having mastered the A-B-Cs of the Christian life, I need to remind myself of them again and again. Luther's little book captures this brilliantly: there really is no arcane secret to orthodox theology, to a vital Christian life, to deep and meaningful prayer. It is all about discipline in the small things. Luther's book also reminds me that church is the first place I should be if I want to live a healthy Christian life; I cannot do that properly by locking myself away in my own room anymore than a rugby player can hone his skills without the benefit of a team.

This is where the rub is for most students of theology. Protestant evangelicalism is a religion of the book. Its very literary focus lends itself to academic ambition, and such is not bad in itself. Christian theologians, like Christian footballers or Christian bank managers, are called upon to be the best they can be in their chosen calling, but when intellectual excellence becomes an end in itself, at least two unfortunate consequences follow. First, we lose sight of the basics, the very things that are the meat and drink of the Christian life, both in terms of theology and practice. This is where things like catechisms and the regular discipline of church attendance are so important for students of theology. Second, we lose sight of who is and who is not important: we crave the approval of those who despise God's word or who use that word simply as a means of self-promotion, and we look down our noses at the Peter the Barbers of this world. Human wisdom comes to supplant divine foolishness, and as any reader of 1 Corinthians knows, divine foolishness is infinitely wiser than the greatest human wisdom.

Sadly, the tale of Peter the Barber has a somewhat sad ending. Shortly after Luther wrote him this treatise, he got drunk and stabbed his son-in-law, who had claimed (presumably while in a similarly intoxicated state) to be invulnerable to wounds. Such was not the case, and Peter escaped the death penalty only because Luther interceded on his behalf and managed to have the sentence commuted to lifelong banishment. Yet even this speaks eloquently of Luther's care: even when Peter had let him down so badly, the busiest man in the European Reformation found time to speak up on his behalf. He could do that because, theological genius as he was, Luther was a true Christian leader who never lost sight of the little things of the Christian life, whether doctrines, disciplines, or disciples.¹

¹ Martin Luther's treatise on prayer can be found in the following works: Martin Luther, "To Peter Beskendorf," in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Council* (ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 124–30; idem, "A Simple Way to Pray," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann; trans. Carl J. Schindler; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 43:187–209; idem, "Luther the Confessional Theologian: A Practical Way to Pray (1535)," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (ed. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull; 2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 12–17.

The Embattled Bible: Four More Books

— Robert W. Yarbrough —

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Quite apart from commentaries and hermeneutical textbooks, books on the Bible—its nature and ultimately its authority—have been appearing with daunting frequency of late. To list just some of the titles from the last few years:

Published 2005:

1. Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation*
2. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*
3. Walter Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology*
4. Kevin Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*
5. N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*

Published 2006:

6. A. K. M. Adam, *Faithful Interpretation: Reading the Bible in a Postmodern World*
7. Roland Boer, *Rescuing the Bible*
8. Hoi Chee An and Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, eds., *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women*
9. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler, eds., *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*
10. John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, The Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority*
11. Clark H. Pinnock with Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible*, 2nd ed.

Published 2007:

12. Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*

13. William P. Brown, *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible As Scripture*
14. Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture*

Published 2008:

15. G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority*
16. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan Torrance, eds., *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*
17. Craig Evans and Emanuel Tov, eds., *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*

Clearly it would be impossible in brief compass even to summarize this wide-ranging discussion (and more books could be listed). It is also being carried on, of course, in scores of journal articles, not just in English and in North America but around the world in numerous languages. It will be years before the dust settles (assuming it does) and we gain the distance necessary fully to assess developments currently unfolding. It seems everyone is weighing in. A sea change may be underway.

This essay will attempt to highlight and reflect on four additional studies that add their voices to this spirited and sometimes contentious conversation. The first two appeared in 2007. The other two were published in 2008. Since all four authors are or have been faculty at evangelical universities or seminaries, the witness of these books affords, among other things, an informative snapshot of how the Bible is understood at present in circles traditionally associated with a high view of Scripture.

1. Mark Alan Bowald, Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics¹

Bowald writes from within the community of scholarship associated with what has come to be called the theological interpretation of Scripture.² He teaches at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He seeks to address “weakness in the contemporary perception of the event of reading the Bible” (ix). In particular, he seeks to make room for more robust attention to the role of divine agency in Scripture reading. To this end, the book seeks “to lay bare in a more comprehensive manner the basic dynamics of the reading of Scripture that underwrite any and all hermeneutical proposals” (x). Bowald hopes to foment “new ways of joining together to listen to God’s gracious Word and reading and responding together in faith” (x).

This book renders two major services. Firstly, it furnishes a useful taxonomy of three different ways Scripture is read currently among the scholars engaged in theological interpretation of Scripture. The taxonomy is visually depicted in over a dozen charts scattered throughout the book. The first way of reading Scripture, Bowald argues, focuses on human agency in the “text.” Leading advocates are the early Hans Frei, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson. The second way focuses on human agency in the “reading,” or on what is commonly called reader response. Bowald interacts here with David Kelsey, the later Hans Frei, Werner Jeanrond, and Stephen Fowl. Leading spokesmen for the third way, which

¹ Subtitled *Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Hampshire, UK/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007). Parenthetical page numbers in this section refer to this volume.

² See, e.g., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Bowald favors and for which this book serves as an apologetic, are Karl Barth, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and James K. A. Smith. This way, unlike the others, is said to prioritize divine agency in the reading of Scripture. It would be going too far to say that the first and second ways culpably neglect God, while the third way, Bowald's, is the only way possible to affirm and hear God. But that seems to be a logical entailment of how Bowald sets up the taxonomy. Whatever the limitations of these schematics, the charts and informing discussion serve to make tolerable sense of various positions in a complex discussion. This in itself is a worthwhile achievement, though the discussion plotted is more reminiscent of the 1990s than of the present hour.

Secondly, Bowald devotes his opening chapter (1–23) to “The Eclipsing and Usurping of Divine Agency in Enlightenment Epistemology and Their Influence on Scriptural Hermeneutics.” In this he offers a useful exposition of portions of the Kant corpus to show that Kant “imposes immanent limits on both the knowing agent as well as the object in the epistemological action of creating or building knowledge” (4). In short, for Kant humans can never attain knowledge of God; they can at best—even with the help of Scripture—attain a state of “faith,” which is inferior to knowledge (7). In addition, the interpreter is forbidden to entertain input from other knowing agents or opinions in any attempted act of understanding, including the interpretation of Scripture. Church teaching, for example, must be rigidly excluded from consideration. The same is true for one's own intuition. Suppose one felt from the totality of personal experience (of religion, of nature, of historical events, of incidents in one's own life) that God exists and operates in our lives somewhat the way he is said to be present in Scripture—we cannot flee his presence (Ps 139:7); he numbers the hairs of our heads (Matt 10:30). All of this is inadmissible, in a Kantian interpretive world, from corroboration by or even discovery in Scripture unless it can be validated in advance by coldly rational means apart from the Bible. Bowald rightly and helpfully shows how this mentality was “an unnatural impediment to theological undertakings and especially to the reading of Scripture” (8). He also sketches how this outlook first trickled, then poured, into biblical scholarship, investing it with a *de facto* agnostic if not outright atheistic cast and agenda.³

This gave rise to what came to be called historical criticism and derivative methods. Bowald notes, “The investment in historical critical methods, underwritten by the immanent epistemological preferences and limitations of the Enlightenment, was unanimous across the theological and denominational spectrum at this point” (15).

It is understandable that Bowald is filled with zeal to drive home this insight, though it is only partly true. It is the main plank in the *raison d'être* for “theological interpretation” in the current depiction of its practitioners: Enlightenment biblical scholarship banned the God of Scripture from any active role in the reading of Scripture (and from its writing, for that matter), resulting in an atheological aridity in biblical scholarship from which theological interpretation (which for many seems to mean especially Karl Barth as understood by some) must rescue the Bible. There is a key point, however, at which this account of matters is a distortion.

Bowald lumps together all “biblical scholars of a conservative stripe” (15) with their non-conservative cohorts. This effectively demonizes *all* scholarly interpretation of the Bible since the Enlightenment.

³ Immanuel Kant's own approach to religion has recently received a fresh defense: see Chris L. Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's "Religion"* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008). But biblical scholarship has not been driven so much by Kant himself as by “neo-Kantian” construals of the world, religion, revelation, and Christian faith. See, e.g. Thomas Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978). For how this played out in the twentieth century's most influential NT scholar, see R. A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing: Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 1974). Bowald's critique is in line with applications of Kant that have been dominant in biblical interpretation.

If true, this *does* establish the need for interpretation's rescue by Bowald's (and others') "theological interpretation." But it is not true. Bowald is either unaware of or simply misconstrues a host of interpreters who took part in the discussion dominated by Kantian (or later neo-Kantian) loyalties but who did so in their capacity as scholars attentive to the ground rules of professional interaction in the academy. That is, they spoke and wrote, not as mindless adherents to every point of the interpretive agenda that eventually emerged in the increasingly post- and anti-Christian hermeneutical systems associated with names like F. C. Baur, Julius Wellhausen, Ernst Troeltsch, and Rudolf Bultmann, but as an increasingly marginalized remnant seeking to get a hearing for Christian testimony in an intellectual marketplace that cruelly and often dishonestly proscribed what they claimed to have shown in their scholarship, which was in turn a corroboration of their personal knowledge of God confessed in their lives and churchmanship. I have in mind here people like J. C. K. von Hofmann, B. F. Westcott, J. B. Lightfoot, Bernhard Weiss, B. B. Warfield, Theodor Zahn, Otto Procksch, Adolf Schlatter, J. Gresham Machen, Martin Albertz, Oscar Cullmann, Joseph Bonsirven, George Ladd, and many others. Participating in historical-critical discussions and making use of historical-critical methods, they did not bow the knee to the dogmas of the historical-critical worldview—in fact they explicitly worked against them on both historical and theological grounds, agreeing with Bowald in his critique of Kantian thought.

This same zeal on Bowald's part causes him to misconstrue even an ally of his cause like Kevin Vanhoozer. Using a curious method, as well as argument from silence, he makes much of one essay written by Vanhoozer in the mid-1980s on "The Semantics of Biblical Literature."⁴ Since "the issue of divine agency is not addressed anywhere in this early piece" (60), Bowald associates Vanhoozer with Kantian understanding of divine agency in interpretation. This is a low blow from which Bowald has to back away on the next page (61) and in analysis of Vanhoozer's subsequent work, which Bowald treats as a development in Bowald's direction but which actually, I would argue, simply articulates the hermeneutical convictions latent in Vanhoozer's outlook all along. He finally admits that Vanhoozer is one of the few today who "attempts to fully account for all three aspects" of biblical interpretation that comprise Bowald's taxonomy: the text, the reader, and God (73). But he asks provocatively "whether Evangelicals [will] follow his lead or dismiss him as a prodigal son" (*ibid.*), as if these "Evangelicals" stand against privileging God in biblical interpretation and might whack any of their number who does this. Bowald's innuendo here rightly reflects that he favors decoupling written Scripture from the transcendent Word of God in ways that Christians through the ages, as well as many recent evangelicals, have not felt to be warranted or wise.

The almost complete lack of interaction with German-language sources may be felt by some to be a weakness in a book so dependent on issues and figures rooted in that land and its hermeneutical history. On a stylistic note, some will tire of sentences with semi-colons but only one independent clause; dozens of times I thought I was reading a second sentence set off from a first one, only to realize I was digesting a sentence fragment. Finally, I felt the ending was naïve. So we can all "talk about God" à la Barth, "the most significant modern example of an attempt in this direction" (183 with n. 33). Many of us are not convinced that Barth himself (however plausible neo-Barthian strategies may prove) permits a high enough view of Scripture for us to know that the words we find in Scripture are sufficiently congruent with the Word on whom his theology seeks to center.

In the end, Bowald furnishes a bracing rebuke of Kant as he was appropriated in subsequent

⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 53–104, 374–83.

generations of theological interpreters. I found chapter one to be the high point. But the overall thrust of the book amounts to a hard break between text (= the Bible) and God, which seems to invite Kant's dualism right back in.

2. A. T. B. McGowan, The Divine Authenticity of Scripture⁵

The subtitle of this book is promising: *Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage*. But that is the North American edition. The British title is different, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture*, and the subtitle is more honest: *Challenging Evangelical Perspectives*.⁶ McGowan is not so much "retrieving" a heritage but seeking to correct it. As far as I can tell, the two editions are identical apart from their titles, covers, and purely incidental matters. McGowan was until recently principal of Highland Theological College in Dingwall, Scotland. He is now pastor of Inverness East Church, a Church of Scotland congregation.

At one level this is a straightforward study. McGowan wants to reconsider the doctrine of Scripture. But whereas he started out to write a broad study of the doctrine (possibly thinking of Jude 3 here?), he decided rather to limit his focus more to how other evangelicals have got the doctrine wrong (9). Many of these evangelicals are actually fundamentalists who fail "to engage with biblical scholarship" and due to "sheer obscurantism and anti-intellectual approaches" damage "the case for a high view of Scripture" (ibid.).

McGowan proposes to correct the misguided with four moves (12–16).

1. Rather than place Scripture at the head of Christian doctrine à la the Westminster Confession, we should subsume it under the doctrine of God.

2. We should replace the word "inspiration" with the expression "divine spiration." Likewise the words "illumination" and "perspicuity" are to be replaced with "recognition" and "comprehension," respectively. McGowan thus clears the deck to reconfigure things pretty much from scratch: "we must recast the vocabulary of the doctrine of Scripture" (17). McGowan's case for 1 and 2 is contained primarily in chapter two.

3. We should cease using the word "inerrancy." "Infallibility" is to be preferred. And rather than so much stress on divine speaking, which was fine back when liberal theology was a threat but has become outmoded in the current climate, "it is time to redress the balance by saying more about the human authors of Scripture" (13). Arguments for these claims are really the substance of the book, occupying chapters three through five, or nearly half the volume.

4. We should adopt a better "evangelical theology of tradition." This is the focus of chapter six. "As evangelicals we do give creeds and confessions an important place in our theology and in our churches but often without any carefully worked out theology of tradition to justify and regulate this" (210). Evangelicals should neither demonize nor divinize classic confessions that have arisen in church history but learn from them in the light of Scripture—or rather, "the voice of God speaking in Scripture" (185); as the book progresses, a slight gap seems to open between that voice/Spirit and the Book, possibly because McGowan cannot be sure it might not be errant at some given juncture. We should learn from Karl Barth that the Westminster Confession of Faith is flawed because it is concerned more with man than with God (187). Or in McGowan's own formulation, to approach theology like the Reformed confessions with "Scripture at the beginning of the theological system takes the primary focus away

⁵ Downers Grove: IVP, 2007. Parenthetical page numbers in this section refer to this volume.

⁶ Nottingham: Apollos, 2007.

from God” (28). One marvels that the Westminster divines could have been so spiritually blind. Or was their sense of what honoring God necessarily entails different from ours?

Chapter seven gives a defense of preaching that opens up the Scripture using Calvin as a template. The brief concluding chapter eight summarizes the whole book and anticipates three criticisms. 1) McGowan pleads he is not arguing for “errancy” (210), though the ground between rejecting “inerrancy” and affirming “errancy” is a pretty narrow spit of terrain, if indeed logically speaking it can exist at all. 2) He defends his reading of Warfield (an inerrantist and therefore in error by McGowan’s lights) vis-à-vis Kuyper and Bavinck (who upheld “infallibility” rather than inerrancy). 3) He argues that there can be “fundamental unity as evangelicals” between “members of the Evangelical Theological Society in the USA who affirm ‘inerrancy’ and members of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians who affirm ‘infallibility’” (212).⁷ As many of us belong or have belonged to both groups, this goes without saying. But it is an olive branch that might have been better placed at the beginning. After 200 pages of sometimes vigorous critique of what many see as the historic Christian view of Scripture (except among Protestant liberals, neo-orthodox, and an increasing number of evangelicals of various stripes today), it is a little disingenuous to say right at the end that there is no cause here for “condemnation and recriminations” (212).

If McGowan is right about inerrancy, dozens of North American colleges and seminaries, several thousand scholars, tens of thousands of pastors, and millions if not billions of Christians worldwide need to repent and change their doctrinal statements—and, so as not to be hypocrites, their beliefs. Granted there is a long tradition of viewing the Bible as without error. This is not part of the ecclesial tradition, evidently, that McGowan in chapter seven argues that evangelicals should respect.

McGowan’s study has much to commend it as a spirited critique of people for whom “the word ‘inerrancy’ has become something of a sacred talisman” (14). But who are these people? One senses they are anyone who does not agree that inerrancy has now simply become an unworkable term. The book thus forces the question: should we abandon inerrancy? There are several reasons why some may not find the book’s main thrust persuasive.

1. The central argument that the “inerrantist” views of Warfield should yield to the softer “infallibilist” view of Kuyper and Bavinck is suspect. See the book by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. reviewed below. Kuyper and Bavinck did not believe in an errant Bible.

2. The assertion that liberal theology is passé is unconvincing and not even consistently upheld in the book. Perhaps narrowly defined as the historical movement associated with Adolf von Harnack (see 10n2, 61) there is merit to the claim. But defined as the theology of the Western Protestant mainline, its central tenets are quite alive in churches, seminaries, and graduate schools in North America and Europe and indeed around the world. In fact, classic liberalism with its stress on the “fatherhood of God” looks biblicistic and conservative in much of the mainline now, which does not allow God to be spoken of using masculine pronouns, let alone imaged robustly as “Father.” McGowan knows that “many hold to broadly the same position concerning Scripture” that liberals always have, naming John Barton and the late James Barr (57–61). But in the end he seems to think it is more important to correct inerrantists by appeal to various human authorities than by returning to Scripture to be reminded of what it says about itself. This raises a primary deficit of the book.

⁷ Yet he calls for movement to “moderate the dominance of the American inerrantist tradition” (214). Throughout the book, there is a question in my mind whether inerrancy is wrong because there is a theological case against it, on the one hand, or because it is associated in McGowan’s mind with America, with particular developments on American shores that he has not understood and with conceptions of the doctrine that are not necessarily accurate.

3. The book says little regarding Scripture's teaching about Scripture. This helps explain McGowan's mystification regarding "why Warfield preferred to speak of 'inerrancy,' rather than follow his European colleagues in speaking of 'infallibility'" (211). Warfield was a NT scholar whose views were rooted deeply in inductive study of the biblical text. McGowan wants a looser if not indeed lower view of Scripture than the old "high" view, but he does not justify this in any sustained way from the way biblical writers use Scripture. Before we follow his reading of figures like Orr, Kuyper, Bavinck, and Berkouwer, it would be helpful to establish the inspired (or should we say "spirated"?) outlook of figures like Peter, John, Paul, and Christ himself. Many think that Warfield got things right because he showed that it is precisely the Bible that teaches us that "inerrant" is an appropriate representation of Scripture's nature and content. His studies on Scripture's self-understanding seem more compelling than Barth's alternate accounts that McGowan favors.

4. There is confusion about the origin of inerrancy. McGowan says that it arose in response to liberalism (50) and relates it especially to American tradition (214). Yet he quotes without comment Mark Noll's observation that "Most Christians in most churches since the founding of Christianity have believed in the inerrancy of the Bible . . . [This] has always been the common belief of most Catholics, most Protestants, most Orthodox, and even most of the sects of the fringe of Christianity" (85). McGowan's book is vitiated by the tension between Scripture and ecclesial tradition, which he says he wants to treasure but which on the whole affirm inerrancy, and certain modern writers whom he feels we must follow so we can focus on God rather than Scripture. This leads to a further reservation.

5. It is debatable whether it is either possible or necessary to vest authority "in God rather than in the Scriptures themselves" (43). In Scripture, God in his essence is Spirit and invisible. His people know him savingly through his divinely inscripturated words to them as the Holy Spirit interprets and applies their truth. The highest privilege of Israel was to have "the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2).⁸ "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him" (Deut 13:4). Yahweh was inseparable from his word. Peter says that the prophetic word of Scripture given to the church is "more sure" than what he witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Pet 1:19). Jesus calls for allegiance to him and his words, not one apart from the other (Mark 8:38). His mission was to confirm and fulfill Scripture, not to reveal a God who is known apart from it. This is not proof-texting but the overt thrust of the Bible's hundreds of "thus says the Lord" statements as well as the clear implications of Jesus' claim to have come directly and uniquely from God, to "declare to the world what I have heard from [the Father]" (John 8:26) and to have appointed apostles to crystallize his self-disclosure in the NT writings.⁹ We can no more separate God and his words to us, if that is what Scripture is, than we can separate human friends and family from the words we exchange with each other. Neither God nor people we know are sphinxes whose identity we ultimately intuit by solely spiritual (or even Spiritual) means. To separate knowledge of persons' identity, human or divine, from their verbal self-disclosure would in the end be both unproductive and perverse.

Can biblical inerrancy be misunderstood, misrepresented, and misguided? Yes, without a doubt, and McGowan's point is well taken that the doctrine is always subject to review, because human

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁹ Still insightful here, and important if we are to heed the "European Reformed tradition" that McGowan favors, is Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (2nd ed.; trans. H De Jongste; rev. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1988).

appropriation of it is always subject to imperfect execution. There are and likely always will be apparent discrepancies in the Bible that await definitive solution this side of glory—a fact openly conceded in the Chicago Statements cited below. Inerrantists as a group could certainly do with personal and corporate repentance and renewed humility as we attempt to interpret and apply the Bible and reflect God’s loving and peaceable presence in the world. *Kyrie eleison!*

But his book might have been more balanced in acknowledging inerrancy’s considerable upsides. To cite just one: while writing this, like millions of others I was saddened to hear of Rev. Dr. Fred Winter’s murder in the pulpit of First Baptist Church of Maryville, Illinois, on Sunday, March 8, 2009. Daily headlines document how religions elsewhere in the world may respond to threats, real or perceived.¹⁰ How would First Baptist members respond? Their website faith statement on Scripture is explicitly inerrantist,¹¹ in keeping with this church’s membership in the Southern Baptist Convention, North America’s largest Protestant denomination. Having learned the dangers of inerrancy from McGowan, one might well fear the worst from this mid-American, conservative enclave.

Here is how their faith in the Bible played out. At a prayer vigil on the very day of the murder, a capacity crowd met in a nearby church (with “cradled Bibles” according to a news report) and heard their surviving pastor reassure them from Scripture that “Pastor Fred is in that place that we call heaven.” Scant hours following the murder, the church website posted a call to prayer—including prayer “for the assailant himself and his family.” In the sort of area where Barack Obama noted that people cling to their guns and religion, Jesus’ teaching to love and pray for enemies is front and center. The anguish and uncertainty of the hour were palpable in the statement. Yet,

... one thing is certain, we, as human beings need a foundation upon which we can live our lives. We at First Baptist Maryville, along with other Christian believers, share this conviction: that foundation is God’s Word. In the pages of the Book we call the Bible, we find the pathway for peace, hope, and a quality of living life despite what circumstances we find ourselves in.¹²

Before evangelicals jettison inerrancy as McGowan calls for, there needs to be careful recollection of why the faithful have clung to the notion so doggedly through the centuries, how it functions in the lives of saved sinners in this world of frequent grief and loss, and whether an ethereal God who speaks in Scripture, but whose voice is not congruent with Scripture, will prove to be the God of Jesus Christ, who stated, “I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” (John 12:49–50). The primary access we have to Jesus and to God through him is Scripture’s testimony (and other means of grace testified to by Scripture: the Holy Spirit, prayer, the sacraments, and so forth). On whose authority do we conclude that this Scripture may not be free from material error? (There is a ready reply to this, of course: see comments on Sparks’s book below.)

¹⁰See, e.g., <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1162039/Minister-beaten-clashing-Muslims-TV-show.html> (accessed March 15, 2009).

¹¹The first article of the statement, however, is “God the Son.”

¹²<http://www.fbmaryville.org> (accessed March 9, 2009). Reprinted in “SBC Pastor Killed in Shooting,” *Baptist Press*, <http://www.baptistpress.org/BPnews.asp?ID=30033> (accessed April 2, 2009). Even more astounding is the response of Fred Winter’s wife in an interview about a week after the murder: <http://www.chrisbrauns.com/2009/03/18/cindy-winters-reflects-the-grace-and-glory-of-christ>.

Many will likely continue to conclude that nuanced arguments favoring inerrancy—and here the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics deserves attention alongside the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that McGowan at least mentions (103–4)—are tenable if indeed not biblically and pastorally compelling for the gospel to continue to be heard, lived, and spread in a world where the Bible’s saving claims are perennially being undermined, whether by enemies or well-intentioned friends. At the very least, groups that uphold inerrancy can afford to abide in their time-tested convictions for now while they serve Christ and wait and see. Will those presently opting to abandon inerrancy fare better than the Protestant mainline and others who have been conducting the experiment of decoupling a more sacrosanct God from a less sacrosanct Scripture for many generations, thus far with ominous results?

It should be readily admitted that the future of “evangelicals,” including inerrantists, is not secure in itself.¹³ I agree with McGowan that it is God, not a view of Scripture howsoever correct, who upholds all things. To the extent McGowan reminds us of that fact—and confesses the Bible’s “infallibility,” itself a radical position in many quarters—his book is a worthy addition to the current discussion, even if its central thesis remains unconvincing.

3. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., God’s Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture¹⁴

The biggest share of this slender volume (107 pages) is not new. Much of the material first appeared in the form of a pair of articles published in the *Westminster Theological Journal* in 1982 and 1983. The occasion was, first, the one hundredth anniversary of J. Gresham Machen’s birth (1881), and, second, the appearance of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim’s *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*.¹⁵ Back then Gaffin penned two articles to respond to the Rogers-McKim claim that Kuyper and Bavinck represent the more centrist, historical view of Scripture—and that they were not inerrantists. John Woodbridge had already shown the limited accuracy of the Rogers-McKim thesis in terms of both method and result.¹⁶ Gaffin entered the discussion to test whether Rogers and McKim were correct in their depiction of the Dutch or European Reformed view, which they claimed was distinct and different from the Old Princeton inerrantist view of Scripture.

The book under review consists of these two essays, introduced by a substantial statement from Dr. Peter A. Lillback, president of Westminster Theological Seminary (v–xvi). The essays are corrected and augmented lightly at points. At the end Gaffin adds a fresh postscript (105–7).

Gaffin proceeds by posing six questions that he thinks the Rogers-McKim handling of Kuyper and Bavinck raises (see 4–5): 1) How did Kuyper and Bavinck situate themselves with respect to post-Reformation orthodoxy? Related to this, how faithfully did this orthodoxy represent the Reformation? 2) How did Kuyper and Bavinck view the Holy Spirit’s role in human recognition of Scripture and its

¹³ See Michael Spencer, “The Coming Evangelical Collapse,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>. Scholars like David Wells have been sounding similar notes for some time.

¹⁴ Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008. Parenthetical page numbers in this section refer to this volume.

¹⁵ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: A Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

¹⁶ See John D. Woodbridge, “Biblical Authority: Towards an Evaluation of the Rogers and McKim Proposal,” *TJ NS* 1 (1980): 165–236. This was expanded and published as *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

authority? 3) How did Kuyper and Bavinck assess the relation between Scripture's form and its content? 4) Did Kuyper and Bavinck see an analogy between the divine-human Christ and the divine and human elements of Scripture? If so how was the relation understood? 5) How did Kuyper and Bavinck view biblical criticism and mainstream biblical scholarship of their era? 6) How did Kuyper and Bavinck view biblical inerrancy? Did they believe that Scripture contains errors? These are the questions Gaffin seeks to answer from the (largely Dutch) sources in some one hundred pages of carefully argued analysis.

There are three reasons why Gaffin's study is if anything more pertinent today than it was when it first appeared as journal articles. First, he shows decisively that Rogers and McKim tended to misrepresent Kuyper and Bavinck. Far from propounding a view of Scripture that was inimical to Warfield or other Princetonians, they on the whole expressed views that comported with Warfield. Around 1900 Bavinck lamented the directions being charted by liberal Presbyterians in the US:

Thus the Reformed church and theology in America are in a serious crisis. The doctrines of the infallibility of Holy Scripture, of the trinity, of the fall and inability of man, of particular atonement, of election and reprobation, of eternal punishment are secretly denied or even openly rejected. (105)

In contrast to this lament, Bavinck extols Princeton Seminary and Warfield in particular. In the end, Rogers and McKim largely misrepresent Kuyper and Bavinck and their views on inerrancy and the Princeton heritage.

Second, Gaffin's study is important because it sets a question mark next to McGowan's reading of Bavinck, a central segment of McGowan's whole argument (see McGowan, *Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 138–64). McGowan agrees with Woodbridge and Gaffin that Rogers and McKim cannot adduce Kuyper and Bavinck in favor of their view of Scripture, and McGowan concedes that Gaffin demonstrates that Kuyper and Bavinck "held a high view of Scripture very close to that of Warfield" (*ibid.*, 138). But McGowan, taking inspiration from James Orr, claims that Kuyper and Bavinck "were not inerrantists" (*ibid.*, 139). McGowan leaves Kuyper to the side at this point, focuses on Bavinck for some twenty-five pages, and gives an unconvincing response to Gaffin.

The problem here is that Gaffin appears to demonstrate two things that McGowan wants to deny. McGowan wants to deny that there is much continuity between Princeton/Warfield and the "European Reformed" heritage championed by Kuyper and Bavinck, and he wants to deny that Kuyper and Bavinck held to inerrancy. Against McGowan's contentions, Gaffin appears to show that for both, "The Bible is without error" (102; cf. 46). For Kuyper, if Scripture contains error, then "God is guilty of error" (46). "The truth of Scripture, appropriate to its unique divine authorship, is impressionistic, not notarially precise or scientifically exact" (*ibid.*). It is nonetheless inerrant. Bavinck was a more inductive thinker and more reserved in his characterization of Scripture's full truthfulness. Yet, Gaffin concludes, "every consideration leads us to suppose that he would not object nor find it inappropriate to speak of the inerrancy of Scripture, provided that, like Kuyper, we understand that in an impressionistic, nontechnical sense" (102). Since McGowan's reading of Bavinck so solidly diverges from Gaffin's, it is not clear why he did not take the time to show where Gaffin went wrong. I do not find in McGowan's treatment clear indication that Bavinck had a view of Scripture that differed essentially from that of Warfield, so at this point I remain convinced by Gaffin. This is all the more true since Gaffin works with the Dutch sources, often correcting faulty translations, while McGowan seems dependent on those translations.

A third reason why Gaffin's book is important is stated by the author in his postscript (105–7). We find ourselves in ongoing battles over the Bible and proper understanding of it today, as the titles at the

head of this essay remind us. There is no easy way out of this. “But,” Gaffin notes, “one thing is certain.” Progress will be possible in agreement on the doctrine of Scripture only “when we share at least a common mind-set concerning the past and what in fact the central church doctrine is” (107). Warfield is among many to have shown that something like what he calls “inerrancy” is the view of Christ and Scripture writers themselves. Woodbridge has shown that “inerrancy” is appropriate to characterize the “central church doctrine” from patristic times forward. Donald Bloesch has noted that *inerrabilis* (roughly “inerrant”) is used to describe Scripture by Augustine, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, while both Luther and Calvin “described the Bible as being infallible and without error,” Calvin calling Scripture an “unerring rule” for Christian faith and life.¹⁷ Gaffin’s reconstruction of Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s views—not essentially different from the inerrantist position of Warfield—ensures that their respective (and quite compatible) doctrines of Scripture can be accurately grasped by any with ears to hear as discussions currently underway run their course in days ahead.

4. Kenton L. Sparks, God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship¹⁸

The aim of this book is “to help shape the intellectual contours of the church” so that it can “assimilate the fruits of academic endeavors to its faith in Christ” (18). The book’s “agenda” is “the church’s careful reevaluation of its relationship to historical-critical readings of Scripture” (21). Specifically, “critical biblical scholarship will be accepted only when a new paradigm explains how the criticism can fit into a life of faith. This book was written to advance that cause, and I hope and pray that in some small way it will succeed in doing so” (372). Yet Sparks is not merely a promoter of historical critical methods and findings. He states, “I am an evangelical, committed fully to the Bible as God’s authoritative Word, to the doctrines of historic creedal orthodoxy, to the unique significance of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and to the hope of his return” (21). He states that he could join with Calvin in signing an inerrancy statement (256).

4.1. Argument of the Book

Before commenting on strengths and weaknesses of this wide-ranging and demanding book, it will be helpful to summarize, with minimal comment, the book’s ten chapters and conclusion.

Chapter one, “Epistemology and Hermeneutics,” seeks to characterize the current hermeneutical setting. Sparks concludes that the limitation of human knowledge is not really a bane; we can have adequate even if not perfect knowledge of most things. He also concludes that interpreters are radically limited to the time and place they inhabit. This is true not only for “Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin” but also for “Jesus, Paul, and Luke” (55). Sparks supports “a doctrine of inerrancy when it comes to Scripture,” but not as traditionally understood. He opts for a “practical realism” that “accentuates the validity and adequacy of human discourse” for mediating what we ought to understand and do (*ibid.*). “Human discourse,” it will turn out, is how we should first of all conceive of the Bible. That is why historical criticism is so necessary: its analytic power to interpret human discourse is unparalleled.

Chapter two, “Historical Criticism and Assyriology,” demonstrates how historical criticism yields positive results when applied to artifacts of ancient Mesopotamia. Sparks concludes that the “negative

¹⁷ *Holy Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 33–34.

¹⁸ Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. Parenthetical page numbers in this section refer to this volume.

aura that often surrounds” the terms historical criticism, biblical criticism, modern criticism, and the like, is “unnecessary and unwarranted” (72). All historical criticism means, for Sparks, is “reading texts contextually” (ibid.). It may therefore be safely applied to Scripture.

Chapter three, “The Problem of Biblical Criticism,” illustrates this. Sparks walks the reader through the findings of historical criticism in a number of areas: the Pentateuch (Moses wrote little if any of it), Israelite historiography (much is not historical), the authorship of Isaiah (there were multiple authors, not one), the four Gospels (they take considerable historical liberties), the authorship of the Pastorals (Paul did not write them), and more. Key historical events of the Bible must be questioned. Moreover, “*at face value, Scripture does not seem to furnish us with one divine theology*” but “*gives us numerous theologies*” (121; Sparks’s emphasis).¹⁹ God may have informed biblical writers, but “their ideas and perspectives were historically contingent, being radically shaped by the particular cultural settings in which they lived and worked” (ibid.). The Bible is primarily and pervasively a human book.

Chapter four, “‘Traditional’ Responses to Biblical Criticism,” faults numerous assessments of biblical criticism that fall short of Sparks’s own “believing criticism” (133). “Traditional” responses fail across the board. Some traditionalists (Billy Graham, Gleason Archer, Carl F. H. Henry) are fideistic. Others mount “philosophical critiques” of biblical criticism that are flawed (Iain Provan, Alvin Plantinga, V. Philips Long). Others are “critical anti-critics” who use specious means to dismiss criticism’s inexorable findings (Kenneth Kitchen, Gleason Archer, Duane Garrett, R. K. Harrison, Derek Kidner, Herbert Wolf, Richard Schulz, Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, Tremper Longman III, James Hoffmeier, T. Desmond Alexander, Brian Kelly, Craig Blomberg, D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo). Part of the problem is that lots of these people are poorly trained because they went to evangelical schools, Jewish schools, or British universities (168). Sparks’s doctorate is from the University of North Carolina, which presumably furnishes a higher vantage point. But there have been scattered good guys like Sparks out there, “progressive evangelicals” including John Goldingay, Carl Armerding, Ray Dillard, Leslie Allen, George Beasley-Murray, F. F. Bruce, Peter Enns, N. T. Wright, Bernard Ramm, and many others who are not chained to traditionalism’s rigid constraints.

Given the abysmal failure of apparently most evangelicals to do justice to the findings of historical criticism, chapter five, “Constructive Responses to Biblical Criticism,” surveys numerous non-evangelical strategies for theological appropriation of Scripture. The assumption seems to be that if there is light to be found, it will not come from an evangelical. Sparks surveys works and proposals by Karl Barth, Gerhard von Rad, the Biblical Theology movement, Brevard Childs, Walter Wink, David Steinmetz, narrative theology (Hans Frei, George Lindbeck), Stephen Fowl, the Catholic Church, James Barr, and others. He terms all this cumulatively a “long-standing and intellectually vigorous tradition in scholarship” (200) that sheds light on integrating criticism and theology. Specifically, from this discussion we may recognize that 1) “some biblical errors are illusions,” 2) “some biblical errors are accommodations to the human horizon,” 3) extrabiblical sources may furnish resources for theology, and 4) the Holy Spirit may aid productive interpretation (203). Based on this, Sparks culls out insights and themes to explore in subsequent chapters.

Chapter six takes its cue from Karl Barth (205) and deals with the human dimension of Scripture. “When we sensibly employ analytic generic categories to read Scripture, treating it as the ancient document that it is rather than as an instance of modern discourse, many of the theological difficulties

¹⁹ Cf. 182: “the cacophony of voices offered by biblical critics” (in contrast to Brevard Child’s allegedly monolithic “canonical” witness); 230: “the Bible does not offer a single, well-integrated univocal theology; it offers instead numerous overlapping but nonetheless distinctive theologies!”

implied by historical criticism are adequately resolved” (227). Humans err, the Bible is written by humans, so its statements often reflect “human limitations and foibles” (226), which is to say, mistakes. Appeals to progressive revelation here are “only half-baked” (226n24). In fact Sparks agrees with Edgar McKnight that “progressive revelation depends conceptually upon Enlightenment notions of ‘progress’” (246n52), a curious claim since it is found in the Bible as well as in church fathers like Irenaeus. But less than full veracity in Scripture is not a problem, as we do not need “perfect language” in Scripture, “only language that is adequate as a bearer of truth . . . God’s truth” (226). Apparently human limitation in Scripture is not so pervasive as to prevent Sparks from ascertaining what parts of it are actually true and reflective of God’s wisdom and will among so much that criticism determines to be false.

Chapter seven focuses on “The Genres of Divine Discourse.” Sparks sets forth “accommodation” as the major solution for acknowledging the divine in Scripture despite its lack of theological unity and the presence of human error. He points out how church fathers, Calvin, and even Gleason Archer allow that “Scripture does accommodate human error in its discourse” (255) without imperiling its status as a medium of divine self-disclosure.

Chapter eight takes up “The Context of the Whole and Biblical Interpretation.” Here the argument is that many things addressed in Scripture take on their right and fuller meaning when augmented by knowledge from outside of Scripture, whether the created order generally or from disciplined study of that order like we find in astronomy, biology, literature, or physics. For example, “God tells us through our pursuit of the biological sciences how life developed; he tells us through Scripture that he’s the one responsible for that biological miracle” (278). Christians should take the wisdom of other religions very seriously, just as they should accept the wisdom of secular biblical scholars. “We are wise to embrace the truth in whatever way that God brings it to us” (278).

Chapter nine, “Negotiating the Context of the Whole,” takes a surprising turn. Sparks affirms the relevance and indeed authority of “the whole” of what Scripture affirms theologically as articulated by Christian traditions (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant) through the centuries. This “whole” should be brought to bear in interpreting the parts of Scripture, no mean feat since much in the traditions as they understand themselves is diametrically opposed—most Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants would not think it easy to combine the three strands and regard the result as a harmonious “whole.” Sparks’s “practical realism” is adept at resolving apparent logical contradictions: they are simply ignored. The “whole” also consists of “the created order and any special revelation that God has provided to humanity” (326). So Scripture is not a lens through which to view all reality (327–28). It is rather “like a good virus that gradually spreads and infuses its wisdom into the entire network of our worldview” (328). “The result is not so much a biblical worldview as a biblically informed worldview” (ibid.). Not only the Bible but human knowledge of it is only human all the way down.

Chapter ten applies the method Sparks has worked out in chapters one through nine to various texts and problems: the story of David in 1–2 Samuel; the imminent eschatology of Daniel and Revelation; the question of women’s ordination. He arrives at conclusions, he notes, “fairly close to the standard conclusions of church tradition,” though he accepts women’s ordination despite its non-traditional nature (354–55). On the other hand, “the divine decree that husbands shall have authority in the home still stands and is still needed” (352). It is important that Sparks, by using historical criticism, arrives at his convictions in ways superior to the approach of “very conservative evangelicalism” (355). He concludes by restating that his purpose in the whole book has been “to preserve a place at the evangelical table for genuine critical study of the Bible” (356). The outstanding question remains: “How and to what extent should modern biblical criticism be embraced in the life of the church?” (356).

In “Conclusions: Biblical Criticism and Christian Institutions” (357–74), Sparks takes up this question. The answer is, basically, that it must be embraced judiciously but maximally. As questions arise in a church setting and as parishioners can bear the truth, it should be shared with them. This will take time, perhaps generations. But it is a vital mission, as Sparks shows by adapting terms from William Carey—so vital, to note one contrast, that nothing is said here or in the whole book about missions in the more usual sense. This mission to promote criticism is the particular responsibility of the Christian college. While this has the effect of giving professors like Sparks their way with impressionable students away from any guidance by their pastors and parents, that is not his point. He rather seeks to implement a merciful protective measure: taking care of this business in the Christian college classroom means “rank-and-file church members are better insulated from the potentially destructive effects of intense academic inquiry and debate” (364). It is not clear why these members should be spared but their children (likely funded by the members) fully exposed to this inquiry and debate. Nor is it clear why the results of criticism that Sparks promotes as so salubrious throughout the book must now suddenly be hidden from the view of people in churches.

Sparks quotes Duane Litfin, president of Wheaton College, but totally rejects his conception of “revelation and creation, or of faith and reason” (365), because it is too narrow and biblicistic. What happens at places like Wheaton is that leaders cater to “uninformed constituencies,” whether because they agree with them or “because they wish to attract their tuition dollars” (366). Instead, there must be academic freedom; otherwise “ill-guided fundamentalist populism” will continue to drive schools like Duke, Emory, and Southern Methodist University “further away from their traditional Christian roots” (367). Sparks does not document how this populism drives the direction of these institutions.

He likens “many evangelical theologians and biblical scholars” today to Edward Carnell (1919–67), who died from overdose and possibly suicide because rigid evangelical institutional expectations at Fuller Seminary were so repressive that he cracked under the strain (368–69). There need to be changes and adjustments in institutional models so that full academic freedom can flourish even when this “flies in the face of external, populist constituencies” (369). The implication seems to be that otherwise evangelicalism can expect further tragedies among its psychologically victimized leaders.

“Students schooled in biblical criticism” should be cautious about airing what they know from college or seminary—Noah’s flood did not occur, nor (probably) the exodus, Nineveh did not repent, the Gospels disagree, Revelation errs in predicting Christ’s return, and so forth (371). So students should be careful where and how they say what they now know, not because the facts are in question (historical criticism assures that) but because people in the pew are not yet ready for these historical critical insights, the church will recoil, the Christian academy that taught these things will be criticized, and Sparks’s mission of seeing historical criticism accepted in the church will be set back (371).

While Sparks sounds a conciliatory note at the very end—“The evangelical scholars that I know are wonderful people, and in many cases their scholarship is excellent” (373)—the grim truth is that “the evangelical tradition” is “equally culpable” with “Enlightenment rationalism and post-Enlightenment relativism” in destroying faith and fomenting apostasies (374). “A more robust faith” like Spark’s “believing criticism” “would chart a different course, one that is at the same time critical in its disposition and wholly committed to the theological and ethical demands of Christian orthodoxy” (*ibid.*).

4.2. Evaluation

So much for a summary of the book. A preliminary comment is in order before moving to strengths and weaknesses.

Sparks describes himself as a member of a “new generation of evangelical scholars” unlike the “old school evangelicals” whose convictions about the Bible this book aims to discredit. Coming in the wake of Peter Enns’s *Inspiration and Incarnation*, there is reason to think that Sparks, like Enns, might become a rallying point for students and others eager to depart from “traditional” views that they may or may not fully grasp. A pair of contrasting reviews of Sparks’s book in *Review of Biblical Literature* confirms this. The first, by seasoned NT scholar Jeffrey Gibbs, is kind and appreciative but wisely critical.²⁰ The second, by a seminary student who hopes to have an M.A.R. in biblical studies by May 2009, is completely laudatory and shares fully in Sparks’s condemnation of evangelical scholarship and views of Scripture.²¹

Precisely if we find ourselves in more or less utter sympathy with Sparks, we should note his clear and persistent conviction about the biblical writers and indeed all historical sources: “Every human person is inescapably located within, and shaped by, a social and cultural context” (126; cf. 121). To the extent we accept that about (even) biblical figures like Jesus and writers like Isaiah and Paul, we must apply it to Sparks as well. His views, by his own rules, are largely determined by his social and cultural context. If they are imbibed without the kind of critical scrutiny that intellectually responsible reading calls for, we are not paying him the respect his book requires from its readers but according his words an ahistorical, docetic quality that does not even inhere in Scripture, according to Sparks.

4.2.1. Strengths

In the interest of paying that respect, I note the following plusses to this book. First, it takes up a perennially important topic. I suppose the first book I read along this line was George Ladd’s *The New Testament and Criticism*, which was much shorter and less ambitious but made similar points.²² The genre goes back into the nineteenth century at least. Many books and essays have sought to address issues related to those Sparks takes up. He was well-advised to devote his energy and learning to this fresh breakdown of key problems along with attempted constructive proposals.

Second, behind this book stands impressively wide reading. Much of it is in areas most familiar to Sparks: the OT in its ancient Near Eastern setting. But as the summary above indicated, he has read in many historical, hermeneutical, theological, philosophical, and other areas. In fact, he probably covered more ancillary ground for this book than some OT scholars will cover outside their fields in their entire careers. This range and command of information is admirable and beneficial.

Third, Sparks is moved by justified concerns regarding hyper-conservative anti-intellectual approaches to Scripture. Where evangelical scholars do in fact “marry that great doctrine of inerrancy to a docetic view of Scripture, which imagines that its discourse was hermetically sealed from the diversity of human ideas and viewpoints” (373–74), or insist on unattainable certainty, or commit the sins of “critical anti-realism” (144–68), such errors need uncovering and correcting. I am not convinced by all of Sparks’s examples—in fact, he commits the same error of “selective and illegitimate appeals to critical scholarship” that he denounces (see below)—but to the extent his darts find their mark, his concerns are well-placed.

Fourth, I found it daring and creative that a biblical scholar committed to historical criticism would try to articulate exegetical findings in the light of both “the created order and any special revelation that

²⁰ http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6514_7044.pdf

²¹ http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6514_7393.pdf

²² George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

God has provided to humanity” (326). There is much in this chapter that critical method often omits by definition, and I commend Sparks for going behind disciplinary constraints as conceived by many to arrive even at “theological interpretation” that is “a process that hears God’s univocal *Word* by listening to his many *words*” (327).

Finally, I commend Sparks’s patience in wrestling with and assimilating the views of so many scholars who would in all frankness see no legitimacy in the post-traditional Christian faith he espouses. This goes beyond my praise voiced above for the *volume* of his reading. Any number of the works he has waded through were penned by figures who are no friends of confessional Christianity in any form. In that sense Sparks has in many cases modeled the openness to criticism he calls for, albeit generally only toward people to the left of him theologically.

4.2.2. Weaknesses

On the negative side, this book is practically bereft of mention of Jesus Christ in ways one might have expected given the focus, sweep, and authorial confession found in the book. There is a single reference to the “scandal of the cross” (13), but Sparks relates this to Noll’s scandal of the evangelical mind (13n1), which is surely far removed from Paul’s reference. He is “God’s great remedy for our troubled human condition” (73). But Sparks takes pains to deny close ties between Christ’s two natures and Scripture’s humanity and divinity (252–53). In one spot he agrees that “Christians will want to consider seriously what Jesus and the New Testament writers said about the Old Testament” (164). But in the very next sentence, what we learn is that Jesus Christ was “human and finite” (164), and subsequently that “modern critical research makes it likely . . . that Jesus has not told us who really wrote the Pentateuch, Isaiah, or Daniel” (165). Modern critical research simply trumps Jesus—end of discussion. We hear nothing here or elsewhere about either Jesus or other New Testament writers in terms of *their view of Scripture*. “Inspiration,” a significant category in ancient thought, is not addressed; 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20–21 and the meaning of *graphe* in biblical writings are not discussed. The implications of “thus says the Lord” in the prophets receive no attention, nor Moses receiving tablets on Sinai and communing with Yahweh face to face. Sparks’s approach here may be “critical,” but it simply ignores the historical. Perhaps this is because he knows these things are not historical based on historical critical authorities.

Second, while Sparks dips into the fathers or the Reformers here and there to make key points—and his treatment on Calvin and accommodation (232–36, 245, 249–51, etc.) while not extensive is insightful—his presentation of the history of biblical interpretation is not up to the weight he places on it. Origen (ca. AD 185–254) wrote in the third century, not the second (143). Sparks thinks that Porphyry (ca. AD 232–ca. 304) and Augustine (AD 354–430) wrote “at about the same time” (*ibid.*); figures writing in the third and fifth centuries are farther removed temporally than were Paul and Irenaeus.

Sparks uses a quote from Augustine to answer the question of when to broach “a difficult subject like historical criticism with the local church” (360), but when Augustine speaks of “some great passages which are not understood . . . or are understood with great difficulty . . . and these should never be brought before the people at all, or only on rare occasions when there is some urgent reason,”²³ he is talking about Scripture passages, not “the standard results of biblical criticism” (359) of which Sparks is speaking. Similarly, Sparks claims Augustine’s authority for the view that the Gospel of John’s divine insights “can go no farther than the man himself can bear” (246)—so Augustine, like Sparks, affirms a radical human limitation to John and the other Gospel writers.

²³ *On Christian Doctrine* 4.9.23, available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.iv.v.html>.

But it is not so simple. Augustine's *Harmony of the Gospels* 35.54 gives a fuller picture of this Latin father's view. Jesus appointed disciples. These he used in writing the Gospels "as if they were his own hands." The image is almost grotesque: the reader who

apprehends this correspondence of unity and this concordant service of the members [i.e., the hands, the disciples], all in harmony in the discharge of diverse offices under the Head [i.e., Christ], will receive the account which he gets in the Gospel through the narratives constructed by the disciples, in the same kind of spirit in which he might look upon the actual hand of the Lord Himself, which He bore in that body which was made His own, were he to see it engaged in the act of writing.

To look upon the written Gospels is to see de facto the hand of Jesus Christ himself engaged in writing it! This gives rise to Augustine's direct response to the claim (made repeatedly by Sparks) that the Gospels materially contradict (*italics added below*):

For this reason let us now rather proceed to examine into the real character of those passages in which these critics suppose the evangelists to have given contradictory accounts (*a thing which only those who fail to understand the matter aright can fancy to be the case*); so that, when these problems are solved, it may also be made apparent that the members in that body have preserved a befitting harmony in the unity of the body itself, not only by identity in sentiment, but also by constructing records consonant with that identity.

Augustine does not support Sparks's view of the Gospels on this point.

Moving to more recent times, any defense of historical criticism requires a fuller account of the move from pre-Kantian interpretation to postmodernity than Sparks's chapter one furnishes. It is fair enough to speak of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, but the precipitous leap (40) from these figures to today leaves almost all of the doyens and developments of historical criticism untouched. Particularly vital here is the nineteenth century, as it set the stage for discussion still underway today. But Sparks deals with few to no scholars from this era. This lack of background makes it impossible for the untrained reader to get historical perspective on the topics concerning which he accuses evangelicals of being so mistaken, while praising "critical" scholars for possessing such sagacity. It is precisely the missing history that is required to make the debates intelligible.²⁴

A third weakness is that Sparks finds almost all ill and nearly no good on the "evangelical" side of the ledger, and the opposite on the side of historical criticism (which he depicts as a monolithic whole, though it is manifestly not). In a lucid moment he concedes that "large swaths of the church have been almost decimated by" it (58). Yet he insists that "the negative aura that often surrounds" the words "historical criticism" is "unnecessary and unwarranted" (72). Does the decimation of "large swaths of the church" count for so little? Do the empty churches of Europe signify nothing, where state university educational monopolies taught historical criticism to theology students for generations until it is now mainly only Muslims who believe in God there? Do mainline centers of theological study in North America that are dismissive of biblical Christianity, and that send out pastors who do not preach the saving Christian message, merit none of the censure that this book dishes out to evangelical Christians

²⁴ Scholars of the era and their scholarship covering both Testaments is on display in Donald McKim, ed., *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove/Nottingham: IVP, 2007); see especially pp. 45–66 ("Biblical Interpretation in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries"; note bibliography on 65–66). More broadly see Ninian Smart, et al., eds., *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

so liberally? To his credit he is able to raise a red flag against the “minimalist school” (169n80; cf. 131) and anti-realists (131). But he rarely finds fault with a “historical critical” scholar or outlook. Meanwhile, this review has already intimated how sweeping and scathing is the book’s dismissal of hundreds of evangelical colleagues, many of whom he readily cites by name.

A fourth weakness is that there is no serious acknowledgment of how many of Sparks’s concerns are actually addressed by the Chicago Statements. Granted, these documents articulate a conception of inerrancy that he sees fit consistently to pillory. One reason for this, though, is that he depicts them (when they come into view at all) as wooden, unreflective, and intellectually dishonest. Since so many bright and productive colleagues in dozens of Christian colleges and seminaries have cheerfully affirmed these statements, this might have alerted him to the possibility that they are more serviceable as articulations of warranted belief than this book gives credit. Let us concede that they are a generation old and bear revisiting and rephrasing today.²⁵ Nevertheless, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics agrees with Sparks, e.g., that “Scripture communicates God’s truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms” (Article X), that “awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study” (Article XIII), that “legitimate critical techniques should be used in determining the canonical text and its meaning” (Article XVI), that “any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it” (Article XIX), and that “in some cases extra-biblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations” (Article XX). To avoid the appearance of an Elijah complex (“Lord, I alone am left”), Sparks might have been less binary and more inclusive in affirming such common grounds of concern.

Fifth, the book is deceptive in casting evangelical views as traditional but historical-critical views as invariably current and fresh. *In fact, nothing is more traditional than historical-critical findings.* Few of them, by now, are truly new; many were established in the nineteenth century or even earlier; some are as ancient as anti-Christian apologists like Celsus (ca. AD 180). Once these “critical” beliefs get established, they get passed from professor to student with the same apodictic authority Sparks associates with evangelical dogma. Luke Timothy Johnson showed this in the history of scholarship of 1–2 Timothy.²⁶ I have shown it in the history of NT (and to some extent OT) theology going back to the 1830s.²⁷ Charles Hill has made a similar point with regards to Johannine studies over the last half century.²⁸ Sparks typically casts the matter like this: “*Traditional interpreters* accept the Bible’s ostensible claims that the books are written by Paul, while *most modern scholars* believe that the Pastorals are certainly not Pauline” (113; italics added). Johnson paints a truer picture. After tracing the generations of Pastoral Epistles scholarship in Germany going back to Schleiermacher (ca. 1810), who first asserted their non-Pauline authorship, Johnson observes that by the twentieth century in North American universities,

no one could any longer truly read them as Pauline. Having the majority position enunciated authoritatively in standard scholarship, having it assumed by all studies of

²⁵ A point made with less restraint than I would by Iain Provan, “How Can I Understand, Unless Someone Explains It to Me? (Acts 8:30–31): Evangelicals and Biblical Hermeneutics,” *BBR* 17 (2007): 1–36. Editor’s note: See Jason Sexton, “How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate,” *Them* 34 (2009): 26–49.

²⁶ *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 42–53.

²⁷ *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (History of Biblical Interpretation Series 2; Leiden: Deo, 2004).

²⁸ *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

the life and thought of Paul, and having it taught as self-evident in college and seminary classrooms for the past ninety years means that many generations of readers have been shaped by this view, which has come to be seen as a fact of nature rather than a scholarly hypothesis.²⁹

This could be said about most of the “flashpoint” issues Sparks raises. He presents a historical-critical position as if it is virtually revelatory, self-evident to critical reason, while evangelical convictions are at best the result of tradition. The fact is that “critical” solutions all have their history, too, and given the millions of students who are taught “historical critical” views in tax-supported universities and post-Christian colleges in North America, there is more uncritical traditionalism taught and accepted there than in all “conservative” schools put together. But since Sparks hypes historical-critical solutions and can only look down his nose at “traditional evangelical” ones, the reader never learns this. Given the second weakness above (i.e., the book’s deficiency in awareness of the history of biblical interpretation since the Enlightenment), perhaps Sparks was not in a position to impart it.

Space does not suffice to air a number of other points bearing comment. For example, I wonder about the ethics of concealing historical criticism from “populist constituencies” in the church but then unloading it on the 18–22-year-old sons and daughters of those churches who send their teens to a Christian school with a faith statement that affirms, “We recognize the Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments, as inspired of God and as the supreme and final authority in faith and life. We submit ourselves to carrying out our mission under its authority”³⁰ I simply cannot square Sparks’s book with that statement. As I read this book I kept recalling J. Gresham Machen’s suggestion in the 1920s that people who had departed from historic Christian beliefs should simply move to institutions more compatible with their views.³¹

Again, I wonder how valid it is to accuse evangelicals (here going back to the Reformers, actually) of an illegitimate quest for indubitable certainty (32–33), a culpable enmeshment in “the Cartesian tradition” (55). Evangelicals have been guilty of many things, but it is doubtful that much of it is rooted directly enough in the legacy of René Descartes to make this association. And I wonder how coherent, really, Sparks’s “practical realism” is as the key “essential element in the church’s healthy response to biblical criticism” (55). He wields it as an alternative to an alleged Cartesian certitude, but the result is hard to distinguish from neo-foundationalist certainty that one camp gets almost nothing right and the other gets almost nothing wrong.

A final and poignant shortcoming of the book is that its vaunted center, historical criticism, is actually not amenable to Sparks’s deployment of it. He may try to Christianize it, but it is much bigger than he is and will recognize him as a scholar only to the extent that he bends the knee to its rules and internal logic. I say this only somewhat tongue-in-cheek. In terms of the argument of the book, for me the segment on which everything else turns is “Miracles, History, and Historical Criticism” (313–22). Here Sparks takes on Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). Troeltsch, who was a Kant scholar, Baden neo-Kantian, and systematician of the so-called History of Religion school,³² did not invent historical criticism. But he codified its rules—criticism, analogy, correlation—and articulated its worldview. *Historical criticism*

²⁹ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 53.

³⁰ <http://www.eastern.edu/welcome/missionstatement.html> (accessed March 13, 2009). This is an official statement of the university where Sparks teaches.

³¹ *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).

³² Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, “The dogmatics of the ‘Religionsgeschichtliche Schule,’” *AJT* 17 (1913): 1–21.

as generally affirmed by biblical scholars worldwide assumes those rules and requires that worldview. Otherwise, it is not “historical criticism” in the sense that nearly all of the “historical critical” scholars whose authority Sparks adduces would affirm. It is totalitarian in its conception, claims, and demands, all of which completely and utterly rule out the intellectual validity of historic Christianity as in any sense a revealed religion.³³

Sparks valiantly tries to argue around Troeltsch. He even resorts to calling on help from evangelical scholars who are in this discussion suddenly useful to him: C. Stephen Evans, missiologist Don Richardson, David K. Clark, even Alvin Plantinga, who earlier in the book is cited as an example of someone guilty of a flawed “traditional” response to historical criticism (142–43). I think Sparks is resourceful and correct in his refutation of Troeltsch and applaud his efforts here. The problem is that Troeltschian historiography rules the roost in mainstream biblical scholarship. That is what “historical critical” means, or even “historical” when used by “historical critical” scholars (Bart Ehrman is an excellent example). It means radical doubt of the (biblical) source, analysis using the tool of analogy, and reconstruction under the principle of correlation. It is a radically immanent enterprise—divine causation is not allowed. I think Sparks is instinctively sensitive to this; it may be a reason (see the first weakness above) why the concept “Jesus is Lord,” the most fundamental of all cognitive Christian affirmations, plays no active role that I can recall in the formation of knowledge in this book. Jesus’ lordship is irrelevant and must remain so for historical criticism to operate. Believe it privately as you wish, but the moment it affects your scholarship, you have left the nurturing bosom of historical criticism. (Here it is a loss for Sparks that he was not able to reflect on chapter one of Bowald’s book reviewed above.)

Christian thinkers can and do use modified versions of the historical-critical method; that is how Christian biblical scholarship has operated in the Western academy since Enlightenment convictions generally spread, crystallized, and attained prescriptive status. That is precisely why, too, it is often not recognized as “scholarship” at all by the academic hegemony. Now Sparks, for his part, wants “historical critical” first, not “evangelical.” His book is a proud credo that he retains the latter while privileging the former. His book also teaches that as an evangelical, I can brook nothing but indubitable certainty. But on this matter, at least, I do harbor doubt.³⁴

³³ See Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology,” in *The Historical Jesus Quest* (ed. Gregory W. Dawes; Louisville: Westminster John Knox; Leidenorp: Deo, 1999), 29–53.

³⁴ For critical comments on an earlier draft of this review I would like to thank Kevin Vanhoozer (portion only), Doug Sweeney, Charles Anderson, and Hans Madueme.

How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate

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The doctrine of inerrancy has been a watershed issue among evangelicals in the West, perhaps now more evident than ever.¹ While the inerrancy debate never entirely dissipated from its last spell in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it recently surged to the forefront of discussions about an evangelical doctrine of Scripture both in North America and abroad. This transpired with recent events in the Evangelical Theological Society (hereafter, ETS) dealing with inerrancy² and fresh publications of at least a dozen books, articles, and reviews.³ With this new rally, one might say that evangelicalism is

¹ It was designated a “watershed” over three decades ago by Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 26–27, and eight years later by Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1984), 44. The degree of watershed was challenged early by Richard H. Bube, “Inerrancy Is/Is Not the Watershed of Evangelicalism: None of the Above,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 29 (March 1977): 46–47, who called for “revelational inerrancy,” asserting that the term “inerrancy” outlived its usefulness. Some, however, see the inerrancy debate as a watershed for other reasons—because of a “classically modern” view of truth that made inerrancy the “foundational Christian doctrine upon which all others depend.” Jeffery Stephen Oldfield, “The Word Became Text and Dwells Among Us? An Examination of the Doctrine of Inerrancy” (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2007), 232–33.

² While embers for the resurgent discussion over inerrancy were burning with the Open Theism controversy and charges that Open Theists deny inerrancy, the first recent major publication challenging the standard doctrine of inerrancy was by Peter Enns, former Professor of OT and Biblical Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary, in *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). As the Open Theism controversy faded, at the 2003 annual meeting of ETS, L. Russ Bush requested that the Executive Committee recommend to the Society appropriate ways to clarify its understanding of their doctrinal basis, since the meaning of the statement might seem unclear to some. The society moved to clarify details for those unclear on inerrancy’s meaning. At the 56th Annual Meeting (November 19, 2004) the clarity resolution was passed by an eighty percent majority, stating the following: “For the purpose of advising members regarding the intent and meaning of the reference to biblical inerrancy in the Doctrinal Basis of ETS, the Society refers members to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978). The case for biblical inerrancy rests on the absolute trustworthiness of God and Scripture’s testimony to itself. A proper understanding of inerrancy takes into account the language, genres, and intent of Scripture. We reject approaches to Scripture that deny that biblical truth claims are grounded in reality.” A disturbing feature at the meeting was how few were familiar with the Chicago Statement. This was so stark that members of the Executive Committee were prompted to print copies of it for every attending member. In 2006 the society voted to add this reference about Chicago as an amendment to its by-laws, having it serve as the standard definitional reference point referring to “inerrancy” in the doctrinal base. (I am grateful to James Borland for points of clarification here.)

³ While Enns’s 2005 work is indispensable to the debate, here is a selection of works dealing with the Bible’s inerrancy and authority since 2005 (in addition to those covered at length later in this article): Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006); Roger D. Olson, “Why Inerrancy Doesn’t Matter,” *The Baptist Standard*, February 3, 2006 (available at http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4670&Itemid=134 [accessed November 5, 2008]); D. A. Carson, “Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review,” *TrinJ* 27 (2006): 1–62; Justin S. Holcomb, ed., *Christian Theologies of Scripture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); William P. Brown, ed., *Engaging Biblical Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007) (cf. Craig L. Blomberg’s laudatory review of Brown’s work: “Review of *Engaging Biblical Authority*,” *RBL* [August 16, 2008]; available at http://bookreviews.org/pdf/6118_6532.pdf); Ronald F. Satta, *The Sacred Text* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007); Ben Witherington III, *The Living Word of God* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

in the third wave of the inerrancy debate.⁴ Few signs indicate that the discussion will subside any time soon.

This essay hopes to offer a small contribution to the discussion by answering the title question, “How Far Beyond Chicago?” By “Chicago,” this essay refers to the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, CSBI) and not subsequent statements from 1982 or 1986. The rationale behind upholding CSBI as a relevant touchstone today and basis for any further conversation on inerrancy is as follows. (1) It is the most recent, wide-ranging, definitive attempt made by a relatively unified group of evangelicals seeking to understand and articulate inerrancy in light of non-inerrantists discounting Scripture’s authority. (2) Concerning the first meeting of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, ICBI) in 1978 with over three hundred scholars and leaders, J. I. Packer noted that over ninety percent of the delegates present signed CSBI, which caused him to conclude, “in view of this broad representative base of support it should be able to function as an agreed platform and reference point for the debates of the next generation.”⁵ (3) CSBI is the reference that the executive committee of ETS and the overwhelming majority of recent ETS members set forth as what is meant by “inerrancy” in 2004 and 2006. (4) Arguments made today from those opposed to inerrancy are similar and often the same as the previous generation’s critics of inerrancy, which resulted in CSBI. (5) Greg Beale, the latest respondent to inerrancy’s critics, has set forth CSBI as the positive course forward, showing how the debate may build on CSBI as a foundation.⁶ (6) After his extensive study on the doctrine of inerrancy, Jeffrey Oldfield concludes, “I have yet to find an inerrantist who has argued against the Chicago Statement. For this reason I have used the Chicago Statement as the definitive statement concerning inerrancy.”⁷

The inquiry that follows is animated by three questions related to CSBI: How far *does* CSBI allow movement beyond itself? How far beyond CSBI *have* people already gone? And how far *should* those who agree with CSBI go beyond it? The study unfolds in three parts. The current state of the inerrancy debate is assessed, along with a brief sketch of its history and ethos. Recent works will then be considered, including efforts to restructure the debate. After this, suggestions will be made for moving forward in the defense and construction of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture in the current context.⁸

⁴ Cf. Peter Enns’s comment in “Response to G. K. Beale’s Review of *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 326 about the imminency of “another inerrancy war” and G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 221, referring to “the fragmentation of evangelicalism” because “the absolute authority of Scripture is under serious debate.” However much one seeks to avoid polarization, it is undeniable that a very serious new discussion of inerrancy is underway in a new context, with issues on the table that have never been discussed among those holding a high view of the Bible as inspired, inerrant and authoritative.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 48.

⁶ Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 267–79.

⁷ Oldfield, “The Word Became Text,” 5n2.

⁸ Important areas outside the scope of this article include hermeneutics and the history of the inerrancy debate. From one side of the debate, one might begin with Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate About the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999; repr. from *The Inspiration of Scripture* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980]); and Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Authoritative Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). From the other side, one may find useful the relevant articles in Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); John D. Hannah, ed., *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984).

1. Assessing the State of the Inerrancy Debate

Insight into the inerrancy debate's pedigree is necessary at this point. The present section gives a brief sketch of its historical lineage, followed by indications and causes of ambiguous aspects, along with the tone that has marked the debate's culture.

1.1. A Sketch of the Historic Waves in the Inerrancy Debate

1.1.1. The First Wave in the Inerrancy Debate: 1893

Inerrancy's current canvas spans 150 years.⁹ While the debate may have a transatlantic element, its configuration is largely an American phenomenon.¹⁰ This does not negate that many throughout church history, including some church fathers, scholastics, and Protestant theologians held the Bible to be without errors,¹¹ nor does it mean that this discussion has been totally confined to the US. So where did the recent view of inerrancy come from? An inspired and inerrant Scripture was commonly held in the US and Britain in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is seen in John Wesley¹² and in the US with The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833).¹³ Yet in the midst of this, "there was no attempt to elaborate any *theory* of infallibility or inerrancy."¹⁴ Nevertheless as H. D. McDonald helpfully summarizes, "Prior to the year 1860, the idea of an infallibly inerrant Scripture was the prevailing view."¹⁵

November 1859 saw Darwin's *Origin of the Species* released, indicating a time of considerable shift for how the church viewed the Bible. Within a growing evolutionary environment, "the idea of an inerrant Bible was being discarded."¹⁶ Yet in the US, the Bible's inerrant inspiration remained the

⁹ H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), 197–99.

¹⁰ Daniel J. Treier comments, "Conflict over scriptural inerrancy has not defined evangelicalism elsewhere as it did in the United States" ("Scripture and Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* [ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 40). See the same sentiment in Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966–2001* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 192; A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 13; and Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 32.

¹¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Church Fathers and Holy Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 199–220; idem, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 214.

¹² Note the significant quote from Wesley from his journal dated July 24, 1776: "[I]f there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth" (cited in McDonald, *Theories of Revelation*, 197).

¹³ This states that the Bible "has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any admixture of error for its matter. . . ." (I am grateful to Rev. Liam Garvie for this reference.)

¹⁴ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989), 13 (emphasis mine). Cf. also the description Bebbington gives of the influence that Haldane and Gausson had on leaders in England and Scotland, emphasizing the "deductive approach" to inspiration from "their *a priori* assumptions" (ibid., 89–90). This seems quite similar to the framework in which inerrancy has been articulated by evangelicals from Warfield until now.

¹⁵ McDonald, *Theories of Revelation*, 196. Compare this with Bebbington's alternate reading of the history: "[A]t a representative clerical meeting in 1861, [two years after Darwin's work] a majority still favored the traditional view that there might be inaccuracies on non-religious topics" (*Evangelicalism*, 91). It seems that in light of McDonald's reading Bebbington is mistaken that this was the "traditional view" and fails to give details of this "representative clerical meeting" he cites from the *Christian Observer*.

¹⁶ McDonald, *Theories of Revelation*, 199.

dominant position for some time yet.¹⁷ It was this scenario into which Charles Briggs introduced his view of an inspired yet errant autographical text of Scripture in the early 1880s, prompting Hodge and Warfield to articulate what was meant by inerrancy in the autographs. Briggs was eventually defrocked from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the US in 1893, marking the climax in the first wave of the inerrancy debate.¹⁸

1.1.2. *The Second Wave in the Inerrancy Debate: 1976*

The majority view continued to pulse within evangelicalism,¹⁹ living on in American fundamentalism and into mid-twentieth century “neo-evangelicalism,” which gave birth to organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals (1942), Fuller Seminary (1947), ETS (1949), and *Christianity Today* (1956).²⁰ During this time, E. J. Young recognized that there were few definitions for the terms, and he seems to be the first evangelical to distinguish between “infallibility” and “inerrancy.”²¹ Packer’s treatment came one year later, relying on the term’s cognate origin.²² This nuanced treatment of inerrancy came into evangelicalism with little significant notice—until the debate’s second wave in the 1970s. Controversy had been brewing at Fuller Seminary, with faculty publicly denying inerrancy in 1962, while the inerrancy clause was not officially removed for another decade.²³ At this time, extensive work began to emerge providing nuanced views of inerrancy and its importance.²⁴

The second wave of the debate reached a climax with the 1976 publication of Lindsell’s *Battle for the Bible*, to which Fuller President David Hubbard summoned Jack Rogers for a response in kind.²⁵ Around

¹⁷ Mark Noll recognizes that Randall Balmer (“The Princetonians and Scripture: A Reconsideration,” *WTJ* 44 [1982], 352–65) “has argued convincingly” that Hodge and Warfield’s view was that of the Princeton tradition and “of much American theology generally to that time” (Mark Noll, ed. *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 43). This has been well attested both by John D. Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer, “The Princetonians and Biblical Authority,” in *Scripture and Truth*, 251–79, and most recently in the work by Satta, *Sacred Text* (see n. 3).

¹⁸ Satta, *Sacred Text*, 91–96.

¹⁹ This paper is using the working definition of “evangelical” from Timothy Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–14.

²⁰ With the exception of the National Association of Evangelicals (which referred to the Bible as “inspired,” and “the only infallible, authoritative Word of God” since inception), the other three organizations here each had inerrancy in their statements from their beginnings. Fuller dropped the term in 1972, while ETS and *Christianity Today* maintain it.

²¹ E. J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 113. By “infallible” he means that the Scripture “possesses an indefectible authority.” By “inerrant,” while being a close concept to infallible, he means that “the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error.”

²² J. I. Packer treats this topic in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1958; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 94–101. It also appears later in his updated version of *God Has Spoken* (rev. and enl.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 110–18, though it seems peculiar that it was not included in the original 1965 edition. Cf. the interesting and challenging note on Packer’s use of this term in Stephen R. Holmes, “Evangelical Doctrines of Scripture in Transatlantic Perspective,” *EvQ* 81 (2009): 45n34. Cf. also Packer’s own journey with the term “inerrancy” without which “the structure of biblical authority as evangelicals conceive it collapses” (*Truth and Power: The Place of the Bible in the Christian Life* [n.p.: Eagle: 1996], 91).

²³ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200–219.

²⁴ E.g., cf. René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (trans. Helen I. Needham; Chicago: Moody, 1969). An early collaborative effort is John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *God’s Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973). For a discussion of inerrancy’s importance in ETS, see Millard Erickson, “Biblical Inerrancy: The Last Twenty-Five Years,” *JETS* 25 (1982): 387.

²⁵ The response was Jack B. Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco: Word, 1977), which was followed by the work with Donald McKim in 1979, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*. See his personal account of the relevant events in Jack B. Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 7–10.

this time, ICBI formed and held its first meeting in Chicago.²⁶ However success for ICBI is defined, its publications were voluminous, and its influence reached far and wide.²⁷ It established the ethos that holds at least among ETS into the present.

1.1.3. *The Third Wave in the Inerrancy Debate: 2005*

This leads up to the contemporary third wave of the inerrancy debate.²⁸ Clearly, American evangelicalism, whose self-critique has been termed “alarmist,”²⁹ has generated and nurtured inerrancy’s current structure. And while it may have been Enns’s 2005 work that threw a rock at the hornet’s nest (though perhaps it was the subsequent stream of argumentation from Enns and others), evangelicals once again have the opportunity to engage fruitful debate that will bring them toward a God-glorifying view of Scripture in the present context. But at least two initial factors hinder this progress.

1.2. The Inerrancy Debate’s Need for Clarity

In this debate, rhetoric seems unending, and half-baked understandings of one’s interlocutors abound. An example is the reading of select theologians and exegetes in church history, a case-in-point being Calvin.³⁰ Another example concerns readings of Warfield, often mistakenly identified as having invented the doctrine of “inerrancy of the original autographs,”³¹ an idea that many find illogical and meaningless.³² But though oft-quoted, one is hard-pressed to find someone who understands Warfield’s

²⁶ ICBI’s stated purpose was “to define, defend, and apply the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an essential element of the authority of Scripture and a necessary ingredient for the health of the church of Christ in an attempt to win the church back to this historic position” (Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, ix).

²⁷ Erickson notes the “close ties” ETS has with ICBI (“Biblical Inerrancy,” 393). Note that CSBI is published in *JETS* 21 (1978): 289–96, and ICBI’s Statement on Hermeneutics is published in *JETS* 25 (1982): 397–401.

²⁸ Criteria for a debate’s “wave” seem to include at least four inextricable features: (1) a standing position is challenged; (2) multiple people from various positions are engaged in the conversation at once; (3) a large amount of publication on the topic commences; and (4) at least someone leaves or is dismissed from an institution or organization over the issue.

²⁹ Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism*, 4.

³⁰ John Goldingay cites J. I. Packer for holding Calvin as regarding Gen 1 as “theologically instructive without being scientifically true” (*Models for Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 271). But Packer did not observe this distinction between theology and science. He saw Calvin as defending Moses for speaking about things “as they appear rather than in scientific terms” (“John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture,” in *Inerrancy and the Church* [ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody, 1984], 180). While some who affirm Calvin’s “ill-advised” views on certain passages deem him to believe that “the Holy Spirit . . . was not always meticulously precise on such matters” (John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* [1960; repr., Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1979], 30–31), Calvin saw Moses writing in a “popular style,” for “common usage,” leaving “no reason why the janglers should deride the unskilfulness of Moses . . .; for he does not call us up into heaven, he only proposes things which lie before our eyes” (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* [trans. John King; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.], 1:86–87). Packer understood that Calvin saw God in some cases “evidently not concerned to speak with a kind of degree or accuracy that goes beyond what those forms of speech would naturally convey” (179). Cf. also the reading of Calvin from Kenton L. Sparks for a misunderstanding of similar proportion to Goldingay (*God’s Words in Human Words* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 232–36).

³¹ Ronald F. Satta, “The Case of Professor Charles A. Briggs: Inerrancy Affirmed,” *TrinJ* 26 (2005): 86.

³² Cf. Olson, “Why Inerrancy Doesn’t Matter”; Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 59–61; McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 109–12, 163, 211; and Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 157, 173. Cf. also William J. Abraham who guesses it was the “half-hearted” acceptance of historical criticism that “led to abandoning of the term ‘dictation’ and the emphasis on the original autographs” (*The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1981], 29). But this is not the case, for while Hodge and Warfield’s 1881 article accepted the Holy Spirit’s “superintendence” over the “process” of Scripture’s genesis, they still allowed that “some of the prophetic parts were verbally dictated.”

views here on his own terms, which assert inerrancy for the autographic *text*, not the *codex*.³³ Others have given unfair interpretations of opposing views, unwilling to recognize others' positions on their own terms and instead illegitimately reading into their views more than what they have explicitly stated.³⁴

The debate's terms also cause difficulty, creating the challenge of determining when a term refers to a particular concept in the debate's vast context.³⁵ When each does what is right in his own definitional eyes, ambiguity abounds.³⁶ An example of this is E. J. Young's and Packer's desires to nuance "inerrancy" and "infallibility" while Lindsell wished to swallow them back into one sweeping definition.³⁷ In the present context, there seems to be little consensus that each understands the other's positions. The recent example here is the Enns/Beale debate(s), with a running total of six articles and two books in three years covering much of the same issue. Before any forward progress can take place, some consensus on terms must be located. Along with this, a serious attempt at a comprehensive understanding of the history of this debate (without bowing to the often-sought question, "Did *they* take *our* view?"), replete with all the arguments set forth, needs to be made and is due to the evangelical community. The debate's scope is massive and its materials nearly incalculable. The three waves are not statically linear either, as the climaxes might lead one to think, since even the non-eruptive times had evangelicals still working with and aiming toward a high view of Scripture. But clarity is not all that is needed.

1.3. The Inerrancy Debate's Need for Charity

Much can be learned from Orr and Warfield a century ago. While their views differed, their deep regard for one another did not wane, as seen by Orr contributing to *The Fundamentals* and Warfield contributing the well-known article on "Inspiration" to the *ISBE*, over which Orr served as general editor.³⁸ Henry's wisdom from a generation ago is also outstanding. For while he ardently defended inerrancy on theological grounds, he renounced reactionary approaches and saw "the ongoing campaign to *make* inerrancy the watershed of true evangelicalism as bad politics."³⁹ Learning from these men will

³³ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* (ed. John E. Meeter; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973; repr., 2001), 2:583–84. I have found no quote better than this for so succinctly capturing Warfield's position: "[W]e affirm that we have the autographic text; and not only we but all men may see it if they will; and that God has not permitted the Bible to become so hopelessly corrupt that its restoration to its original text is impossible. As a matter of fact, the great body of the Bible is, in its autographical text, in the worst copies of the original texts in circulation; practically the whole of it is in its autographic text in the best texts in circulation; and he who will may today read the autographic text in large stretches of Scripture without legitimate doubt." Mark Noll has adequately recognized the aforementioned position in *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921* (268–74), though he is part of a short list. Cf. also David P. Smith, "B. B. Warfield's Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship" (PhD dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2008).

³⁴ Cf. Achtemeier's reading of Lindsell (*Inspiration and Authority*, 55).

³⁵ Cf. Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith," in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing* (ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 40–41.

³⁶ E.g., Davis, *Debate About the Bible*, 120, who affirms "infallibility" (not *a priori*), noting that some will call this "limited inerrancy," though he does not like the contradictory term. See also Stanley Grenz, who uses a standard inerrancy definition for his description of "infallibility" (*Theology for the Community of God* [repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 398). D. A. Carson also helpfully discusses this in "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 30–31.

³⁷ Thomas Buchan, "Inerrancy as Inheritance?" in *Evangelicals and Scripture* (ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm; Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 44.

³⁸ McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 137, stresses the "vital point" that "Orr did not argue that there *were* errors in Scripture," but that "one could not rule this out as an *a priori* imposition."

³⁹ Gary J. Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 119; cf. also James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought* (2 vols.; 2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 2:404–5.

mean that at various points, one must admit that certain ground in one's position may also at times need to be given up.⁴⁰ Modifications and amendments may need to be made since rigorous thought and serious engagement in understanding, developing, and articulating a Scripture principle is an ongoing task of the church.

Inerrantists are not asking whether the Bible is inerrant. They believe it is, and the answer is not up for grabs unless one is developing a purely bottom-up Scripture principle. In that case, one would not need divine revelation, or anything besides one's logic, and whatever system informs one's view of reality (e.g., Cartesian Realism, Darwinism, or forms of postmodernism). But if the inerrancy view is sustainably the best view, the burden belongs to the inerrantist for gracious, sound argumentation, not only in constructing the doctrine further, but also in dealing with voices that have entered the debate, even challenging the status quo. Recent cases of this will now be considered.

2. Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Debate

This paper has so far sought to establish that the debate about an inerrant Scripture is not held in a vacuum. American evangelicalism has a story, and inerrancy is a major character in that story. At different times, some have tried to write inerrancy out of the story. Others have tried to rewrite its role or the context in which inerrancy's part is played. Looking to the current canvas of the inerrancy debate, this section considers six of the most recent contributions, each participating in the attempted redaction. Revolving around stated or unstated relationships to CSBI, which marks inerrancy's received history in American evangelicalism, two categories give the groupings of these contributions as those either seeking to revise or reinforce the doctrine of inerrancy.

2.1. Revisioning the Debate's Context

The first five works make attempts to establish new frameworks for the debate. Two are from theologians, one is by a young evangelical student, and two are by biblical scholars. A few smaller contributions will also be considered. These efforts do not claim to be a conspired, collaborative effort, but seem genuinely offered in attempt to think carefully through critical aspects of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Full reviews cannot be given here, leaving assessments only to a few germane observations. However, a summary appraisal will be given after all the revisionist treatments are presented.⁴¹

2.1.1. A. T. B. McGowan's Organic Approach or New Infallibility

This work made no small waves among Reformed people on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴² Seeking to

⁴⁰ It seems clear that this is what Warfield and Hodge did. Maintaining a strong commitment to inerrancy *a priori*, at points they did permit concessions to and amendments because of critical scholarship: "[The Scriptures] are written in human languages, whose words, inflections, constructions and idioms bear everywhere indelible traces of error. The record itself furnishes evidence that the writers were in large measure dependent for their knowledge upon sources and methods in themselves fallible, and that their personal knowledge and judgments were in many matters hesitating and defective, or even wrong" ("Tractate on Inspiration" [1881], in *Westminster Doctrine Anent Holy Scripture: Tractates by Profs. A. A. Hodge and Warfield with Notes on Recent Discussions by Rev. Robert Howie* [Edinburgh: Hunter, 1891], 40). This simple acknowledgement allowed them to refine their understanding and articulation of inerrancy even more than they previously had.

⁴¹ Fruitful study might come from comparisons of these and future proposals for inerrancy with clear statements from CSBI.

⁴² Released in Britain in November 2007 (*The Divine Spiration of Scripture* [Leicester: Apollos]) and in the US in summer 2008.

move away from what he describes as a “somewhat mechanical,” “rationalistic,” inerrantist (“American”) approach, he opts for a “more dynamic (or organic)” (“European alternative”) view of authority that he finds in “infallibility.”⁴³ He prefers to discard the inerrancy debate altogether⁴⁴ and looks to Orr and particularly Bavinck for guidance in developing his “third option.”⁴⁵ While believing that a Scripture principle⁴⁶ cannot be divorced from one’s tradition, McGowan develops a principle of “spiration” and “authenticity,” situating Scripture “in the context of the knowledge of God that comes by revelation through the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷ He asserts that this approach not only lends to preaching, but adequately recognizes the genuine “humanness” of Scripture’s authors, to which McGowan opines that inerrantists pay mere “lip service.”⁴⁸

Aspects of this work are commendable. A bottom-up principle that gives adequate weight to Scripture’s top-down aspect is helpful, as is his fresh reading of Bavinck.⁴⁹ However, his desire to read early theologians into today’s context is misplaced at times (and vice versa).⁵⁰ He indicts inerrantists for binding God to a certain mode of revelation,⁵¹ but cannot avoid self-indictment when speaking of what God “is able” to do with Scripture because of certain preconditions.⁵² McGowan’s organic view of Scripture has at least two significant problems. First, it does not distinguish Scripture’s substance from its end.⁵³ Second, whatever presence from God that was specially lent to *the writing* of Scripture as God’s revelation, distinction should be made between *it* and God’s presence lent to the acts of reading, interpreting, preaching, and applying the Bible.⁵⁴ McGowan’s liquid view of Scripture does not allow for this characteristic in the Spirit’s activity.

⁴³ McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 48–49.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁶ By the term “Scripture principle,” this article means “a doctrine of Scripture” or “a component of a doctrine of Scripture.” Cf. its common usage by theologians as diverse as Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (1976; repr., Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 4:386, 390; 5:178; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–98), 1:26, 28, 32, 33, 42, 46, 119, 125; Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Allen, *The Scripture Principle* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); and Karl Barth, “Scripture Principle,” in *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:201–26.

⁴⁷ McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 38–43, 164, 25, 29.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 119, 148, 158, 161.

⁴⁹ He gives minuscule regard, however, to Richard Gaffin’s 63-page article “Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy,” *WTJ* 45 (1983): 219–72. Unfortunately, McGowan limits his acknowledgement of Gaffin’s two articles on Kuyper and Bavinck (totaling 103 pp.) from *WTJ* 44 and 45 to merely one general reference (*Divine Authenticity*, 138n60). They were recently republished as *God’s Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008). Editor’s note: see the review of this book by Robert Yarbrough, “The Embattled Bible: Four More Books,” *Them* 34 (2009): 10–14.

⁵⁰ See the peculiar reference made to James Orr’s comments on inerrancy “in light of the much later International Council on Biblical Inerrancy” (McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 135).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 113, 114, 209.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118. What McGowan does here with the Scriptures seems to come very close to a Barthian view, perhaps revealing bigger problems in his treatment of Scripture’s humanity and divinity. See a discussion on this by Telford Work, *Living and Active* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 80–84.

⁵³ McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21. Cp. John Webster, *Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68–106.

2.1.2. Jeffery Oldfield's Nonfoundationalist Approach

This 2007 PhD thesis charts new territory for understanding theological truth while seeking common ground for inerrantists and non-inerrantists to understand biblical authority. With no desire to disprove or dismiss inerrancy, he enters the debate questioning its role as a primary doctrine in the church.⁵⁵ Examining Warfield's and Henry's philosophical bases, he finds their approaches to truth and inerrancy lacking⁵⁶ and argues that presuppositions about revelation and theology's objective, scientific nature bring Henry to a rationalistic view of Scripture that logically deduces an errant text's incompatibility with authority. This, then, according to Oldfield, forces Henry to hold inerrancy rather than authority as his highest Scripture principle.⁵⁷ Oldfield thus cannot accept Henry's definition of truth and authority, which seem to him to be based entirely on the past action of the Spirit.⁵⁸ He prefers something more like a nonfoundationalist structure that, like McGowan's pneumatological emphasis, depends on the Spirit's present work of establishing Scripture's present (not just past) authority and for bringing about God's purposes.⁵⁹

Henry's view of the Spirit's role in the Word of God's reception is more robust than Oldfield shows and could have been represented better. Oldfield does not acknowledge Henry vis-à-vis his detractors (e.g., Loewen and Barth), whom Henry sees making revelation's qualities highly inner and subjective.⁶⁰ This is cause for pause in a hasty dismissal of Henry. For while confronting views like these, he argued for the text's objective authority, similar to that proposed by Grenz and Franke, though they represent a nonfoundationalist or softer way.⁶¹ Oldfield pays little notice to how CSBI emerged as a response to inerrancy's detractors from the previous wave, who advanced arguments that appear to be just as rationalistic and foundationalist as Henry's are said to be. In his own context, Henry's construction should be at least adequate, especially if one recognizes the contextual nature of theological constructs. Henry's weakness, admittedly, is seen when his commitment to inerrancy effectively drifts into becoming his primary principle.⁶² When focusing on any doctrine in debate, it can inadvertently become primary, though it seems preferable to speak of inerrancy as a *distinguishing* aspect of an evangelical Scripture principle rather than *the primary one*. For when one allows inerrancy to be a part (however significant, but still a part) of a Scripture principle in today's theological context, it effectively says most and speaks loudest of one's view of Scripture.

⁵⁵ Oldfield, "The Word Became Text," 225–26.

⁵⁶ Oldfield shows that Henry views truth and propositions synonymously and sets forth a univocal understanding of propositional truth that is verifiable for both believer and unbeliever (ibid., 99, 101).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 166–67.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 223, 230.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 221, 239.

⁶⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4:266–71. Compare also Henry's assertion that the objectively accessible "text," and not the individual's mind, needed to be illumined (4:266), with his later reference to the illumination of "readers and hearers" (4:259). Henry's view of Scripture is much more variegated than has been allowed by some.

⁶¹ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 68. Yet while Grenz's program is said to reject philosophical foundationalism (Warner, 10), it seems to yield only a "chastened" or "soft foundationalism" (Brian S. Harris, "Revisioning Evangelical Theology: An Exploration, Evaluation and Extension of the Theological Method of Stanley J. Grenz" [PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2007], 258).

⁶² Oldfield labors this point ("The Word Became Text," 166–67). He demonstrates that while Henry set out to establish "authority" first, with "inerrancy" being a subordinate doctrine, he logically ends up placing inerrancy at the fulcrum. But for Henry, it is precisely at this point that inerrancy becomes the joint at which inadequate views of Scripture (i.e., inclusion of errors = nonauthoritative) buckle.

2.1.3. Carlos Bovell's Disgruntled Approach

Bovell advocates the need for critical scholarship to inform evangelical philosophy and theology, especially a Scripture principle, and especially for the next generation.⁶³ He desires that critical scholarship and theology talk to each other, while the end result will never be inerrancy. His program intends to develop insight for understanding how the inerrancy doctrine is psychologically damaging and harmful for younger evangelicals' spirituality.⁶⁴ He asserts that if inerrancy is not plain wrong, it is "not for everyone today"⁶⁵ and definitely not for him.

While there might be some virtue in the desire for a contextual theology seeking "new evangelical dogmas of Scripture,"⁶⁶ this book's other merits are hard to find. Although various parts may stand alone (papers and articles spanning three years), the book's form and structure are highly-disjointed, leaving very poor argumentation.⁶⁷ In the general summaries throughout, he claims to have an objective desire to "nudge readers to respond" in one way or another,⁶⁸ though he clearly wishes to influence them away from inerrancy. But while he does this, he provides no alternatives for them beyond a footless polemic against evangelical teachers, scholars, and inerrancy.⁶⁹ Accordingly, he leaves readers in the same position he claims inerrancy left him. His interaction with nonevangelicals is good and substantial, but he never permits evangelical scholars to answer his concerns. Although his view of an evangelical is inseparably linked to CSBI,⁷⁰ he shows no real knowledge of the document or its contemporary relevance within the evangelical community. He is therefore too sweepingly dismissive and not as sensitively constructive and thoughtfully creative as he purports to be. He paints evangelicals as unwilling to recognize problems with doctrines like inerrancy, but this simply does not represent reality.⁷¹

⁶³ Bovell later contradicts this (*Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals*, 29–31), asserting that older believing evangelical scholars must "disabuse" younger evangelicals in ways that openly acknowledge the "lurking incompatibilities that beset academic study within the context of religious allegiance." Elsewhere he even disallows any role for believing scholarship (39).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 12. By "younger evangelicals," he means those from teenage years to around thirty, before having a "more or less enduring sense of identity" to cling to for the rest of their lives (6). Cf. also the connection he makes to the theory of inerrancy's negative effects on E. J. Carnell as advanced in Rudolph Nelson, *The Making and Unmaking of an Evangelical Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. 203–6 (*Inerrancy and Spiritual Formation*, vii–viii, 8).

⁶⁵ *Inerrancy and Spiritual Formation*, 154.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

⁶⁷ In the introduction, he doubts his own arguments for the position he takes, but nevertheless hopes that his presentation will cause some to consider the "possibility" of his position (*ibid.*, 12).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁹ While decrying the incarnational analogy for Scripture's composition, he recognizes that "the million dollar question" is how the Bible can be both divine and human (*ibid.*, 80). As far as a "constructive, theoretical work" that will give suggestions for a positive scripture principle after they have distanced themselves from inerrancy, readers will simply have to await the follow-up work Bovell hopes to write (*ibid.*, 162). Whatever proposal he offers will be guaranteed not to have inerrancy as an option.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15n1, references the evangelicals to which he refers—those aligned with ETS/EPB, both of whose members must affirm the ETS doctrinal basis.

⁷¹ Cf., e.g., Michael A. Grisanti's illuminating article, "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and The OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," *JETS* 44 (2001): 577–98, which reckons with problems while maintaining inerrancy. Interestingly, Bovell allows the similar position of "entelechy" (*Inerrancy and Spiritual Formation*, 144), though of course without inerrancy, which Grisanti holds.

2.1.4. Craig Allert's Canonical-Critical Approach

In his book, Allert seeks to reframe the inerrancy debate through exploring “how a historical understanding of the formation of the [NT] canon should inform an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.” He takes this understanding and seeks to locate its “implications for the way evangelicals have understood the nature and function of the Bible in our own traditions.”⁷² After surveying American evangelicalism, with its “defensive posture,” he notes the impact of “traditionalism”⁷³ and then argues that the way evangelicals understand the reception of inspired texts and canonicity is “anachronistic,” ultimately leading to an inerrantist view that does more bad than good, as in the case of the pressure on Robert Gundry to resign from ETS in 1983. Before coming back to inerrancy, he labors through an understanding of canon that sees “the indispensability of the [institution of] the church,” which he claims gave birth to the Scripture as the “embodiment of the canonical tradition of the church.”⁷⁴

Evangelicals can certainly benefit by informing their Scripture principle with canon formation, moving away from an occasional traditionalism,⁷⁵ but Allert's base here is faulty, claiming that after *The Fundamentals*, evangelicals lost a theological framework.⁷⁶ In this case he entirely misrepresents evangelicalism, since one can be assured that major evangelical leaders lost no framework whatsoever inasmuch as Warfield remained a Calvinist and Torrey a dispensationalist. Here and in his canonical views, Allert is as guilty as he claims his opponents are of “anachronism” and of imposing a “twenty-first-century perspective” onto the issues.⁷⁷ This is further seen in his view that biblical data are “surprisingly vague” on a theory of inspiration. By saying this he anachronistically assumes that the biblical writers gave technical precision by today's standards.⁷⁸ Allert also offers conjectural arguments derived from silence and from a pre-commitment to late canonical formation. As a Protestant, he admits to having no fixed canon⁷⁹ and sees it as open and “fluid” into the fourth and fifth centuries, though Allert fails to note that the inspired text was not open to change.⁸⁰ Although some fathers also may have viewed noncanonical books as “scripture,” they were not deemed to be θεόπνευστος in the same manner as γραφή in 2 Tim 3:16.⁸¹ Unfortunately, in Allert's view there is no room for canonical books to be “self-authenticating” or for the canon to be “self-establishing,” which are inseparable for an evangelical view of Scripture. Allert will not allow God's Word to demonstrate itself as such.⁸² His view of Scripture, therefore, is far too low.

⁷² Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* 12, 144.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30, 35.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 78, 82.

⁷⁵ A point also made by David G. Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 299–360.

⁷⁶ Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* 30.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 65, 70.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 174n1. See an alternate position by Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” 358.

⁸⁰ Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon* (3d ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 54.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 171–72. Compare Allert's attempt to locate three examples to the contrary from the fourth and fifth centuries (64–65), though none of the three passages use the term γραφή as the subject, nor the modifier πᾶς. If the fathers did not say that “all scripture” maintained the “God-breathed” property, then these examples do not entirely support Allert's view. Of further interest is that in 2 Tim 3:16 θεόπνευστος is in the nominative case, whereas Allert's examples are either in the genitive or accusative cases.

⁸² Cf. Charles E. Hill, “The Canon of the New Testament,” in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2580–81. Witherington also observes, “because these books are a revelation from God and were recognized to be the word of God written, they reflect a natural and not an artificial unity” (*The Living Word of God*, 119).

2.1.5. Kenton Sparks's Postmodern Historical-Critical Approach

This book is the latest work seeking to reframe the debate. Broad in scholarly engagement, it is written by a self-identified evangelical for a scholarly evangelical audience. Sparks makes a case for believing historical-criticism that will benefit the church, giving her a “biblically informed worldview.”⁸³ With strong aversion to “Cartesian” philosophies, Sparks moves to integrate faith and criticism, which, he asserts, offers the best in Christian scholarship.⁸⁴ He notes advances in critical scholarship that will aid the study of the Bible through the academic expertise of intellectually gifted scholars.⁸⁵ Considering postmodern epistemology, he identifies himself as a “practical realist,”⁸⁶ opining an appropriate definition of historical-criticism as “reading texts contextually.”⁸⁷ He then makes a case for the orthodox view of God’s inerrancy and that “God does not err in Scripture,” while yet paradoxically maintaining errors in the Bible attributed to the human authors.⁸⁸

Serving in the broad academic arena is good for evangelicals, breeding rigorous scholarship in demanding contexts. But one wonders if Sparks is really willing to be tested there. Specifically, the question begging to be posed to historical critics who adopt serious engagement with postmodern epistemology is whether their discipline can be performed with any confident relevancy at all. Can one rely on critical scholarship while still seeking to be dislodged from constraints by modernism? Does a postmodern or nonfoundational historical-criticism really exist? Or is “reading texts contextually” from a tamed practical realism (with little criteria to determine this and no description of how this might work) simply unrealistic? Further, with the seeming absence of little if any argumentation from recent critical scholarship, this book could have easily been written ten years ago.⁸⁹ What if historical criticism becomes passé as a modern, rationalistic, Cartesian edifice built by nineteenth- and twentieth-century German scholarship? Does Sparks have a backup plan?

At the end of the book, Sparks tries to synthesize criticism with theology.⁹⁰ Here it seems that theology is the only means by which any sort of critical methodology might be redeemed for biblical studies.⁹¹ He observes that not all criticism is healthy and helpful, referring elsewhere to that which

⁸³ Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 18–20, 328, 356.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 49, 52, 170, 183, 366, 373.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 58, 70.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 42–44, 263.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 139, 227. Compare Goldingay’s similar position that the Bible is “adequately factual” but not “inerrantly factual” (*Models of Scripture*, 282–83). See also Work, *Living and Active*, 81, and John Webster, who holds a similar notion that the Bible’s authority “does not lie within itself, any more than the sacraments have inherent effectiveness, but in its testimony to the authority of the one who appoints Scripture as his servant” (“Scripture, Authority of,” in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* [ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 726). This notion would also be allowed by Denis O. Lamoureux, who identifies “incidental statements” in the Bible regarding things such as the cosmology of the universe, to which “biblical inerrancy cannot extend” (“Lessons from the Heavens: On Scripture, Science and Inerrancy,” *The Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 60 [June 2008]: 13).

⁸⁹ This matter could have been improved with more reference than just a footnote to works like Francis Watson, *Text and Truth* (London: T&T Clark, 1997), and Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

⁹⁰ Sparks, *God's Words in Human Words*, 203.

⁹¹ Cf., for example, the proposal by Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

acknowledges Scripture's authority "in word but not in deed."⁹² He employs "accommodation" for understanding differences between divine and human accounts in Scripture,⁹³ though never explaining how to determine which is which or what might decide an accommodation. It seems, frankly, that whenever normal interpretation yields something unexplainable to the reader or some presumed error based on a critical-realist reading of the text, "accommodation" then becomes the "theological explanation for the presence of human errors in Scripture."⁹⁴ So, does a literal hermeneutic guide this process for determination? If so, then in the "inerrant" parts about the "inerrant God" (wherever they may be), does Scripture speak univocally of him, allowing the reader to judge empirically whether God is in error?⁹⁵ If so, problems have shifted from a doctrine of Scripture to epistemology, theology proper, and doctrines of man and sin.

One wonders what a "practical realist" reading of Scripture looks like for Sparks, and what criterion might exist for determining where an error is not. A better position seems to be, rejecting any docetic notions, that Scripture is both human and divine; where one ends and the other begins is impossible to know, for they are inseparable. Had these matters been clearer in Sparks's work, he might have had more to contribute to the inerrancy discussion.

2.1.6. Other Contributions

Other recent noteworthy contributions remain for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, each wanting to see the debate reframed. Roger Olson rejects inerrancy as the best word to determine one's views of Scripture,⁹⁶ though he does not suggest how American evangelicals should get past the term's indelible history.⁹⁷ Witherington suggests moving past the terms "infallible" and "inerrant."⁹⁸ Steve Holmes has set forth principles for an evangelical view of Scripture in a transatlantic perspective, perhaps even maintaining inerrancy in a more functionally sustainable role.⁹⁹ Peter Enns continues to

⁹² Sparks, *God's Words in Human Words*, 23, 356. Sparks does not seem to apply this throughout his program in any practical way. Cf., however, his historical-critical comment about conjectures of NT authors viewing extracanonical works as "inspired Scripture" (125–26). Yet he gives no room for what he calls "speculative" harmonizations of scholars like Blomberg (164). Still, whatever bearing these historical-critical observations and others may have on one's ethics (i.e., contra whatever is "in word but not in deed") escapes this author.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 202–3, 230.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁹⁶ "Why Inerrancy Doesn't Matter."

⁹⁷ One might, however, posit synthesizing the "inerrancy" and "trustworthiness" schools, as I. Howard Marshall seemed sympathetic to a generation ago (*Biblical Inspiration* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982], 71), reflecting an earlier time in evangelical history.

⁹⁸ Cf. Michael F. Bird's interview, "Ben Witherington on Scripture" (September 15, 2007; available at <http://euangelizomai.blogspot.com/2007/09/ben-witherington-on-scripture.html> [accessed November 12, 2008]), in which Witherington asserts, "The terms inerrant and infallible are modern ways of attempting to make clear that the Bible tells the truth about whatever it intends to teach us about. I much prefer the positive terms truthful and trustworthy. When you start defining something negatively (saying what it is not) then you often die the death of a thousand qualifications, not to mention you have to define what constitutes an error. I am happy to say that the Bible has three main subjects—history, theology, and ethics, and that it tells us the truth about all three." A generation ago, Paul D. Feinberg noted that "truthfulness" was the key concept in the Scripture and the minds of those using "inerrancy," which he deemed as needing a better definition ("The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, 293).

⁹⁹ In "Evangelical Doctrines of Scripture," 63, Holmes suggests five pointed principles for a working description: divine origin, authority, accuracy, clarity, and sufficiency for salvation.

contribute to the debate¹⁰⁰ and may perhaps yet offer more refined attempts to explain inerrancy.¹⁰¹

2.1.7. *Synthesis of Revisionist Approaches*

In summary, the contributions to the debate offered by the above authors are found primarily in their due emphases on the humanness of Scripture, reckoning that evangelical scholarship apparently neglects the matter.¹⁰² That this neglect exists is questionable. Everyone assumes that the biblical documents are written by humans; there is nothing unique about that. What is unique is that inspired canonical Scripture is of divine origin. That is most unusual and what should be emphasized, for the other is so easily observed. The Bible's divine status catches one's attention. Human writing is very ordinary, whereas God's communicating in writing is extraordinary. This is why the Bible and current evangelical theology place emphasis here, not to neglect its humanness (which is not emphasized in the Bible either), but to revel in its status as God-inspired and not merely the words of mortal man. These detractors, however, do raise the need for continued discussion of how the Bible works (from inspiration [in writing] to reception [in reading] to ethics [in application]), including the need to be honest about problems, whether historical, moral, philosophical, theological, or epistemological. Beyond this, they issue a clarion call to consider both canonical and historical critical elements in the formation of an evangelical Scripture principle.

While each of the previous works makes genuine contributions to the debate, they each seem to create more problems than they solve, which seems to be the tenor of the debate's recent wave. Though data from scholarship grows deeper, arguments become more complex, and new discoveries are incorporated into the conversation, how they may integrate into and inform an evangelical doctrine of Scripture is the lingering question. While questions posed, issues raised, and proposals offered should not be minimized, none of the aforementioned contributions crafts an acceptable Scripture principle for American evangelicals. This is mainly because American evangelicals must do more than pay scant or pitiable attention to CSBI. For it seems strange that American evangelicals attempting to reframe the debate often misunderstand the very heritage from which they come. And when engaging a Scripture principle, they have little or no knowledge of the history of this debate in American evangelicalism and therefore make no reference to CSBI. But a discussion about inerrancy cannot be held without acknowledging and relating to CSBI somehow.¹⁰³ Moreover, CSBI must be part of the ongoing conversation (as displayed by ETS and Greg Beale's efforts) since it is a major part of the previous wave of the debate.

2.2. Reinforcing the Debate's Context: *Greg Beale's Inerrantist Reconstructive Approach*

While significant critique can be offered of Greg Beale's *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism*,

¹⁰⁰ Cf. the more "responsive" rather than "constructive" recent articles: "Response to G. K. Beale's Review of *Inspiration and Incarnation*," *JETS* 49 (2006): 313–26; and "Response to Professor Greg Beale," *Them* 32 (2007): 5–13.

¹⁰¹ Among Enns's recent work was a Student Fellowship at Princeton Theological Seminary initially titled, "The Nature of Biblical Inerrancy" (February 9, 2009). Meanwhile, some of his engagement on a doctrine of inerrancy is available at <http://peterennsonline.com/ii/inerrancy> (accessed November 12, 2008).

¹⁰² Cf. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 65–80, for one recent treatment addressing this concern.

¹⁰³ Cf. Oldfield, "The Word Became Text," 5n2, for a brief discussion on CSBI as the "definitive statement" on inerrancy.

evaluation cannot be made here.¹⁰⁴ The relevant question concerns how the book informs the inerrancy debate. His stated aim is “to focus on a specific debate that bears upon the broad issue of biblical authority that has arisen recently in evangelicalism,”¹⁰⁵ namely, the one with Peter Enns. Beale holds the standard inerrancy view in his interaction with Enns and theological interpretation,¹⁰⁶ both in opposing Enns’s views and offering alternate interpretations of Scripture. He sees no need to present innovative definitions of inerrancy as a Scripture principle but instead simply gives a theological and exegetical treatise that offers only CSBI for his positive course.

The book, however, offers something constructive to the inerrancy discussion. While Beale himself does go beyond CSBI, though only minimally,¹⁰⁷ he simultaneously yields a relatively consistent use of CSBI. Seeking to construct an exegetical theology by theological exegesis, he continually emphasizes the Bible’s authority while adhering to CSBI as his major reference point. Beale’s work makes the first substantial defense of the inerrantist position in perhaps over twenty years. It is a determined, reasonable, theologically-oriented response to current elements in the debate,¹⁰⁸ entering the discussion from a forthright commitment to inerrancy as articulated in CSBI. By this, Beale has skillfully shown that inerrancy provides a platform for confidently resting in Scripture’s authority so that serious exegesis of the inspired text and the resultant theology can be performed in constructive (not de[con]structive) ways. Evangelicals must learn from this step he has taken in a positive direction of offering a chastened reconstruction of inerrancy without replacing or abandoning the Scripture principle that has marked American evangelicalism and ETS for sixty years.

2.3. Summary of the Recent Attempts to Reframe the Debate

Those who easily dismiss the place of CSBI within American evangelicalism are seeking to do theology either in a vacuum¹⁰⁹ or with a presupposition against inerrancy. Recent revisionists reflect little willingness to consider CSBI with any semblance of objective openness; when they do consider it, it appears to be a deeply upsetting matter to them. Though assessments of the first and second waves of the inerrancy debate are becoming more acute, there still seem to be no new positions, and few new arguments on the table.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ See forthcoming reviews by Mark Thompson in *Them*, Peter Enns in *BBR*, and Jason Sexton in *JETS*.

¹⁰⁵ Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Oddly, an underlying assumption seems to be that Beale thinks that he is safe by avoiding “myth” as a description of biblical events, but generates a temple-theology throughout (esp. chaps. 6–7) that seems to function similarly, at least potentially.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 24, where he says CSBI “represents generally my own understanding of what should be considered the evangelical view of the authority of Scripture.” Cf. the note on the “very minor adjustments” that Beale wishes to make concerning *language* in CSBI (267n1, italics mine).

¹⁰⁸ This may be the major strength and weakness of the work. While Beale performs theological interpretation, he ends up presenting not a restated Scripture principle, but theological exegesis that indirectly avoids the debate.

¹⁰⁹ One cannot do this, as the late Stanley J. Grenz made clear in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 95–99.

¹¹⁰ Each proposal already marked the debate’s previous history to one degree or another. This reason makes it a good idea for Beale’s third appendix (281–83), which gives sixteen quotations from Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* that depict his view of Scripture. Students of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture should be aware of connections between recent (and second-wave) attempts to reframe inerrancy and Barth’s views on Scripture. They are strikingly similar at points, which may cause more evangelicals to migrate toward a Barthian view of Scripture, but also might lead them towards a more evangelical one. Two recent works interacting with Barth on this issue are Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority

Challenges from revisionists, however, should be heard, but this should be reciprocal, with all evangelicals willing to recognize problems in their views. Biblical scholars (canonical and historical critics) must be informed by theology (not divorce their discipline from it), and theologians need to interact with a theology of the Spirit's role in the text's origin, development, and contemporary reception.¹¹¹ Inerrantists should interact with pertinent data demarcating distinctly human aspects of Scripture, either in the historical context or in the formation of the canon. Evangelicals of all kinds from both groups need grounding, both theologically and historically. Whether this dialogue can actually occur between the two disciplines (historical criticism and theology) and between divergent evangelical groups remains to be seen. It may come down to whether critical scholars are truly willing to converse with inerrantists, even to the point of considering the integration of aspects of the inerrantist position into their views of Scripture. CSBI should be the starting point for an inerrancy discussion in the present context, and a commitment to it as a significant factor allows evangelicals to interact with recent scholarship while offering new constructions that do not abandon dearly held commitments. Quite positively, these new constructions of inerrancy bring those dearly held commitments to a new conversation that echoes a 150-year-old debate.

3. Some Suggestions on the Way Forward

At this point, with so many claiming to take the Scriptures "seriously,"¹¹² charting the way forward is no easy task. Suggestions here flow from a desire to cultivate dialogue, not solve every problem for inerrancy. What is hoped for is a theologically grounded, astute,¹¹³ and modifiable view of inerrancy that builds upon the current conception of the doctrine with great care. The final section of this paper raises three factors for a move forward. It reconsiders the theological and contextual development of inerrancy's framework, followed by inerrancy's intellectual defensibility. Suggestions are then made for moving beyond CSBI with constructions that do more than "pay lip service" to the faithful, courageous work done a generation ago in CSBI.

and Interpretation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (ed. Sung Wook Chung; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); and Mark D. Thompson, "Witness to the Word: On Barth's Doctrine of Scripture," in *Engaging with Barth* (ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange; Nottingham: Apollos, 2008).

¹¹¹ It seems, however, that observing the Spirit's primary place in Scripture's reception is treating as central something that conservative evangelicals already affirm. I.e., serious exegetes who genuinely wrestle with Scripture's text, meaning, and application intensely depend on the Spirit's active work and presence to illumine and guide. Conservative evangelicals have focused on the inerrancy of the text (perhaps leading to inadvertent exclusion of the Spirit's role [not in practice, but in scholarly discussions]) because of where the battleground is. It becomes purely a contextual, historical, and theological matter focusing on the issue at hand that serves to articulate the Bible's authority. Compare the focus on the text post-1860, and even some of what Carl Henry's agenda focused on in light of inerrancy's detractors. One does not have to adopt a Barthian view of Scripture to speak of the Spirit's present role of bringing Scripture to bear on the reader.

¹¹² This includes evangelicals and non-evangelicals, each considering its own to be the most serious construction available. Compare Daniel Treier's statement about evangelicals taking Scripture's self-testimony seriously ("Scripture and Hermeneutics," 36) with Blomberg, who refers to a collection of non-evangelical scholars who "take the Bible seriously" ("Review of 'Biblical Authority'"). Compare also I. Howard Marshall, who asserts how his position takes certain elements in Scripture "seriously" (*Biblical Inspiration*, 43), with Geisler's alleged threat during the Gundry controversy in 1983 to start a new society that would take inerrancy "seriously" (in Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* 167n9).

¹¹³ This would involve, for example, a conscious awareness of historical-critical issues with sensitivity to canon-formation. This is a significant part of the debate. One cannot accuse others of imposing an outside "code" onto the Bible if the theologians and exegetes accused are aware that external ideas (from modernist philosophy, forms of rationalism, etc.) are available, causing them to steer clear of them.

3.1. Recognizing Inerrancy's Contextual Development

All theology is done in a context. While the contextual, corporate effort of inerrancy's development may be contested¹¹⁴ and unwelcomed by some,¹¹⁵ its present coming of age cannot be denied. But what does this mean for evangelical scholars today?

3.1.1. Corporate Theological Constructs Should be Valued

No evangelical group is an island, and theology neither starts nor stops with any individual or group. As such, evangelicals cannot dismiss the current context in which all three waves of the inerrancy debate occurred nor its reception as an important doctrine. And though the degree of its importance may be debatable, evangelicalism has been deemed a movement marked by “theological *emphases* that are largely determined by context.”¹¹⁶

The inerrancy discussion happened primarily within American evangelicalism over the past 130 years. Those wishing to have an informed Scripture principle must understand arguments therein. While desiring to include those abroad who wish to engage in “some serious transatlantic scholarship”¹¹⁷ on the issue, the British (and European) heritage is not marked by inerrancy as acutely as the American. Therefore limitations and difficulties will be part of the conversation.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, American evangelicals should dialogue with challenges that have been offered by their evangelical counterparts across the Atlantic.¹¹⁹ Indeed, while seeking to locate the debate primarily in the US, how does this bode not just for a transatlantic, but for a global view of Scripture? These questions are beyond the reach of this paper. Currently, in one form or another, inerrancy is held by many in the US,¹²⁰ and a voluminous number of articles and books by reputable scholars have been written in support of the doctrine. While this article is unable to explore unique challenges of inerrancy's incarnation outside the US, the point is largely moot since the debate regarding the nature and essence of inerrancy belongs primarily in the American arena.

The received tradition that American evangelicalism inherited from the inerrancy debate is at least CSBI. Lest some think that inerrancy can be swiftly discarded, it still contains a doctrine adhered to by many if not most evangelicals.¹²¹ Further, CSBI is set forth as the reference point for evangelicals to look to, vis-à-vis ETS, when beginning to wrestle through what is meant when speaking of the Bible's authority. For them, the Bible's authority is reflected through a commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy.

¹¹⁴ Buchan, “Inerrancy as Inheritance?” 53–54.

¹¹⁵ D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 131–51.

¹¹⁶ Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* 33 (italics in original).

¹¹⁷ Acknowledging the plea by McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 214.

¹¹⁸ While McGowan states that “inerrancy” is “rarely used in Europe,” some British scholars are willing to consider a Scripture principle including inerrancy, as McGowan later suggests (*ibid.*, 48, 214). It seems, however, that those holding inerrancy in the UK have major connection to the North American scene.

¹¹⁹ McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 214.

¹²⁰ This includes major denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention, which has not changed its position on inerrancy through two significant revisions of the original 1925 Baptist Faith and Message, and the Evangelical Free Church of America, which recently strengthened their position on inerrancy (cf. Collin Hansen, “It's Not Broke, So Fix It,” July 14, 2008, *Christianity Today*, available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/julyweb-only/129-11.0.html> [accessed February 23, 2009]).

¹²¹ “Many evangelicals,” Randall Balmer observes, “regard biblical inerrancy as one of the touchstones of orthodox theology” (“Inerrancy,” in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 292).

3.1.2. *Will Inerrancy Be Necessary in Fifty Years?*

Inerrancy is relevant for coming generations who want to locate their doctrine of Scripture historically, especially in American evangelicalism. A discussion on defining what doctrinal constructs classify as “time-transcendent” cannot be had here, but suffice it to say that the term has not fallen into disuse, especially in the US, in spite of challenges to its relevancy.¹²² One good reason for this might be that inerrancy was deemed most conducive to the gospel’s advancement as the message that truly saves sinners, who are located in real-time-space present and are looking to a real-time-space Savior whose work in both creation and redemption is not subject to any passing cultural or ideological whims since he stands outside of them.¹²³ Ideologies, philosophies, or systems trying to muzzle it will find the gospel’s rays of divine light bursting through to communicate the message written for all peoples in all generations, completely sufficient for salvation. Here is the significance of a high view of Scripture that affirms the Bible as inspired, inerrant text, which is able to break through all hermeneutical barriers when Spirit-effected and believingly read, since it is the penetrating Word of God.¹²⁴

Forward progress in the inerrancy debate will mean that the American construct and context must be understood. At points, it was a debate held in the context of Scottish-realist philosophy, and at points with language of other theories of truth. Scholars must know what was said, and if one’s position resembles or mimics a previous idea, then one is located in that line and should appropriate that doctrine for the church today where appropriate. A better definition of the doctrine is still in order, as Paul Feinberg stated a generation ago.¹²⁵ If evangelicals believe themselves to be part of a Spirit-led movement, it seems wise to acknowledge God’s work within inerrancy’s development and in CSBI for seeking to pick up the task of an evangelical Scripture principle today.

3.2. Reasserting Inerrancy’s Intellectual Defensibility

3.2.1. *Inerrancy’s Defensibility*

Being forged in the fires of American evangelicalism, the doctrine of inerrancy provides the platform for a gospel-advancing movement and a defensive strategy to ward off invaders.¹²⁶ Each proponent of inerrancy must be understood in context. In the present context, a line (albeit of varying shades) is traced to CSBI, which is an inextricable part of evangelicalism and therefore what evangelicals today have inherited. This means that evangelicals currently attempting to reframe the debate misunderstand the very heritage from which they have derived and developed and from which

¹²² E.g., consider Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), who chooses not to use the term in the book, though stating elsewhere, “it doesn’t follow that the idea is absent” in the book (available at <http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.com/2007/09/kevin-vanhoozer-interview.html> [accessed October 25, 2008]). Compare also the discussion in Carson, “Recent Developments,” 30–31.

¹²³ Recently, a relatively new Christian in a church where I served as “Planting-Pastor” said that when evangelizing someone, an objection to Christianity came from the non-Christian whose purported roadblock to believing the gospel was that there are “errors” in the Bible and therefore it cannot be trusted as from God.

¹²⁴ Cf. Paul Wells, “The Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Reforming or Conforming*, 61, for comments relating to the rich, manifold ways that God speaks.

¹²⁵ “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” 293. Carson, “Recent Developments,” 7, suggests that nobody should comment on the definition of inerrancy without having read Feinberg’s article.

¹²⁶ Each robust articulation of inerrancy from previous waves came about as responses to what believing scholars deemed assaults on the trustworthiness of Scripture.

they are drawing historically and theologically.¹²⁷ But how does inerrancy fare in the marketplace of ideas?

First, inerrancy responds appropriately to historical-criticism and has been described as “modern language responding to historical-critical controversies.”¹²⁸ Developed in nineteenth-century Germany, historical criticism “approached the Bible with [the] presupposition of skepticism” to miracles and to the historical Jesus, “[i]n the name of scientific objectivity.”¹²⁹ It was thus a means of muting divine accounts of Scripture. This, for Christians, posed a threat to faith in Scripture and in Scripture’s God.¹³⁰ Today, historical-criticism and its negative effects seem like a far-removed, academically disastrous ideology whose shelf-life nears extinction.¹³¹ As such it may be a dying field groping for ideas like postmodernism to survive (which only then yields equivocating constructs like the flaccid “practical realism”), while confused on what to do with it.¹³² What about historically-oriented referents and lucid statements Scripture makes about specific historical events about which archaeologists, for example, have garnered clear and ample evidence for today?¹³³ What about the need for some kind of view on essential history?¹³⁴ There are major implications for holding or not holding to the historicity of texts of Scripture that claim to be from God and appear to reflect essential history,¹³⁵ and major repercussions for rejecting other aspects that a doctrine of inerrancy addresses.

Second, inerrancy responds appropriately to postmodernism. At least one evangelical has developed an approach to Scripture that seeks to be sensitive to issues raised by postmodernists.¹³⁶ One is hard-pressed, though, to find a work sensitive to postmodern issues that works directly from and relates consistently to CSBI. Operating from the base of the inerrantist position, however, seems to be

¹²⁷ Cf. Erickson, “Biblical Inerrancy,” 387–89. Cf. also the argument offered by Carl F. H. Henry to show that “the real objection to inerrancy is philosophical and speculative” (“The Bible and the Conscience of Our Age,” *JETS* 25 (1982): 403–4.

¹²⁸ Treier, “Scripture and Hermeneutics,” 39.

¹²⁹ Richard E. Burnett, “Historical Criticism,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 291.

¹³⁰ Compare this to the approach of believing scholarship, which is committed to “the academic study of Scripture within a confessional framework” and therefore also “a commitment to Christian witness in the contemporary world” (I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 12).

¹³¹ Seitz, *Figured Out*, 194–97.

¹³² Examples of this confusion appear in divergent positions where on the one hand Sparks synthesizes postmodernism, historical-criticism, and an evangelical blend of inerrancy while on the other hand William J. Abraham resolutely argues, “We must either abandon critical historical study and honestly admit this or we must abandon the theology of inerrancy” (*Divine Inspiration*, 27–28).

¹³³ Cf. Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 58–62.

¹³⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 225–26.

¹³⁵ Cf. Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 59, 70, 75; and also Witherington, who says, “theology and ethics are grounded and indeed based in real historical events in space and time. A theological approach to the Bible that is not properly historical and incarnational in approach is docetic at best and Gnostic at worst” (*The Living Word of God*, 184 [italics in original]).

¹³⁶ Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation” *JETS* 48 (2005): 89–114, though he states explicitly, “Evangelicals should no more emerge out of postmodernity than modernity” (113). Reviewing Vanhoozer’s recent work, however, Paul Helm comments, “*The Drama of Doctrine* is a post-modern work in a sense in which, were he to be persuaded of the fact, would not please its author” (available at <http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2008/08/analysis-17-unexpected-help.html> [accessed September 8, 2008]).

at least one good way to keep one's doctrine of Scripture from being swallowed by postmodernism.¹³⁷ It is only non-inerrantists who enjoy the free liquidity inherent in postmodernism that allows them to emphasize whatever they want in a doctrine of Scripture.¹³⁸ Some temporarily use empiricism to dismiss inerrancy while inconsistently using it in their other theological formulations and commitments.¹³⁹

Inerrancy also accounts for the humanness and divine inspiration of the Bible. Precisely because the Bible is not only God-breathed but equally human, there is a need to say something about its authority since it has been touched by human hands. Inerrancy is a term that precisely does this, speaking of Scripture's accuracy and inability to be eclipsed by the potential corruptness that would have naturally occurred in Scripture's original writing. This, in turn, informs how evangelicals discuss canonical issues and why certain nuanced descriptions would be attributed to the autographic text. Other views of the Bible besides the evangelical inerrancy description (as embodied in CSBI) seem to loosen their views on one aspect of the Bible's origin when placing emphasis on the other (leaving either humanity to trump divine-inspiration or vice versa).

Inerrancy adequately expresses a significant point of an evangelical Scripture principle. Revisionists have attempted to adjust terms of the inerrancy debate,¹⁴⁰ but this seems like a sure way to breed more confusion. There is much more to be gained in working with the established terms (i.e., inerrancy and infallibility), which have a deep history and need to be understood in previous contexts before being applied in the contemporary context, none of which is conducive to lazy scholarship. Abandoning historic terms is unnecessary, especially when suggested by those having no desire to understand the terms' historical-theological pedigree and contemporary relevancy. In such cases, some other agenda might be taking precedence. These pertinent terms have been used for centuries, although some understanding of their cognate meanings, etymological developments, and definitional gradations will certainly aid in the understanding of the terms. Moreover, this is just the way people talk.¹⁴¹

Finally, "inerrancy" belongs as an ancillary under "authority." While one may be hard-pressed to find an evangelical inerrantist who does not locate inerrancy *under* Scripture's authority,¹⁴² this is

¹³⁷ It does not seem that one has to embrace Vanhoozer's characterization of "exchanging masters" (i.e., moving from postmodernism back to modernism) ("Lost in Interpretation," 113) in order to understand inerrancy's usefulness while working from it to develop a further Scripture principle today.

¹³⁸ E.g., at the outset they may subvert bibliography to theology proper or pneumatology, or generate new paradigms altogether in hopes of facilitating theology, and even a theology of Scripture.

¹³⁹ Cf. Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* 70, and also Sparks, who inconsistently utilizes both postmodernist and modernist forms of historical-criticism. This has also caused uneasiness among some evangelicals (Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation," 114; Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 30–31; Witherington, *The Living Word of God*, 119, 193–94; and Myron B. Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005], 30).

¹⁴⁰ Olson, "Why Inerrancy Doesn't Matter"; Witherington, "Ben Witherington on Scripture," available at <http://euan-gelizomai.blogspot.com/2007/09/ben-witherington-on-scripture.html>; McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 38–49.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Kevin Vanhoozer's comments in the question and answer session at the 2008 Wheaton Theology Conference, April 12, 2008 (cited at <http://thesuburbanchristian.blogspot.com/2008/04/wheaton-theology-conference-kevin.html> [accessed December 9, 2008]). Hsu recounts that Vanhoozer pointed out "that yes, 'inerrancy' was a term used that was particularly meaningful in the various debates of the 1940s and 50s, and that it is still valuable for affirming Scripture by what it negates (just as the word 'infinite' affirms a characteristic by what it negates, that it is 'not finite'). And Vanhoozer said something to the effect of how instead of automatically affirming (or denying) the use of the word 'inerrancy,' it's usually better to find out what people mean (or don't mean) by it first."

¹⁴² To list a few examples, Beale recently spoke of the Bible's "inerrant authority" (220), as did Craig Blaising during the Doctrinal Basis Discussion representing the ETS Executive Committee (60th Annual Meeting of ETS, November 19, 2008). Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), gives four characteristics of Scripture (authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency); while giving "inerrancy" its own chapter, he does not deem it as a characteristic, placing it under "authority."

not usually the practical outworking of inerrancy's articulation. Inerrancy often ends up becoming the fulcrum of any discussion on an evangelical Scripture principle, which is a reminder of the practical nature of theology: what is emphasized becomes what really matters, however inadvertent, and thus what gets published, discussed, and shapes theology for good or ill. Care must be taken then on the matter of inerrancy's subordinate, supportive, and complementary role to authority. While being the tension point in a contemporary doctrine of Scripture, inerrancy is a construction that was intended to serve the Bible's authority for the church and the world. This needs to be recovered explicitly. If inerrancy does not serve the Bible's authority, it runs the risk of becoming a useless doctrine in the life of the church with little relevancy. Yet if inerrancy is established, there seems to remain little quibbling with the Bible's authority.

3.2.2. *Inerrancy's Intellectual Sustainability*

Searching for precise wording is a constant pursuit in theology. Precision in articulation is the least that can be done when it comes to speaking about doctrinal truths, especially when seeking to lay them before God's people for their edification. It should be acceptable to have a theologically-driven, developed and developing, presupposed, driving view of Scripture.¹⁴³ For this is one of the quests of evangelical scholarship that is committed to academic study of the Bible within a confessionally Christian framework.¹⁴⁴

But how does one go about this? How might inerrancy stand up in the academy as part of a doctrine of Scripture? It is not without problems yet is seemingly the best view, both within the academy and without. Inerrancy is best posed to deal with conflicting views of Scripture. For example, if Barthian components are being employed,¹⁴⁵ then engaging these various points provides a base for healthy, coherent dialogue. Evangelicals also need to expand thinking and writing about how Scripture does not merely witness to God's self-disclosure, but *is* his own self-interpreted, economically oriented, *pro nobis*, verbal extension of his own mind and heart.

Inerrancy has stood the test of time. While one should not minimize difficulties that have arisen because it was misunderstood, misrepresented, or misapplied, it is a good doctrine that says much about a high view of Scripture. It upholds the gospel, affirming that God really worked *then* in Scripture and is working now in the contemporary context, which leads to a final consideration for the way forward.

3.3. Reestablishing Inerrancy's Extensibility

While noticeable divergences of opinion exist on the nature of inerrancy and how the doctrine is defined, the nuances are nothing new,¹⁴⁶ though they seem to be found in increasing variety.¹⁴⁷ What is hopeful, however, is that evangelicals from a broad spectrum are engaged at different levels in a renewed

143 Cf. Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation*, 136, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Introduction" in *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 19–25.

144 Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 12.

145 E.g., cf. dependence on Barth by evangelicals such as Oldfield, "The Word Became Text," 176–94, and McGowan, *Divine Authenticity*, 155–56, who distances himself from neo-orthodoxy elsewhere (29). Cf. comments by Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 20, 24, 281–83.

146 As evidenced in Clark Pinnock's early essay, "Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative," in *God's Inerrant Word* (ed. John Warwick Montgomery; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), 143–58.

147 Cf. Erickson's seven conceptions of inerrancy (*Christian Theology*, 248–50) and David S. Dockery's nine variations ("Variations on Inerrancy," *SBC Today* [May 1986]: 10–11).

discussion of inerrancy, which should alert one to the practical nature of this doctrine's helpfulness in cultivating dialogue about a Scripture principle. With CSBI as a referential starting point, something close to the robust Isaianic view of Scripture (Isa 66:2) seems to be indelibly in the warp and woof of an evangelical Scripture principle, where humility, contrition, and trembling mark those who come to God's Word. Consider the tone and the open invitation to dialogue, expansion, and furtherance of understanding the inerrancy principle as expressed by CSBI's preface:

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.¹⁴⁸

It is rarely observed, unfortunately, that evangelicals who framed CSBI were epistemologically humble in that while they passionately upheld inerrancy, they recognized that their doctrine of inerrancy was not inerrant. Therefore, as an evangelical doctrine of Scripture is still in progress, so also is the structure and articulation of the doctrine of inerrancy, with a variety of features taking place on how to engage and express this doctrine in light of other fields of integrative thought.¹⁴⁹

3.3.1. *Debunking Fallacies*

At this point, some fallacies should be debunked.

1. The above statement shows that CSBI was not a creed or an indefinitely fixed reference point. So it may phase off the scene or be replaced by something better, which one could hope for.¹⁵⁰

2. The pressing issue at hand is still a high view of Scripture, which may be difficult to maintain alongside an increasing desire for academic dialogue partners about the nature of Scripture. But inerrancy should be upheld by those serious about the Bible.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Beale, *Erosion of Inerrancy*, 269.

¹⁴⁹ Buchan, "Inerrancy as Inheritance?" 54. Here might be where those in Britain and other places can helpfully contribute to the understanding of an evangelical Scripture principle, while also finding relevancy in an inerrancy concept that provides credence to Scripture's authority. For an upcoming two-volume collaborative attempt at something like this, see D. A. Carson, ed., *The Scripture Project: The Bible and Biblical Authority in the New Millennium* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

¹⁵⁰ Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* 160–63, stresses that CSBI is bent on imprecision. This has been neither the case nor the consensus within US evangelicalism. Some confusion may exist, however, either from seeming internal inconsistency or even from its layout in four components: Preface; A Short Statement; Affirmations and Denials; and Exposition. It should also be noted that the desire to have CSBI replaced by something better maintains it as a touchstone for now. But if inerrancy is focused on (as an apologetic facet) to the exclusion of authority, clarity, sufficiency, the doctrine of inerrancy may be doing a disservice—it was intended to support Scripture's "authority." One who affirms inerrancy should then be open to an extension of its articulation, as stated in CSBI (which CSBI also calls for—as stated explicitly in the CSBI "Preface"), that might be yet more biblical and continue to serve the church's understanding of the authority of Scripture in the present generation and coming ones. Consistent with Packer's reception of CSBI (*Beyond the Battle*, 48), the document has a shelf-life.

3. The inerrancy debate is not about a “term” but what is meant by a term.¹⁵¹

4. The “death of a thousand qualifications” that inerrancy is purported to have died is an erroneous characterization.¹⁵² Qualifications describe theology, which is always provisional, fragmentary, and tainted because it is human.¹⁵³ There is a better way forward for an evangelical Scripture principle. It simply needs a better description in the present context that will fervently summon the reading, preaching, hearing, and obeying of Scripture. Inerrancy is a helpful and integral part of this,¹⁵⁴ for it lends to a robust interpretation of Scripture as God’s Word, which was completely true when written and is true today. It additionally supports the Bible’s application in Christian communities and in people’s lives.

3.3.2. Other Factors for Extending a Scripture Principle

Other factors also come into play for a further extension of a Scripture principle.

1. Should there be parameters for structuring future views of inerrancy? How will these be determined?

2. How will unbelieving scholarship build up the believing church? Can those who cannot say “Jesus is Lord” tell those who can what the Bible says and define the nature of its content? Do these scholarly options set the tone for debate to be had in evangelicalism?

3. Is there still a place for the Bible’s self-authentication?¹⁵⁵

4. How can evangelicals learn from recent non-evangelical contributions? Could a comparative-style dialogue through history and with various disciplines aid the understanding of a distinctly evangelical doctrine of Scripture?¹⁵⁶ Could the very natural untheorized approach for understanding the Bible’s practical authority in individual lives bring suggestions for understanding practical dimensions of the Bible’s authority in evangelicals’ lives as well?¹⁵⁷

4. Conclusion

In attempting to answer the title question, this paper has examined how far evangelicals have gone from CSBI’s understanding of inerrancy and argued that the current discussion should relate to CSBI with more attentiveness than recent efforts have but should also search for ways to extend beyond it. A major point underlying this paper is that the doctrine of inerrancy seems to be here to stay for evangelicals. It recognizes the strong Scripture principle that has been a part of the particular life and history of evangelicalism, and it contributes effectively to the articulation of the Bible’s authority in the current context.

The Bible is God’s Word. As such, the church must look for ways to hold it and its message out as God’s

¹⁵¹ Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, 71.

¹⁵² Cf. “Ben Witherington on Scripture” (available at <http://euangelizomai.blogspot.com/2007/09/ben-witherington-on-scripture.html>) for the example of “in the autographs” for inerrancy.

¹⁵³ Grenz, *Revisoning Evangelical Theology*, 82; Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 126.

¹⁵⁴ The day that the inerrancy doctrine will not be needed is the day when someone will not assert “errors in the Bible” as grounds for disbelief in the gospel explicated in the Bible.

¹⁵⁵ Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, 114; Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 111, 141; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 78.

¹⁵⁶ E.g., Holcomb, ed., *Christian Theologies of Scripture*.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. the authors in Brown, ed., *Engaging Biblical Authority* (none of whom holds to inerrancy).

steadfast truth in a time of great error. It is a rock because the God who attributes to it His very own authority is a solid rock in an age where every other ground is sinking sand. The proposal, then, offered in this paper for a constructive approach to an evangelical Scripture principle is submitted humbly yet urgently, looking to the future with great hope while not neglecting the rich heritage that exists in the evangelical view of the Bible's inerrant authority.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ I am very grateful for the helpful interaction of Steve Holmes, Rosalind Hine, Charles Anderson, and an anonymous reviewer, who read and commented on earlier drafts of this article.

Divine Retribution: A Forgotten Doctrine?¹

— Andrew Atherstone —

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The summer of 2007 was the wettest in Britain since records began, registering over twice the usual amount of rainfall between May and July. It led to extreme flooding, the most serious since 1947, affecting hundreds of thousands of people. Thirteen lost their lives—including a man swept away when crossing a road in Sheffield; another drowned when his foot got trapped in a storm drain in Hull; a teenager fell into the River Sheaf; and a father and son were found dead at Tewkesbury rugby club where they had been attempting to pump water out of the premises but had been overcome by fumes. Across the country 48,000 households and nearly 7,300 businesses were flooded, causing billions of pounds of damage. In Yorkshire and Humberside, the Fire and Rescue Service launched what they called the ‘biggest rescue effort in peacetime Britain.’ In Gloucestershire, 350,000 people were left without mains water supply—the most significant loss of essential services since the Second World War. The floods brought with them many other problems, including infestations of rats, mosquitoes and flies, and health problems such as diarrhea and asthma. In farming communities 42,000 hectares of agricultural land was under water; a thousand sheep were killed in Staffordshire; and several thousand chickens drowned in Lincolnshire. To put these events in a global context, during 2007 there were over 200 major floods worldwide, affecting over 180 million people, and leading to 8,000 deaths. But even against that stark reality, in purely economic terms, the floods which devastated Britain were the most costly floods in the world in 2007.¹

Why did it happen? The independent review conducted by Sir Michael Pitt (published in June 2008, with over 500 pages) naturally focused on questions of meteorology, infrastructure, and politics. The unusual amount of rainfall was explained as the result of ‘the position of the Polar Front Jet Stream and high North Atlantic sea surface temperatures.’² The devastation caused by the water, Pitt concluded, was due to poor drainage, insufficient flood defences, and incompetent local authority planning. God is mentioned only once in the entire report, as an expletive, quoting a woman from Hull.³

Nevertheless some observers, notably a handful of Anglican bishops, were willing to offer an alternative commentary on the floods, from a theological perspective. Graham Dow, Bishop of Carlisle, was quoted in the *Sunday Telegraph* as saying that the disaster was caused not just by humanity’s lack of respect for the planet, but was also a divine judgment on British society’s moral decadence:

This is a strong and definite judgment because the world has been arrogant in going its own way. We are reaping the consequences of our moral degradation, as well as

¹ Details from *The Pitt Review: Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods* (June 2008), esp. 3–15.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 156.

the environmental damage that we have caused. . . . We are in serious moral trouble because every type of lifestyle is now regarded as legitimate. . . . Our government has been playing the role of God in saying that people are free to act as they want. . . . The Sexual Orientation Regulations [which came into force in April 2007] are part of a general scene of permissiveness. We are in a situation where we are liable for God's judgment, which is intended to call us to repentance.⁴

Bishop Dow referred not just to sexual immorality, but to the sins of greed and oppression. He suggested that the West was being punished for the way in which it had exploited poorer nations in its pursuit of economic gain: 'It has set up dominant economic structures that are built on greed and that keep other nations in a situation of dependence. The principle of God's judgment on nations that have exploited other nations is all there in the Bible'. He acknowledged that those affected by the flooding were innocent victims, but explained that the problem with 'environmental judgment is that it is indiscriminate'.⁵ Although God was not specifically 'targeting' the places affected, Dow urged that in the face of natural disaster it was wise to pray, 'Lord, have mercy'.⁶ On Radio Cumbria he suggested that sins like sexual permissiveness, violence, occult practices, and disrespect for school teachers had a direct effect upon the fruitfulness of the land. He reiterated:

In the eyes of God our morality and its consequences affect everything. . . . we need to heed the signs and to seek God and his mercy. . . . there is a clear link between rebellion against God, moral collapse, exploitation of others . . . and environmental catastrophe. And what God is looking for is repentance.⁷

Meanwhile James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, focused upon global warming and human abuse of the natural world:

People no longer see natural disasters as an act of God. However, we are now reaping what we have sown. If we live in a profligate way then there are going to be consequences. . . . We have a responsibility in this and God is exposing us to the truth of what we have done.⁸

Unlike Bishop Dow, Bishop Jones was careful not to use the language of 'judgment', but this theological distinction was lost on the newspapers.⁹

Secular journalists had a field-day, pouring scorn on these Anglican dignitaries. Most entertaining was the *Times* columnist, Libby Purves, who proclaimed,

Bishops! Lead them not into temptation, because their verbal trespasses can be hard to forgive. At the weekend, as thousands of families and businesses confronted the filth

⁴ Quoted in Jonathan Wynne-Jones, 'Floods are Judgment on Society, say Bishops', 2 July 2007, available at www.telegraph.co.uk. An abridged version of this report was published in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 July 2007, 1.

⁵ Quoted in *ibid*.

⁶ 'A Statement by the Bishop of Carlisle', 5 July 2007; 'Bishop's Full Statement of his Comments on the Floods', 15 July 2007, available at www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk.

⁷ 'Bishop of Carlisle's Talk on Radio Cumbria', 8 July 2007, available at www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk.

⁸ Quoted in Wynne-Jones, 'Floods are Judgment on Society'.

⁹ Letter from James Jones, *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 July 2007, 26.

and devastation of their homes and livelihoods, and some faced actual bereavement, two mitred misfits spoke out in a way that only the kindest could fail to interpret as smugly opportunist.¹⁰

For Bishop Dow to speak out like this when ‘families of blameless sexuality and, very likely, considerable goodness are being comprehensively stuffed by rogue weather pattern’ was not, said Purves, ‘a tactful remark from a man with dry feet and a palace.’¹¹ Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, spoke of ‘living as if we owned the earth,’¹² but Purves mocked,

A fine motto, suitable for embroidering [*sic*] on any teacloth. But not when you pin it to one miserable, wet, freakish and indiscriminate meteorological disaster. This sort of smug punitive opportunism gets religion a bad, bad name. I was brought up religious, and know that there are plenty of more constructive ways for churchmen to meet disaster than going ‘na na na, God is punishing us, told you so.’ . . . To hijack a natural disaster and harness it to their own political and ethical bandwagon is the last thing good pastors should do. Unfortunately, too often it is the first.¹³

The comments emailed to *Times Online* were less restrained, and Bishop Dow bore the brunt of public anger:

Wouldn’t it be nice if, just for once, these garrulous fossilised clerics dumped their opportunist agenda and identified, on a humane level, with the displaced people who have had their homes and property ruined or families who have lost relatives through these floods. . . . If bishops are truly seeking to make social connections presenting themselves as caring human beings, then pouring guilt over the population at every opportunity is a perverse way of doing it.¹⁴

The fact is, trying to scare people by invoking frankly barmy notions that the weather is ‘out to get us’ on the whim of an angry God, is puerile, facile, and just makes most normal people think he’s a complete nut case.¹⁵

Graham Dow is a deep embarrassment to all sensible, rational, modern-minded Christians. He is mentally stuck in the 14th century: the fact that Christians used to believe in such nonsense, and the fact that the Old Testament is full of nonsense, is no excuse whatever. It does not make him a more authentic Christian, merely a more authentic twerp.¹⁶

One Episcopalian wrote from Arizona to distance himself from the bishop’s ‘garbage’: ‘This is hate, pure

¹⁰ Libby Purves, ‘Our Smug Bishops, Busy Hijacking the Floods,’ *Times*, 4 July 2007, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Quoted in Wynne-Jones, ‘Floods are Judgment on Society’.

¹³ Purves, ‘Our Smug Bishops.’

¹⁴ Posted by Hugh Manitas in response to Ruth Gledhill, ‘Dow, Decadence and the Deluge,’ 3 July 2007, available at www.timescolumns.typepad.com/gledhill.

¹⁵ Posted by J. Pearce, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Posted by Nelson Jones in response to Ruth Gledhill, ‘The Face,’ 3 July 2007, available at www.timesonline.co.uk.

and simple. I'm sorry, but when people in the Anglican church make statements like this, I am deeply embarrassed.¹⁷ Another churchgoer proclaimed in the *Times*,

As a Christian, I am appalled. Has this Bishop not read the Bible from which he purports to spout? In the good book, after the great flood, God promised never again to punish man in this fashion. Sometimes, senior clerics make it harder to be a Christian than it is without their ridiculous statements.¹⁸

Given the fierce public backlash experienced by Bishop Dow and his colleagues, it is no surprise that the theological connection between calamity and judgment is very seldom elucidated by the Church of England's episcopate. It is not considered good 'PR'. Like many other traditional Christian doctrines, it provokes endless derision amongst modern sceptics. Nevertheless, as this paper seeks to illustrate, Dow stands within a long and honourable tradition of evangelical preaching. As will be shown, the doctrine of divine retribution was widely held by the churches in Britain from the early centuries until the very recent past, and has fallen into neglect only since the late-Victorian period. Reaction against such teaching has not been motivated by better biblical exposition or more mature theological reflection, but by a clash with the presuppositions of our contemporary culture.

1. From the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century

Throughout the Middle Ages, from the arrival of the first Roman and Celtic missions to Kent, Scotland and Northumbria in the sixth and seventh centuries, a theology of divine retribution was frequently taught by the Christian churches in Britain. As Antonia Gransden has shown in her magnum opus on English historiography before the Reformation, the doctrine was a dominant feature of medieval chronicles, beginning with Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in the 730s. Bede was the primary model for later works like Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* and Henry of Huntingdon's *History of the English* in the twelfth century, or the *Eulogium Historiarum* (*A Eulogy of Histories*) in the fourteenth century. These chroniclers consistently interpreted calamity, whether sudden death, natural disaster, or military defeat, as a sign of God's wrath and made the link explicit in their didactic historical narratives.¹⁹

Likewise during the theological upheaval of the Reformation and Civil War periods, the doctrine of divine retribution remained alive and well—taught as boldly by Puritans as it had been by their medieval forebears. Alexandra Walsham examines the trends in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in her magisterial study *Providence in Early Modern England* (1999) and concludes, 'No Protestant minister could pass up the opportunity afforded by a major conflagration, blizzard, drought, inundation, or epidemic to deliver a thundering diatribe on the doctrine of divine judgements.'²⁰ Natural disasters were called *flagella dei*, the scourges of God, sent to 'awaken and affright' sinful humanity to repentance. For example, Hugh Roberts, a Welsh clergyman preaching in Sussex in 1598, spoke of the

¹⁷ Posted by Craig, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Letter from Alan Copage, *Times*, 5 July 2007, 18.

¹⁹ See Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c.550—c.1307* (1974; reissued, London: Routledge, 1996) and Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (1982; reissued, London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁰ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 116. The material in these paragraphs relies on her chapter, 'Visible Sermons: Divine Providence and Public Calamities', 116–66.

lessons to be learned from these catastrophes:

everie plague, everie calamitie, sudden death, burning with fire, murther, strange sicknesses, famine, everie flood of waters, ruine of buildings, unseasonable weather: everie one of these and of the like adversities, as oft as they happen in the world, are a sermon of repentance to all that see them, or heare thereof . . . a memento to every one of us to looke to our selves, and to call to remembrance our owne sinns, knowing that it is the same God that will take vengeance of everie sinne, and transgression of men, & that he will strike with a more heavie hand, if his warning, and example of his justice be not regarded.²¹

Disasters were widely interpreted as warning of worse to come and gracious chastisement by a heavenly father, as Walsham explains:

Such gentle strokes and lashes were, in fact, encouraging signs: they indicated that the Almighty had not yet given up hope of reclaiming a village or city from its Babylonian captivity in sin. It was when He ceased to castigate a locality and allowed it to wallow in its own wickedness that the inhabitants should really begin to worry and prepare themselves for the worst.²²

So when a town was ravaged by fire, it was a sign of grace that the Lord had held back from making ‘one general bonfire’ of the entire world. Likewise when East Anglia, London, and Kent were shaken by the ‘Great Earthquake’ of 6 April 1580, it was interpreted as a sign that the Lord was losing his patience. Yet in his mercy he had limited the tremor to less than a minute, ‘so rather shaking [his] rod at us, than smiting us according to oure deserts.’²³ When it came to identifying the specific sins which had brought forth divine retribution, early modern preachers had many from which to choose. When Banbury burned to the ground in the spring of 1628, the people were rebuked for Sabbath-breaking, abuse of the Lord’s Supper, and drunkenness. On other occasions, the correlation between vice and punishment seemed more obvious. For example, one Sunday afternoon in January 1583, a gallery full of bear-baiting fans at Paris Garden on the south bank of the River Thames collapsed, killing eight spectators and leaving another 150 maimed—in what Walsham calls an ‘Elizabethan Hillsborough.’²⁴ Likewise the burning of the Globe and Fortune theatres in 1613 and 1621 led to urgent appeals for actors and audiences to forsake this depraved entertainment. A similar lesson was drawn from a disaster at Witney, near Oxford, in February 1653 when a large crowd was watching a play in an upstairs room at the White Hart Inn. After the second act, the floor suddenly collapsed, killing five and injuring sixty more.

By the early nineteenth century, this theological interpretation of disaster was still going strong, especially (although not exclusively) within evangelical discourse. Historians like Brian Stanley and John Wolffe have shown how late-Hanoverian and early-Victorian preachers consistently interpreted national calamities as divine judgement—whether military disasters like the Crimean War and the

²¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 116.

²² *Ibid.*, 123.

²³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 132.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

Indian Mutiny, premature royal deaths like those of Princess Charlotte and Prince Albert, or plague and famines like the cholera epidemics and the Irish potato famine.²⁵

2. J. C. Ryle

One well-known exemplar of this theology was J.C. Ryle (evangelical vicar of Stradbroke in Suffolk, and first Bishop of Liverpool from 1880). During an outbreak of cholera in 1865, he wrote a tract called *The Hand of the Lord!*, insisting that ‘cholera, like every other pestilence, is a *direct visitation from God*’.²⁶ His title was taken from King David’s exclamation in 2 Sam 24:14 that the sudden death of 70,000 Israelites from plague was due to ‘the hand of the Lord’. Ryle cited several other Old Testament texts which show that God sends plague upon his people because of their sin—Lev 26:25; Num 14:12; Ps 78:50; Jer 24:10; 29:17; Ezek 14:21; Amos 4:10. He proclaimed,

Some men will tell us confidently that cholera arises entirely from second causes. Bad drainage, bad water, want of cleanliness, want of sufficient food—all these are enough in the eyes of these men to explain the present visitation. But unfortunately for these people there was no drainage at all in former days! The streets of our great cities were dirty and unpaved! The water supply was miserably defective! The sanitary condition of the people was in every respect disgracefully bad. Yet in these days there was not cholera. No! it will not do. Second causes, no doubt, may help on cholera when cholera begins. But second causes will not account for its beginning. There is no standing ground for a man on this point, but the simple ground of the Bible. . . . It is the Lord’s hand!²⁷

The primary cause of cholera, according to Ryle, was not bad sanitation but national sins like ‘Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, infidelity, blasphemy, fornication.’²⁸ The disease was sent to awaken the nation to repentance:

It should oblige us to remember that heaps of spiritual and moral filth are just as dangerous to a nation as heaps of material dirt. Oh! that God, by the cholera, may give Englishmen an eye to see and an ear to hear! . . . Once more God is speaking to us by His providence. Once more He is calling on us by His judgments, to repent of our national sins. I trust that He will not call in vain.²⁹

In particular, Ryle called upon his hearers to put their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, so that they would be ready to die and to meet their God.

²⁵ John Wolffe, ‘Judging the Nation: Early Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicals and Divine Retribution’, in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Retribution, Repentance, and Reconciliation* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 291–300; Brian Stanley, ‘Christian Responses to the Indian Mutiny of 1857’, in W.J. Sheils, ed., *The Church and War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 277–89; Richard Janet, ‘Providence, Prayer and Cholera: The English General Fast of 1832’, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51 (September 1982): 297–317; Peter Gray, ‘National Humiliation and the Great Hunger: Fast and Famine in 1847’, *Irish Historical Studies* 32 (November 2000): 193–216; Olive Anderson, ‘The Reactions of Church and Dissent Towards the Crimean War’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1965): 209–20.

²⁶ J.C. Ryle, *‘The Hand of the Lord!’ Being Thoughts on Cholera* (London: William Hunt, 1865), 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

Although the epidemic was heaven-sent, Ryle also offered practical advice on how to avoid contagion:

Insist on the utmost cleanliness in every part of your house from top to bottom. Wage war against bad smells and heaps of dirt, as you would against a poisonous serpent. Complain at once to the parish authorities if nuisances near you are not removed. Be very careful about your own eating and drinking, and the eating and drinking of all the members of your family. Forbid green apples, unripe plums, and cheap stale fish to come within your doors. . . . Have a bottle of simple cholera medicine always in the house.³⁰

This has led some modern readers to accuse Ryle of inconsistency, by the logic that if cholera is God's will then to evade cholera is to evade God's will.³¹ Yet Ryle saw no conflict of interest here. As D. A. Carson comments on the locust plague prophesied by Joel,

We should not adopt the stance of fatalists. If we can stop locusts today (satellites can sometimes spot incipient swarms that are then stopped by trucks with pesticides), then we should do so—in exactly the same way that we should try to stop war, plague, AIDS, famine, and other disasters. But in a theistic world where God is sovereign, we must also hear the summoning judgment of God calling his image-bearers to renounce sin's selfishness and cry to him for mercy.³²

Shortly after the cholera, a terrible cattle plague (the deadly rinderpest virus) swept through Britain, calling forth dozens of sermons and tracts which urged national repentance, such as Edward Harman's *The Cattle Plague: Its Warnings and Its Lessons*, W. W. Clarke's *The Cattle Plague: A Judgment from God for the Sins of the Nation*, Newton Smart's *The Cattle Plague: A Divine Visitation*, and Bishop Samuel Waldegrave's *The Cattle Plague: A Warning Voice to Britain from the King of Nations*.³³ Ryle again contributed a booklet entitled *This is the Finger of God*, taken from Exod 8:19 where the pagan magicians tell Pharaoh that the plague of gnats upon Egypt is 'the finger of God.' Ryle comments, 'Reader, it would be well if all Englishmen were as wise as these Egyptians!'³⁴ To those who asked where the cattle plague originated, Ryle asserted,

I answer unhesitatingly that it comes from God. He who orders all things in heaven and earth—He by whose wise providence everything is directed, and without whom nothing can happen—He it is who has sent this scourge upon us. *It is the finger of God.* . . . I refer any one who asks for proof to the whole tenor of God's Word. I ask him to mark how

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹ Lucy Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain in Late-Nineteenth Century English Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 21.

³² D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Treasures of God's Word* (2 vols, Leicester: IVP, 1998), vol. 2, comment for 9 November.

³³ See Matthew Cragoe, "'The Hand of the Lord is upon the Cattle': Religious Reactions to the Cattle Plague, 1865–67," in Martin Hewitt, ed., *An Age of Equipoise? Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 190–206; Stephen Matthews, 'Explanations for the Outbreak of Cattle Plague in Cheshire in 1865–1866: "Fear the Wrath of the Lord"', *Northern History* 43 (March 2006): 117–35.

³⁴ J.C. Ryle, *This is the Finger of God: Being Thoughts on the 'Cattle Plague'* (London: William Hunt, 1866), 3.

God is always spoken of as the governor and manager of all things here below, from the very least to the greatest. Who sent the flood on the world in the days of Noah? It was God. . . . Who sent the famine in the days of Joseph? It was God. . . . Who sent the plague on Egypt, and specially the murrain on the cattle? It was God. . . . Who sent disease on the Philistines, when the ark was among them? It was God. . . . Who sent the pestilence in the days of David? It was God. . . . Who sent the famine in the days of Elisha? It was God. . . . Who sent the stormy wind and tempest in the days of Jonah? It was God.³⁵

But why had God brought the cattle plague upon Britain? Ryle continued,

I answer that question without hesitation. It has come upon us because of our national sins. God has a controversy with England, because of many things among us which are displeasing in His sight. He would fain awaken us to a sense of our iniquities. This cattle plague is a message from heaven. . . . I believe that this cattle plague is a special national chastisement on England, because of our special national sins.³⁶

In case some doubted that God judges nations, not just individual men and women, Ryle pointed to Old Testament prophecies about Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, Damascus, Moab, Edom, Ammon, and Nineveh. He observed, 'Surely, if a man believes the Bible, these passages should set him thinking. The God of the Bible is still the same. He never changes.'³⁷

Ryle was reticent about identifying the specific sins which had brought God's judgment upon Britain in the 1860s, because he was not an authoritative Old Testament prophet but only a fallible preacher. He admitted, 'I may be quite wrong.' Nevertheless, observing 'the signs of the times,' he pointed to seven specific national sins: covetousness, love of luxury, neglect of the Lord's Day, drunkenness ('We are worse in this respect than either France or Italy'), contempt for sexual purity, toleration of Roman Catholicism, and scepticism ('Nothing, I am thoroughly persuaded, is so offensive to God as to dishonour His written Word').³⁸ The preacher concluded,

I believe firmly that these things are crying to God against England. They are an offence against the King of kings, for which He is punishing us at this very day. And the rod He is using is the cattle plague. *The finger of God*, I believe, is pointing at our seven great national sins. To say that we are not so bad as some nations, and that the sins I have named are far more abundant in other countries than in England, is no argument at all. We have had more privileges than other countries, and therefore God may justly expect more at our hands.

Ryle's booklet has been republished twice in recent decades, in 1967 (by the Banner of Truth Trust) and in 2001, when plague again swept through British cattle in the form of 'foot and mouth' disease. Some again wondered what national sins had hastened the disaster, observing that 1967 was the year abortion was legalized in Britain.

³⁵ Ibid., 4–5.

³⁶ Ibid., 8.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 9–11.

3. *Francis Chavasse*

A similar theological emphasis is consistently found in the sermons of Francis Chavasse, principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Ryle's successor as Bishop of Liverpool from 1900. During his early ministry in the 1870s and 80s, he had an influential preaching ministry among students at St Peter-le-Bailey in Oxford, and notes of over 700 of his sermons survive in the Bodleian Library in twenty-six manuscript volumes.³⁹ These reveal that Chavasse frequently spoke from the pulpit about national disasters.⁴⁰ His sermons include many references to the calamities dominating newspaper headlines. For example, in September 1878, the *Princess Alice* sank on the River Thames with the loss of over 600 lives. Eight days later a massive explosion at the Prince of Wales Colliery at Abercarn in south Wales left 268 men and boys dead. In October 1878, one of Scotland's largest banks, the City of Glasgow Bank, suddenly collapsed, leading to financial ruin for hundreds of families. November 1878 saw the start of the second Anglo-Afghan war, while in December Princess Alice herself, Queen Victoria's second daughter, died of diphtheria at only thirty-five years old. In January 1879 British forces in the Anglo-Zulu war were slaughtered at Isandhlwana by King Cetshwayo's impi warriors. Two years later British soldiers in South Africa were again routed, this time on Mount Majuba by Boer insurgents. Meanwhile the late 1870s and early 1880s brought a fresh wave of violence and murder across Ireland, instigated by Charles Parnell and the Irish National Land League. There was a crisis in British agriculture, compounded by severe weather and a succession of poor harvests. Britain was also in the midst of a widespread economic downturn, known to some modern economists as 'The Long Depression'.

Chavasse understood these events to be the voice of God to the nation. They were divine judgment upon Britain's sins and a warning to repent. At the St Peter's Church harvest celebration in October 1879, after another bad year for the farmers, Chavasse entitled his sermon 'The Voice of Dearth' and declared, 'We have sown much but we have brought in little. There is a close connection between England's sin and sorrow.'⁴¹ On a similar occasion a quarter of a century later, he observed, 'Dearth has its lessons as well as Plenty. A scanty Harvest has a voice from God as well as a year of abundance. God speaks to men by judgments as well as by mercies. May we hear and obey.'⁴² This theme was often reiterated. The lesson was simple: 'National sins lead to national ruin.'⁴³ The preacher proclaimed,

Clouds thick and dark are beginning to mass themselves round our country. . . . God has been smiting England when she deemed herself strongest and most secure, as if to teach her that all her strength and safety lies in Him. . . . Our national *pride* was never greater. . . . We have deemed ourselves secure, all powerful, never to be removed, with great

³⁹ Bodleian Library, MSS Chavasse dep. 45–73. See Andrew Atherstone, "'The Prince of Pastoral Preachers': The Oxford Sermons of Francis Chavasse," in Mark Smith, ed., *British Evangelical Identities Past and Present* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 201–14.

⁴⁰ See in particular, 'Our National Sin' (1878), 'True Patriotism' (1878), MS Chavasse dep. 48; 'National Calamities' (1879), MS Chavasse dep. 49; 'The Voice of Dearth' (1879), MS Chavasse dep. 50; 'England's Mission' (1881), MS Chavasse dep. 55; 'The National Recognition of God' (1887), MS Chavasse dep. 66.

⁴¹ 'The Voice of Dearth' (1879), MS Chavasse dep. 50, fo. 106.

⁴² 'The Call of Dearth' (c.1902), MS Chavasse dep. 69, fo. 49.

⁴³ 'True Patriotism' (1878), MS Chavasse dep. 48, fo. 26.

colonies round us. . . . We have gloried in our own strength and forgotten to give God the glory.⁴⁴

God deals with nations as with individuals. First He calls, then He smites—smites gently at first, but if we will not listen harder and yet harder. And if voice and rod fail, then He leaves us. And the nation that God has left, who can sustain? Its fall is speedy, terrible, irreparable. May England hear, before it be too late.⁴⁵

4. *Scientific Advance and Ethical Revolt*

As this paper has sought to illustrate, the doctrine of divine retribution was widely taught by British Christians for many centuries. However, it began to be eroded from the middle of the nineteenth century—as symbolized by the demise of public days of fasting and humiliation, which had been a regular feature of national life since the Reformation.⁴⁶

In part, this theological shift was the result of scientific advance in disciplines like geology, pathology, and meteorology. Now that the material causes of earthquakes, diseases, and hurricanes were better understood, many ceased to accept spiritual causes. Likewise rapid medical advance reduced human suffering. For example, James Young Simpson, who was largely responsible for popularizing anaesthetic childbirth in the 1840s, laughed at Christian teaching that labour pains were part of God’s curse upon Eve at the Fall. For the first time in human history it was possible for women to give birth pain free, and the spiritual lesson was quickly forgotten.⁴⁷ In the face of medical or military disaster, commentators now began to blame the incompetence of surgeons and generals, while leaving God out of the picture.

Secondly, the doctrine of divine retribution was eroded by what Howard Murphy has called ‘the ethical revolt’ against Christian orthodoxy.⁴⁸ Victorian Britain witnessed a growing repugnance towards concepts like election and reprobation, eternal punishment, vicarious sacrifice, and divine retribution as ‘morally barbarous and a relic of primitive society.’⁴⁹ For example, in October 1853, F. D. Maurice was dismissed from his post at King’s College, London for his notorious *Theological Essays*, which rejected the traditional Christian doctrine of hell and claimed that vicarious atonement ‘outrages the conscience.’⁵⁰ Two years later, Benjamin Jowett’s New Testament commentary denied the idea that Christ’s death was

⁴⁴ ‘National Calamities’ (1879), MS Chavasse dep. 49, fos 145, 147–48.

⁴⁵ ‘The Voice of Dearth’ (1879), MS Chavasse dep. 50, fo. 108.

⁴⁶ See Roland Bartel, ‘The Story of Public Fast Days in England’, *Anglican Theological Review* 37 (July 1955): 190–200; C.J. Kitching, “Prayers Fit for the Time”: Fasting and Prayer in Response to National Crises in the Reign of Elizabeth I, in W.J. Sheils, ed., *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 241–50; Christopher Durston, “For the Better Humiliation of the People”: Public Days of Fasting and Thanksgiving during the English Revolution, *Seventeenth Century* 7 (Autumn 1992): 129–49; Philip Williamson, ‘State Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings: Public Worship in Britain 1830–1879’, *Past and Present* 200 (August 2008): 121–70.

⁴⁷ Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain*, 21.

⁴⁸ Howard R. Murphy, ‘The Ethical Revolt against Christian Orthodoxy in Early Victorian England’, *American Historical Journal* 60 (July 1955): 800–817.

⁴⁹ Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850–1960* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 111.

⁵⁰ F.D. Maurice, *Theological Essays* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1853), 138. See further, Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 76–89.

vicarious sacrifice, denouncing the doctrine as ‘horrible and revolting’ and ‘inconsistent with truth and morality’. He asked, ‘Was it that God was angry, and needed to be propitiated like some heathen deity of old? Such a thought refutes itself by the very indignation which it calls up in the human bosom. . . . God, if He transcend our ideas of morality, can yet never be in any degree contrary to them.’⁵¹ This moral revulsion against traditional Christian orthodoxy was also evident among biblical scholars like Bishop Colenso, who decided that the massacre of Midianites under Moses was non-factual, because it was even more morally reprehensible than the Cawnpore massacre during the Indian Mutiny.⁵² There was a similar reaction against the idea that God in his providence brings death and disaster upon communities as chastisement for their sins. In her study of Victorian attitudes to pain, Lucy Bending observes, ‘For Evangelicals, as indeed for Catholics, the righteous trinity of atonement, eternal damnation, and physical chastisement was unbreakable.’⁵³ These three teachings were interwoven. As many British churches began to abandon the doctrines of hell and penal substitution during the late nineteenth century, so the doctrine of divine retribution vanished as well.

Today divine retribution is a forgotten doctrine. It is hardly ever preached in Britain today, even within evangelical churches. It has fallen by the wayside and been discarded. Yet the question remains—the question which history so often forces us to face—why has it been forgotten, having been readily accepted by Christians for so many centuries? The historical evidence suggests that this teaching has been neglected not because the churches have engaged in more rigorous biblical study than their predecessors, but because it clashes with our modern and post-modern sensibilities and presuppositions.

5. Questions Demanding Attention

Of course, the doctrine of divine retribution presents many vital theological and pastoral questions which we have not begun to explore in this paper. Let us note ten key concerns raised by contemporary theologians (both evangelical and non-evangelical) which demand attention:

1. Would a just God bring such destruction?
2. Are not natural disasters precisely that—‘natural’, not supernatural?
3. Is not God’s wrath held back until the Last Day?
4. Why do the innocent suffer and the guilty so often escape?
5. Are we able to discern which sins God is judging?
6. Is there such a category as ‘communal’ or ‘national’ sin?
7. Is God’s justice remedial or retributive?
8. Is this another brand of the ‘prosperity gospel’?
9. What is the difference between chastisement and punishment?
10. Has not all the punishment deserved by Christians already been borne by Christ on the cross?

The only way to answer these questions is through rigorous biblical exegesis, which space does

⁵¹ See Andrew Atherstone, *Oxford’s Protestant Spy: The Controversial Career of Charles Golightly* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 163–78.

⁵² Peter Hinchliff, *God and History: Aspects of British Theology, 1875–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 29.

⁵³ Bending, *Representation of Bodily Pain*, 21–22.

not allow here. However, it is worth observing how many biblical texts relate directly to the subject. Throughout the Old Testament, the link between sin and calamity is regularly and explicitly emphasised on page after page, as preachers like Ryle and Chavasse were ready to acknowledge. Individuals, families, cities, and nations experience disease, military defeat, flood, famine, plague, exile, and death as a direct result of their rebellion against God.

Divine retribution is also taught within the New Testament, albeit less frequently. For example, after Jesus healed an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda he warned the man, ‘Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you’ (John 5:14). In contrast, on a later occasion, he explained that a beggar’s blindness was *not* due to sin but ‘that the works of God might be displayed in him’ (John 9:3). When some speculated that two local calamities—the massacre of Galileans by Pontius Pilate and the collapse of a tower in Siloam—were God’s judgment on sin, Jesus turned the question around, warning his hearers that they were equally sinful so must repent or they too would perish (Luke 13:1–5). He went on to pronounce judgement upon the whole nation of Israel (Luke 13:6–9). Similarly, Jesus prophesied the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman armies, because the people had rejected the Messiah (Luke 19:41–44; 21:20–24; 23:28–31). Later in the New Testament, the early church witnessed the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5) and of King Herod Agrippa who was struck down by an angel of the Lord because he pretended to be God (Acts 12). Meanwhile, Paul taught the church in Corinth that some had fallen ill and others had died because of their scandalous approach to the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:30). James also seems to link sin and sickness (James 5:14–16). If we are to recover an understanding of divine retribution which is faithful to Scripture, we must wrestle honestly and carefully with these biblical texts, not merely follow our current cultural presuppositions.⁵⁴

6. *A Prophet in Our Time?*

What then are we to make of Bishop Dow of Carlisle’s controversial comments during the calamitous British floods of 2007? Some preliminary conclusions are possible. As has been shown in this essay, he stands in a long and honourable evangelical tradition, courageously proclaiming that a nation which has turned away from the Lord (as shown both by government legislation which promotes immorality and by widespread exploitation, violence, greed, sexual permissiveness, and occultism) stands under divine judgment. Those sins have consequences today as well as on the Last Day. Therefore the bishop is to be applauded for his willingness to speak out. He was right to describe the floods as a wake-up call from heaven, and right to urge self-examination and repentance. He was also right to remind his hearers that the innocent are caught up in calamity and that those who were flooded were no more guilty than the rest of the British population—which is all the more reason that everyone must repent without delay (see Luke 13:1–5).

Bishop Dow was mistaken, however, in two ways. First, his comments lacked theological humility. The Bible encourages a healthy caution in interpreting the cause of disaster. Sometimes it is wrong to connect sin and suffering (see John 9:2–3). Furthermore, the church today lacks authoritative God-inspired prophets and apostles to interpret events for us. Therefore it is impossible to know for certain which sins are being judged. Bishop Ryle was wisely hesitant in his analysis of disaster, making a link with specific national sins but also acknowledging that he might be wrong. Bishop Dow displayed no such reticence or admission of his own fallibility.

⁵⁴ A helpful place to begin is Stephen Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (rev. ed., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

Second, Dow's initial comments were pastorally careless. Ryle always delivered his teaching on this subject as an exhortation to a congregation or an evangelistic booklet, motivated by a desire to promote spiritual change in the lives of his hearers and readers. He eschewed speculation about why calamity had fallen upon other people and instead sought to persuade his audience that they must consider their own lives and repent of their own sins. In contrast, Dow's first pronouncements about the floods were made 'off-the-cuff' to a journalist on the telephone looking for a quick news story. This was bound to lead to controversy rather than to genuine spiritual engagement by readers of the *Sunday Telegraph*. Only later, in a sermon on Radio Cumbria, did the bishop direct his comments to a congregation, urging them to repent and turn back to God. This should have been his first pastoral instinct—to exhort a congregation, rather than to feed lines to a journalist.

Despite Bishop Dow's two mistakes (theological and pastoral), his courageous declarations about the floods of 2007 are nonetheless laudable. Despite the fierce backlash he was likely to provoke, he willingly laid down a challenge to British society, calling for repentance and spiritual reformation. As a Christian leader he sought to bring biblical and theological reflection to bear on a national crisis. While most commentators and politicians focused on mundane questions like rainfall and drainage, Bishop Dow urged the British people to lift their eyes and look to the Lord. In these ways, the bishop is an excellent example, whom other preachers and theologians would do well to imitate.

Calvinism and Missions: The Contested Relationship Revisited

— Kenneth J. Stewart —

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1. Forgotten Judgments of Charity

In the mid-twentieth century, one could readily find informed Protestant observers acknowledging the Calvinist tradition's major missionary contribution. For example, in 1950 N. Carr Sargant, British Methodist missionary to India, explored the subject of "Calvinists, Arminians, and Missions" and maintained that these two expressions of Protestantism had served one another well with each goading the other towards foreign missionary effort. From within his own Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, Sargant wrote,

To praise Arminianism and to reproach Calvinism is the conventional judgement. In respect of missions, however, rigid Calvinism and the warm Arminianism of the Wesleys were in substance the same.¹

Was this verdict simply an example of charity run wild? One would not conclude this upon reading Sargant's patient analysis, for he maintained that the Calvinism of the period of the Great Awakening or Evangelical Revival was merely showing its true colors when it began to pursue foreign mission aggressively. The founding of the broadly Calvinist London Missionary Society (originally simply the "Missionary Society") in 1795 was in fact the linear descendent of a proposal of 1772 made at Trevecca, Wales to send missionaries to pre-revolutionary America's settlers and aboriginals.² For his own Methodist tradition in the eighteenth century, Sargant claimed not the honor of pioneering Protestant foreign mission,³ but of demonstrating a pattern of domestic evangelistic activism that served as

¹N. Carr Sargant, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Missions," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 176 (1951): 340–44. From the same era, note J. Van den Berg, "Calvin's Missionary Message: Some Remarks About the Relation Between Calvinism and Missions," *EvQ* 22 (1950): 174–87; and S. M. Zwemer, "Calvinism and the Missionary Enterprise," *Theology Today* 7 (1950): 206–21.

²Sargant used the Welsh event of 1772 not to mark an utter beginning for English-speaking Protestant foreign mission but to show how natural an expression this was of the spiritual fervor of the era we call the Great Awakening or Evangelical Revival. We shall see below several instances of Protestant missionary effort long before 1772.

³A distinctly Wesleyan missionary society did not arise until 1817. Some examples of Methodist foreign mission predate the erection of a formal Mission Society, notably the efforts of Thomas Coke (1747–1814).

a stimulus to foreign mission by Calvinists.⁴ Moreover, Sargant was candid enough to acknowledge that whereas Calvinist missionaries in the early decades of that era had “gone to the heathen,” his own theological tradition, Methodism, for too long specialized in sending preachers to places in which nominal Christians were abundant and in preaching conversion and holiness to these.⁵

2. A Recent Charge: The Reformed Tradition Has Neglected World Mission and Evangelism

Yet more recently a different version of the story has been spread. Since the time that Sargant wrote, churches standing in the Reformed theological tradition have regularly been suspected of constituting a “weak link” in support for world missions and evangelism. More than anything, Reformed theology’s endorsement of the doctrine of predestination has been singled out as the reason for this, as it has been reckoned by non-Calvinists to provide a kind of respectable subterfuge for lethargy in missions and evangelism. “After all,” Calvinists are alleged to think, “God will see to it that the proper number of elect persons are saved—irrespective of whether we are active as His agents.” This kind of suspicion was certainly in existence in 1959 when theologian J. I. Packer gave the university talks that eventually grew into his little book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. In it, Packer states by way of preface,

The aim of the discourse is to dispel the suspicion (current it seems in some quarters) that faith in the absolute sovereignty of God hinders a full recognition and acceptance of evangelistic responsibility and to show that, on the contrary, only this faith can give Christians the strength that they need to fulfill their evangelistic task.⁶

Something was in the wind. In 1960, William Richey Hogg, a Methodist professor of missions and ecumenics, gave credibility to this kind of suspicion. Surveying Protestant missions since 1517, he argued that from the era of the Synod of Dordt (1619) onward, “an extreme Calvinism . . . prevailed widely and worked effectively to throttle missionary endeavor.”⁷

This kind of second-guessing has now become commonplace. The late William Estep, a reputable Church historian of the Reformation period, called Calvinism “logically anti-missionary.”⁸ He viewed with alarm the late twentieth-century resurgence of Calvinistic views and spoke with apprehensiveness about the likely diminution of missionary concern that would follow if this resurgence went unchecked in his own Baptist churches. Norman Geisler, a widely-published evangelical theologian and apologist, insisted in 1999 that resurgent Calvinist views that he termed “extreme” militated “against enthusiasm

⁴ Carr’s thesis is an interesting one. He believed that the danger (real or imagined) that Calvinism would serve the interests of Antinomianism helped Calvinists focus on the need for missionary activism, an activism that would demonstrate that their beliefs did not result in indolence and indifference.

⁵ Sargant, “Calvinism, Arminianism and Missions,” *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 177 (1952): 51. We will shortly return to the question of Protestant mission in the eighteenth century and earlier. The point being established initially here is simply that twentieth century judgments about Calvinism and mission have been subject to wide variation.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1961), 8.

⁷ William Richey Hogg, “The Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern, 1517–1914,” in *The Theology of Christian Mission* (ed. Gerald H. Anderson; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 101. Hogg was alluding to the robust defense of the doctrine of unconditional election in this Synod in the face of the challenge posed by Arminius and his followers. We will have reason to note below that strong advocates of foreign mission participated in the Synod of Dordt.

⁸ William Estep, “Calvinizing Southern Baptists,” *Texas Baptist Standard*, March 26, 1997.

for missions and evangelism.”⁹ Dave Hunt, an evangelical given to writing exposés, declared in 2002 that men and women holding to world mission “bring the gospel to the world not *because* of their Calvinism, but only *in spite* of it.”¹⁰ In addition to this recent upsurge of criticism, there remains a legacy of criticisms uttered centuries earlier.

3. A Much Older Charge: The Entire Reformation Movement Neglected Missions

There is no disputing the fact that in the sixteenth century, the European pacesetter in foreign mission was Roman Catholicism. The Portuguese vessels that plied the west coast of Africa had landed missionary priests at the mouth of the Congo River by 1491. Portuguese ships in the Indian Ocean soon landed missionary priests such as Francis Xavier (1506–52) on India’s west coast. Spanish missionary priests and friars (Franciscans, Dominicans, and later Jesuits) were in Central and South America in the same decades along with waves of colonists.¹¹ Admittedly, early Protestantism would lag behind this pace for some decades; these facts and more beside have been regularly rehearsed.

It would restore a sense of proportion to the recounting of this tale, however, if it were admitted that there were contemporary Catholic observers who did not find these admitted mission advances to be everything that could be hoped for, given their symbiotic relationship with European conquest.¹² Bartolomao de las Casas (1474–1566), who reached Spanish America in 1502, became—after his own religious conversion in 1514—the foremost advocate of the rights of the aboriginal peoples of the conquered territories. These peoples were being decimated by the introduction of disease and the imposition of forced labor. De las Casas, who was made colonial bishop of Chiapas, Mexico, complained to King Philip that under Spanish colonial rule, even Indians with proof of their freedom were likely to be abused and pressed into forced labor.¹³ The Christian humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), who died as a loyal Catholic, complained that Catholicism’s missionary commitment was neither deep nor heartfelt. In the year before his death, he penned *On the Art of Preaching*, a treatise urging gospel preaching at home and abroad in order to claim the world for Christ. He observed that many of his European contemporaries were deploring

the decay of the Christian religion (and saying) that the gospel message which once extended over the whole earth is now confined to the narrow limits of this land. Let those, then, to whom this is an unfeigned cause of grief, beseech Christ earnestly and continuously to send laborers into His harvest. . . . Everlasting God! How much ground there is in the world where the seed of the gospel has never yet been sown, or where there is a greater crop of tares than of wheat! Europe is the smallest quarter of the globe; Greece and Asia Minor the most fertile. . . . What shall I say of those who sail around unknown shores, and plunder and lay waste whole States without provocation? What name is given to such deeds? They are called victories. Even the heathen would not

⁹ Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 136.

¹⁰ Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism’s Misrepresentation of God* (Sisters, OR: Loyal, 2002), 29.

¹¹ Justo González, *The Story of Christianity* (2 vols.; Peabody: Prince, 2001), 1:377–412; Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (2nd ed.; London: Penguin, 1990), chap. 6.

¹² Unlike Spain, Portugal’s commercial expansion did not customarily include conquest.

¹³ Bartolomao de las Casas, “Letter to King Philip II,” in *Classics of Christian Missions* (ed. Francis M. DuBose; repr., Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 213–19.

praise a victory over men against whom no war had been declared. . . . Christ orders us to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers, because the harvest is plenteous and the laborers are few. . . . But all offer various excuses. . . . There are thousands of the Franciscans who believe in Christ . . . and the Dominicans abound in equal numbers.¹⁴

Erasmus did not accept that Catholicism's missionary response adequately reflected its resources; neither did he accept that evangelization at sword-point was authentic. It would be beneficial if this more sober assessment of Catholic missions in the sixteenth century was noted at intervals.

The various expressions of early Protestantism rapidly had to face the criticism that for all their claimed zeal for the recovery of pure biblical teaching, they had very little to show in terms of conversions of non-Christian peoples. So far as we know, the first to raise the question about early Protestantism's failure to apply itself to missionary work was the Catholic theologian and controversialist Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). Bellarmine believed that missionary activity was the only way that a church proved that it stood linked to the original missionary apostles. Since Roman Catholicism's missionary activity was indisputable at this time and thus supplied a strong support for its claim to stand in solidarity with the original missionary apostles, the question naturally arose, "Had Protestantism any such evidence of its link with the apostles?" It was a good question.

In this one century the Catholics have converted many thousands of heathens in the new world. Every year a certain number of Jews are converted and baptized at Rome by Catholics who adhere in loyalty to the Bishop of Rome. . . . The Lutherans compare themselves to the apostles and the evangelists; yet though they have among them a very large number of Jews, and in Poland and Hungary have the Turks as their near neighbors, they have hardly converted so much as a handful.¹⁵

Bellarmino must have thought he had struck a "bull's eye" with this criticism. Many Protestant writers since that time have certainly accepted that he did—and winced. Having felt the sting of Bellarmine's seventeenth century charge, they have tended to plead "no contest" and to accept it as settled that Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their followers were stay-at-homes. The Protestant Reformers have in consequence tended to be portrayed as men who, if pressed for reasons, were ready to provide contrived theological rationalizations for sending no missionaries to the horizons of their then-expanding world.¹⁶ But the

¹⁴ Erasmus's treatise of 1535 was published under the Latin title of *Ecclesiastes sive Concionator Evangelicus* (*On the Art of Preaching*) in four books. Only the first book was ever translated into English. Excerpts are available in Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Scribners, 1969), 324; and James Smith, *A Short History of Christian Missions* (8th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 116–17. The attitudes of Erasmus and other Christian humanists towards the state of the unevangelized are helpfully explored by G. H. Williams, "Erasmus and the Reformers on Non-Christian Religions and *Salus Extra Ecclesiam*," in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison* (ed. Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Weigel; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 319–70. W. P. Stephens explores Zwingli's approach to the same question in "Zwingli and the Salvation of the Gentiles," in *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church: Essays in Honor of James Atkinson* (ed. W. P. Stephens; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 224–44.

¹⁵ Robert Bellarmine, *Controversiae*, Book IV (as quoted in Stephen Neill, *History of Christian Missions*, 189).

¹⁶ E.g., Gustav Warneck, *An Outline of the History of Christian Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* (trans. George Robson; 3rd ed.; New York: Revell, 1901), 8–12; Hogg, "Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern"; Neill, *History of Christian Mission*; David F. Wright, "The Great Commission and the Ministry of the Word: Reflections Historical and Contemporary on Relations and Priorities," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25 (2007): 132–57. Especially in the late sixteenth century there was an appeal to the idea in keeping with Col 1:23 (i.e., the gospel has been heard by every creature under heaven) that there had already been a universal gospel proclamation. Nations now in heathen darkness *could* on this

very readiness of many Protestant writers to plead “guilty” has left unexplored various neglected factors that seriously cloud the question before us.

3.1. Undeniable Obstacles to Protestant World Missions

In fact, a good number of mitigating factors can be put forward to explain why transoceanic missions were not a realistic option for Protestants in the earliest decades of the Reformation era. The respected historian of missions Kenneth Latourette provided six.¹⁷ None were so weighty as the fact that in the earliest decades of the Reformation no Protestant domain had access to the sea, was a maritime power, or had any immediate prospect of a seaborne empire.¹⁸ Catholic Spain and Portugal, the acknowledged leaders among missionary-sending regions at this time, had all these. For lack of one or more of these, whole Catholic nations of Europe (such as Poland and Hungary) evidenced no more foreign missionary concern at that time than did Lutheran Saxony or the Zurich of Zwingli. There were also Catholic seagoing nations such as France, adjacent to Spain and Portugal, which initially failed to share the level of missionary concern shown in those neighboring nations.¹⁹ Therefore, it was not the case that every Catholic territory across the board uniformly recognized foreign missionary obligation and that no Protestant territory did.

3.2. Factors Beyond Access to the Sea

Moreover, those seagoing Catholic regions of Europe that did demonstrate missionary concern abroad did so through the combined interest of monarchs (such as Philip and Isabella of Spain), willing navigators (such as Christopher Columbus), and concerned monks within their kingdoms. It is important to acknowledge these important constituent factors rather than simply to attribute early European overseas missionary concern to Catholicism as a system. The Catholic Church, considered corporately as an institution, took steps to coordinate foreign mission only in the post-Columbus era in 1622 when Pope Gregory XV established at Rome the “Sacred Congregation for the Propaganda of the Faith.”²⁰

When Protestant missionary concern emerged beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century (and we shall see that it made a small beginning then), it would need to proceed without the

understanding be reckoned as having already rejected the gospel. For the advocacy of this idea by Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, and second-generation Lutheran theologian Johan Gerhard and the opposition to this view, led by Adrian Saravia, see Neill, *History of Christian Mission*, 189–90.

¹⁷ (1) Early Protestantism was preoccupied with its own consolidation. (2) Some early Protestants disavowed the application of the great commission to their age. (3) Inter-confessional religious wars encouraged a survival mentality among Protestants. (4) Protestant governments that supervised early Protestantism lacked missionary interest. (5) Protestantism lacked the monastic workforce that supported Catholic missionary effort. (6) Early Protestant territories lacked contact with non-Christian peoples—a factor that did not change until the seventeenth century (Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity* [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1944], 3:25–30).

¹⁸ Latourette here follows Warneck, *Outline*, 8. See also Neill, *History of Christian Mission*, 188. Contemporary historian Glenn Sunshine has revived this significant argument in “Protestant Missions in the Sixteenth Century,” in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (ed. Martin Klauber and Scott Manetsch; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 14. Andrew Walls, in “The Eighteenth Century Missionary Awakening in Its European Context,” helpfully speaks of the “new Iberian maritime consciousness”; see Brian Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 28.

¹⁹ Latourette, *History*, 3:27.

²⁰ Neill helpfully describes the importance of this milestone in Catholic missions (*History of Christian Mission*, 152).

sponsorship of heads of state, to succeed in capturing the imagination of pastors and people at the parish or regional level, to find missionary workers (as monasticism had been abolished in Protestant regions), and to gather funding. There were no ocean-going navigators standing by ready to help. Yet in spite of these obstacles, most of which were completely beyond the control of the early Protestants, missionary beginnings were not so long in coming as is widely believed.

4. Protestant Mission Began in Regions Neighboring Home

4.1. Foreign vs. Regional Missions

Looking back from this distance of time during which global mission has been now conducted on a very large scale for over five centuries, we find it easy to draw a clear distinction between long-distance “overseas” missionary efforts and mission carried out nearer to home. But why draw such a distinction? In the sixteenth century, mission nearer home customarily involved perilous circumstances and fierce opposition as might have been encountered in some remote place far from European civilization.

A closer look at early Protestant “regional” mission near to home shows how widespread this reality was.²¹ The fact is that Reformation cities such as Geneva, Lausanne, Emden, Zurich, and Basel were like hubs. From them streamed out many hundreds of persons who—often after finding a safe haven from persecution in a particular city of the Reformation—returned to their home regions with the theological and pastoral training required to fit them for work as pastors and evangelists. They went in response to appeals from cells of evangelical believers in France, the Low Countries (today’s Belgium and the Netherlands), north Italy, and regions of the Alps. Particularly in France, there is evidence of a determination to build networks of congregations systematically across the kingdom.²² From Geneva alone (by no means the only “sending” center) more than two hundred preachers were sent out during the fifteen year period 1555–70. The sober fact is that many were arrested, imprisoned, and executed before they ever reached the destinations for which they had set out.²³ Others served faithfully where they were called and saw Protestant congregations take root and flourish.

Detailed information about European Protestant home-mission has now been available from various historians for at least half a century. Yet by itself it has not tended to convince naysayers that this Protestant missionary work deserved to be equated with going to the jungles of Central America or the west coast of India (places where Catholic missionaries were present in numbers by the mid-sixteenth century), but it ought to have done so for multiple reasons.

²¹ It is fascinating to see this conception of home-mission used to describe the early effort of European Protestantism utilized by mission historian George Smith in a work originating in 1884 (*A Short History of Christian Mission* [8th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920], 110).

²² W. Stanford Reid, “Calvin’s Geneva: A Missionary Centre,” *RTR* 42 (1983): 69.

²³ The “big picture” of this training of refugees in Reformation cities so that they might return as missionaries is well described by William Monter, *Calvin’s Geneva* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 134–35, which speaks of 120 sent out from that city alone between 1555 and 1572, and Graeme Murdock, *Beyond Calvin: The Intellectual, Political and Cultural World of Europe’s Reformed Churches* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 34–35. Murdock speaks of more than 200 missionary preachers returned to France from Geneva, Lausanne, and Neuchatel between the mid-1550s and 1570. Further light, especially on Geneva’s role in this, is provided by Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement 1564–1572* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 30–36; Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, “John Calvin as a Director of Missions,” in *The Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. John Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 140–54; W. S. Reid, “Calvin’s Geneva: A Missionary Centre,” *RTR* 42 (1983): 65–73.

4.2. The Protestant Reformers, with Other Christian Humanists, Saw Europe as Imperfectly Christianized

Much earlier than the decisive year of 1517 (when Luther nailed his “Theses” to the Wittenberg church door), advocates of reform had wished to spur European Christianity beyond its complacency, low biblical literacy, and poor appropriation of a biblical morality. Preaching in the vernacular? Scriptures in the common tongue? Rebukes of the church for its accumulation of wealth and land? One could have found all these in the ministry of the Waldensians of Piedmont in the twelfth century and among the followers of John Wyclif—the Lollards in fourteenth-century England, the Hussites of Bohemia, or the followers of Savonarola in fifteenth century Florence.

In Luther’s time, these were the concerns of Erasmus and those called Christian humanists—that trans-European movement of scholars who were determined to turn the fruits of renaissance learning in the ancient languages towards the project of the purification of Christianity. Erasmus’ edition of the Greek New Testament, printed at Paris in 1516, became the foundation on which would stand vernacular translations in German, English, French, and Dutch. Erasmus, just as surely as the translators of those vernacular versions, had it as his ambition that ploughboys and milkmaids would be able to read the Holy Scriptures for themselves.

In the mind of European Christians concerned for the restoration of scriptural Christianity, the non-availability of the Bible in the language of the people had been the mother of confusion in doctrine, morals, and the wielding of ecclesiastical power. Traces of earlier pagan religion—the veneration of places, groves, annual days and feasts—had never been adequately rooted out. A good portion of Europe’s professed Christians considered Christianity to consist in merely observing set days and reverencing certain places and objects. Consequently, too much that passed for Christianity in Europe was deplorably sub-standard. The Reformation historian Scott Hendrix has described the mind of those concerned for the restoration of Christianity: “The veneration and intercession of saints contained a mixture of superstitious, folkloric, and Christian elements; the same can be said for prayers, pilgrimages, indulgences, and other types of medieval piety.”²⁴ Thus, advocates of reform genuinely expected that the recovery of a purer Christianity was the prerequisite for the expansion of Christianity within Europe as well as beyond it. This is why—from Wittenberg, Basel, Strasbourg, Lausanne, and Geneva—missionary preachers went in all directions.²⁵ That they encountered opposition (often of a brutal sort) in their advocacy of the purification of Christianity was demonstration enough that what passed for European Christendom was very often bound in thick darkness. With such a mindset in place, we should not be surprised that when given the opportunity to look beyond Europe, early Protestants (Calvinists among them) would avail themselves of opportunities to take the gospel abroad.

²⁴ Scott Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 17.

²⁵ It is the primary purpose of this essay to demonstrate that Reformed theology was not without missionary concern. It could be argued in parallel form that the Lutheran influence of Wittenberg was expressed in the preaching of reform and the provision of vernacular Scriptures in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Poland, Moravia, and Hungary. See Paul E. Pierson, “The Reformation and Mission,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (ed. A. Scott Moreau; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 813–14.

5. Early Protestant Transoceanic Mission: Who Would Go?

In an illuminating essay, “The Eighteenth Century Missionary Awakening in Its European Context,” Andrew Walls highlighted how the elimination of the monastic orders in Protestant territories also served to eliminate the labor force that in Catholic lands had been the first to go abroad in service of the gospel. The filling of this “gap” would require Protestants not simply of the mainstream but of the enthusiast variety.²⁶ But from where would they come?

5.1. The Genevan Calvinist Mission to Brazil

For reasons outlined above, land-locked Geneva was herself unlikely to launch transoceanic mission initiatives of the kind we associate with Spain and Portugal. However, when Geneva’s neighbor France gradually grew alert to the potentialities of transoceanic navigation, that nation focused (among other sites) upon the coast of Brazil, thus opening a door of opportunity for Geneva. A colonizing expedition was led by one Nicholas de Villegagnon.²⁷ A shortage of willing colonists on the initial voyage that departed from Havre de Grace in July 1555 meant that the door would be opened also to French Protestants to join the expedition in the following year. The Genevan church was asked to provide French-speaking ministers and some colonists to join the expedition.²⁸ The missionary possibilities were clear to the leaders of the Genevan church. Contemporary chronicler (and participant in the expedition) Jean de Léry recorded, “Upon . . . hearing this news, the church of Geneva at once gave thanks to God for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in a country so distant and likewise so foreign and among a nation entirely without the knowledge of the true God.”²⁹

The church was further helped in deciding to support the matter when it received correspondence from Gaspard de Coligny, who was Admiral of France and a known Protestant sympathizer.³⁰ Two ministers, Pierre Richier and Guillaume Chartier, were commissioned to go in the company of carpenters, a leatherworker, a cutler, and a tailor. As a part of a group of 300, they reached the island colony (now called Fort Coligny) in March 1557.³¹

Villegagnon, the colonial governor, had determined that the colony should establish itself on an island off the Brazil coast. It lacked both sources of fresh water and native inhabitants. Since interaction with the natives was the key to obtaining adequate food supplies and to any missionary possibilities, this

²⁶ Andrew Walls, “The Eighteenth Century Missionary Awakening in Its European Context,” 24. Walls goes on to demonstrate that this “want” in Protestantism was ultimately supplied by European Christians of the Pietist variety (30–31).

²⁷ Some details about Villegagnon are provided in G. Baez-Camargo, “The Earliest Protestant Missionary Venture in Latin America,” *CH* 21 (1952): 135; and Amy Glassner Gordon, “The First Protestant Missionary Effort: Why Did it Fail?” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8 (1984):12–13.

²⁸ It is important to note that the expedition, conceived of originally as an all-Catholic enterprise, entailed the sending of no missionary priests—or priests of any kind.

²⁹ Jean de Léry, *Journal de Bord de Jean de Léry en la Terre de Brésil 1557, présenté et commenté par M.R. Mayeux* (Paris, 1957), as quoted in R. Pierce Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” in *The Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. John Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 61. Portions of the de Léry *Journal* appeared in English dress as “Journey to the Land of Brazil, 1557,” in Joannes Boemus, *The Manners, Lawes, and Customes of All Nations, Collected out of the Best Writers* (1610; trans. Ed Aston; London: G. Eld, 1611), 483–502. I am indebted to Boston University and Gordon Conwell Seminary ThD student Travis Myers for pointing me to the Boemus volume, which is accessible through Early English Books Online.

³⁰ As Admiral, de Coligny was responsible for French naval and maritime ventures.

³¹ Beaver, “The Genevan Mission,” 62.

island location seemed very disadvantageous. Interaction with the Indian population, when it came, proved difficult; the Genevan pastors were initially taken aback at the barbarism of the people they now met. But they adopted the long-term strategy of placing boys from the colony among the Indians so that, with time, they would have the services of bilingual translators.³² One of the colonists, the chronicler de Léry, spent extensive time among the onshore native population and recorded extensive observations about their manners, customs, and religious ideas. His work has been termed an attempt at missionary ethnography.³³

Religious differences soon surfaced. Villegagnon seems to have been unprepared for the degree of religious diversity that the arrival of the Francophone Protestants would represent, and disputes broke out about Catholic-Protestant doctrinal differences. The governor made it his business to hinder the ability of the Genevan Calvinists to proselytize among the at-least-nominally Catholic French colonists. In the course of time, Villegagnon exiled the Genevan pastors to the mainland, where their exposure to the Indian population continued until the time when they and other Genevans were forcibly returned by the governor to France. At best, we can say that the short interlude of missionary opportunity among the natives of Brazil provided the Geneva contingent with a seedbed for further thinking and reflection about cross-cultural mission.³⁴ In fairness, we should be able to grant that the Genevans seized this modest missionary opportunity when it was offered to them.

5.2. John Eliot's Ministry Among Massachusetts Indians

There is no disguising that among the English interested in developing their own seaborne empire, there was more talk about missions to native peoples encountered in foreign territories than there was any systematic plan of carrying the gospel to those peoples when they were actually encountered.³⁵ More intense interest may have been generated for the cause in "old" England rather than "new."³⁶ The discrepancy between aim and actuality was obvious enough in Massachusetts. John Winthrop, the original governor of the colony, had promoted emigration there by listing first among reasons for locating there the prospective missionary opportunities:

It will be a service to the church of great consequence to carry the gospel into those parts of the world, to help on the coming of the fullness of the gentiles and to raise a bulwark against the kingdom of anti-Christ which the Jesuits labor to rear up in those parts.³⁷

³² Ibid., 64.

³³ Gordon, "The First Protestant Missionary Effort," 14.

³⁴ Ibid., 16.

³⁵ This is a point made most effectively by Henry M. Knapp, "The Character of Puritan Missions: The Motivation, Methodology and Effectiveness of the Puritan Evangelization of the Native Americans in New England," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 76 (1998): 113.

³⁶ This is the sober assessment of R. Pierce Beaver, "American Missionary Motivation Before the Revolution," *CH* 31 (1962): 216. The point is made with new force in the excellent essay by Jon Hinkson, "Missions Among Puritans and Pietists," in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (ed. Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 224–25. See also the treatment of this problem in J. A. de Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640–1810* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1970), 31–33.

³⁷ "Reasons to be considered for Justifieinge the Undertakinge of the Intended Plantation in New England," from R. Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop* (2 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown, 1864), 1:309–11, as quoted in Lacey Baldwin Smith, ed., *The Past Speaks: Sources and Problems in English History* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Lexington, MA: Heath, 1993), 1:411. It is interesting to note Winthrop's awareness of Jesuit missionary activity in the New World.

Yet the settlers who responded to such reasoning were, on arrival, preoccupied with their own safety and sustenance rather than the spiritual needs of the native population. Moreover, they had no prior experience with non-countrymen to guide them in intercultural questions. The governing “General Court” of Massachusetts, however, persisted in its attempt to stir up interest in evangelization of the natives in the 1644–45 period.³⁸ This provided the context in which John Eliot (1604–90), Puritan minister at Roxbury, Massachusetts, began in 1646 prolonged efforts to evangelize them. He never left his Roxbury pastorate, but began to go every other week to preach among the natives and to catechize their children.

It was not long before his missionary work came to the attention of sympathetic persons in England. The Parliament of England sanctioned the creation of the “Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England,”³⁹ and over time £12,000 was gathered to support this ministry. By 1652, Eliot and his associates saw the first signs of faith. By 1659, eight adults were ready to make formal profession of faith. Eliot and those assisting him took seriously the need to communicate in the language of the nearby Indians. They soon gained the ability to preach in their language (variously termed Algonquian or Moheecan) and subsequently produced an Indian catechism by 1653, selected Psalms by 1658, and a complete Bible by 1663.⁴⁰

Eliot’s New England ministry was not only significant in demonstrating an early Calvinist attempt to carry out the Great Commission (admittedly without extensive support from other colonists), but in its methods, which were in some ways eclectic and in other ways distinctly Protestant. Eliot’s method of gathering an eventual 3,600 persons into what were called “Praying Towns” (all-Indian Christian settlements) approximated to some degree the tendency in Catholic missions to central America and the American southwest, namely, to gather those willing to accept instruction in the Christian faith into stable communities in which they could learn trades,⁴¹ cultivate crops, and receive education. These methods persisted until the terrible disruption brought about by “King Philip’s War” of 1675–77. This colonist-Indian conflict had Christian Indian converts and their communities caught in the crossfire and distrusted by both sides. Happily, a parallel ministry to Indians carried out on the Massachusetts island named Martha’s Vineyard by Thomas Mayhew (1620–1657) was untouched by these hostilities; it was a work—continued after Mayhew’s untimely death at sea—by his own father and descendants. By the early eighteenth century, some 1600 Indians professing Christianity were worshipping in their own churches on this one island.⁴²

³⁸Note the helpful discussion of the merely gradual pursuit of Indian evangelization by the Massachusetts Bay colony in Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians Before King Philip’s War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), chaps. 1–2.

³⁹It would appear that the action of the Long Parliament in 1649 was the *first* action by a Protestant legislature to assist the carrying out of foreign missionary activity. Jon Hinkson terms it “the oldest English Protestant Missionary Society” (“Missions Among Puritans and Pietists,” 28). Surviving archival records of Eliot’s ministry were analyzed by Sidney H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), chap. 3; and de Jong, *As the Waters*, 67–78. The seventeenth century tracts published by Eliot for the purpose of advocating mission to the Indians and progress observed there have been edited by Michael Clark as *The Eliot Tracts: With Letters to John Thorowgood and Richard Baxter* (New York: Praeger, 2003).

⁴⁰These details regarding Eliot are provided by P. C-H. Lim in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (ed. Timothy T. Larsen, David W. Bebbington, and Mark A. Noll; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 206.

⁴¹R. W. Cogley reports that members of the Roxbury congregation taught carpentry and agriculture to the Indians, as well as providing them with medical care (“John Eliot’s Puritan Ministry,” *Fides et Historia* 31 [1999]: 9).

⁴²Hinkson, “Mission,” 29–31.

In relation to other Protestant mission efforts of the seventeenth century, we find Eliot's work setting the pace in early production of vernacular Scriptures, the training of indigenous Christian leaders in Scripture and doctrine, and the rapid elevation of native persons into positions of Christian leadership. The first native pastor was ready for ordination by 1683, less than forty years from the time Eliot had commenced his bi-weekly Indian ministry. Though rural Massachusetts would have been considered somewhat on the fringe of European civilization, the Christian world would take note of what Eliot and his successors had accomplished.

The German church historian Ernst Benz has shown how information about the late John Eliot's Indian ministry in Massachusetts was mediated by prominent Boston minister Cotton Mather (1663–1728) to his Halle (Germany) contact, the Lutheran Pietist leader August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). Through Francke, this information was communicated to the German Pietist missionaries Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) and Heinrich Plutschau (1678–1747), who had accepted missionary appointments to south India from the King of Denmark in 1705. Mission news from south India eventually reached Mather in Massachusetts via a network extending through Halle and London.⁴³ In Tranquebar (the region of south India in which Denmark's colony was situated), the ministry led by Ziegenbalg and Plutschau produced a Tamil-language New Testament by 1714, and his successors produced an entire Bible of high quality by 1796. An Indian pastor was ordained by 1733, and fourteen in all would be set aside for ministry in the mission's first century.⁴⁴

The significance of these accomplishments in New England and south India are best appreciated when comparisons are drawn. Nearly three centuries would pass between the time Catholic missions to the Americas began and the ordination of its first native clergy in 1794.⁴⁵ An even greater lapse of time separated the onset of Catholic missionary effort in the Americas and the availability of vernacular Scriptures in these regions. These finally were made available when James (Diego) Thomson (1788–1854), the peripatetic agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, entered Argentina in 1818 and subsequently set up Bible distribution networks in that country, Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico.⁴⁶ Here, we may see the natural outworking of the European Reformation (and also Calvinist) principle of re-Christianization: If vernacular proclamation, vernacular Scriptures, and vernacular liturgy were requisite in Europe because intelligent, heartfelt worship required them, why would the same principle not apply in non-European lands?⁴⁷

5.3. Dutch Reformed Missionaries to Southeast Asia

Returning to the early decades of the seventeenth century, and concurrent with the Puritan experiment in the New World, Holland was, after 1590, gradually extending its reach into southeast Asian territories earlier reckoned as the trading domains of Portugal. This Dutch incursion had the

⁴³ Ernst Benz, "Pietist and Puritan Sources of Early Protestant World Missions," *CH 20* (1951): 31–33. The basic details about the Danish-Halle mission are supplied in Neill, *History of Christian Mission*, 194–98. Ronald E. Davies has shown that another important purveyor of transoceanic mission news in this era was the Scot Robert Millar (1672–1752). See his "Robert Millar—An Eighteenth Century Scottish Latourette," *EvQ 42* (1990): 143–56. Tales of John Eliot's ministry and the Tranquebar missionaries were circulated in mid-eighteenth century also by the Scottish minister John Gillies (1712–96) in his *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel* (1754; rev. Horatius Bonar; Kelso: J. Rutherford, 1845).

⁴⁴ Neill, *History of Christian Mission*, 195–96.

⁴⁵ Cogley, "John Eliot's Puritan Ministry," 10n10; Neill, *History of Christian Mission*, 150.

⁴⁶ Stephen Sywulka, "Thomson, James 'Diego,'" in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 959–60.

⁴⁷ Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard*, 172–73.

double effect of curtailing further Roman Catholic missionary work and opening the door to missionary work of the Protestant and Reformed type. The trading concern that represented Holland's interest in the region, the Dutch East India Company, was obliged by concerned Dutch Reformed believers (and it was this constituency that most heavily supported the monopolistic trading company) to take some steps to prepare a missionary force for southeast Asia. A seminary was established at Leyden for the purpose of training workers who would minister to the needs of the trading company's employees and commence the presentation of the Gospel to the native population. These—when they proceeded to that region—had some success in gathering and baptizing a large number who professed the Christian faith. A vernacular New Testament was produced in Malay by 1668 along with catechetical materials.⁴⁸

Mission historians such as Neill have indicated the ways in which this initial Reformed missionary effort to Southeast Asia left much to be desired. Since the missionaries, who were actually employed by the trading company, received economic incentives relative to the numbers baptized, there was a willful inflation of the numbers reckoned to be enfolded in the church.⁴⁹ But for our present purposes, it is sufficient to note that contrary to the kind of aspersions which have been cast in the past half-century, Dutch Calvinism—far from being hostile to foreign mission, or second-guessing the need for it (in light of acceptance of divine election), was in fact congenial towards it. Research has demonstrated the presence in the Synod of Dordt (1618–19)—a synod alleged to have restrained missionary labor because of its support for the doctrine of election⁵⁰—of advocates of foreign missionary work such as Gisbertus Voetius,⁵¹ and of language in the Canons of Dordt that was supportive of the missionary task.⁵² The sizeable Protestant population of Indonesia today is a witness to Dutch missionary activity that was carried on, almost without a break, until that nation withdrew from its former colony in 1947. Comparable missionary progress had been achieved under Dutch instrumentality in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

5.4. The American Mission to Indians Under David Brainerd

The era of the 1730s was one of heightened spiritual vitality in regions of Western Europe, Britain, and British territories in North America.⁵³ Christians and churches in the Reformed tradition were by no means the only branch of Christianity quickened during this period. It is certain that the surge of missionary activism associated with Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) and the Church of the United Brethren (commonly known as Moravian) was the foremost direct expression for missions of the zeal engendered in this period of spiritual awakening. Yet it was not the *only* such expression, and here, since it is our purpose to highlight chiefly the missionary activity proper to the Reformed or Calvinist tradition, we turn to focus on the most illustrious missionary career in this stream of Christianity in the first half of the eighteenth century.

⁴⁸ Jan Jongeneel, "The Missiology of Gisbertus Voetius: The First Comprehensive Protestant Theology of Missions," *CTJ* 26 (1991): 72. Jongeneel reports that a single gospel (Matthew) had been available in translation from 1629.

⁴⁹ Neill, *History of Christian Mission*, 191.

⁵⁰ Note the interpretation offered by Richey Hogg in 1959 (see n. 7 above) without any corroborating evidence.

⁵¹ Cf. James Tanis, "Reformed Pietism and Protestant Missions" in *HTR* 67 (1974): 71–73. Jongeneel's "The Missiology of Gisbertus Voetius" (56) reports that Voetius's own belief in the doctrine of election was the guiding principle of his mission theology.

⁵² Cf. Anthony Hoekema, "The Missionary Focus of the Canons of Dordt," *CTJ* 7 (1972): 209–20.

⁵³ The literature on this era is vast. The one major work bridging all geographic regions is that of W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

David Brainerd (1718–47), himself a convert of the Great Awakening,⁵⁴ was appointed, with his brother John to work among the Indians of western Massachusetts under the auspices of a society that was a kind of successor to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England. This was the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, which existed to evangelize the Highlands of Scotland and to send ministers among Scottish emigrant communities abroad as well as among unevangelized native peoples.⁵⁵

Brainerd's initial years in western Massachusetts preaching among the Housatonic people were not especially heartening. But when, in August 1745, he preached among the Delaware Indians of New Jersey, he saw something entirely different: assembled crowds of native people visibly affected by his preaching about the love of God shown in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Brainerd was observing developments highly analogous to events unfolding under the preaching ministry of the Moravians, namely, that ordinary hearers were enabled to respond to the simply proclaimed message of the cross. The traditional apologetic method was to clear the ground for the preaching of the gospel by defending theism, miracles, and revelation. Now Brainerd believed that he witnessed such methodology being made unnecessary by an almost immediate working of the Holy Spirit by employing only the essentials of the gospel message.

As surely as Eliot's labors had been reported in London, Halle, and Tranquebar (India), the reputation of Brainerd spread abroad, primarily through the posthumous publication of his diary and Jonathan Edwards's *An Account of the Life of the late Reverend David Brainerd* in 1749.⁵⁶

5.5. William Carey, Father of Modern Missions

We began this inquiry by noting that a dispassionate Methodist researcher, Norman Carr Sargent, had found special significance in a conference regarding world mission held by Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in 1772. Here there was evidence of the quickening of missionary interest four decades into that era of evangelical awakening. The transatlantic circulation of literature such as the *Life of David Brainerd* was certainly part of the blend of influences that helped this quickening of interest forward. William Carey, an English Calvinistic Baptist who first helped promote the foundation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792,⁵⁷ is reported to have been able to quote sections of that work from memory.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Timothy George, "The Evangelical Revival and the Missionary Awakening," in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (ed. Martin Klauber and Scott Manetsch; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 47.

⁵⁵ The Society had origins in Edinburgh extending back to 1709 when it was founded by royal charter. Details are supplied in D. E. Meek, "Scottish S.P.C.K.," in *Scottish Dictionary of Church History and Theology* (ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron; Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 761–62. An English counterpart, the S.P.C.K. had existed since 1698. Important details about the Scottish S.P.C.K. have been provided by Donald MacLean in "Scottish Calvinism and Foreign Missions," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 6 (1938): 5–7.

⁵⁶ Hinkson, "Mission," 32–33. Edwards, who would have become father-in-law to Brainerd had not premature death from tuberculosis intervened first for Brainerd and then for his own daughter Jerusha, himself served the mission to the Indians of western Massachusetts when he fell from favor with his Northampton congregation. See George Marsden, "Jonathan Edwards as Missionary," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 81 (2003): 5–17.

⁵⁷ Brian Stanley indicates that the society was originally designated "The Particular-Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen" ("Baptist Missionary Society," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 110). The term "particular" indicated that these Baptists held to the concept of "definite" or "particular" atonement; this is a Calvinist distinction.

⁵⁸ Timothy George, "Evangelical Revival," 47. George similarly demonstrates that Henry Martyn, the young Church of England chaplain to India influenced so much by Carey's example, was just as definitely influenced by Brainerd's life and example.

As Carey first promoted the need for a missionary society (only later volunteering to go himself), he encountered opposition. On hearing Carey advocate a mission to the heathen, a Baptist minister named John Ryland Sr. (1723–92) is reported to have reminded Carey, “When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without you.”⁵⁹ Here was a recurrence of an idea, at least as old as Hulderych Zwingli (1484–1531), that God—in considering the fallen heathen—was at liberty to bestow mercy on them irrespective of their inability to hear and respond to the claims of Christ and the gospel.⁶⁰ But in spite of what polemical writers have tried to “wring” from the episode (e.g., that opposition from such a quarter as Ryland’s requires us to accept that Carey held a position antithetical to that of the avowedly-Calvinist Ryland),⁶¹ it is difficult to shirk the conclusion that Carey, as surely as Brainerd, Mayhew, and Eliot before him, was a Calvinist convinced that God uses means.⁶²

The outline and the significance of Carey’s mission to India has often been described. Here three issues can be highlighted. First, we must grasp how—given the rise in missionary zeal across Britain in that century of spiritual awakening—Carey and his cause were taken up and endorsed by evangelical Calvinists of all stripes. His contemporary Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), who travelled on behalf of the nascent mission society after its launch (and after Carey’s departure for India), recorded the almost-universal welcome extended to him in a wide range of churches across denominational boundaries. Believers within the broadly Calvinist tradition and beyond it gladly contributed their gifts to a cause that was now dear to their hearts also.⁶³ Carey was both a symbol of and focus for the surge in missionary zeal as the evangelical Protestant public took up the cause of world mission to a degree not previously found.

Second, the record of Carey’s ministry in India sounds some now familiar notes of post-Reformation Protestant missions that we have already observed in New England and Southeast Asia: preaching in the vernacular, Scriptures in the vernacular, and an indigenous ministry trained with urgency. To stress this takes nothing away from Carey’s extraordinary abilities as a self-taught linguist and translator; it is merely to note that the priorities and strategies he pursued were very often those identified also by Protestant missionaries before him.

Third, we can note that Carey—and the mission society whose creation he advocated—was a part of what Andrew Walls has aptly called “the fortunate subversion of the church.”⁶⁴ Having acknowledged earlier that Protestantism would be as reliant on a type of “enthusiast” to prosecute the actual task of world mission as Catholicism had been in relying on members of the monastic orders, we must now acknowledge that as the broadly Calvinist Protestant world more actively embraced the cause of world mission, the societies that stood at the vanguard of this movement were not (with the exception of the Moravian movement) the direct instruments of the churches of the Reformation; they

⁵⁹ The account is provided in George, “Evangelical Revival” (50).

⁶⁰ Cf. Stephens, “Zwingli and the Salvation of the Gentiles,” 224–44. Stephens shows that Zwingli’s attitude was reasonably common among sixteenth century Christian humanists, who were excessively deferential to the great minds of classical antiquity and who were willing to assume their inclusion among the elect on the basis of their close approximation to revealed truth.

⁶¹ This is the very line of reasoning followed by a polemicist such as William Estep (see n. 9 above).

⁶² On the contested nature of the Rylands-Carey exchange, see Thomas J. Nettles, “Baptists and World Missions,” in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (ed. Martin Klauber and Scott Manetsch; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 90–91.

⁶³ J. W. Morris, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Andrew Fuller* (London: T. Hamilton, 1816), 145–47.

⁶⁴ See Andrew Walls, “Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,” *EvQ* 60 (1988): 141–55.

were *voluntary* societies made up of likeminded persons drawn from those churches and united for a common purpose. It was true of Carey's sponsoring Baptist society; it would be even more the case for the Missionary Society founded at London in 1795 (later known as the London Missionary Society), which provided a vehicle for the missionary aspirations of the zealous found in Anglican, Presbyterian, and Congregational-Independent churches. The one who takes the time to sample the biographies of the earliest leaders of the LMS assembled by John Morison will be struck again and again at their combined zeal for Calvinism and mission.⁶⁵

In emulation of these British developments, similar voluntary mission societies were begun in short order by concerned believers within Scotland at Glasgow and Edinburgh (1796) and in connection with the Reformation churches of the Continent in Amsterdam (1797), Basel (1815), and Paris (1822). Though the London society had welcomed Church of England involvement, by 1812 a similar voluntary society serving but not controlled by the Church of England was begun as the Church Missionary Society. The example of Carey and the Baptist Mission extended across the Atlantic for another voluntary society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (Congregationalist), which began in 1812 in support of mission effort in India. The element of "subversion" of which Walls spoke would require a leavening work over time, for it was only decades later that the various denominations from which the early enthusiastic supporters of mission were drawn committed themselves corporately to the ecclesiastical support of the missionary cause.⁶⁶

6. Conclusion

This essay has not attempted to rewrite the history of Protestant mission, but only to draw attention to under-represented parts of that story. This requires a fresh acknowledgment of both the temporal priority of Catholic transoceanic mission in the age of the European voyages of discovery begun a half-millennium ago and the unfortunate combination of military conquest and colonial domination with those early missionary efforts. Also required is an acknowledging that there are not lacking early and regular examples of Protestant missionary effort (with Calvinists very prominent in them) as Protestant regions of Europe gradually gained oceanic access in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. That oceanic access brought first Geneva, then the Netherlands, and in turn the New England Puritans to embrace missionary opportunity.

In the eighteenth century, Lutheran Pietists as well as German Moravians joined this Protestant world mission effort. All this effort preceded the epoch marked by the departure of William Carey for India in 1793; the reader who has devoured Carey's seminal booklet *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) will know that Carey had made it his business to devour all the previous Protestant mission history (including that of Calvinists) he could obtain.⁶⁷ In light of this pre-history, we may only with qualification go on describing Carey as "the

⁶⁵ John Morison, *Fathers and Founders of the London Missionary Society: A Jubilee Memorial Including a Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the Institution* (London: Fisher, 1844). Ten of the thirty-six leading ministers involved in the origination of the LMS were Scottish Presbyterians serving expatriate Scots in England, while others served Congregational/Independent or Calvinistic Methodist churches in London and the south of England. The evangelical Calvinism of the early LMS is also helpfully detailed by Johannes Van den Berg, *Constrained by Jesus' Love* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1956).

⁶⁶ In broad terms, the 1820s witnessed denominations in the Reformed tradition, on both sides of the Atlantic, authorizing the setting up of foreign mission agencies as expressions of their corporate life.

⁶⁷ A facsimile edition of Carey's *Inquiry* was published in 1961 (London: Carey Kingsgate). It is also accessible in Daniel Webber, *William Carey and the Missionary Vision* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2005).

Father of Modern Missions.”⁶⁸ The fervor for mission work that was laid bare by the transdenominational outpouring of support for Carey and the Baptist Mission Society clearly brought much nearer the founding of the London Missionary Society; this differed from the Baptist Society not over Calvinism (with which both were in harmony) but only the administration of the baptismal ordinance given by Christ. The passing of this missionary “torch” to new, like-minded societies on the Continent and in America fills out this under-told story of how evangelical zeal when combined with Calvinist theology provided the underpinnings of a vast proportion (never the whole, of course) of Protestant missionary expansion in “the great century” of missionary expansion.

It seemed so obvious at the end of the nineteenth century that Calvinism and missions had been good partners that few felt pressed to document the full extent of it. One who did (from within the Presbyterian and Reformed constituency) claimed at the century’s end that of the world’s Protestant missionary force, a full 25% were recruited from that family of churches.⁶⁹ His figure took no account of the many Congregationalists, Anglicans, and Baptists whose convictions substantially overlapped. It is good to be reminded just how many “household names” from that great era of missionary expansion were both sent out by agencies upholding and served within a Calvinistic framework. A dictionary of biography would rapidly make this plain regarding Robert Morrison (1782–1834) who translated the Bible into Chinese by 1818; Robert Moffat (1795–1883) and his son-in-law David Livingstone (1813–73), who gave themselves to South and Central Africa; and a host of others.⁷⁰

Late twentieth century prognosticators about an assumed dampening effect of Calvinism upon missions have therefore made their pronouncements rashly. Apprehensive statements made in these last decades in the face of the current resurgence of interest in Reformed theology surely ought to give way to more careful assessments if mission history is to be trusted. If it is true that *all* branches of the Christian family might have done more for missions, it is also true that this branch has been “in harness” as long as any expression of Protestantism.

⁶⁸ Cf. A. Morgan Derham, “Carey, William,” in *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. J. D. Douglas; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 192.

⁶⁹ The claim was made by Scottish Church historian T. M. Lindsay (1843–1914) in the Glasgow 1896 General Council Meeting of the Reformed and Presbyterian Alliance, as quoted by Zwemer, “Calvinism and Missionary Enterprise,” 215.

⁷⁰ A search of a biographical dictionary for the following figures illustrates just how widespread has been the missionary contribution of men and women drawn from a broadly Reformed constituency:

19th century: Alexander Duff, Donald Fraser, John Geddie, Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone, Robert Moffat, Samuel A. Moffett, Robert Morrison, John L. Nevius, John G. Paton, John Philip, A. T. Pierson, John Scudder, Mary Slessor, Johannes Van der Kemp, John Williams.

20th century: J. H. Bavinck, William Borden, David Bosch, Hendrik Kraemer, Samuel Hugh Moffett, Lesslie Newbigin, J. H. Oldham, Ida Scudder, Robert E. Speer, Johanna Veenstra, Johannes Verkuyl, Samuel Zwemer.

PASTORAL PENSÉES

Power in Preaching: Decide (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) Part 1 of 3¹

— Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. —

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Why are we talking about preaching with power? Because of what Christianity *is*. Christianity is “a divine and supernatural light immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God.”² It is the living God coming down through the gospel of Jesus Christ to change us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Real Christianity is pervasively miraculous. The Bible says,

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, . . . doing wonders? (Exod 15:11)³

Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children (Ps 90:16).

No eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. You meet him who joyfully works righteousness (Isa 64:4–5a).

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28).

Jesus breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

¹ The three articles in this series are lightly edited manuscripts from the 2008 E. Y. Mullins Lectures presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on September 30 and October 1–2, 2008 (available at <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/category/lectures/mullins/>). Parts 2 and 3 (“Power in Preaching: Desire [1 Thessalonians 1:2–5]” and “Power in Preaching: Delight [2 Corinthians 12:1–10]”) will be published in *Them* 34:2 and 34:3 (2009).

² Jonathan Edwards, *Works* (reprint, Banner of Truth: Edinburgh, 1979), 2:12.

³ 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.

Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2, 4).

The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16).

The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power (1 Cor 4:20).

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might (Col 1:11).

Remove wonder-working power from Christianity, and what do you have left? Religious franchises managing community service programs. But is that what we read about in the book of Acts? Biblical Christianity in the world today is an ongoing miracle of God's gracious power. And if that is so, and it is, then Christian preaching can and must be in divine power.

When Francis Schaeffer was struggling with disillusionment as a Christian, he asked his wife one day,

“Edith, I wonder what would happen to most churches and Christian work if we awakened tomorrow, and everything concerning the reality and work of the Holy Spirit, and everything concerning prayer, were removed from the Bible. I don't mean just ignored, but actually cut out—disappeared. I wonder how much difference it would make?” We concluded it would not make much difference in many board meetings, committee meetings, decisions and activities.⁴

And in many sermons.

Isn't it time to confess our need of divine power in our preaching? As long as the book of Acts stands written, with the entire New Testament, which we confess to be authoritative over us, can we be happy to fall short of God's Word and way? Let's thank the Lord for all the blessing he is giving. We would be wrong not to thank him, but we long for revival. We long to be filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, helped by the Spirit, sanctified by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit. We long to walk by the Spirit, bear fruit by the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, and preach in the power of the Holy Spirit. We bow low before God, asking for his supernatural visitation upon us at every level, including our preaching, for his glory in our generation.⁵

We have good and sufficient reasons, therefore, to devote these studies to what God himself says about preaching the gospel with a power from beyond ourselves. What if we spent our lives preaching in the power of the flesh because we had never seriously considered the alternative? Now is our time to consider and pray that our preaching would be living proof that God is with his people in this generation, for his glory.

1. Thesis

First Corinthians 2:1–5 shows us God's power in the very act of preaching. Here is the case I am making: *A crucified Savior can be preached in divine power only by crucified preachers.* This passage is not primarily about the content of the gospel; it is primarily about the communication of the gospel. Embedded in Paul's thinking here is the assumption that gospel-content and gospel-communication are inseparable. And Paul made a decision about his communication. He refused to preach a crucified

⁴ Edith Schaeffer, *The Tapestry: The Life and Times of Francis and Edith Schaeffer* (Waco: Word, 1981), 356.

⁵ I adapted this paragraph from John R. W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago, 1964), 3.

Savior through his own cool persona. He could have done so. He was an amazing personality. But uncrucified preachers succeed by human power. They build churches grounded in the weakness of human power and the folly of human genius—sandy foundations for the future. But strong churches, rock-solid churches that can stand up to anything, are a miracle of the Holy Spirit, who empowers crucified preachers only. Have you decided yet to be uncool?

2. An Overview of This Three-Part Series

The key word in part 1 is “decide.” You see it in 1 Cor 2:2: “I *decided* to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

The key word in part 2 is “desire.” First Thessalonians 1–2 shows us God’s power in the preacher’s relationships. The Holy Spirit uses a man with converting power when the people see in that man not demands from them but desires for them.

The key word in part 3 is “delight.” Second Corinthians 12:1–10 shows us God’s power in the preacher’s personal life. The Holy Spirit strengthens a preacher who delights in his weaknesses for the sake of Christ.

My appeal throughout is what I heard from J. I. Packer when I was a seminary student thirty-five years ago: “Do not neglect the revival dimension in your ministry.”

3. 1 Corinthians 1:17–31

1 Corinthians 1:17

We come now to 1 Cor 2:1–5 and the decision every preacher must make. Paul starts moving us toward clarity when he says in 1:17, “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel.” That is a strong statement. Not even the sacraments are central. Christ has sent us to preach. But how should we preach? How should we communicate the gospel? It is possible to preach the gospel in ways that empty out the power: “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, *and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*” If we preach the gospel with eloquent wisdom, or more literally “the wisdom of speech,” it is worse than a lost opportunity. Something goes *wrong*. The cross of Christ is emptied of its power.

We are capable of emptying the cross even as we preach the cross. It is possible to use biblical words like “atonement” and “sacrifice,” but they have been emptied out. The result is hollowed-out churches. To accomplish that result, we do not have to forsake the message. All we have to do is preach the biblical message with what Paul calls “wisdom of speech.” Either the cross will discipline our communication, or our communication will empty out the power of the cross. So if Christ has sent us to preach, and if his power works in only a particular way, what is that way? Paul explains in 1 Cor 2:1–5.

You know the context. The Corinthian church was ripping itself apart with popularity contests for their favorite preachers—Paul, Apollos, Cephas. Some claimed Christ alone, but not because they were so spiritual. The implication was, “I follow Christ, *and you don’t.*” The root of it all was pride. The Corinthians were sermon connoisseurs, critiquing their preachers as entertainers rather than critiquing themselves as Christians.

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Now if Paul had moved directly from 1:17 to 2:1, I would not have noticed that anything was

missing. But he takes another step first in 1:18–31. Paul’s vision rises from the problem immediately before him to God’s whole strategy for human history. He puts Corinthian pride up against a larger backdrop. According to 1:18–25, God’s strategy is to destroy the wisdom of the wise (1:19), make foolish the world’s brainiest ideas (1:20), defy human demands and elude human inquiry (1:21–23) and make the biggest breakthrough with an approach we would scorn (1:24–25). God is lifting over this world of self-assurance a cross. God deliberately stoops to weakness and folly. He *makes* his salvation look unpromising when judged from the lofty gaze of human pride. God *intends* to embarrass human genius, exalt divine folly, and bless everyone who is foolish enough to esteem a crucified Savior.

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

In 1:26–2:5, Paul shows the Corinthians how they themselves have seen God working his grand strategy within their own experience. They have seen God’s surprising methods in two ways. First, in 1:26–31, Paul reminds them that not many of them are big-shots in the world. But God chose the foolish, God chose the weak, God chose the low and despised in the world. Three times in 1:27–28 Paul reminds them it was God’s own choice. He was not stuck with the leftovers. He got first dibs, and he *chose* the nobodies. Why? Look at the purpose clauses in 1:27–29: “to shame the wise, . . . to shame the strong, . . . to bring to nothing things that are, [and here is God’s final aim] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” As C. S. Lewis taught us, human pride is “the complete anti-God state of mind,”⁶ and he will never make peace with it. But according to 1:30, God loves to give simple people his wisdom and discredited people his righteousness and sinful people his sanctification and enslaved people his redemption in gracious union with Christ. It is all of God. Therefore, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord” (1:31).

4. 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

Now in our passage, 2:1–5, Paul reminds the Corinthians of a second way they have seen God using unimpressive people for his own glory. They have witnessed the divine strategy in Paul as well. It’s why he starts 2:1 with “And I, when I came to you . . .” He is saying, “Do you want another picture of God’s power making something of human ordinariness? Look at me.”

1 Corinthians 2:1

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom (1 Cor 2:1).

How can the testimony of God be served by the cleverness of man? Even if the doctrine preached is true, a presentation that showcases the presenter, to make him sparkle, empties out the true power. In a way, that’s an odd thing for Paul to say. This brilliant man was incapable of being dull. This passage itself is an eloquent deconstruction of human eloquence. What was it then that Paul did avoid in his preaching? What was the “lofty speech or wisdom” he considered unfit, along with the “words of eloquent wisdom” back in 1:17, that disempowers the gospel? Where did he draw the line, and where do we?

Duane Litfin’s excellent book, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, helps us here.⁷ Litfin connects

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 94.

⁷ Duane Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Paul's argument with the culture of rhetoric in the ancient world. When Paul refers to "words of eloquent wisdom" (1:17), "lofty speech or wisdom" (2:1), and "plausible words of wisdom" (2:4), he has in mind the arts of classical rhetoric. Rhetoric was the basis of education and credibility in Paul's world. It was the social dividing line between the leisured upper class of smart, cool people and the working lower class of simple, ordinary people. Not all rhetoric was sophistry, but audiences did applaud the clever use of argumentation so that a weak position could win out over a stronger one. They respected the display of intellectual sophistication and wit. It was how the gears of persuasion were lubricated. Rhetorical polish got a man's name in lights. And the Corinthian church had no problem with it (2 Cor 11:18–21).

We see it today in advertising, in political spin, in manipulative legal argumentation, in TV talk shows when nothing newsworthy has happened but they still fill up an hour with words, in the brilliant monologues of late night comedians, in pop music groups with closely choreographed steps and absolutely nothing to say but saying it in a way that keeps us watching. Rhetoric is the professionalization of communication, and it works. But there is a problem: it's all about self-display for self-glorification, and that's where Paul draws the line. He was a gifted, articulate, careful, passionate, learned, fascinating man, but he knew the difference between preaching Christ and showing off. He knew the difference between winning disciples to Christ and attracting a following to himself. He knew the difference between getting the gospel out and branding his own recognizable way of saying it. He knew the difference between the Spirit and the flesh.

It's the difference between a ῥήτωρ and a κήρυξ. A ῥήτωρ, a rhetorician, aimed at shaping opinion and producing belief. He wanted to take people somewhere. So he analyzed his audience, figured out what it was going to take to move them from Point A to Point B, and by the sheer force of his persona and skills led them to the desired conclusion. Teachers of rhetoric set up schools in Paul's world to show people how. You see ads for it today in airline magazines. For \$250 you can buy a set of CDs to teach you how to sway an audience and get a standing ovation. But truth is not the passion of the rhetorician; he is targeting opinion.

By contrast, a κήρυξ, a herald, was controlled by his message. He was responsible to the one who had sent him. A herald didn't disregard his audience. We know from 1 Cor 9 that Paul adapted humbly and widely to the various human profiles in his mission field. He saw himself as a debtor to the wise and to the foolish (Rom 1:14), but he could never adjust his message for anyone. That message was the cross, and the humiliation and powerlessness and egolessness of the cross disciplined Paul's communication. If it's true that when an amateur is invited to speak in public the first question he asks is "What should I talk about?" but when a pro is invited to speak in public the first question he asks is "Who is my audience?", then Paul is saying here, "I *chose* to be an amateur."

So for the rhetorician, the fixed point was the audience, and the variable to be adjusted was the message. Paul reversed that. He was sensitive to his hearers. He longed to reach their hearts. He answered their questions. But he did not use the tricks of the trade to produce a result. Paul had become captivated by a foolishness and a weakness that his audience didn't understand or even respect. He knew it was the wisdom and power of God. The gospel points to a bloodied mass of crucified flesh hardly recognizable as human and says to us all, "*There* is the healing of all your wounds. *There* is the satisfaction of all your desires. *There* is the wisdom for every question you ask. *There* is the victory that will open up a new future for the whole universe." The best kept secret in the world today is that life comes out of death, joy out of sorrow, power out of surrender, greatness out of ordinariness, opportunity out of setbacks. Jesus *is* the paradox. Hanging from his cross and rising from his grave, Jesus proved the wisdom of God's folly and the power of God's weakness. Paul understood that. He revered it. He didn't

want salvation any other way. The cross set Paul free *not* to be a glittering personality in his preaching but to be as weak as Christ himself.

1 Corinthians 2:2

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

Whatever other preachers may or may not do, Paul had thought it through for himself and he made up his mind. I love that. This man thinks. He thinks for himself. He is not retailing someone else's ministry. He is not molded by the expectations of the audience. He is gripped by the testimony of God. So he made a decision—and not between a watered-down message of the cross *versus* a fully biblical message of the cross. The decision he made was between a fully biblical message of the cross communicated by an uncrucified preacher *versus* a fully biblical message of the cross communicated by a crucified preacher. When he came to Corinth, he was ready to be used by the Spirit of God.

When I look at 2:2 and ask myself what one English word objectifies the tone of this verse, the word “reverence” is the only word that fits. Paul revered Christ. He did not use the gospel of Christ for another end. He revered Christ. A nineteenth-century poet put these imaginative but appropriate words into the mouth of the apostle:

Christ! I am Christ's! And let the name suffice you;
Aye, for me too He greatly hath sufficed.
Lo, with no winning words I would entice you;
Paul has no honor and no friend but Christ.⁸

Paul knew and felt that the preaching of Christ crucified was sacred, untouchable, and sufficient in itself. It is the testimony of God, who said to his people through Isaiah,

When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you
this trampling of my courts? (Isa 1:12)

The courts of the temple belonged to him, not to them, and the preaching of the gospel belongs to him, not to us. He sets the tone. He defines the ground rules. If we vulgarize the sacred precincts of gospel ministry by intruding our egos into our preaching, he is offended. You have some courageous decisions to make about your preaching style. If you don't, the pressure of the audience will overwhelm you, and those pressures are not conducive to the reverence of 1 Cor 2:2.

I hope I might have the privilege of attending your church someday. But if at the end of the service my dominant impression is how cool the lighting was and how hip the band was and how darling you were, I will walk up to you afterwards and ask you,

Who was all this about—you or Christ? Your people are desperate sinners, and some of them know it. They walked in here this morning almost begging you to show them a Savior, and that Savior is not you. They need Christ. But they can't hear, really hear, his gospel without divine power in it. Are you reaching by faith for the power of God,

⁸ F. W. H. Myers, *Saint Paul* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1916), 13.

or are you settling for the power of you? Who is all this about? Who is it for? Have you decided?

1 Corinthians 2:3–4

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor 2:3–4).

Paul didn't mind coming across as modest, unimpressive, even weak. How could he mind, if his message was a crucified man? Paul's presence did not counteract his message, though the self-admiring Corinthians would have preferred someone more formidable. Imagine two members of that church running into each other in the marketplace during the week:

"Hey, who's preaching at church this Sunday?"

"Paul."

"Oh no! I've invited my neighbor. I thought Dr. Smartypants was preaching this week.

Paul means well, but he'll never make it in the big leagues."

Paul knew he wasn't what they wanted, but that was okay with him. His reverence for Christ crucified wouldn't let him stride onto the platform of public discourse in Corinth with the cocky self-assurance of a first-rate rhetorician. As a minister of Christ, he wouldn't stoop to it. Philostratus commented that Scopelian the popular speaker appeared before his audiences not "with the bearing of a timid speaker but as befitted one who was entering the lists to win glory for himself and was confident that he could not fail."⁹ But the apostle Paul came "in weakness and in fear and much trembling."

I don't think Paul is idealizing an "aw-shucks" presentation, which is only another form of self-display. He isn't proposing that we secretly commend ourselves by demeaning ourselves, which is only another form of manipulative self-focus. Today, rather than be embarrassed by our weaknesses, we might hold them out for all to see and call it "honesty." But Paul is not saying that he showed off diffidence rather than confidence. He didn't show off at all. William Willimon reminds us, "Authenticity is more than a matter of being who I am; it is a matter of being who God calls me to be. For preachers, authenticity means being true, not just to our feelings, but true to our vocation, true to God's call."¹⁰

Paul felt inadequate. And why not? It is God's strategy for human history to expose that inadequacy and then replace it with Jesus. So Paul did not falsify himself or compensate in any self-exalting way. He decided that when he stood before people, it was only about Christ, and the power of God entered in.

Obviously, the contrast in 2:4 is between "plausible words of wisdom" and the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The plausible words of wisdom are the impressive forms of presentation that influence feeling and opinion. But no human powers, however brilliant, can create the certainty, the heartfelt, Christ-focused certainty that inspires heroic resistance to this present evil age. Those human powers are a part of this present evil age. Even if they do change someone, it is only rearranging the furniture in their worldly minds.

Persuasion is valid, even obvious. Paul himself says, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,

⁹Quoted in Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 209.

¹⁰William H. Willimon, "Naked Preachers are Distracting," *Christianity Today* 42 (April 6, 1998): 62.

we persuade others” (2 Cor 5:11). We should aim to satisfy the mind, win the heart, and move people to action (Acts 17:2–4; 18:4). Lazy, unimaginative, unsurprising tedium in the name of faithfulness will not do! But for our preaching to come across as the testimony of God, the Holy Spirit must prove it. Paul not only depended on the Spirit’s power; his preaching demonstrated the Spirit’s power. The word “demonstration” here means proof. It takes a person’s thinking beyond plausibility into certainty, where the decisions of a lifetime are forged. That is what the Holy Spirit does, and only the Spirit can do that. Paul is frankly admitting here that he wasn’t even effective at the level of plausibility. But God came down. The Spirit flew in under the radar of people’s prejudices, entered their minds and hearts, and demonstrated—he proved as only God can—that Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God brilliantly disguised as folly and weakness and that the worldly beliefs the hearers had always clung to were folly and weakness brilliantly disguised as wisdom and power. That change of heart is a miracle. It is the gift of “all the riches of full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2). No rhetorician, not even an apostle, can get people there, but God can, and he does, through weak preachers. Here is the net result:

1 Corinthians 2:5

that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor 2:5).

The advantage of spiritual preaching—not just expository preaching but spiritual preaching—is significant. Paul could have achieved results with “the wisdom of men,” but human wisdom works with human power. Even the message of the cross, preached in human power, leaves converts forever vulnerable to a *more* clever argument, a *more* impressive presentation, a *more* charismatic personality. Today’s unanswerable argument by human wisdom is tomorrow’s unnoticed academic footnote. Paul preached as a vessel fit for noble use because the Holy Spirit is moving through the world in power today for this one purpose: to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Friend of sinners.

5. Conclusion

Let’s never be intimidated or depressed by our ordinariness and inadequacy and unimpressiveness. Most of us are quite ordinary. All of us can improve our preaching, and we will. But the sacred given is the message of the cross, which the Holy Spirit empowers in men of the cross. Let’s not disempower it. Let’s trust God’s strategy. God himself entered into his own strategy through an egoless nobody named Jesus Christ, whom this brilliant world crucified. That Christ is sending us out to preach his message by his power. We are fully equipped in every essential with the testimony of God, the message of Christ crucified, and the power of the Holy Spirit. *Will you decide to stake your whole ministry there?*

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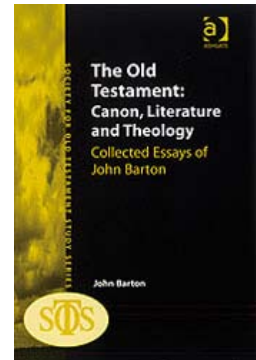
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— OLD TESTAMENT —

John Barton. *The Old Testament: Canon, Literature and Theology: Collected Essays of John Barton*. Society for Old Testament Study. Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2007. 308 pp. £57.00/\$114.95.

This book conveniently gathers together a related series of articles that appeared in the last twenty years in journals and multi-authored books. A similar collection of the author's articles on biblical ethics has also been published. He is Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford University and is perhaps best known for his book *Reading the OT: Method in Biblical Study* (1984, 1996). Much of his first two sections in this collection naturally coincides with his conclusions drawn there, but they are discussed here at greater length and from various angles. Here and elsewhere Barton exemplifies the image of British scholarship as coolly and judiciously evaluating the hot, new notions of others, though this is not to minimize his own innovative work. This quality of engaging in what Mathew Henry called "second and sober thoughts" makes his writing essential reading, although and in fact because he often stands in a center-left position rather than in the center-right one of many readers of this journal.



Of the twenty-four essays, the largest number, eleven, is devoted to literature. This preponderance accords with the fact that he received a literary training before a theological one. Those of us who are less lettered and yet try to handle literature-based approaches must appreciate his expertise and listen carefully to his recurring warnings that neither Robert Alter nor Brevard Childs is to be followed uncritically. The essay "What Is a Book?" concludes with a plea for tolerating loose ends and not striving to impose on the text a tidiness that can emanate from a literary approach. The next essay closes with a warning that "the Church is not best served by an academic community that delivers the verdicts it wants to hear" (p. 156). Chapter thirteen was the inaugural lecture of his professorial chair. It makes the ever timely point that "the question [biblical criticism] asks is always 'What does the text say?' rather than 'What have we always been told that the text says?' or 'What would it be good to believe that the text says?'" (p. 162). The next essay, on "Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*," which depends solidly on the earlier articles in the journal *Semeia* 25, is a good example of advancing scholarship by first standing on others' shoulders. In "The Final Form of the Text," Barton poses some gadfly questions. The final essay in this section, "On Biblical Commentaries," engages in perennial concerns and urges an approach of "chastened historical criticism" (p. 210).

Seven essays are concerned with the issue of canon. Much of what he says is a persistent evaluation of Childs's "canonical approach," which he opposes in a sympathetic manner, arguing for instance that the emphasis on product should be balanced by James Sanders's stress on process. The essay on the Book of the Twelve gives an example of what he urges generally in "What Is a Book?"—not to impose uniformity on the text but to respect its variety and diversity. A number of the essays in this section reiterate this warning as part of a plea to retain a historical-critical approach in order to elucidate scripture properly. One misses a recognition at some point that Childs was no stranger to biblical tension and often brought it to the fore in his *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*. In "Old Testament or Hebrew Bible?" he argues forcefully in favor of the former title over against the latter one or even First Testament.

The remaining six essays relate to theology. Chapter nineteen is a careful evaluation of von Rad's theological interpretation of OT literature and in this case finds an improper diversity. "History and Rhetoric in the Prophets" appreciates the role of rhetoric in the prophetic interpretation of history, but one is left wondering whether Barton's balance is right. "The Messiah in OT Theology" includes a thoughtful discussion of what OT theology is or should be as well as a consideration of the role of the Messiah in it. "Covenant in OT Theology" tackles the different attitudes to covenant encountered in biblical studies and tries to draw some conclusions. In his final essay, "The Day of the Lord in the Minor Prophets," he argues well that the doctrine reverted after Amos to a pre-Amos definition, but one wonders whether he has appreciated the essential difference between a pre-judgment perspective and a post-judgment one.

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Marvin A. Sweeney. *I and II Kings: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. 476 pp. £27.99/\$49.95.

In the latest volume of the Old Testament Library series, Marvin Sweeney, who is undoubtedly one of the leading scholars in prophetic literature today, has written a concise and lucid commentary on Kings that reflects his impressive historical and literary erudition. Though written with the classical historical-critical view in mind, it is innovative and offers insights that will be the subject of scholarly discussion for years to come. Sweeney attempts to bridge the gap between 'those who defend the Bible's truth claims . . . and look for evidence to confirm the veracity of its historical presentation' and 'those who question the Bible's truth claims' and dwell on the challenges that archaeology, ANE literature, and the Bible itself ostensibly present to discount Kings as a historical source, by presenting a 'middle way' (p. 4).



I and II Kings: A Commentary begins with a lengthy, but helpful, introduction that discusses preliminary matters found in most commentaries, such as historicity, literary structure, theology, and textual versions, but the majority of this space is devoted to his understanding of the compositional history for Kings. A cursory reading of the introduction might lead one to summarily categorise Sweeney with the consensus historical-critical view regarding composition and literary structure; however, his understanding of the composition of Kings has distinctive elements that are intriguing, and he diverges from the commonly held view of a tripartite structure of the book. Sweeney advocates a multistage composition of Kings with several editions of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), which ultimately results in a final exilic edition in the mid-sixth century B.C.E. The final form of Kings is a highly theological account of the history of the fall of the Davidic monarchy, but underlying the final form are several layers of previous editions that have been incorporated into the final exilic form. Previous editions of the DtrH include the Josianic edition from the late seventh century B.C.E., which presents Josiah as the ideal monarch of the Davidic line. Sweeney points to literary tensions in the final form, which, he argues, are the result of redactional activity of a Josianic edition into the exilic edition

(pp. 438–42). For those familiar with Sweeney’s scholarship, the prominence of Josiah in Sweeney’s understanding of the composition of Kings, and for that matter the Hebrew Bible in general, should not be surprising. Much of his views can be traced to his earlier work, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford University Press, 2001), and to a lesser degree, his recent commentary on Zephaniah (Fortress, 2003), where he argues that Zephaniah is a work during the reign of Josiah. Another edition, according to Sweeney, is the Hezekian edition, which is the basis for the Josianic edition. For him, the abrupt interruption of Hezekiah’s reforms by the Assyrian invasion, placement of Hezekiah’s regnal account immediately following Hoshea’s regnal account, and formulaic patterns in the regnal accounts are evidence of a Hezekian edition. Sweeney’s multistage composition takes him beyond a Hezekian edition to an even earlier stage: the Jehu Dynastic History, produced in the first half of the eighth century and found in 1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 14 (with the exception of 1 Kgs 13). This is a modified approach to Campell and O’Brien’s Prophetic Record proposal and has implications for the Davidic history in 1 Sam 1–1 Kgs 10. The earliest edition of Kings, according to Sweeney, is the Solomonic History that culminates in 1 Kgs 3–10 and commences in 1 Sam 1 (minus 2 Sam 10–12; 21–24), and dates to the mid-tenth century, a hypothesis at which most historical critics will undoubtedly cringe. Sweeney bases his argument on the positivistic presentation of Solomon’s reign as an unprecedented period of peace, prosperity, power, and stability, and the demise of the house of Saul in 2 Sam 9–20, which is crucial for the rise of David, as a clear indicator of pro-Davidic/Solomonic interest. Consequently, his commentary on 1 Kgs 3–10 is particularly interesting.

With regard to the overall structure of Kings, Sweeney prefers a sequence of thirty-eight ‘regnal accounts’ that evaluate the reigns of the kings (1 Kgs 14:21 to 2 Kgs 25:30), over the majority view, which views 1–2 Kgs in a tripartite structure (1 Kgs 1–11, the ‘united kingdoms’; 1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 17, the ‘divided kingdoms’; and 2 Kgs 18–25, the ‘remaining kingdoms’). The OTL series format allows for comment on chapter-length units, which Sweeney uses to provide helpful overviews and literary perspectives, as well as smaller units, where he demonstrates his mastery of linguistic, archaeological, and historical details.

In short, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* is a wonderfully balanced commentary, in terms of its accessibility and excellent scholarship and its ‘middle way’ approach to critical matters. That Sweeney maintains a high view of the text and considers Kings to be a historically verifiable account of the past is also refreshing. This volume promises to be a standard commentary and is a ‘must-have’ for scholars, students, and pastors alike, who wish to further engage with Kings.

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Ephraim Radner. *Leviticus*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008. 320 pp. £16.99/\$29.99.

This book is part of a commentary series initiated in 2005. Nearly one quarter of the series has been published so far. The series emphasizes theological exposition based upon the concept that “theological training in the Nicene tradition prepares one for biblical interpretation.” Readers who are used to traditional commentaries will miss some of the textual debate. However, this does not mean that they will find theology pressed upon the Old Testament texts.

It is fortunate that Ephraim Radner is an accessible writer with thorough historical knowledge, mainly about the pre-critical tradition. Origen, Augustine, Calvin, and many Jewish writers teem in his work with challenging interpretations that historical-critical approaches have banned. Incidentally, this has been Radner’s main contribution in his commentary: the recovery of pre-critical theological thought, and his postcritical doctrinal dialogue with it.

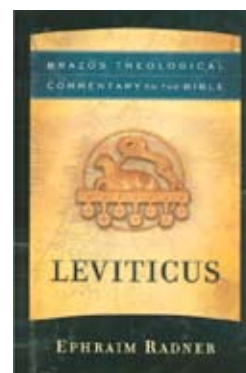
Radner sustains the thesis that throughout the entire twenty-seven chapters of Leviticus sacrifice is a loving offering that provides support to, explains, and is explained by the passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. From the outset, readers are made keenly aware of the importance of the conceptual and practical linkage between Jesus Christ and the book of Leviticus. The physical body of Christ is the symbolic central figure that governs the entire book.

Once Radner’s theological presuppositions and scope are made clear, it is hard to point out weaknesses. Of course each exegete would arrange things differently. Being aware of this, I would, for instance, observe that Jesus’ teaching in Mark 7:21–23 fits better in Chapter eleven, instead of Chapter fifteen. Although I agree that Mark’s context does not refer to separation, the fact remains that it is about food and eating. Also, the reader is strained at times to follow the author’s argument carefully, perhaps because the central theme of love offering is at the same time scattered throughout the book and is an essential concept accomplished in Christ. I would suggest that the reader should first read through the book’s Epilogue. Even without grasping every detail, they would get a better mental hold of Radner’s main points. After this effort the reader could create a preliminary outline of questions and then look for answers or explanations in the commentary in order to understand better the peculiar interpretive approach of the book.

There are three strengths: (1) The author engages much underused, interesting material from Old Testament commentators—mainly pre-critical and Jewish interpreters. (2) As a result we have a picture of the history of theological interpretation of Leviticus. (3) The general thesis that Christ is the heart of the book is certainly a helpful option to understand the whole story of Scripture and its redemptive meaning, particularly reminding Christians of their responsibility in drawing the world toward God as a reflection of an individual relationship of responsibility with God.

Radner offers an interesting perspective on Leviticus, showing how God reorients his people amidst this disoriented world. All separation (*nazar*) must be seen as a reminder of our position as creature. Without referring and mirroring the Creator we are senseless.

The Epilogue, as I have said, should be read first, to give readers the taste of Radner’s approach as a whole. Be prepared, however, that the Epilogue is dense. There one could explore a plethora of themes: creation, love, atonement, service, adoration, and others. This compactness triggers a twofold



conclusion. First, Radner could have written more about each theme, specially providing contemporary contextualization to preachers. Second, by drawing on a theological approach to Leviticus, Radner gives us the opportunity to interact with his view, unpacking those dense themes laid down at the end of his book.

Readers of the Bible need to give this volume careful attention. It will provide a helpful interpretation and understanding of sacrifice. It will inspire and convict as well as teach.

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H. G. M. Williamson, ed. *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*. Proceedings of the British Academy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xxii + 432 pp. £50.00/\$99.00.

As the series title indicates, this collected volume of nineteen essays began its life in a symposium sponsored by the British Academy. Organized by Oxford's Regius Professor of Hebrew, H. G. M. Williamson, with assistance from Professors Graham Davies of Cambridge and Lester Grabbe of Hull, the 2005 symposium brought together scholars of different stripes to tackle the "problem of method in the academic study of the history of ancient Israel" (p. xiii). Three key issues were emphasized as contributing to the sometimes sharp disagreements among historians of early Israel: (1) the "varied, fragmentary and partial" nature of the available evidence, whether textual, archaeological, iconographic, etc.; (2) the sometimes sharp disagreements over "just what sort of history we ought in any case to be attempting to reconstruct"; and (3) the inescapable fact that "one of the major sources at our disposal is the Bible itself," about whose character and historical import scholars are divided (pp. xiii–xiv).



Eschewing the overheated rhetoric—even name-calling—that in recent years has occasionally marred the debate, the symposium aspired to consider "our present predicament . . . in a more rational, considerate and informed manner." All participants were asked to "write with a self-conscious reference to method" and to "concentrate on the ninth century B.C.E. as a test case" (p. xiv).

The nineteen essays that comprise the volume are logically arranged under four headings: orientation, comparative perspectives, sources and methods, and synthesis. The longest section, on sources and methods, begins with two very instructive essays on the uses and abuses of archaeology in reconstructing Israel's history. That the authors of these two essays, D. Ussishkin and A. Mazar, disagree on some major points only enhances the value of the volume, as its readers are challenged to wrestle with vying viewpoints and come to their own considered judgments. Indeed, the juxtaposition of contrasting positions characterizes the shape of the volume as a whole and was intended by the symposium organizers, who hoped to capture something of the breadth of opinion among those writing on the history of ancient Israel.

Not only the variety of methodological perspectives and preferences, but the wide range of disciplines represented by the participants in the symposium, combine to offer a rich feast for serious

readers. Most contributors are biblical scholars by trade, but also included in the mix are specialists in archaeology, ancient Near Eastern history, classics, Semitics, Islam, modern Jewish studies, etc.

It is not possible in a short review even to begin to summarize the content of the nineteen essays, but a listing of their authors will give the reader conversant in the field a sense of the volume's breadth and diversity: in Part I "orientation" is provided by J. W. Rogerson, K. W. Whitelam, H. M. Barstad, P. R. Davies, and L. L. Grabbe; in Part II "comparative perspectives" are offered by classicist T. P. Wiseman, Islamicist C. F. Robinson, and ANE historian A. Kuhrt; in Part III, on "sources and methods," archaeologists D. Ussishkin and A. Mazar lead off (as noted already), C. Uehlinger offers a well-illustrated, important treatment of the wise use of visual evidence in historical reconstruction, M. J. Geller discusses Akkadian sources pertinent to the 9th-century Palestine, K. L. Younger discusses the important issue of "periodization" as this relates to Assyrian and Israelite history, A. Lemaire provides a survey and analysis of ninth-century West Semitic inscriptions, M. Z. Brettler presents a provocative methodological essay, to which G. Auld responds with critique and his own theoretical construal; and finally, in Part IV, "Synthesis," R. Albertz demonstrates the heuristic value of appropriately chosen sociological models (taken in combination with textual data), former law professor B. S. Jackson argues that Jehoshaphat's judicial reform "fits well with the circumstances of the ninth century" (p. 394), and N. Na'aman rounds out the volume with a sweeping, suggestive reconstruction of the history of the Northern Kingdom in the late tenth–ninth centuries.

Before concluding, I would like to say just a little about the five "orientation" essays in Part I. In some respects I regard this expressly methodological and philosophical section as simultaneously the most important and the most disappointing part of the volume. Rogerson rightly alerts us to the fact that many of the hotly debated issues pertinent to ancient Israel's history are not entirely new. Barstad's substantial methodological essay is characteristically fair and instructive.

That the other three essays should be by Whitelam, Davies, and Grabbe gives rise, in my opinion, to a one-sided impression. Each of these three makes some astute and sensible observations but also some comments that deserve challenge. For instance, Davies' insistence that "history without a god is a more 'economical' explanation (in Occam's sense)" (p. 50) is logical enough from Davies' own metaphysical perspective but should give pause to biblical scholars who are theists. Also disappointing in a volume aspiring to debate in a "more rational, considerate and informed manner" (p. xiv) is the dismissive (even derisive) treatment that some recent works, including one by the present reviewer, receive. Whitelam lumps together Provan, Long, and Longman's *Biblical History of Israel* (WJK, 2003) with Kitchen's substantial tome *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2003) and describes the publication of both as "a reflection of a neo-conservative agenda that has dominated American politics in recent years" (p. 16), suggesting further that such works, "given the current conservative climate, are both easy and extremely lucrative to produce" (p. 17). Grabbe rightly maintains that labels such as maximalist/minimalist are a bane (pp. 57–60) and admonishes the field to respond to "actual argument and not just dismiss it because of the presumed motive" (p. 60). And yet he does not hesitate to label our book "a maximalist history" and—bypassing argument—to dismiss it as "utterly boring," "a very brief paraphrase of the biblical text" (it runs to 230,000 words) with only the occasional reference to extra-biblical material and "the occasional quotation of another scholar" (over 500 are referenced), whose "basic ploy is to ignore difficulties" (p. 59), exhibiting "the trappings of scholarship" but "cloak[ing] fundamentalist motives" (p. 60). "Ploy," "trappings," "cloak"—to have one's work mischaracterized and maligned in this fashion is disappointing, to say the least. The present review provides neither space nor necessity to respond, so perhaps a simple "let the reader decide" must suffice.

Despite *some* disappointing features in *some* of the essays in the orientation section, overall the volume under review is instructive and stimulating. Its substantial discussions of a wide range of issues pertaining to the history of early Israel, contributed by a wide variety of scholars of diverse opinion, provide grist for the increasingly active mill that is the academic study of the history of Israel. The volume is well produced and indexed.

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J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*. Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xviii + 896 pp. £27.50/\$55.00.

The very idea of putting together a *handbook of biblical studies* should alert the informed reader about the longstanding difficulties with regard to synchronizing the contributions coming from just about everywhere. At the core of such difficulty is the uncertainty regarding the way one should handle the many issues related to the subject. The editors are well aware that synchronizing does not entail harmonizing the contributions, instead, the “diversity that becomes apparent in the Handbook is a reliable guide to the present state of biblical studies” (p. xvii). That continues to be the aim and certainly the main contribution of *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*—to encourage scholars to integrate and contextualize their findings into this diverse whole.



The opening essays on the history of the discipline show us that the resultant picture “is that of a discipline full of vigour, offering many new challenges and possibilities” (p. 22). In this regard it is encouraging to see the integration of the essays on the contribution of archaeology (Bartlett) and ANE studies (Lambert and Kitchen), in section 2, with their “counterpart” in part 5 dealing with *methods in biblical scholarship*: “The main problem of biblical archaeology was that it was one-sided, attempting to fit archaeological evidence into the mould set by biblical historians” (p. 576). The *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* is an attempt to interfere with this one-sided approach by making available in one volume a sizable collection of contributions. This is a significant contribution of the *handbook*, namely, to acknowledge the impact that other disciplines have upon biblical scholarship.

Since its first appearance in 2005, the *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* has been reviewed and criticized from different angles; the last section on *authority* seems to attract all types of reaction. The essay by Harriet Harris dealing with Fundamentalism has been criticized elsewhere in that “the primary focus seemed to be on critiquing fundamentalism, rather than describing the larger (and quite varied) landscape of views about how the Bible functions authoritatively today”. Yet, Harris ends her essay with a review of Kevin Vanhoozer’s contribution on the subject, saying that he responds to fundamentalism by offering the conditions for a theology constructed differently, in which the triune God is the ground of faith and Scripture, and the Spirit speaks through Scripture to make it efficacious. On a fundamentalist rendering, by contrast, Scripture is the ground of faith, meaning that it is the basis upon which we know anything about God, and the triune God inspires and interprets Scriptures in order to ensure the

sufficiency of the evidence it contains. This section on *authority* ends with an essay by J. W. Rogerson, who is conscious that the section will seek to do the impossible, namely, to describe how and in what ways the Bible is authoritative. For Rogerson, the impossibility has to do with the many different ways in which such authority is viewed by different churches (p. 853).

Unfortunately, the purpose of such a promising project can be easily defeated by the selective reader who bypasses the synchronizing character of the handbook genre and focuses on the conflicting voices in the essays. Being involved in Latin American scholarship, I certainly welcome the project of a handbook on biblical studies for the simple reason that it fosters contribution without isolation, a problem that has characterized much of the Latin American voice in current discussion.

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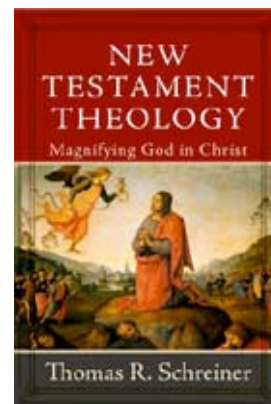
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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Thomas R. Schreiner. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. Nottingham: Apollos; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. 990 pp. \$44.99.

Thomas R. Schreiner has produced a near exhaustive New Testament theology that takes a distinctive thematic approach to the task. Schreiner defends the thematic approach (as opposed to a corpus-by-corpus method) since it emphasizes the coherence and unity of the NT. The corpus approach can be repetitive, and it gives a theology of the entire NT, not just its constituent parts. Schreiner does not deny the value of the corpus approach (cf. the work of I. Howard Marshall and Frank Thielman), nor does he deny the value of various approaches to NT theology (written from the vantage point of eschatology, Christology, etc.). Schreiner is also aware that a thematic approach can flatten out the distinctives of the biblical authors and lead to over-systematizing. Yet in his view, because no NT author intended to write “theology,” a NT theology can emerge only from a synthesis of the whole. Furthermore, for Schreiner, the centre of a NT theology is God’s purpose to bring honor to himself and to Jesus Christ *and* the fulfillment of his saving promises. These two nodes are combined in order to comprise Schreiner’s ultimate centre: “God works out his saving plan so that he would be magnified in Christ, so that his name would be honored” (p. 14).

Part 1. In the introductory chapter Schreiner gives a broad overview of the NT by surveying the centrality of God and God’s kingdom in Christ, and he emphasizes the importance of the now-and-not-yet in biblical eschatology. Part one focuses on inaugurated eschatology in the NT with the fulfillment of God’s saving promises. In chapter one (“The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels”), Schreiner identifies the kingdom as being central in Jesus’ ministry and pays attention to its inaugurated character and its manifestation in the person and work of Christ. In chapter two (“Eternal Life and Eschatology in John’s Theology”), Schreiner argues that even though John emphasizes “eternal life”



rather than “kingdom of God,” he has not evacuated future eschatology from his theological horizon. An eschatological dualism permeates the Fourth Gospel and the emphasis on the present experience of eternal life still looks forward to a future consummation. Chapter three (“Inaugurated Eschatology outside the Gospels”) traces how the now-not yet scheme permeates the rest of the NT. Though the contrast between ages can be made in different ways by different authors, the consistent feature is that God has begun to fulfill his saving promises in Jesus Christ and believers still await its ultimate consummation.

Part 2. Part two addresses the saving work of the Father, Son, and Spirit. In chapter four (“The Centrality of God in New Testament Theology”), Schreiner shows how God is the foundation for all of NT theology as Creator and Redeemer. Then in chapter five (“The Centrality of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels”), he lays out the Gospel accounts that describe Jesus as the climax of redemptive history and his divine nature. Chapter six (“The Messiah and the Son of Man in the Gospels”) was a particular highlight with some sane remarks about complex topics of messianism and the enigmatic Son of Man. Jesus was a messianic claimant despite his unwillingness to use the title due to the political unrest it might cause. In Daniel 7, Schreiner sees the “one like a son of man” as both a symbol of the saints and an individual figure. Son of Man is a title in the Gospels that indicates Jesus’ role in establishing the kingdom and that the kingdom comes precisely through the Son of Man’s travails. The substance of chapter seven (“Son of God, I Am, and Logos”) examines important aspects of NT Christology and shows that it is indebted to the Jewish background supplied by the Old Testament and its subsequent reception rather than to Hellenistic influences.

In chapter eight (“Jesus’ Saving Work in the Gospels”), Schreiner focuses on how the Servant of the Lord from Isaiah is appropriated by the Evangelists, an outline of the story of salvation in the Synoptics, and a very good sketch of the cross in the Fourth Gospel. However, this chapter lacks one crucial thing, namely, showing how the story of the cross also relates to the story of Israel in God’s ultimate plan for salvation in the Gospels. But Schreiner is definitely correct that Christology and soteriology are indissolubly connected together in the NT. Into chapter nine (“Jesus’ Saving Work in Acts”), there is analysis of the kerygmatic materials in the Acts of the Apostles, and, importantly, Schreiner shows how Luke retains a genuine theology of the cross. In the tightly compressed chapter ten (“The Christology of Paul”), there is a survey of the centrality of Christ, Christological titles, and Jesus as God with emphasis on Jesus’ equal stature with God.

Chapter eleven (“The Saving Work of God and Christ according to Paul”) is the most rewarding and most frustrating chapter of the book. Schreiner examines the various metaphors and expressions for salvation and rightly summarizes Pauline soteriology as “salvation is of the Lord” (p. 379). This is Schreiner at his best and it shows that he is a true Paulinist at heart! Even so, I find some grounds for objection: (1) Schreiner organizes his explication of Paul’s soteriology around Rom 8:29, starting with foreknowledge, God’s love, election, predestination, etc., but this unfortunately elevates an *ordo salutis* over Paul’s *historia salutis*. Paul begins his most theological letter not with foreknowledge but with “gospel” (Rom 1:3–4), and his central thesis is redemptive-historical, apocalyptic, evangelic, and theocentric (Rom 1:16–17), not personal individual soteriology! (2) On justification, Schreiner sets forth an excellent case for the forensic nature of justification and gives a wonderful explanation of its link to the new life that believers receive (see esp. pp. 352, 361–62). Yet he reads Phil 3:9 into Rom 1:17 (and into 10:3–5) and defines the “righteousness of God” as a genitive of source, understanding the gift of righteousness as a declaration of not guilty. Contra Schreiner (p. 357), the absence of the preposition *ek* from Rom 1:17 is decisive! God’s saving righteous indeed results in a righteous status for believers,

but it cannot be equated with it. Rom 1:17 introduces not merely Rom 1–4 but Rom 5–11 as well, which includes forgiveness, redemption, transformation, life in the Spirit, union with Christ, victory over evil, and eternal life to name but a few themes. (3) Much of Schreiner’s discussion of justification seems to ignore the historical contingencies in which Paul argued for justification as being rooted in his efforts to legitimize the identity of Gentile believers as Gentiles in the face of Jewish Christian proselytizers. Schreiner no doubt would recognize this ecclesiological implication or horizontal dimension (see his discussion of reconciliation on p. 364), but I think that he should have expounded it a way that reflects Paul’s own concerns and priorities (e.g. Rom 3:21–26 is followed by 3:27–31 and Rom 10:3–11 is followed by Rom 10:12). (4) Lastly, I would point out that the apocalyptic and participationist approach to Paul’s theology is not necessarily at odds with a juridical articulation of righteousness by faith in Paul. Although I have focused here on aspects of this chapter that I find unconvincing, Schreiner exudes and oozes Paul.

In chapter twelve (“The Christology of Hebrews–Revelation”) there is a condensed but useful exposition of the Christological themes of the Catholic Epistles and the Apocalypse which demonstrate Schreiner’s thesis that an exalted Christology secures salvation. Chapter thirteen (“The Holy Spirit”) contains a description of the Holy Spirit, and Schreiner taps into various debates that require an answer (e.g., is the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts charismatic or soteric, and is the baptism that the coming one dispenses meant to signify cleaning or entering into the fires of judgment?). Schreiner successfully identifies an incipient trinitarianism in the NT as well.

Part 3. Part three involves the matter of experiencing the promise as it relates to believing and obeying. Chapter fourteen (“The Problem of Sin”) includes an exposition of the cause, nature, and depth of sinfulness in the human condition. Chapter fifteen (“Faith and Obedience”) contains some very useful discussions about the priority of faith and new obedience in the Gospels, Paul, and James on good works and justification, apostasy and falling away in Hebrews (Schreiner opts for the view that the warnings themselves are instrumental in producing perseverance and implies that believers will be shown to be false if they apostatize), and overcoming in the Book of Revelation. In chapter sixteen (“Law and Salvation History”), Schreiner engages one of the most perplexing topics of biblical theology. He performs a satisfying exercise of showing how the NT authors consistently think of the Law as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Though Schreiner appropriately describes the nuances of each NT author, I think he does flatten out some of the more specific differences here as evident from a comparison of 1 Corinthians (8:1–13; 10:25–33) and Revelation (2:14, 20) on whether one can eat idol food.

Part 4. Part four seeks to explain the life of church in the context of God’s promise for his people for their future. Chapter seventeen (“The People of the Promise”) provides a basic survey of how the NT authors see the Abrahamic promises fulfilled in the church. Schreiner identifies the discipline, sacraments, offices, and covenantal life of the church as the “true” Israel. Chapter eighteen (“The Social World of God’s People”) is one of the most salient of the book, and Schreiner focuses on five main areas: (1) riches and poverty, (2) the role of women, (3) marriage, divorce, and children, (4) relationship to governing authorities, and (5) slavery. I think Schreiner gives a fair and balanced summary of these matters although sometimes he would do well to add a prefatory note when he is speculating (e.g., “Junia probably worked particularly with other women in propagating the gospel” [p. 772]—but the fact is that we just don’t know what her “apostolic” work consisted of). In this chapter Schreiner provides a capable demonstration of how eschatological and theological perspectives shaped Christian engagement with social issues. Chapter nineteen (“The Consummation of God’s Promises”), the final chapter, provides a discussion on Jesus’ second advent, the future reward of believers, and the final judgment, with an

excursus on the future of Israel. I think Schreiner rightly identifies the Olivet Discourse as showing that the judgment that fell upon Jerusalem in AD 70 is a typology of the final judgment. He also gives a sober appraisal of the future of ethnic Israel, who will find salvation at or near the second advent of Christ.

In the epilogue Schreiner sums up the book as showing how God's promises made in the OT are fulfilled in Christ and the Spirit in the NT. Ultimately, to believe in Jesus Christ is participate in the story of God's saving actions. The book then closes with an appendix on "Reflections of New Testament Theology". There Schreiner surveys various approaches to NT theology and rightly critiques secular and history-of-religion perspectives in favor of those who see biblical theology as part of the movement toward a systematic theology. In terms of method, he states that no one has a God's-eye-view and that presuppositions inalienably shape interpreters and interpretations. In his own view, it is a presupposition of the NT as the inspired Word of God that is the presupposition that is most appropriate to the task.

In response, I find myself in two minds about Schreiner's thematic approach on how to do a NT theology. I think, on the one hand, that a thematic approach is the simplest and easiest way to organize the materials of the NT so that it is accessible and useful for students and pastors. However, in terms of following the text, the inductive corpus-by-corpus approach lends itself, I think, to providing the closest reading of the text as the basis for one's theological reflections. Ultimately, both methods are needed and have their relative strengths and weaknesses. The challenge for any NT theologian is to balance contingency with coherence and to perform evenly an inductive study with adequate theological synthesis. Schreiner's book is a worthy model in that task.

The only major criticism I have of the volume is Schreiner's theological centre of God working out his salvation plan so that he would be magnified in Christ. First, it does not jump out at me when I read the Gospel of Mark, the Epistle of Jude, or the Epistle to Philemon. Schreiner's centre is a synthetic interpretation and an inference drawn from the texts, but does not directly manifest itself in the NT. Something akin to God's salvation revealed through Jesus Christ would have a better claim to being the centre in my reckoning.

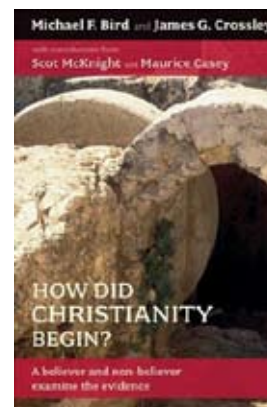
Second, while there is ample grounds for postulating that God acts out of a concern for his glory (e.g., Exod 14:4; Isa 48:11), I think it is important to add that God's self-magnification relates intimately to God's love as well. For instance, in Ps 115:1 (ESV) we read, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" whereby God's glory is something placed in service of his covenant love. God's love and glory are complementary aspects of his character and actions, so we can properly say that God's glory and God's love are different sides of the same coin. God is glorified in order to love, and God loves in order that he would be glorified. The love and glory of God are centrifugal, and they invade a world that rejected his glory and spurned his love so that all of creation would be filled with his love and glory. Thus, while God's self-magnification is a genuine biblical theme, we should stress also the inter-permeation of God's self-giving love with God's concern for his own glory and so disarm suspicions that God's self-magnification is a form of divine self-interest. In this sense, I would like to have seen Schreiner tease out this relationship between love and glory and so synthesize Eph 1:3–14 and John 3:16.

Those questions and criticisms notwithstanding, this is a book that should be on the bookshelf of every interested Christian. May it be read for many years to come!

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Michael F. Bird and James G. Crossley. *How Did Christianity Begin? A Believer and Non-believer Examine the Evidence*. With contributions from Scot McKnight and Maurice Casey. London: SPCK; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008. 206 pp. \$19.95.

This interesting book sprang from internet dialogue between Michael Bird, lecturer in New Testament at the Highland Theological College in Dingwall, Scotland, and James Crossley, lecturer in New Testament at the University of Sheffield. The former writes out of his evangelical and confessional heritage; the latter writes, not as someone from a liberal branch of Christianity, but as a secularist committed to studying and explaining nascent Christianity without recourse at any point to the supernatural. To some extent, both enjoy being mavericks within their respective traditions—Bird believing, for instance, that he can reconcile traditional Reformed theology and substantive aspects of the new perspective on Paul, and Crossley arguing for an early-forties date for the composition of Mark, a position that would make most self-respecting secularists blanch.



After an introductory four pages in which Bird and Crossley give their respective explanations of their approaches and commitments, five chapters unfold, Crossley beginning the first. Within the chapter, Bird responds and Crossley offers a surrejoinder. In subsequent chapters the two scholars alternate as to which one primarily sets out a position, the other primarily responding, with the first author in each chapter providing the surrejoinder.

These five substantive chapters treat, respectively: (1) The historical Jesus. Crossley argues that there is nothing done or said by the historical Jesus, including his claims and his approach to the law, that was not unparalleled in Judaism, and that the origins of Christianity are perfectly explained by socio-historical factors. Bird responds by briefly affirming Jesus' virginal conception, his miracles, his peculiar understanding and announcement of the kingdom, and his self-alignment with God—the latter stance openly taken up by his followers in worship. Crossley responds that Bird does not understand “socio-historical methodology” and dissents from some of Bird's assertions. (2) The resurrection. Here Bird starts off the discussion, but the pattern of exchange is similar. (3) The apostle Paul. (4) The Gospels. (5) Earliest Christianity.

The sixth and final substantive chapter was written by Scot McKnight and Maurice Casey. McKnight, Karl A. Olsson Professor in Religious Studies at North Park University, responds to Crossley; Casey, Emeritus Professor of New Testament at the University of Nottingham, responds to Bird. One of McKnight's charges is that Crossley devotes too much attention to the social dynamics of Jewish and Christian approaches to law and monotheism, and focuses too little attention on the kingdom, the centrality of Jesus, and “the incredible verbal display and concentration those early ecclesial communities had on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, along with the gift of the Spirit.” Casey undermines the credibility of the sources and insists that Bird's “evangelical convictions lead him to believe in the historicity of much secondary material in the canonical Gospels, to read early traditions in the light of later ones, and to view the Christ of evangelical faith as if he were the Jesus of history.”

A two-page seventh chapter, jointly written by Bird and Crossley, offer their joint “final reflections.” After almost two hundred pages of at least interesting debate, these two pages descend to the level of mush. Our two authors agree that they “disagree about a great deal,” that there are different ways of

looking at the evidence, that the subject is complicated, that it would be good if we could see ourselves as others see us (complete with the necessary reference to Robert Burns), and jointly support the hope that neither the religious Church nor the secular State will control the other, while jointly affirming the virtue of religious freedom and “the intrinsic goodness of humanity.”

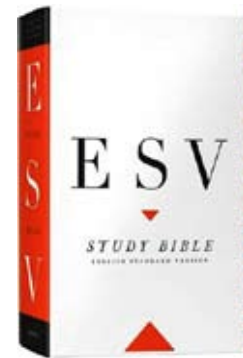
It is hard to figure out for whom the book was written or to whom I would recommend it. Those who have read even moderate amounts of New Testament and related introduction will learn nothing from this book: it is not pitched at them. I suppose undergraduates setting out to become aware of some of the disputes in the field might be given it, but in that case it would have to be supplemented by a cursory introduction to the history of the discipline, including nineteenth-century debates, the various quests of the historical Jesus, the gradations of belief/unbelief in contemporary scholarship, the historical pattern of creating Jesus-figures in our own likeness, and so forth. Treatments of various topics are not only brief, but the mode of approach adopted by Bird is rather different from that of Crossley. Bird is interested in ideas and coherence, but invests relatively little energy in wrestling with history; Crossley rather crossly charges that Bird’s approach is “odd and outdated,” and in some respects that is true. But Crossley’s implicit understanding of “faith” or “belief” does not wrestle with how the word is used in Paul. In any case, it is surely unlikely that anyone reading this book with any prior knowledge of the field would change his or her mind.

Moreover, what is perhaps most disappointing is that the discussion operates on such evidentialist principles that the insight the New Testament writers display regarding the moral dimensions of belief and unbelief are given virtually no thought. Jesus weeps over the city because it would not believe; Paul understands that he came to faith because of revelation; the same apostle insists that the “natural” person does not understand the things of God; several New Testament writers relate human blindness to massive idolatry. Such convictions do *not* mean that Paul (to go no further) is then unwilling to advance reasons and arguments: on the contrary, he sets out to persuade people, as both Acts and Paul’s own letters make clear. Nevertheless Paul recognizes that if people embrace the truth of the gospel, it is because God has opened their eyes, he has given them his Spirit, he has placarded the cross before them, he has convinced them they were dead in trespasses and sin. In other words, in a wild stretch of imagination I could imagine the apostle Paul entering the publishing lists with a first-century James Crossley, but it is impossible to imagine Paul jointly writing the last two pages with him, comfortably agreeing that opposing interpretations may be called up by the same phenomena, while jointly affirming the virtue of religious freedom and “the intrinsic goodness of humanity.”

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The ESV Study Bible: New Testament. Wayne Grudem, gen. ed. Thomas R. Schreiner, NT ed. Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008. 2,752 pp. \$49.95.

The *ESV Study Bible* sets a new standard for the genre. The aesthetics of the *ESV Study Bible* are without parallel. The maps help readers locate events geographically. There are graphs that collect thematic and structural data from particular books or from the NT as a whole. There are phenomenal drawings that reconstruct Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, Herod's Temple, the Synagogue at Gamla, Golgotha, Jesus' tomb, and more. The pictures themselves are worth the price of the volume.



The introductions and notes are laced with historical fixed points so that the reader can piece together the chronological picture, and the essays on “The Time Between the Testaments,” “The Roman Empire and the Greco-Roman World,” and “Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament” provide essential information for understanding the New Testament in context. An essay on “Reading the Gospels and Acts” precedes the Gospels, and another on “Reading the Epistles” stands before Romans. It is hard to imagine a better three-page statement on New Testament theology than what is found in the essay “The Theology of the New Testament.”

Some of the positions reflected in the *ESV Study Bible* are worthy of comment, since some of these issues are under attack today. The notes and articles treat the Scriptures as totally true and trustworthy, and the introduction to 1 Timothy expressly rejects pseudonymity. The historically Christian perspective on gender issues is upheld against modern egalitarian revisionism. There is a gentle inclination toward a reformed perspective on soteriological issues, though other perspectives are treated fairly. The treatment of works versus faith is nuanced and takes into account everything the NT teaches, and such doctrines as the substitutionary atonement, justification by faith, and imputation are well explained in study notes on relevant passages. The introduction and notes to Revelation are a model of evenhanded discussion of various evangelical interpretive possibilities.

As I anticipated the release of the *ESV Study Bible*, I confess that I was actually a little afraid of its appearance. My apprehension sprang from the specter of trying to teach people with a copy of the *ESV Study Bible* open before them. What could possibly be communicated to instruct people with so much information about the historical background, literary structure, geographical setting, and other forms of interpretive help at their fingertips?

The actual release of the *ESV Study Bible* brought me great relief. This relief was not due to any deficiency in the product or the way it presents the wealth of information it contains. The relief came from the fact that there is so much information here that only those who make a long study of both the text and the various helps in this study Bible could make a beginning at digesting and putting this information to use.

There is simply more information available in this study Bible than most people will have time to access on the spot, which results simultaneously in both the potential strengths and weaknesses of this tool. The strengths are obvious: a wealth of data is presented in an attractive and easily accessible format. This tool can be studied carefully for years, and it will be most beneficial to those who give much time to the text itself in conjunction with the interpretive helps found herein and available elsewhere.

The potential drawbacks may not be so obvious, and some of them are not unique to the *ESV Study Bible*. To keep this review from seeming like a commercial for the *ESV Study Bible*, these potential

weaknesses should be pointed out. For one thing, it will be hard to reduce the size of the *ESV Study Bible*. Bulkier Bibles are hard to tote around, so the *ESV Study Bible* might become the leave-at-home study Bible, with smaller (non-study Bible) copies of the ESV being carried to and fro. Another potential drawback casts its shadow over all study Bibles—the possibility that people might spend more time on the notes than they do in the text, or that the interpretations in the notes, which as full as they are still do not exhaust all possibilities, might inordinately influence interpreters. It is a frightening thought, too, that these interpretations are placed within the very covers of the Bible, indeed, on the same page as the text of the Bible itself.

These potential drawbacks do not detract from the obvious accomplishment of the *ESV Study Bible*, for which Crossway and the editorial team should be applauded. I offer these thoughts more than anything else as reminders that this study Bible does not itself restore us to Eden. Also—and this is a source of relief for all who are called to teach the Bible—the *ESV Study Bible* will not replace the need for careful study and exposition of the texts themselves. Impressive as it is, the *ESV Study Bible* will not render teachers and preachers of the Bible obsolete.

The great potential benefit of *ESV Study Bible* is in the opportunity it affords to those who will make long study of the Bible and these notes and introductions. This tool opens the door to deeper understanding in the minds of more Bible readers, which we can pray will have the happy result of causing people to return again and again to the pages of Scripture to learn yet more. There is nothing quite like taking a guided tour of some great museum or having an expert point out what makes some famous piece of music fabulous. Having a copy of the *ESV Study Bible* is like having a whole pile of experts at one's disposal, each ready to give a guided tour of the intricacies of God's literary gift. The editorial team, the contributors, and Crossway publishers have done their part to stamp out biblical illiteracy in this generation. It is as though they have given us the boots to wear and made the floor beneath our feet firm. May the multitudes shod their feet with this study Bible, as it were, and get addicted to stomping around in its pages.

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Pauline Nigh Hogan. *“No Longer Male and Female”: Interpreting Galatians 3:28 in Early Christianity*. Library of New Testament Studies 380. London: T&T Clark, 2008. xi + 228 pp. £70.00/\$140.00.

In this published version of her doctoral thesis accepted by McMaster University, Pauline Nigh Hogan brings together three current trends in New Testament studies: interest in early Christian identity, questions about the role of women in nascent Christianity, and the history of interpretation of a particular biblical text. An unnumbered introductory chapter treats customary matters such as the purpose and limits for the study. Although the subtitle indicates that her study focuses solely on the interpretive history of Gal 3:28, Hogan uses this text as a springboard to investigate a second concern, namely, attitudes toward the roles of women in the church by the writers using this text. She limits her study to pre-Augustinian interpreters arguing that Augustine's reading of the text solidified its interpretation for the church in the West. She seeks to uncover readings of this text in the time before such consolidation took place.

Five subsequent chapters investigate the use of the focal text within selected periods (roughly defined) of time. First, Hogan looks at modern interpretations of Gal 3:28 itself as well as echoes of the egalitarian-sounding nature of the text in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Philemon. Secondly, she turns to interpretations of the verse in post-Pauline writings from the late first to early third centuries. Here she includes Colossians, 1 Timothy, and a variety of additional works such as the *Acts of Paul*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Philip*. Hogan acknowledges she has little material to work within these texts since they do not explicitly quote the Galatians passage. She is therefore forced to read passages that reveal attitudes toward women's role in the church as possible reflections on Gal 3:28. Chapter three looks at the overt usage of the focal text in Clement of Alexandria and Origen in the third century. Chapter four examines the varied employment of this text in the fourth century Cappadocian fathers: Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Hogan's fifth chapter analyzes the use of the text in the late fourth century after Christianity has become the official religion of the empire. Ambrose, Eusebius, and Epiphanius serve as the primary sources for study in this chapter. A concluding section accurately reviews and summarizes the study as a whole. The book includes a list of abbreviations, a bibliography, and an index of ancient authors, ancient writings, and subjects.

Unsurprisingly, Hogan finds that readings of this verse vary considerably according to the interpreter's context and concerns. As a result, she concludes that there is no singular interpretation given to the phrase "there is no longer male and female," nor can one discover any clear line of development within early exegesis of this verse.

Hogan does, however, identify a broad commonality among these early interpreters involving some sort of concern for Christian perfection characterized by a resolution of former differences into Christian unity. Again, what these interpreters understand by Christian perfection and what differences need to be overcome varies according to the individual author's context and interest. Thus, for some it means both men and women have equal access to virtue as a means to spiritual perfection. For those locating the spiritual ideal in celibacy, perfection was attained when a believer, either male or female, ceased from sexual intercourse. For others perfection could involve equal right to prophesy. Thus, in spite of the varied details, a common concern for Christian perfection pervades interpretations of this phrase during the pre-Augustinian time period.

The book's twofold purpose, to review interpretations of Gal 3:28 in the early church and to examine attitudes towards women held by writers who use the text, at times makes the flow of argumentation a servant of two masters. For example, Hogan is well aware that explicit evidence for the use of the Galatians text in the writings covered in chapter two are few. She is therefore forced to speculate on the text's use on the basis of comments about women's roles in the church found in these writings. But the stated direction of argument should run the other way, from use of Gal 3:28 to its influence on attitudes towards women. In this and other places, one is left wondering if the search for attitudes towards women in the early church, itself a worthy subject of investigation, actually drives the study. Thus, the book's subtitle is partially misleading.

Furthermore, chapter one sits somewhat awkwardly with the rest of the argument. If the study investigates the variety of interpretations of Gal 3:28 within the early church, why include a chapter at the beginning of the work that reviews (selectively) its interpretation by modern critical scholars? If Hogan's study indicates, as one expects it would, that ancient readers produced interpretations shaped in decisive ways by their own context and concerns, why should the same not be true of modern academic interpreters? Is there a presumption here that modern scholars working in their post-Enlightenment, western environment have produced interpretations superior to ancient ones? I do not detect any overt

criticism on Hogan's part of early Christian readings, though she does seem to measure ancient readings on the basis of modern ones in subtle ways. For example, summarizing her analysis of Tertullian, she writes, "Baptism apparently does not create egalitarian relationships within the Christian community in this world" (p. 120). The assumption here is that Tertullian's interpretation of the verse must be measured against modern, egalitarian ones.

Nevertheless, Hogan has done the church and the academy a great service by successfully collecting and analyzing statements from a wide variety of sources concerning Gal 3:28 and attitudes toward women's role in the church during the pre-Augustinian era. The interpretations she catalogs, produced in a cultural context that differs greatly from our own, makes for fascinating reading as well as offering an opportunity for substantive reflection on the influence of context on the process and product of biblical interpretation.

Given the exorbitant prices charged by the publisher for volumes in this series, all but independently wealthy individual scholars are prevented from owning this book. Institutions, however, will want this volume in their library collections. We may hope that Hogan will now turn her critical eye toward the use of other Pauline passages among the early Christians.

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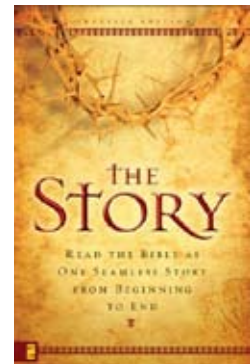
The Story: Read the Bible as One Seamless Story from Beginning to End. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 407 pp. \$14.99.

Some students at Clearwater Christian College in Florida recently shared with me how much they profited from reading *The Story* as one of their texts for OT Survey 101, a class required for all students. The professor, Anthony Abell, explained that *The Story* helps students better understand the Bible's sweeping storyline. Abell observed that many students know various stories in the Bible (particularly in the OT) but that most do not understand how those stories fit into the grand story of salvation history.

The Story is a unique presentation of the Bible, using the readable *Today's New International Version*. Unlike *The Reader's Digest Bible*, which condenses the actual Bible's text, *The Story* chronologically presents selected (but not condensed) excerpts from the Bible and adds italicized summaries of portions that it skips. Line spaces also indicate omitted text. *The Story* consists of thirty-one chapters; the first twenty-one survey the OT, and the last ten survey the NT. It includes excerpts from 361 of the 1,189 chapters in the Bible (231 of the 929 OT chapters and 130 of the 260 NT chapters).

The team of editors who produced *The Story* explains, "Our goal was to make the Bible read smoothly and easily, so that you can read it just like you would read a novel" (p. v). The section on Jesus, for instance, reads like a fifth gospel since the editors redact the four Gospels. The chapter on the resurrection, for example, ends with John 20:24–29; 21:1–19; over to Matt 28:16–20; back to John 21:26; and then back further to John 20:31 (pp. 319–21).

The Story has three corresponding strengths and weaknesses:



1. Accessibility: It is an accessible tool that would profit non-Christians, young Christians, and mature Christians, not least since many people find it challenging to grasp the big picture of the Bible's storyline line while slowly reading through the entire Bible. One could easily read *The Story* in a month by reading a chapter a day, an average of just 12.5 pages per day. It is longer and more detailed than many Bible story books for children (and it does not include illustrations); it is more like an adult Bible story book, though it could certainly be read to or by children as well.

On the other hand, it is potentially misleading to advertise *The Story* as "an exciting alternative to a traditional Bible," which many people consider too "boring," "religious," "irrelevant," and "long" (p. iv). *The Story* is a supplemental tool, not a substitute for the unabridged Bible.

2. Editorial work: A timeline of *The Story* lists conservative dates (e.g., 1446 b.c. for the exodus) and serves as a handy reference. The footnotes are generally excellent (especially for first-time Bible readers), defining terms like holiness, transgression, and grace. The italicized summaries inserted in the text are not overly interpretive (e.g., the summary of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, p. 208), nor do they water down essential components of the Bible's storyline such as God's wrath being poured out on Jesus (p. 313). Further, the summaries are skillfully written; many function like cliff-hangers, heightening interest and propelling the reader forward. *The Story* concludes with stimulating discussion questions for each chapter (pp. 390–400), an alphabetical list describing the book's characters (pp. 401–5), and a chart of Bible references from which each chapter of *The Story* excerpts Scripture.

On the other hand, the arrangement of the text seems rather arbitrary. It excludes some key texts (e.g., 2 Sam 7), most of the wisdom genre, and almost all of the general epistles. It plays hopscotch through Paul's letters and thus misses Paul's logical development; for example, it completely skips Rom 9–11 (p. 360), and it includes Eph 5:21–6:4 while omitting the head command in 5:18 and the conclusion of the unit on slaves and masters in 6:5–9 (p. 376). Further, some of the brief definitions in the footnotes are inadequate or sloppy (e.g., gospel [p. 291], justification [p. 338], and sanctification [p. 346]).

3. Format: It looks and feels like a normal book. The paper is relatively thick, not the thin crinkly paper that Bibles typically use. The text appears in a single column and is printed according to genre, and it does not include chapter or verse numbers. (On the advantage of excluding chapter and verse numbers, see my two other reviews below in this *Themelios* issue: *The Books of the Bible* and Christopher R. Smith's *The Beauty Behind the Mask*.)

On the other hand, it has a few typographical issues. For example, the symbol "[c]" appears once in the text (p. 190), and some sections should be indented (e.g., pp. 223–25, 241–42, 368–69).

Perhaps Zondervan would multiply the influence of *The Story* if it produced a corresponding audio book using the audio from *The Bible Experience* and adding a narrator to read the italics (and maybe the footnotes, too).

The Story is an edifying tool for a variety of situations: a supplemental textbook for students (junior high, high school, or college), an introduction to the Bible's storyline for non-Christians or young Christians, and a creative refresher for mature Christians.

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The Books of the Bible: A Presentation of Today's New International Version. Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 2007. 1,816 pp. \$8.99.

Have you ever seen an entire English Bible without any chapter or verse references? I hadn't until I saw *The Books of the Bible*. I immediately loved the idea but was simultaneously skeptical about the format's practicality. For example, how does a preacher or someone at a small group Bible study say, "Look down at verse 6"? The answer is to say something like, "Look at the first sentence in the second paragraph" or "Look at stanza 3, line 4." This is a bit more cumbersome, but it constantly reminds one of the context even when highlighting a small piece of it. The group that designed *The Books of the Bible* argues, "The dubious benefit of allowing passages to be located quickly does not outweigh the negative factors that chapters and verses introduce to Bible reading" (p. v). Beyond using *The Books of the Bible* at a small group or while listening to a sermon, it is ideal for reading through large sections of the Bible. (See also my review below in this *Themelios* issue of Christopher R. Smith, *The Beauty Behind the Mask*, which explains the philosophical foundation of *The Books of the Bible*.)



The text is the readable *Today's New International Version* (for which the International Bible Society is the translation sponsor and copyright holder). One's first impression when flipping through the volume will likely be what is absent: section headings, chapter references, verse references, footnotes, cross references—everything except the text. It looks remarkably like a normal book, albeit one with an unusually diverse assortment of genres. A closer look reveals strategically placed white spaces of differing sizes throughout the volume; gaps between the text are the only section indicators—the larger the gap, the larger the section break. As one continues to flip around, confusion may arise regarding the unconventional order of the books, causing one to turn to the preface for an explanation—not unlike a lost man finally stopping for directions. The preface (pp. iv–vi) explains that the volume “draws on the fundamental insight that visual presentation can be a crucial aid to right reading, good understanding and a better engagement with the Bible.” The preface names six specific ways that *The Books of the Bible* “differs from the most common current format”:

1. “Chapter and verse numbers have been removed from the text.” The bottom of each page, however, inconspicuously lists a chapter-and-verse range in a faded gray font. Our present chapter and verse divisions were added around 1200 and 1550 respectively, and they impose “a foreign structure” that actually obscures the text, suggesting that it is “a giant reference book.” Not only are the chapter and verse divisions artificial; they are often inaccurate.

2. “The books are presented according to the internal [literary] divisions that we believe their authors have indicated.” The introduction to each book explains the major divisions. This format imposes an interpretive structure on the text (e.g., section and paragraph breaks), but *all* typography does that to some degree. This genius of this format is its literary sensitivity, which communicates more accurately than traditional chapter and verse divisions.

3. “A single-column setting is used to present the text more clearly and naturally, and to avoid disrupting the intended line breaks in poetic sections.”

4. “Footnotes, section headings and other supplementary materials have been removed from the pages of the sacred text.” The TNIV translators’ notes, however, are available as endnotes after each book.

5. “Individual books that later translation divided into two or more books are made whole again.” For example, Samuel-Kings and Luke-Acts are single books.

6. “The books that have been placed in an order that we hope will help readers understand them better.” The criteria for the ordering is literary genre, historical circumstance (e.g., Paul’s letters are listed chronologically), and theological tradition, but the result is rather awkward and confusing for people accustomed to the current order. Cf. the order of the NT books: Luke-Acts, 1–2 Thess, 1–2 Cor, Gal, Rom, Col, Eph, Phlm, Phil, 1 Tim, Titus, 2 Tim, Matt, Heb, Jas, Mark, 1–2 Pet, Jude, John, 1–3 John, Rev. The book order is probably the most revisable aspect of the format.

The Books of the Bible is ingenious. The way it presents the Bible as a library of literature is unique, simple, and elegant, and it naturally encourages better Bible reading. Perhaps some other translations like the ESV and NLT will follow suit.

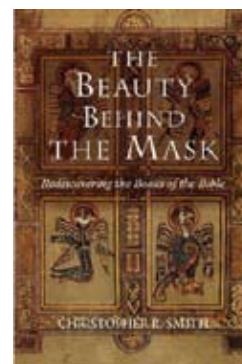
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Christopher R. Smith. *The Beauty Behind the Mask: Rediscovering the Books of the Bible*. Toronto: Clements, 2007. 148 pp. \$19.95.

This volume explains the philosophical foundation of *The Books of the Bible*. (See my review of *The Books of the Bible* above in this *Themelios* issue.) Smith, one of the architects behind *The Books of the Bible*, is a pastor, writer, and consultant living in East Lansing, Michigan. He earned a BA in literature from Harvard University, a MATS in church history from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and a PhD in theology from Boston College, and he has published articles on the literary structure of Revelation (*NovT* 36 [1994]: 373–93), Leviticus (*JSOT* 70 [1996]: 17–32), and Matthew (*NTS* 43 [1997]: 540–51).

Smith argues that centuries of tradition have cumulatively distorted the Bible’s literary forms by adding chapter and verse references (originally added for reference works), dividing books (originally created to keep scrolls a reasonable size), using two columns with narrow typesetting (added by printers for portability and affordability), and including cross-references and notes that crowd the page (pp. 8–9). He presents his argument in four chapters:

1. Chapter and verse references, which were added around 1200 and the 1550s respectively, are problematic for nine reasons (pp. 13–39): (1) “Chapters and verses keep us from recognizing what kind of literature we are reading.” (2) “Chapters don’t correspond with books’ inherent divisions.” (3) “Chapters mask the existence of larger literary units.” (4) “Chapters conceal the existence of smaller literary units.” (5) “Verses typically do not correspond with the smallest meaningful units.” (6) “Verses encourage disintegrative approaches to the Bible.” (7) “Verses invite us to supply meanings from our own experience.” (8) “Verses can create the impression that the Bible is ambiguous.” (9) “Verses encourage legal and propositional readings of the Bible.” Smith’s arguments in this chapter are persuasive, but he



overstates his case when he dramatically pinpoints this issue as the reason “we are not hearing genuinely from God” or “having a life-changing encounter with God” (p. 39).

2. The format of Bibles commonly distorts the literary structure of the books of the Bible in three areas (pp. 41–70): boundaries that are superficial (e.g., dividing Samuel-Kings or Luke-Acts), a sequence that is confusingly non-chronological (e.g., ordering Paul’s letters by size), and titles that may not reliably convey the book’s author, intended audience, central focus, or genre.

3. Several non-traditional English Bibles are noteworthy, but the traditional presentation continues to predominate for several reasons (pp. 71–103). Perhaps the most relevant reason is

that form is best suited to our habits of reading—or, I should say, our habit of not reading. . . .

Chapters and verses were never intended to guide devotional reading. They were rather introduced . . . so that scholarly resources such as commentaries and concordances could be developed. But now our habits of devotional reading are largely shaped by chapters and verses. . . .

The books of the Bible must be recognized, presented and approached for what they are: books. This does not mean that we cannot still read the Bible in appropriate portions, in keeping with the demands of our daily schedules. It does not mean that we cannot cite eloquent phrases that summarize vital parts of the Bible’s message, even treasuring those words in our hearts and committing them to memory. But we must appreciate the smaller portions of the biblical books as parts of larger literary wholes, which we first engage in their entirety. When we do, we will find that we can still read portions and cite phrases, but do so far more appropriately and meaningfully (pp. 102–3).

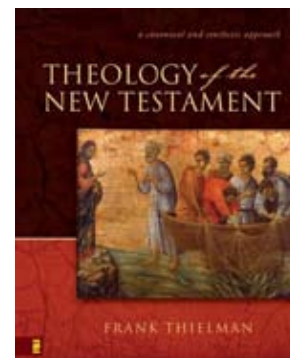
4. *The Books of the Bible* was created to solve this predicament (pp. 105–32). Chapter four recounts the fascinating story of why and how *The Books of the Bible* developed, and then it shrewdly, practically, and creatively suggests how to use *The Books of the Bible* most effectively. Each book of the Bible is like a DVD. DVDs may contain both a feature film as well as supplementary material such as interviews with the cast or documentaries about how the film was made; similarly, each book in *The Books of the Bible* is presented as a complete, “uninterrupted” literary work but with additional features “in the form of book and section introductions and endnotes” (p. 112). Further, the film itself may be divided into “chapters” that one can access directly and even watch separately, “but it is hard to imagine anyone watching a film that way. Nor should anyone read a book of the Bible for the first time in fragments, even if the goal is eventually to study each of its parts in detail” (p. 119). The introductions to each book of the Bible answer four preliminary questions: (1) “What kind of book is this?” (2) “Why was this book written?” (3) “How is the book put together?” (4) “What overall idea or purpose unites all of the parts and aspects of the book[?]” (pp. 120–22).

Although one may justifiably quibble with judgments here and there (e.g., about the order of *The Books of the Bible* or a particular section break in one of the books), Smith clearly and persuasively argues that visually presenting the Bible in a single column without chapter or verse references encourages reading that is more informed and engaged.

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Frank Thielman. *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2005. 798 pp. £23.99/\$39.99.

Frank Thielman writes his theology of the New Testament to ‘provide a service and make a case’ (p. 9). As one would expect, the service provided by this work is to orientate pastors, students, and scholars alike to each book of the New Testament. This he does eminently well, through lucid and well-executed exegesis, discussion, and summary of the biblical text. Thielman also seeks to demonstrate that diversity within the theological emphases and cultural context of each book does not preclude a unified, ‘synthetic’ NT theology. For all the distinctiveness of its discrete textual witness, Thielman shows that the New Testament is remarkably homogenous in its commitment to the centrality of Christ and the gospel.



His approach to the subject is primarily to articulate the theological concerns of the New Testament from the perspective of the historical times and cultural circumstances in which each text has been written. Thus the introduction calls the reader to embrace the insight of faith while carefully examining the New Testament documents in their historical context.

Each NT book’s theological content is examined individually and in relation to the three main theological units of the New Testament—the Gospels and Acts, the Pauline letters, and the non-Pauline letters and Revelation. Thielman keeps each text in conversation with the others while focusing on particular texts in their own right. In doing this Thielman maintains a course somewhere between approaches emphasizing the historical minutiae of the New Testament and those delineating the theological layers.

In terms of tackling the New Testament chronologically or canonically, Thielman follows a roughly chronological approach, not so much to the texts themselves as to the history of early Christianity that the texts presuppose. Thus he begins with Jesus as encountered in the four Gospels, moving on to Paul and his correspondence, before dealing with the non-Pauline texts. Essays at the beginning and end of each of these units draw attention to the coherent convictions and common emphases of these books and are one of the highlights of the work.

Due to the lack of chronological evidence for texts in the latter unit, Thielman opts to deal with the texts thematically, first treating those in which *heresy* is a dominant theme (John’s Epistles, Jude, James, and 2 Peter) and second treating those in which *persecution* is the primary theme (1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation). This methodological device is entirely commendable despite the slightly awkward placing of Hebrews in the latter section. Thielman never really proves that the book of Hebrews ought to be identified with the suffering Christian Diaspora.

Following on the heels of Howard Marshall’s 2004 NT theology, Thielman’s work might for some seem like a surplus. One of its distinguishing features, however, lies in the inclusion of seven chapters throughout the book that draw the variegated strands of theological teaching together, culminating in a chapter highlighting five uniting theological tenets of the New Testament: the centrality of Jesus, the importance of faith, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church as God’s people, and the final eschatological restoration.

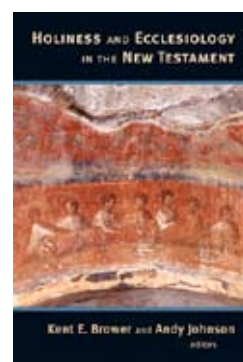
The book is well organized and accessible, benefiting from a generous peppering of sub-headings that help the reader grasp the authorial intent at a glance while also providing a useful guide for preachers

and teachers. Few will disagree that in the arrival of Thielman's NT theology, a service has been laudably provided and a case well made.

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Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson, eds. *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. 409 pp. \$35.00.

Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament (HENT) is a collection of essays edited by Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson in recognition of the seventy years of life and ministry of Alex R. G. Deasley. The volume begins with a warm dedication, and, as is usual for most introductions to *Festschriften*, tends toward hagiography (pp. xiii–xv). The editors introduce the study proper with a thematic presentation of the material as opposed to a summary of each chapter (pp. xvi–xxiv). These themes are holiness as an orientating concern for Second Temple Judaism; holiness as derived holiness; holiness as purity; holiness for communal persons; and the public nature of holiness. The editors locate the project of *HENT* in the *communal* dimension of imaging a holy God to an unholy world. The category of holiness in contemporary idiom, they argue, has either been “ignored, reduced to inward piety, or thought to be the preserve of legalists” (p. xvi). Brower and Johnson contend, however, that “holiness is a theological and ecclesial issue prior to being a matter of individual piety” (p. xvi). The volume seeks to trace the theme of holiness and ecclesiology through the NT.



George J. Brooke heads the first of two essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). His analysis of the DSS demonstrates the complexity of identifying a single ecclesiology from texts embedded with multiple communities. Even a “small and well-defined” movement like Qumran was “far from a static group” (p. 5), and our understanding of NT ecclesiology therefore needs to be “understood as the description of a dynamic not a static phenomenon” (p. 6). The second essay on the DSS belongs to Dwight Swanson, and suggests that at Qumran “[e]verything flows from a concern for the holy” (p. 20), and, after surveying 1QS, CD, 1QH, and 1QM (he also looks outside the Community with 4Q417), surmises that holiness is “the one concept which governed every aspect of life” in Qumran (p. 29). Swanson then surveys the NT, concluding that for the church “the Holiest Place is not found in separation from the world, but within the world” (p. 38). Though his proof text of Matt 18:20 is rather unconvincing, Swanson’s conclusions are quite sound: viz., NT holiness does not withdraw; it reaches out (p. 38).

Essays on the four canonical Gospels follow. Donald A. Hagner begins by exploring “the interconnection between the gospel of the kingdom of God, the new eschatological community, and the call to a new form of righteousness” in the Gospel of Matthew (p. 40). Hagner suggests that the church has “entered an unprecedented era of fulfillment, and with it comes a *new potentiality*”—presumably for the “doing” of righteousness (p. 50)—and challenges the contemporary church to exhibit righteousness in order to impact the world (p. 56). Kent E. Brower follows by arguing that Mark “paints a picture of the restoration and re-creation of the holy people of God centered on Jesus” (p. 57). He reminds readers that “holiness is determined by their closeness to the holy one” (p. 73), and involves a participation in God’s

“sanctifying mission” (p. 74). Richard P. Thompson’s essay turns to Luke and his Gospel’s implicit but distinct “contributions to discussions about holiness and ecclesiology” with respect to meal scenes (p. 77). Richard Bauckham turns to John, introducing his essay with customary subtlety by distinguishing “between holiness and purity” in the OT and Jewish thought (pp. 95–96), while arguing that Jesus is put forth as the new altar in John 10:36 after a careful reading of the Hanukkah tradition present in 10:22.

Two essays on Acts follow. Though the holiness word group is minimal in Acts, I. Howard Marshall demonstrates how there is a range of ways the concept is expressed. “Essentially God has a holy people, holy in that they belong to him, composed of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ and stand in continuity with the faithful people of Israel in Old Testament times” (p. 127). Robert Wall then traces how the book of Acts represents lifestyles of idolatry and sexual immorality as subversive to a holy life.

Michael J. Gorman opens the next section of essays by presenting a Pauline theology of holiness—what he calls “trinitarian cruciform holiness” (p. 166). The theme of holiness is then read through some of Paul’s letters with remarkable contemporary appeal and conviction: Romans (Peter Oakes); 1 and 2 Corinthians (Bruce W. Winter and J. Ayodeji Adewya respectively); Galatians (Troy W. Martin); Ephesians (George Lyons); Philippians (J. Ross Wagner); and 1 Thessalonians (Andy Johnson). Some of the Catholic Epistles are then surveyed as well with similar effect: Hebrews (Gordon J. Thomas); 1 Peter (Joel B. Green); Jude and 2 Peter (Ruth Anne Reese); and Revelation (Dean Flemming).

The shortcomings of the volume are those of almost all *Festschriften*. Perhaps it is better to view the work as *a collection of essays* representing the interests of Professor Deasley than the tracing of a theme through the NT. For example, are two chapters on the DSS an adequate picture of the matrix from which NT conceptions of holiness sprung? Be that as it may, this *collection of essays* is a most useful collection indeed. There are treasures in *HENT* for the church in helping her to realize her (holy) place in this world.

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The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader’s Edition. Compiled by Barclay M. Newman. Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007. 732 pp. \$69.95. Paperback: \$39.95.

Many who have been theological students during the last few decades will recognise the distinctive maroon cover of the UBS Greek NT, though, unfortunately, some will recognise it only as a hazy memory since it may be some time since they have actually opened those covers and read the pages. This new edition of the Greek NT, with the same distinctive cover, may help to ensure that more people actually read the NT during and after their studies.

There are several notable features of this Greek NT. Physically, it is somewhat larger than the standard version, and the Greek text (UBS4/NA27) is printed in a good-sized font on heavier paper than is used in the regular editions, all of which makes the book heavier, thicker, and less portable, but also much more pleasant to use. The most distinctive feature, however, is the inclusion of a “running Greek-English dictionary”



(compiled by Barclay M. Newman) which is found in (approximately, and with some variation) the lower third of each page of the book. The difference which this makes to anyone who is not entirely familiar with every item of vocabulary in the Greek NT is dramatic. Now it is possible to actually *read* the NT in Greek rather than plough one's way through it in tiny portions. When a word causes the reader to stumble, a quick glance downwards is all that is required to get past the problem term without losing much of the momentum of reading. Now, the UBS Greek text has already provided reader helps in the past. It is possible to buy a version with the Greek on one page and the corresponding text of the RSV on the facing page. But that allows the reader who lacks confidence an easy way of escape from the Greek. Then there was the possibility of having a dictionary in the back of your Greek NT. But even with this tool, the reader who faces an unfamiliar term first has to physically turn to the back of the book and then look up the lexical form of the offending word (assuming the reader has any idea what the lexical form is!). Anyone who has had to work with a book which has detailed and important endnotes will recognise how frustrating it is to have to flip constantly to the back of a book in the midst of reading. In this new edition, words which occur less than thirty times in the NT are marked with a footnote reference in the Greek text (normally only on its first occurrence in a paragraph). At the foot of the page is the lexical form of the word, its parsing, and its most appropriate English translation. Since words are treated in context, the reader can be helped to see that the same word can have somewhat different meanings in different texts.

Is this just a concession for students who will not put in the hard work to learn vocabulary? I do not think so. The reader must still know sufficient grammar to see how a word is functioning in the text. The footnotes simply remove the need to interrupt reading if there is a gap in the reader's vocabulary. Some will be frustrated that the text-critical apparatus had to go to make way for the dictionary, but most users will probably own a standard edition of a Greek NT for their textual issues anyway. This book is designed for a different purpose, and it serves it well.

I am very excited about this new edition of the Greek NT. I trust that it will be widely used and that it will encourage students and pastors whose Greek seems on the verge of extinction once again to pick up and read.

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— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Colin Duriez. *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 240 pp. \$24.99.

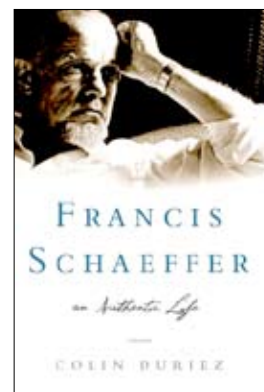
As a PhD student, I provided research assistance to the Baylor historian Barry Hankins as he wrote his biography of Francis Schaeffer (*Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]). At the time, I remember asking Professor Hankins if the family had been cooperative. They had not. Having read Colin Duriez's treatment of Schaeffer, I think I know why. The family was cooperating *with him*, so much so that this book could be considered an authorized biography. Duriez's portrayal is very powerfully personal, more so than anything I have read save Schaeffer's own books, which are self-revelatory to some degree.

An Authentic Life features a number of unforgettable scenes from Schaeffer's life. The reader who has a jaundiced view of Schaeffer as some kind of plastic-mold religious right stereotype will encounter a complex man who had a powerful instinct for justice. As a teenager, young Fran had a job with RCA Victor where he worked in the factory. The women posted along the production line were mistreated and overworked. One day, a woman stopped her work and began calling for a strike. She was soon joined by Schaeffer, who jumped up on a counter, yelling in his piercing voice, "Strike, Strike" (p. 24). This was, after all, the same man who would one day criticize comfortable American Christians for their addiction to personal peace and affluence and their non-compassionate use of wealth.

The pioneer of Christian worldview had a hard road to ministry. His father asked to speak to him at 5:30 a.m. on the morning he was to leave for college and pre-ministerial studies. When they met, his father bluntly told Schaeffer that he did not want a minister for a son and did not want him to go. The young man asked to go pray about it. Tearfully, he tossed a coin three times with each outcome landing in favor of going on to college at Hampden-Sydney. He informed his father, "I've *got* to go." Just before slamming the door on his way out, his father promised to pay for the "first half year" (pp. 25–26). Time would bring the father to share his son's beliefs.

Duriez's book is full of similar interesting vignettes from Schaeffer's life. One theme stands out very clearly. Francis Schaeffer was a man filled with love for the so-called "little people" who were not valued by the world. While he was still a young minister, we discover that he tutored a young boy with Down Syndrome twice each week and took great delight in every increment of progress. He felt the boy's forward steps were just as important, in his wife Edith's words, "as talking to any university student about his intellectual problems" (pp. 50–51). This event perfectly foreshadows his later powerful insistence upon the importance of the sanctity of life, an area in which he was far ahead of the main body of evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Connecting the young Schaeffer to the more famous, older man is a great strength of Colin Duriez's book. It has become well-accepted to break Schaeffer's life up into segments and to characterize him as three different people. There is the young, fire breathing fundamentalist eager to "be ye separate" from the impure compromisers; the artsy, compassionate, bohemian founder of L'abri in Switzerland; and then the old man, brushing off his best instincts and returning to his fundamentalist roots to fight for the doctrine of inerrancy and "Christian America." While it is possible to reach such a conclusion by



looking at his early career and then considering the chronological development of his publications, this book rejects that approach by portraying Schaeffer as a consistent personality throughout.

The man who cared enough to tutor a little boy with Down Syndrome is also the man who told his church in St. Louis that he would resign if a black person ever came to his church and felt unwelcome. The budding intellectual who answered the existential questions of college students in Europe is also the agitator who took up the cause of the unborn and became arguably the finest *shaper of and advocate for* a potent evangelical critique of modern culture. Two sentences in the book make this point about Schaeffer brilliantly: “It was not a new Schaeffer that was emerging. His theology, honed over many decades since the passionate articles of the later forties and early fifties, was that of the lordship of Christ over every area of life—the womb as well as the university seminar room” (p. 182).

If one could ask for anything more from this book, it would be on the subject of Frank (AKA Franky Schaeffer). As Francis Schaeffer’s son has aged, he has increasingly distanced himself from his father’s legacy. First, Frank converted to the Eastern Orthodox Church. More significantly, he wrote thinly disguised novels about his family life that were unflattering to his father and then made a massive turn left politically, ultimately supporting Barack Obama despite his *laissez faire* policies on abortion. One suspects this topic was left alone for two reasons. The first is that, as I wrote above, this book feels like an authorized biography with the family’s full cooperation. They probably did not want this story to include the later years of Frank Schaeffer. The second is that the book very likely neared completion during the time of Frank’s increasing heterodoxy. Regardless, readers hungry for more on this front should look to Os Guinness’s powerful rejoinder to Frank in the journal *Books and Culture* (March 1, 2008; available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2008/marapr/1.32.html>).

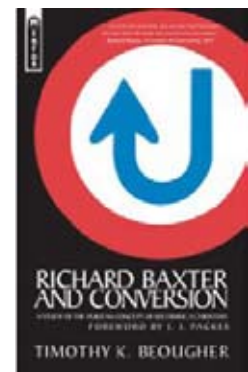
Duriez’s book is an important contribution to Schaeffer scholarship and will challenge those who have portrayed an interesting Schaeffer with a unique voice who morphs into a conventional Christian rightist over time. *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* deserves a wide readership and may well be the standard in the field for some time to come.

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Timothy K. Beougher. *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian*. Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2007. 238 pp. \$17.99.

Many a doctoral dissertation collects dust on library shelves the world over. Others show up briefly in bookstores, released by small presses, appealing to limited audiences only to return to the libraries from which they escaped. Rarely a dissertation contributes to the academy and the church. Tim Beougher’s treatment of *Richard Baxter and Conversion* does just that.

Written while Beougher, now the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was a doctoral student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, *Baxter and Conversion* seeks to explain the English Puritan’s soteriology. This book does just that as Beougher outlines both Baxter’s thought and his practice. It is the combination of the two that motivates J. I. Packer



in the book's foreword to label *Baxter and Conversion* "an outstanding piece of work, of great pastoral relevance for our time" (p. 9).

Prior to examining his theology, Beougher begins with a small portrait of Baxter's life. He does so convinced that it is the context of Baxter's life, in particular his conversion experience, that explains his thought. He was a man of his times and his controversies—particularly antinomianism. His thinking must not and cannot be divorced from them.

Beougher dedicates the bulk of the book to a systematic development of Baxter's theology of conversion. Chapter two examines Baxter's theological method and his overarching theology as it relates to salvation: man, sin, Christ's atonement, and election. Beougher posits that Baxter's well-known "hypothetical universalism" was the theological outworking of his political method, that is, his way of interpreting man's predicament and the solution in light of man's relationship to God's governance of the universe. In this and subsequent chapters, Beougher surveys Baxter's many writings on the topic in question and contends that Baxter truly fits within the Reformed camp in terms of soteriology. The confusion, he writes, arises from the failure to recognize the influence of Baxter's theological opponents on his word choice and the political method he employed. To that end, chapters two through four alleviate some of that confusion.

The last two chapters of *Baxter and Conversion* offer the reader something Baxter himself thought to be a vital part of any sermon—the application. Chapter five describes the presentation of the gospel according to Baxter. As Beougher explains, Baxter believed that evangelism must be the primary concern of the pastor. For those familiar with Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*, this comes as no surprise. Perhaps because of that well-known work, this chapter is the shortest in the entire book. Chapter six, however, goes to great lengths to examine the role of the church in Baxter's theology of conversion. Readers will find helpful discussions on the nature of the church, the sacraments, and the teaching ministry of the church. The goal of it all for Baxter was the conversion of souls.

Beougher is to be commended on several levels for his treatment of Baxter and his theology of conversion. With the publication of his dissertation, Beougher brings new life and light to Baxter and his thought. Moreover, Beougher helpfully explains Baxter's theological methodology, notably the political component of his thought. This does much to bring helpful light to some of the debates surrounding Baxter's debatable positions. Beougher does so in a way that Baxter often failed to accomplish. His presentation is readable and understandable, things foreign to many dissertations-turned-books. Moreover, the book is loaded with practical application that was not forced upon the source as many do but drawn from the well of Baxter's own words.

Very few substantive complaints can be leveled at *Baxter and Conversion*. One complaint, however, can be raised in regards to Beougher's efforts. The subtitle of *Baxter and Conversion* claims that work is *A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian*. For those unfamiliar with all of the debates surrounding Baxter, that subtitle is simply a matter of clarifying the book's intent. However, as others will surely know, there has been no little amount of debate as to the justness of including Baxter among the ranks of the Puritans. Beougher deals with this matter only in the concluding chapter wherein he successfully proves that Baxter deemed himself desirous yet unworthy of the title. Given the presence of this debate, one would wish that Beougher would have addressed the matter much earlier in the treatise rather than leaving it to an afterthought.

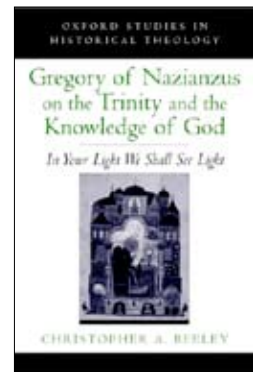
In the end, however, Beougher is to be congratulated. Aside from the scholarly apparatus—footnotes comprise nearly one third of the book's length—and Packer's admission of involvement in Beougher's dissertation writing, *Baxter and Conversion* reads like the polished work of an accomplished author

who knows his subject and his reader rather than a dissertation that has been dusted off for publication purposes. If the reader will honor Beougher's efforts and proceed thoughtfully through the book, he will know more of the subject when he is done, and perhaps more importantly, he will know what he needs to do to further the kingdom of Christ.

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Christopher A. Beeley. *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xvi + 396 pp. \$49.95.

Christopher Beeley has provided excellent insight into the life, theology, and spirituality of Gregory of Nazianzus in *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*. Beeley begins the work with a lengthy introduction that describes the debates, councils, and important figures that preceded Gregory and highlights the major achievements and disappointments of his career as a priest. He shows the many difficulties the Pro-Nicene party encountered and gives clarity as to how multiple positions were being proposed in different councils between Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). He also provides a helpful short biography of the basic stages of Gregory's life that helps the reader understand Gregory's relationship to significant figures and events. The popular paradigm that presents the Nicene party as unified and the clear victor is presented as false, as is the notion that the Cappadocians were united in a theological agenda with the same theological formula.



Beeley's next chapter focuses on two major themes in Gregory's writing—purification and illumination—that earned him the title "The Theologian of the East." Beeley skillfully communicates the spirit of worship that marked Gregory's writings. An example of this spirit is the doctrine of purification based on Matt 5:8. If one is going to approach the infinitely pure God, one must purify himself. The more pure the worshipper, the better vision he has of the one he is worshipping who is perfectly pure.

In the next three chapters Beeley continues to show how Gregory's doctrine of God affected his ministry and understanding of life. The role of the incarnation and its implications in the doctrine of deification as well as Christ's role in sanctification serve as excellent examples of Gregory the pastoral theologian. These doctrines are often misunderstood, but Beeley shows how Gregory clearly keeps the Creator-creature distinction while exegeting texts that speak of deification. Gregory's strong position on the full deity of the Spirit is also well described in light of the controversy that led up to Constantinople.

Beeley's description of the most difficult aspect of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity, the role of the monarchy of the Father, will be a lasting contribution to studies of the doctrine of the Trinity and Patristic studies generally. The emphasis that Gregory puts on the Father's being the source of deity and the cause of the Son and Spirit is difficult to understand in light of the traditional confession of one essence, three hypostases. Beeley explains that the Father's being the source was used by Gregory to argue for the unity of the Godhead because the Son and the Spirit must be like him and work with

him. Gregory avoided Arianism because he did not believe that causation or begottenness takes place in time or with regard to a physical substance. Gregory's ability to maintain an emphasis upon unity and distinction was made clear as was his genius as an exegete and theologian in articulating his confession of the Trinity.

The final chapter describes Gregory's pastoral ministry. This aspect of "The Theologian" is too often overlooked since he produced multiple works on the pastoral ministry that influenced prominent pastors such as John of Chrysostom, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and possibly Augustine. He emphasizes the role and character of the pastor so that the virtue, purity, and obligation to draw the church closer to God are the primary marks of a good pastor. This chapter coupled with chapter one's discussion of purification and illumination will be the most beneficial for pastors as they see a model of pastoral spirituality that is uncommon today.

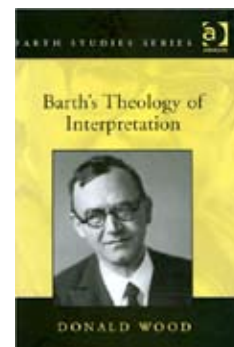
The final chapter compares Gregory to other Fathers of the third and fourth centuries. This helpful chapter aids the reader in seeing who influenced Gregory and, more importantly, it clarifies great differences among the Cappadocians. The one Father who was missing in the comparison was Augustine, whom Beeley stated throughout the treatise stands as Gregory's equal in the West.

Beeley was able to communicate the spirit of Gregory and the emphasis of his writings so that the reader appreciates the greatness of his pastoral and theological ministry. He was able to capture Gregory's style, complicated thoughts, spirit of worship, and skill in exegesis. This is no small task when one considers the complicated personality and multifaceted ministry of Gregory and the fact that Gregory did not produce a major work that summarizes his thoughts. Beeley's theological work complements the biography of John Anthony McGuckin well (*St. Gregory of Nazianus: An Intellectual Biography* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001]). Beeley's work should give the reader a desire to read Gregory himself to experience the elegance of his orations, the difficulties of his personality, and the great depths of his theology and spirituality. Students of theology and history will appreciate the clear portrayal of Gregory the theologian and priest and the doctrine to which he devoted the most attention: the Trinity.

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Donald Wood. *Barth's Theology of Interpretation*. Barth Studies Series. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007. x + 189 pp. £55.00/\$80.00.

The volume of literature devoted to hermeneutical theory has grown exponentially over the past several decades. In a milieu so fascinated with methodological questions, the writings of Karl Barth sit rather uncomfortably. On the one hand, few other theologians have provided an *oeuvre* so thoroughly engaged in the exegesis of Holy Scripture. On the other hand, Barth provided precious little exposition of his specific interpretive method, giving priority instead to exegesis itself. Accordingly, much North American scholarship on Barth's hermeneutics has proceeded by way of a close analysis of the way in which he actually used Scripture in the formation of his theology. Such an approach proved to be highly



rewarding theologically, though somewhat one-sided. By focusing on Barth's explicit hermeneutical reflections, Richard Burnett's landmark work, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), made great strides in shattering the notion that Barth simply went about his exegetical work in an unreflective manner; he was, instead, well aware of the German hermeneutical tradition bequeathed to him. However, what Burnett left under-developed was the broader doctrinal framework in which Barth located the task of biblical interpretation. It is this framework that Donald Wood aims to elucidate. In so doing, Wood hopes to delineate the theological (and spiritual) posture that Barth prescribed for the interpretation of Scripture and, thus, to understand something of the reason for the discomfort that accompanies Barth's position in modern hermeneutical theory.

Wood unfolds his exposition of Barth as follows. In the first chapter, he examines closely representative texts dating from Barth's formal break with Protestant liberalism in 1917, a selection of his lectures on figures and documents in the Reformed tradition, and his first attempt at Reformed dogmatics. In these materials, Wood notes how Barth viewed the biblical text in "active terms," as an instrument taken up by God in his self-revelation and endowed with a freedom and authority corresponding to God's own (p. xii). Of particular importance for this chapter is Wood's exposition of how Barth deployed the Pauline idea (based on Rom 4) that the unity of history is based on God's action in Christ.

In the second chapter, Wood focuses on Barth's lectures on Protestant theology in the nineteenth century, particularly the introductory lecture in which Barth describes his understanding of the task of historical theology and the proper approach to its study. The use that Wood makes of these lectures is twofold: he derives from them clues as to how Barth understood the dominant trends of interpretive theory in modernity and, more importantly, he tries to catch a glimpse of how Barth viewed the interpretive posture he derived from Scripture to be generally applicable to other historical texts.

In the third chapter, Wood expounds the literary and theological context of *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, volume one, in which Barth set out his most sustained comments on the interpretation of Scripture. This exposition involves Wood in articulating the hermeneutical function of the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, and revelation in his prolegomena. Wood rightly views Barth's exposition of the Word of God as a re-articulation of the Reformed Scripture-principle in relation to the opposing views of Scripture expressed in liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Of particular importance in this chapter is Wood's reading of Barth's explicitly Protestant recasting of the doctrines of canon and tradition in response to Roman Catholic critiques.

In the final chapter, Wood continues his investigation of *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* by focusing on Barth's doctrine of Scripture proper. Wood draws from Barth's description of Scripture as witness to revelation further nuances to the manner in which Scripture is to be interpreted and the appropriate character of Scripture's readers. Here Wood focuses on what it means for Barth to prescribe that Scripture is to be interpreted by the Church in obedience to the authority of Christ.

Wood has provided a concise and analytical exposition of the theological themes that come to bear on Barth's understanding of the interpretation of Scripture. Of particular helpfulness is the relationship that Wood highlights between Barth's developing view of biblical interpretation and his work as a historical theologian; both sorts of work are of a theological piece in the way that the doctrine of justification comes to bear on them. Justification reminds the reader that he is a sinner who is nonetheless forgiven by divine grace and that the authors of the texts he reads are likewise united with him under the same judgment of grace. Where Wood's study is perhaps limited, as one would expect with the publication of a doctoral dissertation, is in its scope. As important as the historical lectures are

for understanding Barth's theology of interpretation, the methodological omission of Barth's exegetical texts from the same period is quite glaring. As Wood himself agrees, the making available of Barth's early exegetical lectures will allow the topic of Barth's theology of interpretation to be approached from a fresh angle in the future. Wood's work in this volume provides the service of offering an outline of the broader theological context in which the exegetical lectures might be interpreted and, eventually, of bringing Barth into dialogue with contemporary hermeneutical theory.

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Jerry Sutton. *A Matter of Conviction: A History of Southern Baptist Engagement with the Culture*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008. xiv + 502 pp. \$24.99.

In *A Matter of Conviction*, Jerry Sutton explains how Southern Baptists applied their Christianity to cultural issues between the nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century. Sutton is the former pastor of Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and holds a PhD in church history from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He argues that the Southern Baptists consistently attempted to lead America toward increased social righteousness.

Chapter one explains how Christianity is the foundation for Western civilization and how conflicting views of morality clash in the West. Chapter two surveys the Bible's teachings on ethical standards. The chapter also shows how the church attempted to live out those standards in different periods of history. The next six chapters chronicle the Southern Baptist Convention's efforts at cultural engagement between the mid-1800s and the early twenty-first century. From its founding, the convention addressed moral and social issues (pp. 53–82). In 1908 the Southern Baptist Convention established a Committee on Temperance and later a Social Service Commission. Until 1946, the Social Service Commission led Southern Baptist efforts to engage culture, focusing mainly on temperance, race relations, corruption, and world peace (pp. 83–122). During the next thirteen years, the convention continued to address moral concerns and expanded the Social Service Commission by hiring its first executive secretary. Despite some positive work, the commission began to identify with theological liberalism. The Social Service Commission changed its name to the Christian Life Commission during this era (pp. 123–59). Between 1973 and 1988, the Christian Life Commission moved increasingly to the left theologically and politically and fell out of step with rank-and-file Southern Baptists. The commission's pro-abortion stance particularly offended many Southern Baptists (pp. 206–70). Richard Land was elected head of the commission in 1988 and brought the agency back in step with the convictions of Southern Baptist conservatives. During Land's tenure the commission was renamed the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and fought for righteousness in the public square (pp. 271–420).

This book is encyclopedic in its treatment of Southern Baptist cultural engagement and well researched at many points. By focusing on important personalities in the history of the Christian Life Commission, the work outlines a large body of history without pedantic focus on details. Sutton



demonstrates a thorough knowledge of primary sources related to his topic, especially Southern Baptist Convention annuals and Christian Life Commission documents. He also helpfully situates Southern Baptist cultural engagement in its larger context by reminding readers of the significant events in American history during each era of the twentieth century. Perhaps most importantly, Sutton rightly demonstrates that conservative theology results in social righteousness if lived out consistently.

Despite the book's strengths, it has several weaknesses. First, Sutton fails to reference important secondary sources on Southern Baptist cultural engagement and relies on some sources that are insufficient for scholarly research. Among the important omissions from footnotes are Rufus Spain's *At Ease in Zion* and John Lee Eighmy's *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. Sutton repeatedly cites the Internet-based encyclopedia Wikipedia. Second, Sutton depicts Southern Baptist racism in an inappropriately positive light, explaining or justifying when he should condemn. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention formed in 1845 because "militant abolitionists among northern Baptists forced the hand of Baptists in the South" (p. 64). In the 1940s when the Southern Baptist Convention failed to oppose segregation, Sutton says the denomination sounded "a clarion call that Southern Baptists, or at least their leaders, had every intention of promoting aggressively what they perceived to be the Christian viewpoint on racial matters" (p. 124). Third, Sutton uncritically accepts statements by Richard Land as factual without verification or consultation of other sources. While Land is undoubtedly an expert on cultural engagement and a godly culture warrior, this work would be stronger had Sutton buttressed Land's recollections with archival research.

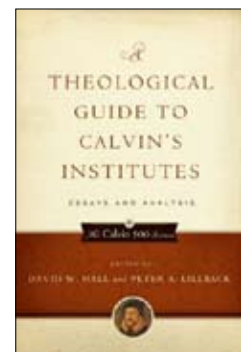
Overall, this book is a helpful source for scholars and laymen studying twentieth-century Southern Baptist history. The work's deficiencies highlight the need for additional books on the Christian Life Commission and Southern Baptist cultural engagement in the twentieth century.

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David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, eds. *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*. The Calvin 500 Series. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008. 506 pp. \$35.99.

This volume is a companion to and a commentary on John Calvin's magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which is to form a part of the commemorative corpus for the Calvin Quincentenary in 2009. The work is comprised of nineteen essays written by nineteen scholars who were selected for their sympathetic reading of Calvin's work and their teaching of this material for a considerable amount of time. Additionally, this volume contains a foreword by J. I. Packer and a bibliography compiled by Richard C. Gamble and Zachary John Kail.

This book will be a helpful companion to readers of the *Institutes* for a number of reasons. First, the reader will profit from the expertise of multiple scholars instead of just one. The editors write, "What this volume offers is a chorale with many voices; we believe that the chorale is superior to a solo" (p. xvi). This feature of the work not only provides the reader with added variety; it also adds depth and breadth to the commentary. While a single commentator may specialize in one or two areas of Calvin's theology, the approach taken in



this work ensures that each section of the *Institutes* receives a thorough treatment by a specialist. For example, Calvin's doctrine of civil government (4.20) receives five pages of analysis in T. H. L. Parker's *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995; see pp. 157–61). François Wendel devotes even less space to the subject in *Calvin: Origins and Developments of His Religious Thought* (trans. Philip Mairet; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). However, in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, David Hall devotes thirty-one pages to Calvin's doctrine of the state.

Secondly, the essayists frequently appeal to the two other major sources of Calvin's thought: his commentaries and sermons. In addition to providing support and illustrations to the authors' conclusions, the commentaries and sermons often serve the reader by clarifying and/or amplifying Calvin's teaching in the *Institutes*. Moreover, by appealing to these other sources, the authors are less susceptible to the dogmatic accommodations that Richard A. Muller warned about in his work *The Unaccommodated Calvin*.

Thirdly, the reader will benefit from the numerous attempts to place Calvin and his thought within their sixteenth-century context. The first chapter of the work is dedicated exclusively to the historical context of the *Institutes*, and many of the following essays attempt to do the same with the subject matter covered. This reminds the reader that Calvin's *Institutes* is a sixteenth-century work and must be read as such.

Fourthly, the reader will also benefit from the contributors' treatment of apparent contradictions in Calvin and the *Institutes*. Joel Beeke addresses various statements Calvin makes about assurance and doubt in the *Institutes*. Robert Reymond discusses a number of Calvin's statements on the Bible that may or may not suggest that he held to what later became known as the doctrine of inerrancy. Robert Peterson evaluates the various statements in Calvin that are relevant to the question of Calvin's view of the extent of the atonement.

Finally, Richard Gamble and Zachary John Kail have compiled an "Essential Calvin Bibliography" for readers who are interested in further study. This bibliography includes listings of the primary Calvin texts, as well as secondary works that are arranged under the following headings: Calvin's Biography; Calvin's Cultural Context—Social and Intellectual History; Calvin's Theology; Analysis and Critique; Piety, Worship, and Ecclesiology; Calvin's Exegesis and Hermeneutics; Calvin and Social, Ethical, and Political Issues. Furthermore, essays two, six, and sixteen include bibliographies of their own relating to the subject matter covered.

If there is a weakness to this work, it is the lack of uniformity in the essays. For example, essays two, six, and sixteen include bibliographies, while the rest do not. Additionally, the sizes of the essays vary. Though most of the essays are around twenty pages in length, the first and the seventh are seventeen pages or less, while the fifth, eighth, twelfth, and eighteenth are over thirty pages. This lack of uniformity, however, is a small fault and should probably be expected from a work that is comprised of nineteen essays written by nineteen different scholars.

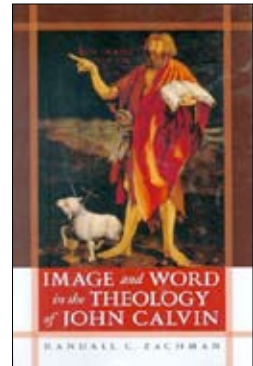
In conclusion, *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* is a welcome companion to the *Institutes*. Readers will undoubtedly profit from the analysis of this chorale of scholars who are sympathetic to the theology of the Genevan Reformer. It is this chorale approach to the *Institutes* that will be one of this work's most enduring contributions. While there are numerous guides to the *Institutes*, this work represents the first collective offering of its kind. Additionally, this work on the whole represents the kind of Calvin scholarship that Richard Muller recommends in *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, although some essays follow Muller's suggestions more closely than others.

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

Randall C. Zachman. *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007. xii + 548 pp. £52.50/\$55.00.

Edward Farley contends in *Faith and Beauty: A Theological Aesthetic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) that the concept of beauty has “virtually no presence among Reformation theologies [of God]” (p. 8). He specifically identifies contemporary Protestant theology as “anti-aesthetic” due to its iconoclastic roots in the theology of the Reformers (p. 68). Are the Reformers, specifically John Calvin, all to blame for Protestantism’s general disinterest in beauty? Or is there perhaps a peculiar kind of beauty unique to Protestant theology that deserves further attention?



To be sure, the narrative told by Farley regarding Protestantism’s disdain for visual representations of the invisible God is all too familiar. In fact, Calvin’s primary argument for eliminating graven images in worship and focusing on the hearing of the Word stems from this supposition. Randall Zachman argues (contra the received view and as part of a growing consensus among Calvin scholars), “Calvin insisted throughout his theological career that the invisible God does become somewhat visible, in what he called ‘living icons or images of God,’ while nonetheless remaining invisible” (p. 2). Such notions are central to Zachman’s thesis whereby he endeavors to demonstrate that “the interdependence of the Word and the work of God, or proclamation and manifestation” is an essential motif of Calvin’s theology (p. 7).

Calvin, according to Zachman, is interested in excising “dead images” for “living images.” Dead images are those that human beings create. Living images are those that God alone creates. Dead images often convey the idea that they can somehow contain God within the image itself, whereas living images signify God’s descent to humanity and serve as vehicles for humanity to ascend to God. Dead images often attempt to fashion God in our own image, while living images transform us from glory to glory. Dead images also depict a false reality, while living images correspond analogically and anagogically to reality. Finally, dead images are incapable of making reality present, whereas living images crafted by the hands of God manifest the reality that they represent. Calvin seeks, according to Zachman, to remove dead images not for the purpose of removing all images but for making present the living images of God in Christ through the power of the Spirit. What, then, are some of these living images?

In part one, “Living Images of God the Creator,” Zachman identifies God’s self-manifestation in the works of creation as those that display God’s eternal wisdom, power, and goodness both in the universe and in us. These splendid representations of the glory of God in creation, however, need God’s Word to clarify our clouded minds so that we can see God’s power in his works. These images are not replaced by God’s Word, according to Calvin, but are clarified by the Word in order to direct our attention to those living images of God “so that we rightly contemplate the God who is represented therein” (p. 41).

In doing so, this display of God’s power is not simply for our contemplation but for our enjoyment such that “our enjoyment of the good things of creation should sweetly allure us to the enjoyment of the

source of all goodness in God” (p. 55). As such, God’s care for his creation reflects his goodness and our enjoyment thereof as he sustains our lives in the face of death. Additionally, God’s providence serves to direct the care of the universe and the events of human history, guiding the pious believer through the tension “between the self-manifestation of God and the often-troubling hiddenness of God in God’s works,” providing hope that God will continue to preserve a remnant of his people (p. 73).

In part two, “Living Images of God the Redeemer,” Zachman highlights those signs and symbols that mark the manifestation of Christ both in the Law and the Gospel, which in turn serve to demarcate the children of God. These signs are necessary because those living images of God in creation, particularly in human beings, are defaced due to the sin of Adam. The Law, through various visual signs and symbols (e.g., the Passover, Covenant, Sabbath), foretells the coming Christ. Moreover, God provides various symbols of his presence (e.g., the Tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, Temple, etc.) to remind the Israelites that he is with them. The prophets, however, not only foretell Christ but also indict Israel for her attempts to confine God’s presence to these images. They often do so by using vivid language and other representations to convey the Word of God that would otherwise remain hidden to his people.

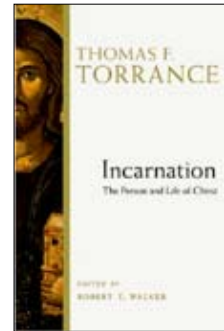
Jesus Christ, then, is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. He is *the* living image of God who is “the source and meaning of all other living images of God” (p. 257). The Gospel of Christ serves as a visual portrait of Christ whereby God “appends . . . many forms of visual confirmation, in terms of miracles, visions, and other people as exemplars of grace, as well as the sacraments” (p. 289). Consequently, pious believers are affirmed and strengthened in their faith “by hearing the promises in the Gospel and by seeing them portrayed and represented before our eyes in the sacraments, even though the Holy Spirit is necessary for both to bear fruit in our minds and hearts” (p. 343).

Zachman’s landmark work, with its copious references to Calvin’s writings and attention to the historical development of his thought, provides Protestants the opportunity to alter the received view of Calvin’s theology as being “anti-aesthetic.” In doing so, he opens the doorway for a thoroughly Protestant and evangelical contribution to the burgeoning discipline of theological aesthetics that connects to both Augustine and Jonathan Edwards. As such, beauty, along with her siblings the true and the good, reemerges as a central concept for understanding the nature of God. Moreover, Zachman restores the proper emphasis on the “goodness” of creation, even after the Fall, that entails our contemplation and praise of the Almighty. For the sake of clarity, though, perhaps Zachman could have used the term *imago Dei* to distinguish the image of God in humanity with the “image” of God in creation; otherwise humanity’s special status seems blurred. Nevertheless, Zachman makes a seminal contribution to Calvin studies that deserves a wide readership and further examination, especially among evangelicals.

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Thomas F. Torrance, and Robert T. Walker. *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 371 pp. £24.69/\$35.00.

This is a very exciting and significant book. It fleshes out (pun intended) our understanding of Torrance's view of the incarnation. *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* is a compilation of Torrance's Christology lectures delivered between 1952 and 1978 at New College, Edinburgh. The focus of the lectures is the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the significance of the incarnation and the unity of his natures. His audience consisted of theological students in the first stages of their training, mostly for ministry in the Church of Scotland. These previously unpublished lectures are edited by Torrance's nephew Robert T. Walker, who attended these lectures as a student. A companion volume on the atonement, also from Torrance's lectures at New College and edited by Walker, is forthcoming.



Synopsis

The book contains seven chapters of lecture materials that are introduced by the “Editor’s Introduction.” In addition to the lecture notes, it includes (1) an extensive section of forty pages called “End notes to Chapter One,” (2) an addendum on eschatology that is over forty-five pages, and (3) a glossary.

The Editor’s Introduction (together with the “Endnotes to Chapter One”) is very enlightening in terms of (1) the process of editing *Incarnation*, (2) an insider’s summation of Torrance’s theological purposes, (3) a crystallization of Torrance’s overall theology, and (4) the expression of such a theology throughout the full sweep of Christology.

Chapter one, “Introduction to Christology,” begins with a discussion of Christological methodology. This chapter, together with chapter two, provides the biblical platform for the theological integration and construction carried out in chapters three through seven.

Chapter two begins with “The incarnation and the old Israel” and “The New Testament Perspective—the Christian doctrine of Israel.” These sections extensively survey the Old Testament, which is God’s means of preparing Israel and humanity with the structures and language with which to begin to comprehend the coming of God in the flesh. “The incarnation and the new Israel,” explores the metaphysics and language of the incarnation with Phil 2 as its primary referent. In this section Torrance brings together incarnation, recapitulation, and substitution-reconciliation (pp. 62–63).

Chapter three is entitled “The once and for all union of God and man in Christ: His birth into our humanity.” This section contains more biblical material, this time dealing with the virgin birth, and some dogmatic reflections with regards to “mystery” and pneumatology in relation to Christology.

Chapter four is on “The continuous union in the historical life and obedience of Jesus.” The themes treated at this juncture include mediation, that is, Jesus’ faithfulness towards both the Father and fellow human beings.

Chapter five, “THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST: the mystery of the union of God and man in the person of Christ,” must be amongst Torrance’s greatest contributions to ecclesiology. This is a rather dense section that may require re-reading. However, it repays this effort and subsequent reflection. In

addition, the Trinitarian aspects of Christology are treated in this chapter; however, these are dealt with in greater depth in Torrance's more explicitly Trinitarian works.

Chapter six is a massive undertaking: "The hypostatic union." It works through the detail and history of anhypostatic/enhypostatic Christology, both the demand for it and its significance.

Chapter seven, "The Kingdom of Christ and Evil," deals with Satan and evil in view of the preceding chapters. However, Torrance's treatment of evil is perhaps less than what would be expected in contemporary works.

The "End Notes to Chapter One" and "Addendum: Eschatology" are excellent. These sections offer far-ranging insights into Torrance's method, views on the deficiencies of various approaches to Christology, and treatments of topics such as election and justification by faith.

Negative Aspects

1. The lack of pagination in the Synopsis (the table of contents) of the book is very irritating, especially if one is trying to make connections between what is said in different sections of the work.

2. Many readers will question Torrance's view that Jesus assumed a *fallen* nature, as this counters the Augustinian and Reformed traditions on the doctrines of humanity and original sin.

3. A friend asked me to describe the book in terms of its complexity. I told him that it is rich like a dense chocolate cake but at times tastes more like mousse. It is not that there is too much air in it; rather, it is "over beaten" and the themes are whipped together in such a manner that they lose their uniqueness. Another way of stating this is that readers can walk away from a T. F. Torrance book with a certain degree of confusion that results from Torrance's style.

Positive Aspects

1. Torrance's interaction with the Bible and with various movements in historical theology (including those beyond patristic and Reformed theology) reveals much of his methodology and theological assumptions.

2. The extent of the significance of the Incarnation both for a Christian understanding of Christ and the life of the worshipping church is captured wonderfully.

3. Torrance's theology of mediation, previously addressed in other works, is developed in relation to many points of theology.

4. In light of the contemporary renewal of interest in "recapitulation" for the incarnation and the atonement, Torrance's work offers a contribution that argues for the merit of such a position when understood in relation to other biblical, patristic, and Reformed theological loci.

5. The editor's introduction is very good.

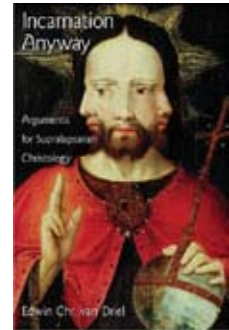
6. It is not difficult to read, even if the ideas are very dense.

In conclusion, though Torrance had written extensively on the Incarnation before his death in 2007, the biblical and historic considerations with which Torrance works in this volume are a unique insight into some of the underpinnings of Torrance's theology, and they argue strongly for the enduring value of his insights.

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Edwin Chr. van Driel. *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. xi + 194 pp. £41.00/\$74.00.

Edwin van Driel seems to have appeared almost out of nowhere. In his essay treating Bruce McCormack's rather controversial thesis regarding election ("Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ," *SJT* 60 [2007]: 45–61), this relatively young and unknown theologian has announced his place in the sphere of systematic and dogmatic theology with gusto. While that particular essay was part of an ongoing conversation, in *Incarnation Anyway* it is given more space to further develop his own position. Yet this is not just a reactionary piece of work but one that is entirely constructive.



At its core, what drives van Driel's thesis is this question: Did Christ become incarnate solely to deal with humanity's sin, or were there other motives? As he frames the issues, the author employs the terminology traditionally found in the doctrine of election. So van Driel refers to the view that Christ took on flesh to deal with humanity's sin problem as an instance of infralapsarian Christology, since the divine will to become incarnate logically follows (*infra*, after) the divine will to allow sin (*lapsus*, fall). Within the same family is the view which holds that the incarnation involved more than Christ's taking on flesh to reconcile sinful humanity. This view can be understood as an instance of supralapsarian Christology. Accordingly, the divine will to become incarnate logically precedes (*supra*, before) the divine will to allow sin.

The author examines three proposals of supralapsarian Christology in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Isaak Dorner, and Karl Barth. While each profile is located within the broader family of this kind of Christology, there are enough substantive differences to warrant a separate analysis of each. According to van Driel, Schleiermacher situates the incarnation firmly in God's relating to what is not God in redemption, Dorner situates the incarnation in God's relating to what is not God in creation, and Barth situates the incarnation in eschatological consummation.

Following this, a constructive proposal is put forward that begins by way of response to the following question: 'If God becomes human only to take care of the sin problem, why does the incarnation continue once atonement is made, and why does it give us so much more than what sin made us lose?' (p. 148). The incarnation, therefore, cannot fully be understood or appreciated if it stands under the aegis of an infralapsarian model and finds itself, 'explained as a divine emergency measure triggered by human sin' (p. 148). If the doctrine of incarnation is to be explained along these lines, that is, if the incarnation can be understood only in its relation to sin, then, by its very nature, the incarnation requires sin. According to van Driel, we should not 'take refuge in a doctrine of sin to beef up incarnation's meaning. We do not need the bad to enjoy Christ' (p. 131).

The author prefers to structure discussion about the incarnation according to the eschaton. If Christ came only to reconcile God and humanity, 'to a restoration of the life of the proton, the life of original creation' (p. 148), then why does the incarnation continue after atonement has been made? If incarnation means more than dealing with sin, though not less, then the goal of Christ's coming is not primarily to restore what was forfeited in Eden. 'In Christ we gain more than we lost in Adam' (p. 151).

What follows is an understanding of incarnation logically situated after election, after creation, and before consummation, and, importantly, it is an understanding not motivated by a view to the fall. God chooses to create a world inhabited by humans so that both parties might enjoy friendship and

fellowship together. The incarnation is seen as the evidence of God's fullest expression of friendship whereby in Christ we see the face of the Father (John 14:9), and at the end of time we are welcomed into a relation of 'heightened intimacy' with God (p. 152).

The Gospel records a picture of Christ existing in bodily form even between his resurrection and ascension. This is important for van Driel because it indicates that the intimacy we shall enjoy before God will include sensory perception by bodily beings rather than a purely intellectual cognition (p.156). Christ assumed flesh and ascended to heaven, and in so doing he led the way of victory so that we might enjoy the presence of God as bodily beings. The beatific vision, the vision of God enjoyed in the consummation, implies that we will enjoy God not only with our minds, but 'full enjoyment of God implies that we will be able to see God, hear God, embrace God—but this can happen only if God is incarnate, in the flesh' (p. 163). This is the reason for which we were created so therefore, even apart from sin, the incarnation was always intended for humanity and, as such, is supralapsarian in character.

Within the field of Christology, Edwin van Driel's proposal will not only be difficult to avoid, but any attempt to do so would be a lost opportunity to follow the lead of an experienced guide across the complex and entangled landscape of Western Christology. Not only does the author engage the thought of such notable figures like Schleiermacher and Barth, van Driel also visits the Christology of the generally overlooked Isaak Dorner.

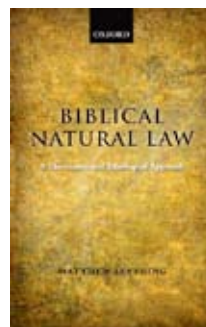
Readers will quickly find that the mode of theology practised by the author is at once informed by a conversation within the Western tradition while also carried along by a rigorous conceptual analysis of the doctrine. The reader, however, will not find the argument overwhelming as van Driel keeps things clear and well sign-posted. Overall, *Incarnation Anyway* appears as one of many books that has recently been published on the subject, though it will quickly find itself as one of the very first to be consulted.

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Matthew Levering. *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. vi + 260 pp. £55.00/\$110.00.

Matthew Levering is a theologian who is convinced that the best way forward in theology often requires taking a few steps back. Sensing that the current situation surrounding moral theology is one in which Holy Scripture and the 'book of nature' have been leveraged from a happy state of cooperation, Levering's 'study proposes that the full scope of natural law doctrine is learned best by means of a dialogue between biblical exegesis, theology and philosophy, where each enriches the other' (p. 1).

Since natural law rests on the assumption that God has 'imprinted' upon each individual traces of his moral law, a law which can, therefore, be known experientially, philosophers have been able to develop a doctrine of natural law that does not appeal immediately (or at all) to Holy Scripture. The author addresses the problem which he sees attending contemporary discussions of natural law, that is, the exclusion of Scripture's necessary role in such discussions. Yet according to Levering, 'Natural law doctrine does not become significantly more persuasive or effective



once pluralism dictates the exclusion of biblical revelation' (p. 18). In fact, once the doctrines of creation and providence become dislodged from an account of natural law, the remainder is 'an anthropocentric discourse of individual human rights grounded upon a false sense of human autonomy' (p. 20). With this taken into account, Levering believes the best way forward is through an articulation of natural law, 'not as a rationalistic rulebook' (p. 21), but as the eternal law of God imprinted in the human person, who participates rationally in God's ordering of humans to their fulfilment.

Chapter one presents a discussion on biblical ethics which revolves around this question: 'Does natural law belong to biblically grounded reflection on the moral life, or is it a Greek and Roman philosophical category that remains inadequate for describing biblical realities?' (p. 49). Levering brings to the discussion the perspectives of Richard Hays and Allen Verhey as representatives of studies in New Testament ethics and John Barton and David Novak as representatives of Old Testament ethics. Levering's broad evaluation suggests that the four examples indicate that there exists sufficient evidence for the biblical warrants for natural law while also providing 'interpretive value' of moral law reflection. To this, Levering provides four claims which, at a minimal level, have to be made when speaking about a natural law that best does justice to the realities taught in Scripture.

Chapter two maps the ways in which the modern understanding of natural law has ended up being articulated anthropocentrically. By giving attention to the development of natural-law discourse within the mainstream philosophies of the past few centuries, Levering points out the moves made which slowly erased the biblical moorings of natural law doctrine. Before he surveys the thought of some prominent philosophers between Descartes and Nietzsche, Levering gives a brief outline of the doctrine according to Cicero and Augustine. What marks Cicero and Augustine apart from the modern philosophers is the stress the former place on the connection between happiness and moral goodness. Both recognize God's providence in relation to natural law. As Levering explains, 'moral goodness is a happiness that is structured upon, rather than alien to or in tension with, our desires for self-preservation, for procreation and offspring, for life in society, and for truth' (p. 82). What follows, according to the modern philosophers, is an account stripped of any trace of God's structuring of life toward human happiness. Such approaches lack the kind of interpersonal communion between Creator and creature, which a teleological approach adverts.

In the final two chapters, Levering offers his constructive proposal. As with much of Levering's other projects, Thomas Aquinas is the figure who can best lead us forward. Aquinas indicates a way of understanding natural law that is at once richly informed by biblical exegesis while also articulated theologically and philosophically. Believing that humans are created for fellowship with God and thus directed towards a Trinitarian love of self-giving (what Levering calls *ecstasis*), natural law, therefore, 'carries us outside ourselves' (p. 221), to be open to another person. In contrast to Nietzsche then, human fulfilment is found in going outside oneself rather than in self-seeking actions. The gains of such an approach illustrate an ethical framework that prefers a providential ordering to one that begins with human beings as the source and origin of law. The consequences of an alternative approach amount to a political order structured according to arbitrary convention and power that promote individual rights, an ordering that makes it easy to approve the 'practices of death such as euthanasia and abortion' (p. 233). Taking seriously the natural law as Levering explains it, one finds in the maxim 'God's love orders all' hope, dignity, and fulfilment as achieved through imitation of the divine *ecstasis*.

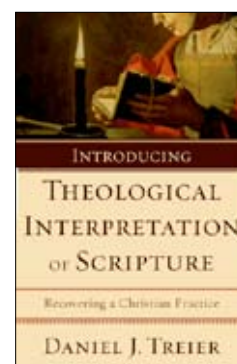
Matthew Levering brings his customary high level of research and insight to an entangled and prickly topic. The range of resources drawn in to bolster his case is typically broad, though the student of the Reformation might feel a little disappointed that the voice coming from this camp is much muted

in the argument. However, in the end what *Biblical Natural Law* does secure is a clearly thought-out consideration of an important, practical subject that will serve its readers well.

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Daniel J. Treier. *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. 221 pp. £11.99/\$17.99.

Dr Treier, associate professor of theology at Wheaton College, has written a fine historical and theological introduction to the well known and vital issue of interpreting Scripture theologically. His introductory chapter, 'From Karl Barth to "Postmodern" Theory' (pp. 11–36), sketches how this theological interpretation declined from the eighteenth century onwards because of the rise of 'critical biblical scholarship'. Barth was the forerunner of a quest to recover this theological approach that gained momentum in the 1990s. His *Letter to the Romans* and *Church Dogmatics*, which were saturated with scriptural exegesis, provided a model in which theological commitments and exegetical insights were tightly interwoven. Treier charts how Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics, who found themselves caught 'between faith and criticism' and had lost ground in a larger battle with 'modernism', began to engage in rather different ways with critical biblical scholarship and to interpret Scripture theologically. The rise of postmodern approaches and the focus on the role that communities play in interpretation also provided the catalyst in this movement towards recovering theological exegesis.



The rest of the book traces the theological interpretation of Scripture from two main perspectives: (1) 'Catalysts and Common Themes' (chaps. 1–3), and (2) 'Continuing Challenges' (chaps. 4–6).

In the first chapter, 'Recovering the Past: Imitating Precritical Interpretation' (pp. 37–55), Treier singles out several features of pre-critical reading that have rightly been taken on board in the current recovery. This spans more than 1,000 years, involves numerous interpreters from various locations and with significant differences of interpretive theory, and contains a considerable number of weaknesses. Yet positive features of pre-critical interpretation have been regained: the Scriptures were read as a corporate, religious activity by those who were convinced of the present reality of God. The biblical texts, though diverse, were understood as a unified whole. They have their own 'historical' meaning yet were 'meant for us' since they catch us up with the saving events. Moreover, by means of typology and allegory the classic interpreters found Christ throughout the Bible (pp. 51–55).

The second chapter (pp. 57–77) deals with the 'Rule of Faith', a 'basic summary of the biblical story centered on identifying God as triune—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . [which] took tangible shape in the ecumenical creeds and directed the church's interpretation of Scripture for centuries' (p. 57). This Rule is able to preserve the truth, encourage a wider set of doctrinal interests and commitments, provide explicit boundaries, and help restrain human tendencies to twist the Scriptures in self-interested ways. Treier draws heavily on the writings of Francis Watson, who as a biblical scholar appropriates Christian doctrines in the midst of exegesis. For Watson all Scripture requires interpretation with the reality of Jesus Christ as the centre of its narrative world. Life in the Christian community shapes our reading of

the biblical texts, while the contemporary context outside the church causes us to reflect theologically on the meaning of Scripture. While some division of labour between biblical studies and systematic theology may be necessary, it should be functional not normative. Unfortunately, it has often had the effect of driving theologians away from Scripture.

Chapter three, entitled 'Reading with Others: Listening to the Community of the Spirit' (pp. 79–100), picks up one of Watson's key elements, namely, interpreting Scripture within the context of God's people (not just as individuals), and with Christian maturity as its goal. The works of Lindbeck, Hauerwas, and Fowl are assessed within the context of Christians' ongoing struggles to live and worship faithfully before the triune God in an ever-deepening relationship with him and others. The Holy Spirit's work in shaping our Christian communities can then be a factor in how we understand the scriptural texts.

Part 2 of the book takes up the 'Continuing Challenges' (chaps. 4–6) to the theological interpretation of Scripture. Fundamental to this enterprise is 'Engaging Biblical Theology' (chap. 4, pp. 103–25). Recognizing that it has had a complicated history, Treier traces its modern development as a discipline and asks whether it can provide a bridge or serve as an interdisciplinary program between biblical exegesis and systematic theology. He discusses a range of issues including the scope of biblical theology, how one should organize it, and its relationship to other theological disciplines. My own view is that biblical theology has a greater internal coherence than this chapter suggests and can be integrated with systematic theology more effectively (though note pp. 190–99).

Chapter five, 'Engaging General Hermeneutics' (pp. 127–56), asks the question, 'How should we apply general theories of interpretation for any text to the special case of understanding the Scripture?' As Treier interacts with the contributions of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Hirsch, Thiselton, Fowl, Vanhoozer, and others, he recognizes that general and special hermeneutics share much overlapping territory, although biblical interpretation constitutes a somewhat distinct province. Since the Christian reading of Scripture concerns living in a way that pleases God according to the image of Christ, then all understanding has a theological component to it.

The sixth chapter, 'Engaging Social Locations' (pp. 157–86), addresses the issue of theological interpretation by Christians in a context of 'globalization', especially in a postcolonial world and in light of the rapid growth of Pentecostal Christianity in the global South. We are reminded that the Christian faith is more than 'Western'; as Andrew Walls affirms, it is 'unique in its portability' (cited on p. 183). Treier comments, 'Redemption in Christ leads us to anticipate a glorious future that continues to involve culture' (p. 184).

Treier's concern for an informed recovery of the theological interpretation of Scripture is timely (see his conclusions, pp. 187–205). A discussion of the 'domains of discourse' between systematic theology and biblical studies would have further clarified a number of issues. Also, what takes precedence when the rule of faith or the assertions of systematic theologians are at variance with or go beyond what seem to be the plain statements of the text of Scripture? Treier's survey of the landscape is vast, and he writes charitably of others' views.

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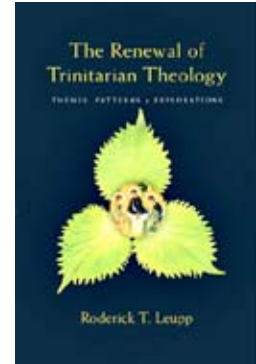
Roderick T. Leupp. *The Renewal of Trinitarian Theology: Themes, Patterns and Explorations*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 206 pp. £17.28/\$24.00.

This book considers the resurgence of Trinitarian theology. Leupp taught Theology and Christian Ethics at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, the Philippines (Metro Manila) from 1992 to 2000, then became pastor of the Wann, Oklahoma United Methodist Church. No novice to Trinitarian studies, Leupp is capable of delivering this work surveying contours in Trinitarian theology. (Cf. his earlier works: *Knowing the Name of God* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1996] and review of LaCugna, *God for Us*, *JETS* 39 [1996]: 317–18.)

Connecting the Trinity with human existence is what this book is about. Leupp sets forth Trinitarian doctrine not as an intellectual problem, but as “the church’s life-giving hope” (cf. the endorsement by Paul Metzger). As “the summit and apex of all Christian theology,” the Trinity has many paths whereby its peak may be ascended, each calling for “purposeful resolve of action” (pp. 16–18). Leupp’s Trinity is one that befits a context, relating to features and formulations carrying relevant apologetic value that serve as “the final test” for the “common Christian confessor” and “curious onlookers” (p. 48). This also goes for the development and construction of Trinitarian theology in history and today, with psychological and social analogies having relevance, though the latter have “greater urgency” in today’s fractious living (p. 26). Nevertheless, Leupp does not abandon Augustine’s psychological analogy. It too has great relevancy, especially for Christian (i.e., “Trinitarian”) ethics, though not to the exclusion of the social model, as the hospital scenario shows (p. 192). Leupp sees the social analogy filling out the psychological analogy (p. 106), while more metaphors can be of further use (pp. 106–9).

Leupp’s engaging writing style and ability to create word pictures simplifies complex theology for average readers. Cultural illustrations range from the relationship between artists and theologians (p. 22) to scenarios of historic tours and museum experiences (pp. 24, 48), from baseball (pp. 24, 62, 148, 181) to music and poetry (pp. 60, 87–88, 92), from film and animation (pp. 52, 80) to restaurant scenes (pp. 71, 154), from the ocean (pp. 65, 126) to work as “giving” (p. 194). His illustrations are occasionally problematic (e.g., the economic Trinity is likened to diseases and the ugliness of Atlantic immigrant crossings, p. 62), though removed as quickly as given before sustainable objections arise. Consequently, Leupp steers clear of heresy at delicate points after giving illustrations (e.g., pp. 55, 65, 76), since he deems metaphors and everything else existing for the sake of the Trinity and not vice versa (p. 10). His carefully prodding organic analogies are not intended to describe the Trinity *per se* as much as they seek usefulness for stretching the mind to understand something of how the doctrine of the Trinity might work. He admits candidly that “not all word pictures are acceptable to trinitarian orthodoxy,” yet even here presents one of the Manhattan skyline (p. 20) in order to show that “the mental rigors of trinitarian theology never forget that theology sings as well as cogitates, and prays as well as deduces” (p. 21).

Illustrations abound in chapters one through three yet are minimized from chapter four on as Leupp becomes more descriptive than illustrative. No major shift exists between sections, though perhaps the various proposals he considers in chapters four through seven require a more direct style of writing. Chapters one and two survey the Trinitarian landscape and emphasize “perichoresis” and its relevancy for the human situation. Moltmann has a large role in chapters three and four, which deal with God’s suffering and identifying with humanity’s spirituality. Chapter five continues the emphasis on the social Trinity and its significance for the redeemed community’s life and worship, noting that “any relevant



ecclesiology” grounded in God’s reality “must be triunely figured, constructed and realized” (p. 127). Chapters six and seven move the doctrine of the Trinity into the arena of Christian ethics which is said to be “a theological task” (p. 146).

Leupp spars with Molnar, sarcastically regarding him as “blessed by the humility” attending deep study the Trinity (p. 63). Yet he finds great import in the approach from another Barthian, T. F. Torrance, who mirrors Calvin and especially Gregory Nazianzus, who shows forth “everything good trinitarian theology is called to be” (pp. 64–65).

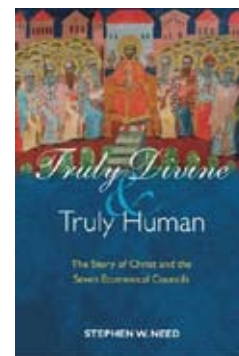
While well written, this book’s scholarship is questionable. Over forty-five references and quotes come from citations in other authors’ works, limiting primary source interaction. References to church fathers may show how other writers read the fathers, which is not what Leupp hopes to present in handling the history of Trinitarian thought and therefore limiting his argumentation. It is also difficult sometimes to identify what Leupp is driving at in the big-picture of the book. Leupp seems to lean toward mystical views of the “hidden Trinity” at points (pp. 175–78), though denies this in the introduction (p. 9). His Arminianism comes clear on his understanding of the Spirit’s work in reason (p. 173). One also wonders if major leaps in the book from God’s communion to ecclesial communion (p. 133) or from perichoresis to human ethics have clear justification. Whatever ground exists, Leupp does a scant job showing it.

Criticisms aside, the book’s content and readability make it a handy contribution to the field of contemporary Trinitarian theology. Additionally, part of its meaningfulness results from a trial the Triune God of love has taken Leupp through in the tragic accident of his daughter Rebecca (pp. 86–87, 196) wherein the Trinity could no longer remain academic for him. While this has certainly shaped his views (esp. in chap. 3), the reader is enriched by Leupp’s experience of the Triune God’s gracious presence in all of life’s events. Someone seeking a more thorough introduction to the landscape of Trinitarian theology can find better options with Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) or Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). Nevertheless, this book is a helpful, accessible introduction to the importance of Trinitarian theology today and to some of the key concepts operative within the discussion, as well as to a handful of the important players.

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Stephen W. Need. *Truly Divine and Truly Human: The Story of Christ and the Seven Ecumenical Councils*. London: SPCK; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008. xvii + 181 pp. £14.99/\$24.95.

This modest volume written by Anglican scholar Stephen Need concerns the development of orthodox Christology as seen through the lens of the seven great ecumenical councils. Written primarily for students, the text carries on in a self-consciously pedagogical style and is fitted with such helpful tools as maps, brief historical excursions, photos, a glossary of key terms, a chronology of the councils with reference to important places, figures, and circumstances, and even an annotated bibliography. In this vein, the author's intentions are simple: "In the end, anyone reading this book should be able to see what the seven ecumenical councils were basically all about and why Jesus Christ gradually came to be portrayed as 'truly divine and truly human'" (p. xvi).



Need sets the stage in the first chapter by identifying the root of Christological reflection in the early church's communal worship and confession. By considering certain titles given to Jesus in the New Testament (Lord, Savior, Son of God, Son of Man, Christ), Need argues that the early Christians perceived a "special relationship" between Jesus and God. Indeed, their convictions concerning this relationship are perhaps clearest in the titles "Wisdom" and "Word," by which they sought to express some notion of Jesus' pre-existence and unique dignity. Yet despite these proto-affirmations about Jesus, "it is less clear that in the early stages [Christians] thought of him in exactly the same sense that the later councils were to think of him, that is as 'God incarnate'" (p. 14). Thus, Need suggests, "the 'high language' [of the New Testament] had perhaps better be put in the category of poetry rather than philosophy or history" (ibid.).

Chapter two introduces the classic Antioch/Alexandria typology as a means of explaining various tensions in the first formal Christologies (with Theodore of Mopsuestia and Origen serving as mature examples, respectively). The Antiochene approach was more "this worldly" and thus concerned with the authentic humanity of Christ, while the Alexandrian approach was more "other worldly" and so focused on Christ's divinity. Hence, a brief discussion of the Aristotelian and Platonic worldviews ensues, though Need qualifies their influence by noting the Fathers' concern over matters of biblical interpretation and salvation as well.

In the following six chapters, Need offers a rather traditional account of the seven councils (Constantinople 553 and 680–81 share a chapter), with Nicaea 325 and Chalcedon 451 functioning as turning points in the story. As anticipated, the Antiochene/Alexandrian dialectic provides an explanatory framework throughout, though Need also introduces a threefold thematic structure that includes 1) Christology (the identity of Jesus Christ), 2) the importance of theological language (the search for appropriate terms), and 3) salvation (the consequences of Christology). By such means, for example, continuity is discovered between the seventh council, which concerned icons, and the preceding six, which concerned Christology proper.

Finally, Need offers some reflections on the relevance of the councils for today, recounting modern attempts to ground ecumenical dialogue on the soil of these early statements. While acknowledging some progress, Need notes that difficulties lie not only in the area of ecclesial reconciliation, but also in the feasibility of orthodox Christology for the modern and postmodern mind. In light of these obstacles, then, Need suggests, "The real value of the councils for contemporary Christians can be found not in

slavishly following what the Fathers of the councils said simply because they said it, but rather in trying to appreciate more fully what they were trying to do and then doing it after them in our own very different circumstances today” (pp. 157–8).

As mentioned above, Need’s book is primarily pedagogical, and according to this criterion it should receive high praise. In leading his readers through deep theological waters, Need’s prose remains eminently readable, presupposing no background knowledge yet untangling the thorny issues with laudable facility (e.g., the enhypostatic/anhypostatic distinction). This is not a polemic work, and one gets the sense that there is no agenda lurking in the background (as can often be the case in such introductory texts). Thus, I suspect theological instructors and pastors of all stripes could happily make use of this volume.

Beyond pedagogy, Need’s book should also be commended for its shrewd presentation of the councils as “reference points” rather than cleanly delineated schools of thought (for a more detailed account of this approach, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* [Oxford University Press, 2004]). Specialists will likely fault Need for his recourse to old typologies (though he is not unaware of their reductionistic nature), but in practice these distinctions tend to serve more as evaluative devices than historical categories.

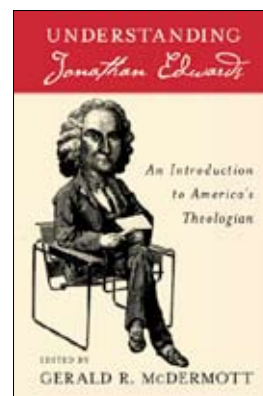
One concern, however, is Need’s portrayal of the “development” of Christology and the relation of the councils to Scripture. For example, he seems to assume that the pluriform interpretation of the New Testament’s “high” Christological passages by the early church belies an ambiguity in the text itself (careful readers may here detect hints of James D. G. Dunn, whose *Christology in the Making* [SCM, 1980] is one of three books cited “for further reading” on the NT background). While it is granted that the Christology of the New Testament does not approach the philosophical precision of Nicaea or Chalcedon, it does not follow that lack of precision according to certain criteria justifies marginalizing the bold theological assertions of, for instance, Phil 2:5–11 as mere poetry. The idea of the apostles groping around trying to find words to express their “experience” of Christ seems to exclude prematurely the possibility that these “high” passages were not merely straining for expression, but actually *succeeded* in saying something *new* in light of the resurrection. Indeed, if certain historiographies struggle to account for *nova* in their reading of history, then so much the worse for these historiographies. It is therefore (at least) not inferior to suggest that the councils emerged not from certain inchoate, “poetic” utterances, but rather as attempts to *correspond* to the real Christological claims of the New Testament within a certain philosophical context *in order to resolve* a clash of interpretations. What remained the same throughout the debates was not just a similar “experience” of Christ, but the received texts of Scripture as well. In this respect, the *homoousion* may be considered more a hermeneutical judgment in kind than a Christological development (as David S. Yeago has argued in his essay “The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma,” in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* [ed. Stephen E. Fowl; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001], 87–100).

Nevertheless, despite these points of disagreement, it should be emphasized that such matters do not overshadow the pedagogical achievement of Need’s very helpful volume, and so *Truly Divine and Truly Human* truly merits a spot on not a few syllabi.

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Gerald R. McDermott, ed. *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America's Theologian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xvii + 228 pp. £13.99/\$24.95.

As someone who thinks that Jonathan Edwards is still worth reading, I was excited to hear about a new project by Gerald R. McDermott, one of the more prolific Edwards scholars of our day. Beyond his interests in biblical typology, Deism, and world religions, McDermott has shown that he has an interest in helping a lay audience grasp Edwards—a task many try but few succeed. Turning his attention again to this latter task, McDermott has edited this new collection of essays under review. There are several distinctive features of this volume making it stand alone among the vast secondary literature on Edwards (which I will highlight below). Initially noteworthy is my favorite aspect—it was written for those who may have little to no knowledge of Edwards or the field of Edwards studies. What excites me about this is that it accomplishes what few (if any) have: an introduction to major themes in Edwards's thought that is usable for the classroom. If this volume achieves what McDermott proposes—to inspire readers to explore Edwards' own writings—then those of us who think Edwards deserves to be taught in both university and church will be in his debt.



For those unfamiliar with Edwards studies, let me explain. Never having written a systematic theology, Edwards's works are occasional, mostly unpublished, and arcane. Grasping onto themes is next to impossible for anyone other than scholars because you have to trace through his 1,400 or so *Miscellanies* notes to see the progression of his thought, not to mention traipsing through his 1,200 extant sermons, his notes on/in the Bible, as well as dealing with the chronological/genre issues that arise because of these sources. Therefore, for the beginning student, Edwards can seem impenetrable, if not just odd. Other introductory volumes usually focus on specific works, which are certainly helpful and needed, but often portray individual works in a vacuum abstracted from the expanse of Edwards's corpus and thought world.

Beyond the introductory form and the volume's readability, McDermott adds several interesting features. Instead of offering a volume of themes by all the classic Edwards commentators, he divides the book into eight themes and has an Edwards scholar write the first and a European scholar (not previously familiar with Edwards) respond. This not only provides for divergent viewpoints, but could very well help students understand the nature and issues inherent to Edwards studies. The topics are: "Jonathan Edwards's Life and Career," "Edwards and Revival," "Edwards and the Bible," "Edwards and Biblical Typology," "Edwards and Beauty," "The Literary Life of Jonathan Edwards," "Edwards and Philosophy," and "Edwards and the World Religions." McDermott chose a great lineup of Edwards commentators, many of them the most prolific scholars in the field, and the European counterparts offer distinctive and erudite engagement of the material. Those of us who think Edwards has good things to say will hope this opens the door for "America's theologian" to be considered in a broader global context.

While all of these themes are interesting in Edwards studies, I was particularly excited to read the chapters on "Edwards and the Bible" and "Edwards and Biblical Typology." There is not nearly enough work done on these topics, and with the revived interest in hermeneutics, typology and differing aspects of theological exegesis, there needs to be more work done. Stephen Stein's comment back in 1988 that, "Despite the quantity of his [Edwards] writing on the Bible, there is an amazing paucity

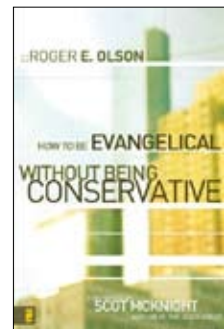
of serious scholarship dealing with it,” still holds true (however much the tides of scholarship have shifted in recent years) (see Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* [Oxford University Press, 1988], p. 123). Doug Sweeney, the Edwards scholar (and Edwards reception scholar) at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, wrote the first essay on the Bible with Wolter H. Rose as a respondent, and Tibor Fabiny wrote the first essay on Biblical Typology with McDermott responding (this being the only theme with a European writing the initial essay and an American offering the response). Fabiny’s essay is fascinating as a scholar focusing in the area of typology and addressing Edwards only after he had written on typology in general. I found this section enlightening and McDermott’s response a helpful counterpart.

While there are many issues one could take with a volume like this (Why these topics and not others? Why not engage more of the major debates? etc.), those issues tend to be raised for any book written on Edwards. This, of course, should not minimize the significance of these objections. It is an important critique to question if *these* essays presented in this volume adequately help one “understand” Jonathan Edwards or “introduce” you to him in a significant way. After all, there is a chapter on Edwards and philosophy but not on Edwards and theology, or even Edwards and reformed orthodoxy. Likewise, one wonders if these themes were chosen not because of their centrality to Edwards’s work, as much as their broad intrigue. Overall, critiques like these may be justified, but only go to show how much more work needs to be done to introduce new audiences to Edwards. I think McDermott did an excellent job creating what he thought necessary—a volume for beginners mapping various themes and issues so that people can take a first step into Edwards studies. Those teaching classes on Edwards will no doubt be grateful, and those looking for an introduction to Edwards’ ideas will find a helpful roadmap.

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Roger E. Olson. *How to Be Evangelical Without Being Conservative*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 208 pp. £9.99/\$16.99.

Roger Olson, prolific author and professor of theology at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, has performed a helpful service to the Christian community by writing *How to Be Evangelical Without Being Conservative*. Those wondering what the post-conservative evangelical movement is all about now have a concise and clearly written explanation. Olson has written in an engaging style that should be accessible to academics, pastors, and the interested layperson. There is no question where Olson stands on this matter. He is an advocate of post-conservative evangelicalism.



New Testament scholar Scot McKnight pens a brief foreword to the book where we are immediately faced with a yawning chasm in what was once thought to be a fairly monolithic movement. The evangelical movement is split into two between so-called liberal and conservative factions. McKnight notes that Olson here presents a “Third Way” (p. 9) between these two extremes. He goes on to point out that Olson delves into twelve areas where this divide can be transcended.

Before Olson dives into his discussion of a dozen areas where he thinks evangelicals would do well to become “post-conservative” he explains what evangelicals are and what conservatism is. He goes to some length to distinguish evangelicals from fundamentalists with reference to an appreciation for Billy Graham (p. 15). From Olson’s perspective, conservative evangelicals are fundamentalists in sheep’s clothing.

As Olson notes, most people in the general public consider evangelicals to be conservative socially, politically, and theologically (p. 19). He then defines conservatives as those who enshrine the past and tradition. To put it another way, conservatives by nature embrace and defend the status quo (p. 20). In contrast to this, the author defines evangelicals as “both radical and open to new things. Not open to anything and everything, of course, but willing to venture out of comfort zones and risk vested interests for the sake of the gospel and biblical fidelity” (p. 20).

In the remainder of the book, the author delves into specific areas where evangelicals would do well to divest themselves of their conservative heritage or sensibilities. For instance, Olson argues for being biblical as opposed to orthodox (chap. 1), building character while avoiding moralism (chap. 2), patriotism without falling for a “my country right or wrong” mentality (chap. 3), seeking truth without certainty (chap. 4), taking the Bible seriously without reading every last word literally (chap. 5), eschewing religiosity without going secular (chap. 6), and aiming to transform society without seeking domination (chap. 7). Olson continues with a chapter affirming the redistribution of wealth (chap. 8), updating worship without trivializing it (chap. 9), relativizing the importance of theology without rejecting it altogether (chap. 10), accepting sinners without affirming their sin (chap. 11), and recognizing the interdependence of men and women in the church and in culture at large (chap. 12).

When one comes to the end of the book, one has been given much food for thought. Unfortunately, every silver lining has its cloud. That is, what is the obvious strength of this book is also its patent weakness. Undoubtedly this book was not meant to be either academic or exhaustive, but it would have been helpful if the author had provided more argumentation in his chapters. At times the book reads like a series of musings only. The absence of notes makes it hard to check for accuracy and fairness.

Additionally, the categories are loaded in favor of a more liberal-leaning position. This reviewer has never met a conservative who desires to transcend the conservative/liberal divide. The overtures always seem to come from the more liberal end of the spectrum. Why is it that conservatives concern themselves only with upholding the status quo? This seems only to short-circuit the questioning process. The author relativizes the truth question throughout the book, and so conservatives are not concerned with maintaining the truth of Christianity (“contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” as Jude 3 has it) but only with keeping things the way they are, thank you very much.

Post-conservative evangelicals are into fresh, new insights from Scripture. Who wouldn’t be? Unfortunately, the author does not always rely upon fresh, new insights into church history or theology. For instance, he passes along the old canard that John Calvin was the virtual dictator of Geneva conveniently ignoring that Calvin was not even made a citizen of Geneva until within a few years of his death. Olson notes that “under his pastorate in the city heretics were burned at the stake” (p. 121). Never mind that Michael Servetus (the specific heretic most likely being referred to here) was warned by Calvin to stay away from Geneva and that Calvin did not execute him, but the city fathers did. Never mind that Servetus was condemned by both Roman Catholic and Protestant authorities. Nor was Geneva unique in executing heretics. Good, bad, or indifferent, it was common back then.

If that is not enough, consider Olson’s treatment of the fresh, new insights into Scripture found within the Open Theist movement (pp. 155–56). Whatever one makes of this movement (and this

reviewer has no doubts about its serious flaws), it is hardly fresh and new. Open theism is, to be honest, old and dusty. In fact, in many ways, the movement is just the rediscovery of an old heresy: Socinianism. Why doesn't Olson bring that little fact up for consideration? Moving on, what is one to make of the comment that Old Princeton theologian Charles Hodge was "all-important" (pp. 144–45)? Also, with regard to the Reformation, while it is true that our theology in this life is a "pilgrimage theology" (a point widely recognized, for instance, by the Protestant Scholastics), it is not true that the Reformation called all aspects of Christian theology into question. Olson says that Martin Luther's experiences led him to reconsider everything he had been taught (p. 149). Actually, the matter in dispute between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformers was mainly the application of redemption.

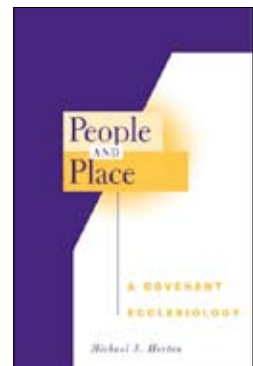
Not all is lost however. The one chapter this reviewer found insightful dealt with the difference between patriotism and nationalism (pp. 58–72). It is true that one can love one's country without agreeing with everything done by the government of that country. It is also true that America is not the replacement of theocratic Israel. America has been blessed, but in ways much like other countries in the world. It should also be noted that there are Reformed Christians who question the whole transformationalist paradigm and seek to embody the Christian gospel in the community of the church.

How to Be Evangelical Without Being Conservative is helpful in accounting for how one prominent postconservative evangelical thinks. For that we can be thankful. For those who are committed to the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ and his Word, they will have to look elsewhere.

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Michael S. Horton. *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008. x + 325pp. £19.99/\$34.95.

With this volume, Michael Horton winds up a four-volume series designed to integrate our theological thought by adumbrating a covenantal perspective that is at once traditionally Reformed and independently contemporary. His quarry in this book is ecclesiology, which he covers as comprehensively as space allows. The three main sections respectively treat the origin, identity, and destination of the church, the whole being governed by a conviction about the nature and form of Christ's presence in salvation-historical and eschatological perspective, for the church must be understood out of its existence in vital union with the ascended, living, and coming Christ. Readers acquainted with the earlier volumes in this series will know that the author outlines his position by conceptualizing it in terms of 'meeting a stranger' as opposed to 'overcoming estrangement' and 'the stranger we never meet.' The full substance and force of these contrasts will be hard to appreciate without reading the earlier works, but this will not deter us from understanding how these notions are applied in this volume and a modest chart on page 68 summarises the way in which ecclesiological debate is conducted under these rubrics.



Broadly speaking, Michael Horton aspires to be solidly Reformed but in a way that incorporates into a covenantal framework emphases from outside the Reformed tradition where they are compatible

and helpful. An example, which has also featured earlier in the series of volumes, is the use of Eastern Orthodox thought: Eastern preoccupation with ‘energies’ can be harnessed by a covenantal theology which emphasizes ‘the *workings* of God’ (p. 137). In fact, the author avers that ‘we should not speak of a Reformed faith or an Orthodox theology or a Lutheran confession, but of a Christian faith, theology, and confession, from a Reformed, Orthodox, or Lutheran perspective’ (p. 210). However, we shall understand just how little or how much is conceded to non-Reformed perspectives only if we read the book mindful of the qualification that the author places on this statement, a statement uttered in light of the challenge to ‘our tendency to find our ultimate identity in our own denomination or tradition.’

It is hard to summarise the theological content of this book without making it sound trite, and this would do it a greater injustice than the one which I propose to do, which is to rest content with a general description of the book. Michael Horton is a scribe who brings forth things old and new: basically, his is the ecclesiology and sacramentology of the classic Reformed Presbyterian tradition, where the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church is the *creatio* and *creatura Verbi* (creation and creature of the Word), its features delineated in a renewed conceptual framework from time to time and quite freshly presented even when the conceptuality is familiar. Michael Horton’s studies in a covenantal perspective are always rewarding and this is no exception. Nothing is missing from the field of vision: doctrine, mission, liturgy, and practice are contained within a balanced embrace, to risk an awkward metaphor.

For all its strengths, and despite its broadly compelling appeal to covenant, it almost inevitably has its drawbacks. Evangelicals of other traditions will understandably chafe at being told ‘that the difference between this [a Radical Protestant] perspective and the Reformed position are as great as those that separate the Reformed from the Roman Catholic view’ (p. 112). The ‘Radical Protestant’ encompasses Baptist and Anabaptist traditions. This statement is generated by the familiar claim that the Reformed emphasise the sacraments as promise, whereas Catholics and Baptists emphasise them as offerings, the offering of faith in the latter case; this, then, is the particular point to which Horton’s words are directed, but it is a central point indeed. However, I think that this is a case where the use of formal theological categories more than runs the risk of obscuring significant religious differences. I do not doubt that Presbyterian/Baptist differences on the sacrament are important, but it is possible to draw the lines of theological division on the sacraments at more than one point, particularly when we consider what all parties concerned understand by the nature of lively faith. Protestant/Catholic differences may begin to look different in that light, and evangelical Presbyterian and Baptist perspectives appear more closely aligned in contrast to Roman Catholicism than they do on Horton’s account.

Further, it seems to me that the author is insufficiently self-critical as regards the Christological foundations of his ecclesiology and sacramentology. We may ultimately conclude as Calvin did on the sacramental presence of the risen Christ, but the assertion that the humanity of Jesus Christ is located in place (which apparently means in space) while the divinity is ubiquitous generates obvious and familiar problems for the Reformed tradition. Horton is certainly aware of inadequacy in Calvin’s position here (pp. 10, 131–35), but it appears to me that the difficulties are not really tackled by tacking on a fuller eschatological perspective at this juncture. Perhaps they are insufficiently explored because a lot of space is given to quotation from various authors; Bonhoeffer, Newbigin, and John Webster are leading positive theological contributors, though Douglas Farrow is extensively used on this particular point. This entails time taken out of a rigorous defence of the author’s own position. However, it may be that the author regards the conceptual issues surrounding space, time, and Christology as simply too many to be treated in a volume devoted to ecclesiology, which is concerned, for example, to defend Presbyterian polity (212–20) and cannot, therefore, over-extend itself in matters ontological.

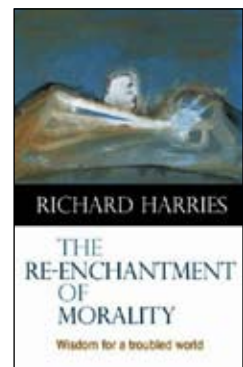
In this and in preceding volumes, we have been given wholesome and substantial fare indeed. This is a worthy volume that concludes a fine series for which, volume and series alike, the author deserves the thanks of all who want to think biblically, theologically, and practically in a new world about an abiding Word.

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— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Richard Harries. *The Re-Enchantment of Morality: Wisdom for a Troubled World*. London: SPCK, 2008. viii + 182 pp. £10.99.

Formerly the Church of England's Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries continues to sit in the UK Parliament's House of Lords as Lord Harries of Pentregarth. Among significant contributions to public life he presently chairs the Ethics and to the first. The fullest is the discussion of sex, and it is here that evangelicals will question whether Harries's theology is doing enough work. Commending the ideal of marriage, and even US campaigns for 'chastity (p. 86), Harries nevertheless sees the wisdom of twenty-something cohabitation to discover 'sexual compatibility (p. 86) and further can commend the touching beauty and fidelity of homosexual relationships (pp. 89–92). Harries seems to perpetuate the confusion that cannot differentiate including the self-identified gay person (whatever criticisms there might subsequently be of this manner of self-identification) in the Christian life and excluding what would traditionally be denoted as fornication—sexual union outside of marriage between a man and a woman. This confusion stems, simply observed, from a failure to allow for singleness and celibacy in the shape of the moral life in the tension between the times. The humble compromise ethic, propounded with great wisdom and dexterity in parts, is also the fruit of a theological failure to take Scripture seriously as canon, as rule, so that the account of who we are as moral agents—Harries's moral anthropology—is founded on wisdom as the playground of experience, not revelation. Experience will distort precisely the recognition and response to the God of Christ in Scripture by the Holy Spirit when it is lifted into the foreground of moral reasoning. The key term that is missing, even as Harries discusses duty throughout and particularly in his discussion of power, is that of authority. Once experience takes over, as it threatens to do in his account, the human moral agent becomes the authority, rather than the one authorised by the Author. Yet it cannot go unnoticed that Harries, in that same chapter on sex, shows considerable clarity on the distinction between moral and criminal assessments of sexual acts, prostitution and sex trafficking as it informs legislation, assessments for which his Parliamentary career equips him well.



Harries wears his considerable learning lightly and is careful to provide sensitive illustrations and quotations from a range of theological and literary sources. One error stands out, although amusing for the Christian ethicists in crowd, when the author Samuel Wells (correctly named in the endnote reference) is actually called Stanley Wells in the main text, just before being identified as following

Stanley Hauerwas, from whence the creeping error has undoubtedly spread. There is a great deal to commend the structure of Harries's apologetic account of the importance of moral theology for the task of moral reasoning that must sustain our decision-making. He is a graciously irenic writer with whom to disagree, very consciously driving the Christian reader to mine responsively Scripture and the Christian tradition in a way that must at least match Harries's seriousness of purpose and eloquence of speech.

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Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears. *Death by Love: Letters from the Cross*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 272 pp. £14.10/\$19.99.

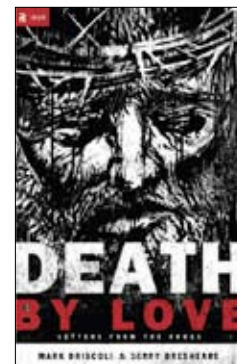
Mark Driscoll's ministry style and verbal frankness have earned him a fairly controversial reputation within evangelicalism. His recent book *Death by Love*, however, is a straightforward exposition of Jesus' crucifixion as a "multi-faceted jewel" (p. 10), a presentation lacking the edginess that has invited criticism in the past.

The book is coauthored: Driscoll wrote the preface, introduction, and twelve chapters, while Breshears drafted the helpful Q&A sections that follow each chapter. The book's format is straightforward. In the introduction Driscoll expounds the historical facts of Jesus' crucifixion. The twelve ensuing chapters are letters written to twelve individuals whom Driscoll counseled. Each letter unpacks a distinct theological facet of the substitutionary atonement (e.g., redemption, justification, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, Christus victor, Christus exemplar) and applies that truth to a real life need. Driscoll's twofold goal in writing is (1) to make the rich truth of the cross "understandable to regular folks" and (2) to provide an example of cross-centered ministry for church leaders (p. 9). Driscoll hit the bull's eye on both targets.

The book evidences a very sober understanding of the horrifying realities of sin (e.g., domestic violence, adultery, sexual abuse, depression, and hypocritical self-righteousness). Far from providing trite answers, the book provides solutions that are deeply rooted in biblical theology, in extensive counseling experience, and in a relational framework that centers on local-church accountability.

Driscoll's content throughout is both thorough and orderly. For example, he offers seven frequent tactics of Satan against Christians (pp. 48–51), five steps to experiencing full liberation from sin (pp. 65–67), ten distinctions between man-made religion and the biblical gospel (pp. 93–100), three categories of defilement by sin (pp. 148–49), four "fig leaves" that women often use to try to hide their shame (pp. 150–52), four questions to help someone identify personal bitterness (p. 221), and eight truths about God that are unveiled by the cross (pp. 239–45). Further, Driscoll offers a specific test case to make people more aware of their functional gospel, functional gods, and functional heaven (pp. 89–93). Such substantial, organized content makes for a book that is useful, memorable, and easy to reference.

Throughout *Death by Love* Driscoll's tone exemplifies several aspects of pastoral counseling



that are kept in good balance: personal encouragement (pp. 39, 83, 133–35), direct confrontation (pp. 40, 64, 90–91, 103, 110–14, 130–31, 146–47, 192–93), righteous anger (pp. 74–75, 126–29, 146, 184–86), empathy (pp. 39–40, 126, 145–46), straightforward evangelism (pp. 59–60, 117–18, 193, 225–26, 247–48), humble self-identification (pp. 67–68, 103, 116–17, 218–19), and helpful precision (pp. 103–4, 127–28, 133, 146–50, 188–89, 199–201). One poignant example will reveal the pastoral tone of this book. In concluding his letter to Mary (chap. 7), a woman who is experiencing deep shame because of sexual sin she has committed and sexual sin that others have committed against her, Driscoll writes,

You can no longer allow your identity to be shaped by what you have done. . . . You can no longer allow your identity to be shaped by what has been done to you. . . . Mary, if I were preaching this to you, I would be shouting at this point; so please hear my plea for your stained soul. Your identity must be marked only by what Jesus Christ has done for you and no longer by what has been done by or to you. To explain this, the Bible uses terms such as atonement, cleansing, and a purifying fountain. (pp. 152–53)

These sorts of “windows” into various pastoral counseling situations are what make this book exceptionally helpful for “regular folks,” whether pastors or otherwise.

Interlaced in these helpful expositions are a few theological issues that will raise concerns for some. While his primary point to avoid emphasizing one truth at the expense of another (i.e., the Holy Spirit and Jesus; Pentecost and the cross) is well taken, Driscoll seems to give uncritical and unsubstantiated endorsement to charismatic practice (pp. 208–11). Most concerns, however, will revolve around Driscoll’s innovative position that he titles “Unlimited Limited Atonement” (chap. 8). In his discussion on this point, many readers will question whether his understanding of his own position over against the traditional understandings of unlimited atonement and limited atonement are historically viable and accurately nuanced.

Despite these few questionable positions, *Death by Love* is biblically orthodox, theologically comprehensive, and provides one of the most practical and pastoral applications of the truth of Jesus’ substitutionary atonement in print.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —

Colin Greene and Martin Robinson. *Metavista: Bible, Church and Mission in an Age of Imagination*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008. 256 pp. \$23.99.

This book describes the church and its mission in the anticipated cultural space that comes after post-modernity. Particular attention is given to the role of the Bible and the narrative of salvation history as the church re-imagines itself and its role in the task of what the authors call ‘radical cultural engagement.’

Part one overviews the frameworks and influence of modernity, post-modernity, and then the ‘meta-vista’—that is the authors’ term for the ‘space’ that they believe is emerging after post-modernism which remains somewhat vague. Within this *metavista* the new ‘rules of engagement’ proposed involve an interplay between the fiduciary frameworks of Michael Polanyi and the power of narrative in locating meaning and identity.

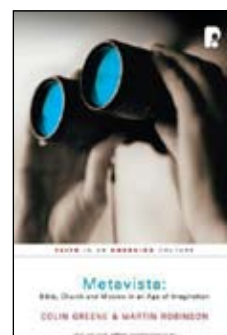
This is illustrated with the extended example of how the story of ‘disability’ has been overturned by a different, imaginative story, resulting in the empowerment of disabled people. It is contended that the church has been telling itself the wrong story—and now needs a new fiduciary framework so that it can re-articulate its own defining narrative. This is effectively an alliance between presuppositional apologetics (although that term is not used) and biblical theology, and there is insight and helpful analysis here.

Part two examines the role the Scriptures can and should play in re-imagining our story. There is an exceptionally crude straw-man argument against those who believe in inerrancy. There is also (to my mind) an over-acceptance of Wittgenstein’s limitations of language. However, the focus on the narrative story of the Scriptures is helpful, and this has indeed been undervalued in many circles.

Seeing how the narrative story applies to today is how I fear things come unstuck. N. T. Wright is criticised for his presentation of the Bible’s narrative because it allows us to live only in the reverberations of the Bible’s story—not re-enter it ourselves. This is the difference between narrative and history—‘narrative allows the contemporary reader to indwell the whole story, because each episode of the story is recapitulated, expropriated and reconfigured in the event of the reading and in the collision of the narrative with the context of the reader’ (p. 110–11).

This may sound rather like reader response theory, but the authors distance themselves from this, saying that they are talking about ‘emplotment’ of the reader. This seems to leave the question of truth up in the air. This is acknowledged and the answer we are given is that truth and meaning are intratextual issues, depending on the ‘reformulation (*perichorsis* or mutual indwelling) of story in the other and the recapitulation of the same plot density in each’ (p. 118). This is not explained further, and it seems to be an argument only for the coherence of the biblical narrative.

In presenting the Bible’s narrative the authors choose a four part story: creation, Israel, Jesus, and the church. These stories, we are told, are all unfinished and are retold and redrafted through the others and so invite our participation at every stage of the journey. While this approach clearly draws on the reworking of themes through Scripture, it seems to fail to appreciate both the historical particularity and the progression and final fulfilment to which Scripture itself attests. The result of these is that we do indeed live in the light of past events as Wright argues. I would also argue that within this presentation is



a downplaying of the fall and a consequent focus of salvation being from the violence between humanity rather than in reconciliation to God (with its subsequent effects on our horizontal relationships).

The third section involves imagining how the church can and should operate as a missional community. There are insightful comments here both about culture today and some of the responses of the church such as the debate over the emerging church, which they suggest is still too interested in models of church life. The proposal is for the church to engage in ‘imagination around a missional matrix’ (p. 195). This matrix involves the individual elements of personal discipleship and mobilisation in the world and the communal elements of church community and engagement in society.

There are once again helpful and insightful comments about how the church can effectively achieve its aims within today’s culture and how it must critique some of its inherited assumptions such as how it views power. There are, however, clear signs of the hermeneutical ‘looseness’ of part 2 coming home to roost. Call me conservative, but there is a downplaying of propositional truth against that of narrative (rather than an appropriate relationship between these) and an associated view of ‘revelation’ that relies on the ‘collision’ of Scripture, tradition, and culture. Much of what is suggested in practice in terms of cultural engagement and alternative communities is right and needed, but I fear for the loss of biblical rootedness and the resulting priorities in belief and practice.

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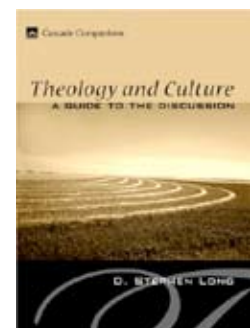
D. Stephen Long. *Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion*. Cascade Companions. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008. x + 114 pp. £11.75/\$17.00.

D. Stephen Long, professor of theology at Marquette University, has written a compact guide of twelve “lessons” to the widening field of theological culture study—a mini-course of only 114 pages. As does any good guide, Long draws on his own sensibility to enable newcomers to understand the contours of the field.

The book is in three sections. In the first section, lessons 1–6, Long delineates culture in relation to theology by referring to nature, language, and theology. In lessons 7–9, Long interacts with the main stream of theological thought about culture. In lessons 10–12, Long provides sketches of six current proposals for theology and culture.

Long’s foundational first section begins with a reminder that the task of theology is nothing other than the task of speaking rightly about God, a genuinely awesome task in view of the first three commandments. Humans have no other choice than to use language, thus culture, in speaking about One who is infinite as we are not. Yet God and culture were related in the incarnation when God became human in order to communicate inside history; and the church’s life continues to have dual divine-human reality in its fellowship, sacraments, and preaching of the Word.

The following lessons within the first section review basic issues for “culture.” The term itself was taken from the realm of agriculture and applied metaphorically to more abstract human cultivations of “nature.” So “culture” the metaphor is not, after all, a “secure, definitive something that gives us the possibility of knowing other things . . . is not a distinct foundation upon which other things like



'language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organizations' build" (21). Further, culture was defined over and against the realm of "nature," a distinction that has become more difficult in a time of artificial intelligence and post-human evolution. Theologians were always aware of the weakness of language in speaking of the ineffable, but since the linguistic turn in philosophy and heightened sensitivity to questions of interpretation, the awareness of language's limits has also been heightened. In speaking of God, are we speaking of anything more than ourselves and our culture? Long gives a preliminary answer: we speak of God regularly whether or not we can account fully for the act.

Having alerted the newcomer to basic issues, Long turns to a historical account. Long's second section considers how theologians have thought about culture. The most famous Christian culture theory is H. R. Niebuhr's 1951 typology of five paradigms of "Christ" in relation to "culture," with Paul Tillich's correlation of culture and religion a close second. Tillich sees the church's efforts to incarnate the gospel in one place and time as always receding, always partial, always cultural expressions. Long emphasizes that the dominant accounts of Christianity and culture have assumed a liberal Protestant view of religion that they absorbed from the German church historian Ernst Troeltsch. For Niebuhr, Tillich, and Troeltsch, culture is outside of theology, something to which theology must be correlated. In their thinking Christianity is an essence to be hosted within a culture, a mystical reality without any definite shape of its own, a mystery that can comport with various social and political bases. Long's first section showed that theology and culture were entwined, and now he leads readers to see that the recently dominant accounts were products of their times.

In the third section, Long reviews six current proposals for a theological culture theory. He is clear that he rejects the notion that Christianity itself has no social shape of its own, pointing to the Anabaptist tradition and to the cultural-linguistic theological model of George Lindbeck that he calls a watershed. Lindbeck's 1984 *The Nature of Doctrine* aims to advance ecclesial accord by moving the basis of agreement from either confessional or experiential-expressive models—broadly, conservative or liberal—toward a cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrine. To Lindbeck, doctrinal systems should be understood as languages internal to their communities but possibly intending similar meanings. As Long had written earlier, Lindbeck would never compare "theology to culture because this would be akin to comparing triangles and a three-sided planar figure whose angles always add up to 180 degrees" (53). Long also reviews contributions of analytical, post-modern feminist, Radical Orthodox, and Communion Catholic schools of thought, noting that these together are six of dozens of current proposals.

Long's guidance is within a renewed Anabaptist tradition fed by the writings of George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas, and the critique of Niebuhr is consistent with Craig Carter's (2006) pacifist revision of Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. I wondered if Tillich's correlation of religion and culture merited a closer look. Tillich was reacting precisely against the unity of state and church that had allowed Nazism to go unchecked, and his analysis of culture makes it at root religious, not the same as Niebuhr's separate-categories approach. While Tillich's understanding of Christianity as never a perfect expression of the truth seems relativistic and historicistic, perhaps more can be said about the incarnation and biblical authority to bolster that weakness. Besides, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach also seems to lack a criterion of reality. One would need to go beyond Long's sensible acknowledgement of the reality of God-talk into an account of inspiration that does justice to that reality.

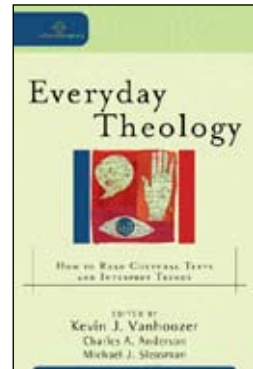
That said, Long's guide is a super, short introduction to culture for seminarians and upper level undergraduates in courses in apologetics, hermeneutics, or missions, especially contextualization. If you are beginning to read in this area, Long's guide will help you see the highways of discussion. Each

lesson ends with questions for reflection, which are helpful as self tests. A minor quibble: I noted several typos.

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Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*. Cultural Exegesis. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007. 287 pp. £15.99/\$23.99.

Everyday Theology joins a number of books in recent years that seek a way of understanding cultural phenomena in the modern West from a Protestant Christian point of view, along with William Romanowski's *Eyes Wide Open* (2001), T. J. Gorringer's *Furthering Humanity* (2004), Gordon Lynch's *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (2005), Kelton Cobb's *Theology and Popular Culture* (2005), Stephen Long's *Theology and Culture* (2008), and a growing list of others. *Everyday Theology* presents a narrative way into culture with sample essays that illustrate its way of reading cultural phenomena.



Vanhoozer is research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, near Chicago, and coeditors Charles Anderson and Michael Sleasman are former students of Vanhoozer. The book comes from Vanhoozer's course "Cultural Hermeneutics," taught at Trinity since 2001. It is intended as a primer for cultural literacy for Christians, and the editors' hope is that Christian college students and adult Sunday School classes will pick it up (p. 11). The cultural hermeneutics course rationale was straightforward: students were acquainted with methods of interpreting the Bible, but as future church leaders were in need of a way to interpret society (pp. 9, 15). Vanhoozer has an array of publications within the past fifteen years on theology, epistemology, hermeneutics, missions, postmodernism and culture, and is amply qualified to lead discussion.

Vanhoozer contributes a substantial Part 1 to the book that justifies and explains guidelines for cultural interpretation. Part 2 applies the guidelines to selected "texts" of culture, five phenomena that indicate American or broadly Western culture. Part 3 applies the guidelines to four cultural trends. Part 4 summarizes the book with a step-by-step example that illustrates the method's usability.

Part 1 is the book's beating heart. Vanhoozer defines culture as "what we get when humans work the raw material of nature to produce something significant . . . these things produced are cultural texts. Not necessarily words on paper, but words in metal or music or art or drama or advertising or shaving cream or cash machines" (p. 26), thus including popular cultural phenomena as well as refined expressions. Vanhoozer aims for a study of culture in its "broader sociopolitical context" or the significance of phenomena within a meaningful whole. Cultural systems are seen as more or less coherent patterns of meaning that propose alternatives to Christian patterns. At various points a culture or subculture will mimic or defy socially deep-rooted Christian patterns. The task of cultural hermeneutics is to discern points of tension in order to challenge texts or trends.

Understanding culture as a system of meaning opens the way to culture as a meaningful text. "Culture tacitly communicates a program for making sense of life: a hermeneutic or interpretive framework

through which we understand the world and read our own lives” (p. 29). The insight stems from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, whose major work was *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). To Geertz, cultures are meaning-systems; cultures speak via their symbols and must be interpreted rather than only analyzed, say, by their economic or political functions. Vanhoozer writes that his proposal interprets culture first in a general hermeneutic, “by making use of contributions from various disciplines . . . ordering them . . . by complexity.” The initial “general hermeneutic” is a phase available universally to secular or religious interpreters. The second phase is a biblical-theological framework with lenses of creation, fall, and redemption (p. 48). Borrowing Mortimer Adler’s levels of reading from *How to Read a Book* (rev. ed., 1972), Vanhoozer intends to relate Adler’s levels to three triads: author-text-reader; Paul Ricoeur’s levels of locution, illocution, and perlocution; and Gordon Lynch’s world behind the text, of the text, and in front of the text (p. 49). Vanhoozer calls the whole a capital-M method but from the perspectives taken in the sample essays, the method is less a fixed procedure than a bag of various lenses. The most used lens in the studies is Lynch’s world behind, of, and in front of the text, corresponding to the production process, the cultural phenomenon itself, and the audience.

The essays of Part 2 analyze grocery store checkout lines, Eminem’s rap music, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, megachurch architecture, and Ridley Scott’s film *Gladiator*. Part 3 examines trends toward increasing busyness, blog-writing, transhumanism, and fantasy funerals. Both parts are insightful reading in themselves. None applies the ten guidelines in rigid fashion. In general, the texts of Part 2 seem more amenable to the holistic pictures desired by Geertzian cultural analysis than the trends of Part 3, which read much like classical apologetic analyses.

Vanhoozer, Anderson, and Sleasman are leading and also following trends in theological education. Cultural exegesis has been included in seminary curricula for decades as apologetics. But apologetics seems to have run aground in an era when any claim is under suspicion as a power grab by ethnicity, gender, economic status, ideology, or religion. Evidence presented for or against a worldview will be routinely dismissed in a world where neutral ground no longer exists. Seeing cultural phenomena as indicating cultural stories, as Vanhoozer and essayists see them, enables future church leaders to find more empathetic points of contact with the wider culture than older apologetics tended to find. A narrative approach also enables more consistently Christian cultural responses.

Vanhoozer includes reader, text, and author in interpretation without preferring one perspective or the other; possibly implied is a critical-realist stance where human subjectivity is influenced by the reality of a world sustained by God in somewhat predictable ways. However, critical realism is not explicit.

On the surface, Vanhoozer’s guidelines seem less theological than literary. But literary theories such as those used here include implicit theology; Terry Eagleton (*Literary Criticism*, 2nd ed.) or John Milbank (*Theology and Secular Theory*, 2nd ed.) tell us that a literary theory implies an ideology, even a kind of theology. If Eagleton or Milbank are right, the lenses of Ricoeur, Geertz, even Adler, will have distortion of which a would-be discernor would want to be aware. But the lenses are placed to hand without a critique of their perspectives. The biblical second phase will provide some correction, but a theological accounting for the observation phase seems to be lacking. After all, no observation is value-free.

While the book is for everyday Christians and is partly written by non specialists, my guess is that it will miss pew and college but help seminary students. The academic origins of the book remain with it. Though Vanhoozer’s Part 1 is far from his most technical writing, it still warrants a six-page glossary. Part 4, a walk-through of the process using trends in wedding ceremonies as case study, demystifies

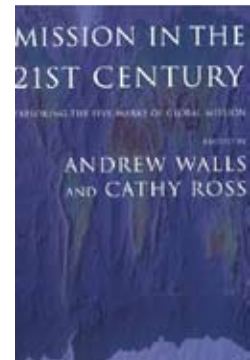
cultural criticism but requires investigations that only apologists or seminary students would usually pursue.

Vanhoozer and coeditors seek to read everyday life in the lens of Scripture. They recognize that Christians must be faithful not in a kind of lint-free room but as embodied in regular life, so they build on the Reformation's emphasis that Christians are always called to live the faith fully. Moreover, the book is an encouraging sign of change in the evangelical stance toward Western culture, from assuming a basically Christian society in which isolated errors can be corrected, toward a missional stance where a framework of beliefs set in a life must be engaged and contrasted, not only cognitively but by whole lives.

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Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, eds. *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*. New York: Orbis, 2008. xvi + 219 pp. \$25.00.

Mission in the 21st Century is structured around the five marks of mission originally adopted by the Synod of the Church of England in 1998: (1) to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; (2) to teach, baptise and nurture new believers; (3) to respond to human need by loving service; (4) to seek to transform unjust structures of society; and (5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. In the first section, two articles are dedicated to discussing each principle: one dealing with theoretical issues, the other with praxis. Although most contributions were worthwhile, I will focus on the work of Gnanakan, Niringiye, Egbunu, Haddad, and de Witt and Bookless as, for me, the most interesting.



In discussing the first mark, Gnanakan tells us what we may not want but need to hear, that in many places today the terms 'Christian' or 'Christianity' have taken on such a negative connotation and western evangelistic methods have so antagonised people, that the church is often considered a poor witness to Jesus. Against that background he reiterates the obvious but too often overlooked observation that the world needs not only to hear the message but also to encounter the living Lord, not least through the Christ-like deeds of his followers.

The gap between the phenomenal growth in Christianity in some parts of Africa and the corresponding lack of evidence of positive changes in society creates a challenging context for the development of credible Christian witness. Nigerian bishop Emmanuel Egbunu writes helpfully on nurturing new believers, sensitive to the dilemma faced by many converts caught between two worlds. He argues that a solution ultimately rests on acceptance of the authority of the Bible and the application of its teaching to all life. Biblical authority is not only "the keystone of the protest by the leadership of the Global South against the revisionist agenda of the West in the wake of the sexuality debate" but is also "binding on all" so that "pastoral responsibility cannot excuse rebellion in the name of cultural peculiarities." His brief handling of baptism is less convincing. In view of the fact that in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, many children are raised in at least nominally Christian homes, it is surely insufficient to see

baptism only, or even primarily as ‘a sacrament given in the context of conversion.’ What then of the covenantal significance of infant baptism? His view of baptism seemed caught somewhere between the sacramentarianism of the 1988 Lambeth Report and the sentimentality of Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life*. I mention this not to carp, but because the missiological importance of the subject deserves more than the little space afforded to it.

Bev Haddad, writing on how unjust societal structures can be transformed by the Gospel, shares experience of working with an isiZulu speaking congregation in South Africa. She issues a call to South African Christians to channel the spiritual energy once used in the struggle against apartheid into tackling the national HIV/AIDS crisis, which today has at least 5.5 million people living with the virus. Although South Africans accept the reality of HIV/AIDS and churches generally desist from a superficial judgementalism that charges HIV positive people with promiscuity, the gospel still needs to confront traditional African gender subordination and patriarchy that removes any possibility of negotiation regarding sexual practice within marriage and so renders married women particularly vulnerable to infection by their husbands.

I also much appreciated the very thoughtful case for sharing in the *missio Dei* by safeguarding the integrity of the creation as the context of all human existence and activity, including the other four marks of mission, as set out by Calvin B. de Witt and demonstrated by Dave Bookless’s stories of Christian conservancy by the organisation, *A Rocha*, and others. As Bookless states, “The good news of the Kingdom of God ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ is good news for people, communities, and for a groaning creation.”

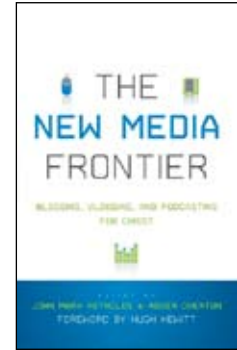
The second section is a collection of seven short essays. Kwame Bediako, in the African context, provocatively asks, “Whose Religion is Christianity?” Jehu J. Hanicles considers the missiological significance of migration. Lamin Sanneh explores “The Islamic Frontline in a Post-Christian West.” Issues of biblical hermeneutics are discussed by Moonjan Lee in “Reading the Bible in a Non-Western Church: An Asian Dimension.” A Japanese perspective on worship as mission is provided by Ken Miyamoto, and Gerald J. Pillay investigates “Education as Mission.”

Finally, Andrew Walls’ incisive afterword surveys “Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context.” With Edinburgh 1910 in retrospect, his depressing analysis of post-Christian Scotland—which surely also applies to other parts of the West—rings true. For the “country that once sent missionaries across the world” and, astonishingly, still celebrates two of the most famous, Mary Slessor and David Livingstone, on bank notes, it is now “too late for revival; the need is basic, primary evangelisation, cross-cultural evangelisation such as the missionaries once sought to carry out in other continents.” As a Methodist he would know that it is precisely when the gospel is preached as he suggests, and as it was in eighteenth century England, then the most profound outcomes may occur. In addition, it is a humbling but thrilling thought that today, when mission is from anywhere to anywhere, such an evangelistic challenge may be taken up by Christians from the two-thirds-world.

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John Mark Reynolds and Roger Overton, eds. *The New Media Frontier: Blogging, Vlogging, and Podcasting for Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 254 pp. £11.65/\$16.99.

To blog or not to blog. That is the question many pastors and laypeople are asking themselves as online media platforms continue to proliferate and rise in prominence. Along with blogging, there are many other ways to communicate across the web. Due to the nature of digital media and the rate of innovation, the online landscape is ever expanding and constantly in flux. As editors of *The New Media Frontier*, John Mark Reynolds and Roger Overton aim to equip believers with “a process of critical assessment” so they might use new media “in a manner consistent with the character and quality of Christ” (p. 17). The volume is an outgrowth of the annual GodBlogCon meetings at Biola University and consists of essays addressing various elements of “the new media frontier.”



The book is divided into two main parts. Part one introduces the concept of new media and explains their basic components. In the first two chapters, Reynolds puts new media in a historical context and indicates where he believes the future of these forms of communication is headed. In chapter three, Matthew Anderson cautions against “uncritically embracing the new media” and discusses important areas where believers need to practice discernment (p. 55). In chapter four, Joe Carter outlines a beginner’s toolbox for blogging, and Terence Armentano and Matthew Eppinette do the same for audio and video podcasting. Part two consists of a series of essays geared toward individuals in a variety of fields. The contributors argue here that new media can helpfully impact areas such as theology (David Wayne), community (Tod Bolsinger), pastoral ministry (Mark Roberts), student ministry (Rhett Smith), evangelism (Roger Overton), academia (Fred Sanders), education (Jason Baker), politics (Scott Ott), bioethics (Joe Carter and Matthew Eppinette), and social concerns (Stephen Shields). Each essay includes a brief introduction to the field and actual examples of what utilizing new media in this area would look like.

The philosophical and theological framework that is provided for believers interacting with new media is a primary strength of this volume. The writers are well aware of the paradox of writing about new media by means of “old media” (a book) and address this phenomenon directly. They undertook this project not for the media savvy, but rather for those who have misunderstood the medium or are simply unaware of how it works. Accordingly, the editors set a tone of urgency that is maintained throughout the book (p. 42). They emphasize that the window of opportunity for Christians to make an impact in this area will not last indefinitely. Even so, their analysis is neither alarmist nor naively optimistic. Rather, the contributors urge that believers use and engage new media “wisely” (e.g., pp. 125, 136, 159). There is a sustained interest in the “habits of the mind” and the “identity shaping” of individuals using these new technologies. This holistic approach strengthens the project and will prolong its influence.

The contributors also provide the vocabulary necessary to articulate a discerning interaction with new media. This feature is especially helpful for those unfamiliar with the newer technologies. Reynolds defines “new media” as “any material presented to a person in digital format that can be cheaply and easily accessed, distributed, stored in a variety of ways, manipulated, and consumed by an average person” (p. 24). In the first part of the book, basic concepts like blog, podcast, vlog, and video sharing are explained, and the hardware, software, and other tools needed both to create and consume these new

communication mediums are addressed. The chapters devoted to these basic mechanical procedures bridge the conceptual framework of part one and the practical applications of part two.

One appropriate feature of the book is the engaging nature of the articles. All of the writers are active participants in the new media culture and have made their web addresses available before each essay. The reader is thus encouraged to visit a contributor's website or blog after reading his chapter. This opportunity extends the scope of interaction with the book and narrows the gap between the old and new media formats.

Another key issue relates to the idea of "community." Any discussion involving new media must address the nature of the community that the online world is capable of producing. Can an online network of individuals provide true Christian "koinonia," or is the very notion of a virtual fellowship simply a result of the individualistic impulses of the prevailing culture? Though they vary in their responses to this issue, the contributors agree overall that new media function best as a complement to rather than a replacement of genuine Christian fellowship (e.g., pp. 115–16). Still the "community" is often spoken of in "universal" rather than "local" terms. An emphasis on local churches might add a needed dimension to this discussion.

Noting these strengths, there are inherent limitations of this project. Any publication treating a "new" phenomenon runs the risk of swiftly becoming obsolete with technological advance. For instance, inevitably some of the links provided in the footnotes and text will at some point no longer work, and the technology discussed in the practical sections will swiftly progress beyond the scope discussed in the essays. However, because the authors speak not only to the specifics of the new media themselves but also to the heart and mind of the user, the overall framework they delineate here will endure long after technological development dates their discussion of particulars. For, as Reynolds asserts, "while technology changes, the essence of men does not" (p. 24).

In sum, this volume makes a sustained argument throughout: The new media have revolutionized the way people communicate and are here to stay. Thus, believers must think critically about these changes and utilize the best of them for the glory of God and the furtherance of his kingdom. Through its timely analysis and stable framework, this book will help believers execute this task as they navigate through the "new media frontier" and beyond.

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