



# themelios

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

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**THE GOSPEL COALITION**

# themelios

## 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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Articles should generally be about 4,000 to 7,000 words (including footnotes) and should be submitted to the Managing Editor of *Themelios*, which is peer-reviewed. Articles should use clear, concise English, following *The SBL Handbook of Style* (esp. for abbreviations), supplemented by *The Chicago Manual of Style*. They should consistently use either UK or USA spelling and punctuation, and they should be submitted electronically as an email attachment using Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx extensions) or Rich Text Format (.rtf extension). Special characters should use a Unicode font.

## 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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**M**ost of us have had the experience of drifting, half awake and half asleep, in a gray mist of semi-consciousness, only to be jerked fully awake by some sudden and vivid memory of a shameful thing we have done or said in the past. The action or words are terribly vivid, and we break out in a cold sweat of shame. An inner writhing makes us wish we could relive those moments and behave differently. But in the immortal words of Omar Khayyam,

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

What is striking about these experiences is that the acute shame we suddenly feel is almost invariably with reference to a horizontal relationship—that is, we feel shame for what we have said or done that has wounded a friend or diminished us in the eyes of a family member or colleague. Almost never do we feel such acute shame before God. Why is this?

I suspect that at least one of the reasons is that many of us care rather more for what fellow human beings think of us than for what God thinks of us. To put this in theological language, we do not fall under adequate conviction of sin—conviction that simultaneously makes us feel guilty because we *are* guilty, and makes us ashamed because we have been so profoundly disloyal to our Maker and Sovereign. What *he* thinks of us when we act or speak despicably ought to be far more important to us than what anyone else thinks of us. That it is not usually so is itself a measure of our estrangement from the living God.

This common experience of God's fallen image-bearers, people like you and me, takes on particular hues in specific disciplines. That is why it is worth asking readers of this digital journal what it is that is most likely to induce a sense of shame or embarrassment among theologians young and old, among pastors and teachers.

Would it be unduly cynical of me to suggest that most of us are more likely to feel troubled by something we have said or done that has upset a colleague or parishioner than by something that has dishonored God? Some do not want to be too closely associated with anything the scholarly guild judges old-fashioned or fundamentalist: that, surely, would be shameful. On the other hand, Jesus says some blunt things about those who are ashamed of him and his words (Mark 8:38). The question resolves into something pretty straightforward: Whose approval do we most earnestly desire? Whose approval do we want when we prepare for a lecture (whether to deliver it or to learn from it)? Whose approval do we seek when we preach a sermon? Whose approval matters most when we write a paper or slog away at a dissertation? Whose approval do we hunger for when we choose a vocation, decide how to use our

time, take pains to build links of affection and accountability in the local church, exercise, bring up our children, nurture our families, read, lead a Bible study, help a neighbor?

If we do not want God's approval the most, where does idolatry begin?

Mind you, the really wonderful thing about occasional midnight writhings when the person we have most offended is God is that this God also provides everything that is necessary to cleanse our conscience so that we may once again look boldly into his face. He is "faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). So we return to the cross, and rest once again.

MINORITY REPORT

# Lest We Forget

— Carl Trueman —

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**M**emory is singularly important. At the personal level, it is a large part of what makes us who we are. Pardon the cheesy wordplay, but who can forget the closing scenes of *Bladerunner* when Harrison Ford discovers that his memories have all been manufactured and that he himself, a bladerunner, is actually a replicant, a robot? It is what makes the film so disturbing: if even our memories are false, then we cannot even know who we are.

Memory is also a significant biblical category. I am at the moment preaching a series on the Book of Judges for the church where my family worships and whose pulpit is currently vacant. What is striking is how the children of Israel *forgot* the LORD and all of the acts that he had performed for them in Egypt, in the wilderness years, and in the initial invasion of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua and the elders who served under him. This forgetfulness served as the context for their depravity, for their worship of other gods and for a cultural assimilation to the ways of Canaan which involved at points both human sacrifice and gang rape.

In this context—and, again, forgive the turn of phrase—it is all too easy for us to forget that the act of forgetting is not an act of will. There was an old joke I heard years ago that people used to run away to join the French Foreign Legion in order to forget, but that, after six months, they had forgotten why they had joined and wanted out. Of course, memory does not really work like that. Forgetfulness is a function of neglect or not caring or, on occasion, ill-health; it is not something which one can willfully engineer. I can want to forget certain miserable obligations which I have to fulfill, but, ironically, the more I dread fulfilling them, the less likely I am to forget them. It is really only those things to which we are indifferent, and which can thus shove to the very peripheries of our minds as irrelevant, which we are able to forget.

What is interesting to me is that the means God appointed to help the children of Israel were to remember what was important. In his dealings with Moses, God had established a set of repetitive processes by which the Israelites would be constantly reminded of all that God had done for them. Thus, for example, in Exodus 12, God establishes the Passover Feast, the performance of which is designed in part to provoke later generations to ask the question of why this is done. This will then require parents to tell their children about God's great act of saving grace in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt even as this was by means of an awesome and terrifying judgment against the Egyptians.

The Passover is just one example of many rituals outlined in the Torah which functioned on one level as reminders of who God was, who the Israelites were, and how they related to each other. Thus, when we come in to the Promised Land and we find the Israelites suffering persistent recurrences of

amnesia, it does not take a genius to assume that part of the immediate cause of this was their abject neglect of the means which God had established for keeping his name and his acts fresh in their minds.

What this kind of amnesia tells us is that we need constant reminders of who God is and what he has done if we are to stay on the straight and narrow; and that these are provided by the routines and rituals which God specifies in Scripture. For the Christian, under the terms of the NT age, these are the Word of God, read and preached and heard, and the sacraments, or, if you are a Baptist, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. These things are given to remind us of who God is; and the neglect of them will only help to accelerate any proclivities towards forgetfulness that our instinctive rebellion of God encourages.

The temptation for a theological student at this point, of course, is to make the obvious answer to this: well, I study the things of God all day long; I am hardly likely to forget about God, who he is and what he has done, am I? Well, there is forgetting and there is forgetting. Remembering that there is a train that leaves the local station every evening at five o'clock is one thing; remembering that I need to be on it to return home to be there for my wife's surprise birthday party is quite another. It is all too easy for the theological student to end up remembering God as an object of knowledge; it is quite another thing to remember him as the all-surpassing subject of existence.

This is why church is vitally important. OK, long-standing readers of *Themelios* know what is coming next: Trueman's pitch for seeing the local church as the necessary context for the Christian life, not least for those called to study theology at the highest level. Well, here it comes; and just because I have said it before does not make it any less true or any less necessary to say it again. After all, some of you may—ahem—have forgotten the speech. As noted above, that's what the Bible itself indicates as happening when predictable but important routines are abandoned or their content taken for granted.

Much modern theological scholarship, particularly—though not exclusively—in the areas of Old and New Testament studies is predicated on a culture of amnesia. What the church has said about the Bible between the close of the apostolic era and the present day can be, by and large, dismissed. These people did not have access to the documents we now have, they did not understand Judaism as we now do, some were simply naïve in how they looked at the world and how they read texts. These are the kind of arguments which pervade this culture.

Now, for the student studying for an MA or MDiv or PhD, these are not insignificant points; they have to be addressed if the student is to avoid being an obscurantist. But the student should also be aware that the framework out of which these kinds of arguments arise is not a value-neutral one; nor does it actually reflect a particularly biblical view either of the value of the past or the importance of the church as the Body of Christ in biblical interpretation, systematic doctrinal synthesis, or application. Thus, it is vitally important that such students make sure that they place themselves within a local church and under the sound preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments/ordinances on a regular basis. Why? Because otherwise their memories of who God is and what he has done over the years will slowly fade or distort as they simply accommodate to sinful, human expectations of who God is and how he acts.

To the research student, and even perhaps the one studying theology for a first degree, this all sounds terribly boring. To spend the week voyaging at the far reaches of intellectual seas of scholarship, and then the weekends listening to some person standing in a pulpit and simply expounding the text or serving bread and wine? What is the value in that? One can imagine the Israelites in the Book of Judges raising similar questions. Do we need to do that Passover thing again? Do we not all know what it means? Do we really need the law read to us so often? Surely once we know what it says, we can move

beyond it? The net result in Judges is, of course, that the values of Sodom come to flourish within the very boundaries of the Promised Land and within the very practices of the Lord's people, with fatal consequences for at least one young woman. Neglect of the boring, day-to-day routines led to absolute disaster.

It is the same today. I have yet to come across a student who struggled with, or even abandoned, the faith, who did not, at some early point in their struggle, abandon the mundane routines of the Christian life: regular attendance at the preaching of the word, prayer, etc. etc. Boring they may be, but they are God's means of preventing amnesia; and we forget them at our peril.

# The Perspicuity of Scripture<sup>1</sup>

— Wayne Grudem —

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I feel honored to be able to give this lecture named after John Wenham. I met John Wenham only once, here in Cambridge, at Tyndale House. My impression was that he was a genuinely humble man who had no idea why I, as a young NT scholar, would be excited to meet him. He also seemed unaware of the significant contributions he had made for the advancement of God's kingdom through his work for Tyndale House, his work for Tyndale Fellowship, and his published writings. In fact, during the six years that I taught NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, I used John Wenham's excellent book *The Elements of New Testament Greek*<sup>2</sup> as the primary textbook every time I taught beginning Greek.<sup>3</sup>

I was invited to present this lecture on "the perspicuity of Scripture." But I do not find the term "perspicuity" to be particularly perspicuous today; therefore, I will at times depart from the wording of the assigned topic and speak of the doctrine of the *clarity* of Scripture,<sup>4</sup> which I think means close to the same thing. Yet a third term that could describe this doctrine is the *understandability* of Scripture, as will be evident from what follows.

## *1. The Clarity of Scripture in My Life*

In preparing for this lecture, I was somewhat surprised to find how pervasive the influence of this doctrine has been in my own life. It might be helpful for me to begin with some autobiographical material related to this doctrine before I attempt to explain it in more detail.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented as The John Wenham Lecture at a meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship on July 8, 2009, at Lee Hall, Wolfson College, in Cambridge, England. I am grateful to Paul Woodbridge and the other leaders of the Tyndale Fellowship for their invitation to deliver this lecture.

<sup>2</sup> John Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> I would also like to add that though I did not know John Wenham, I am thankful for my friendship with his son Gordon Wenham, who has served as chairman of the Tyndale Fellowship for the last three years. Our friendship has lasted now for forty-one years, beginning in 1968 when we were both students at Harvard and continuing through our joint membership on the Translation Oversight Committee of the English Standard Version from 1999 to the present.

<sup>4</sup> By "Scripture" I mean the sixty-six books of the OT and NT that are received as canonical by Protestants. The reasons for accepting these books in the canon and for considering them to be both human words and the words of God are explained in my *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), chapters 3–5. Throughout this essay I also assume an agreement with the Tyndale Fellowship doctrinal basis, which affirms, "The Bible, as originally given, is the inspired and infallible Word of God. It is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and behaviour."



### 1.1. Childhood

The clarity of Scripture was implicit in my assumption, as a young boy of about seven or eight years, that I could begin to read the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible with some understanding of its message. At that age I was hopelessly unacquainted with postmodern theories of indeterminate meanings, and I simply sounded out the hard words and plowed forward, no doubt with some nourishment to my soul. I simply *assumed* the Bible could be understood.

### 1.2. Profession of Faith

The clarity of Scripture was also implicit when, at age twelve, before being baptized, I publicly confessed that I was a sinner who had trusted in Christ for salvation in accordance with Rom 3:23 (“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”), 5:8 (“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”), and 6:23 (“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”).<sup>5</sup>

I simply *assumed* that these gospel-verses could be understood, and that I, at age twelve, had understood them! But if the Bible is not clear enough to be understood, then how can we even be sure we know what the gospel-message *is* or that we are proclaiming it correctly? Isn’t a belief in the clarity of Scripture implicit in every proclamation of the gospel?

Or shall we forever be required to say, “You ask what you must do to be saved? Well, we aren’t sure yet, but some scholars think the Bible *might* say, at least in *some parts* (which might of course be contradicted by other parts), that Christ died for people’s sins and people should place their faith in him—whatever you think faith to be, of course. But there are certainly other views on how to be saved.”

### 1.3. Early Teaching

After I had submitted my PhD dissertation here at Cambridge and left Tyndale House, a conviction of the clarity of Scripture led me to think that I could actually use the Bible as the basis for teaching theology to undergraduate students at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and later to graduate students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and then at Phoenix Seminary. I would *reason* and *argue* with students from Scripture, trying to persuade them that the Bible *actually taught* certain doctrines and *contradicted* others—just as Paul in Thessalonica went into the synagogue “as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). But such reasoning from Scripture assumes that there is a meaning that can be understood and that other proposed meanings are incorrect.

### 1.4. Writing about Theology

While I was teaching theology, for a few years I used as the primary text Louis Berkhof’s book *Systematic Theology*<sup>6</sup>—a remarkably erudite and valuable book, wonderfully useful for all who can read untranslated Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German, and of course Dutch, as well as dozens of technical theological terms that are *presumably* part of the English language. But in actuality these terms are

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<sup>5</sup>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. Unless otherwise noted, emphasis in Scripture quotations is added.

<sup>6</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939).

known only to those in the academic guild. Students found Berkhof difficult, and I had to give them vocabulary lists with definitions for each day's assigned reading.

Then I reflected on this situation: Neither Jesus nor Paul nor even the writer to the Hebrews felt compelled to make their teaching of doctrine *so inaccessible* to ordinary Christians, and I wondered if it might be possible to imitate the *clarity of Scripture* rather than the opacity of Berkhof in writing about theology. The result was that I wrote a book called *Systematic Theology*<sup>7</sup> that attempts to combine responsible exegesis of Scripture with an explanation of its doctrines in a way that does not assume prior technical training in academic theology.

What surprises me is that every year I hear from people who tell me, "It was the first book I read after I became a Christian!" I suppose some academics would be discouraged if they wrote a 1290-page book and then heard such a comment. Why did I give so many years to my education if even non-academics can understand me? I'm not discouraged by this, however, but thankful to God. The clarity of Scripture tells me that its doctrines can be taught in a way that ordinary people are able to understand.

In addition to that, the clarity of Scripture was the foundation for my book *Systematic Theology* in a more profound way than simply wanting to write clearly. The clarity of Scripture convinced me that I could write such a book *at all*.

Some evangelical scholars might object (and some did!) that no one should assume that he can just discover and prove points of Christian doctrine by referring to various passages of Scripture as I did in that book. What about all the alternative interpretations of all those verses found in all the commentaries? What about the thousands of pages on every one of those doctrines that were written by philosophers and theologians throughout the two-thousand-year history of the church? How can you think you can use Scripture (someone might say) to support any doctrine until you have done original research in all of that material, in all the primary scholarly languages?

After pondering this objection, I concluded that to do such original research thoroughly for all the topics in theology would take several lifetimes. And yet I did not believe that God would require several lifetimes of work just to learn or to teach what he wanted us to believe! So I went forward with the training that I had at age thirty-seven and just started to write—not perfectly and no doubt with many shortcomings, but for the most part reflecting the mainstream evangelical (and largely Reformed) position that seemed to me (from seminary training, from doctoral work, and from several more years of reading and teaching) to be most faithful to Scripture as a whole. I wrote the book because I believed that it was *possible* for Christians today to know what Scripture taught about the great doctrines of the faith and that God wanted his people to be able to learn what it taught in clear and understandable words.

### 1.5. Technical Academic Articles

A persuasion about the value of clarity means that even when writing more technical articles—such as three detailed articles in academic journals on the meaning of one word in Eph 5:23 (κεφαλή, "head"), totaling 133 pages and months of research—I tried to write the articles in such a way that an interested and motivated layperson could at least read and follow the argument.<sup>8</sup> I was writing to the academic guild but extending courtesy to the non-specialists who might be listening in the back row.

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<sup>7</sup>See note 4 above.

<sup>8</sup>See Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of κεφαλή ('Head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (ed. Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2002),

In short, the doctrine of the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture has deeply affected my entire life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, how should we understand this doctrine? The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture is easily misunderstood and, I think, commonly misunderstood. In what follows, this lecture gives me the opportunity to give a more precise explanation of this doctrine than I did twenty-four years ago when I wrote that chapter in my *Systematic Theology*.<sup>9</sup>

I understand the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture as follows: Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but (1) not all at once, (2) not without effort, (3) not without ordinary means, (4) not without the reader's willingness to obey it, (5) not without the help of the Holy Spirit, (6) not without human misunderstanding, and (7) never completely. We begin with the main affirmation.

## ***2. Scripture Affirms That It Is Able to Be Understood***

### **2.1. Old Testament**

Several OT passages affirm an expectation that the words of Scripture are able to be understood. For example,

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. *You shall teach them diligently to your children*, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 6:6–7)

But surely talking of God's words "when you walk by the way" was not limited to only one verse about marriage or relationships with neighbors or worship of God, for children naturally seek not partial discussions but the "bottom line," the final result of all that the words of God say about a topic. They seek teaching that they can follow that very day. They seek direct answers for what to believe and how to live. They seek, in simple form, systematic theology and "whole Bible" ethical teaching. Thus, the command to teach children assumes an ability to summarize and make plain, at some level, "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) regarding many different topics.

Other passages in the OT also assume that God's words are able to be understood by his people:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us

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145–202. That chapter is a reprint with only slight modifications, and the addition of interaction with Anthony Thiselton's commentary, to my article, "The Meaning of κεφαλή ('Head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," *JETS* 44 (2001): 25–65.

My two earlier studies on the meaning of κεφαλή were "The Meaning of *kephalē* ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies," *TJ* 11 (1990): 3–72 (reprinted in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991], 425–68) and "Does *kephalē* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," Appendix in George W. Knight III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody, 1985), 49–80 (also printed in *TJ* 6[1985]: 38–59).

<sup>9</sup> See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 3.

and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. (Deut 30:11–14)

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
*making wise the simple.* (Ps 19:7)

The idea here seems to be that God’s testimonies make *even simple people* to be wise, and if they make wise the simple, then surely they make everyone else wise as well. A similar idea is found in Ps 119:130: “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.” Elsewhere in the same Psalm, the metaphor of a lamp conveys the idea of imparting understanding, namely, how to live in the ordinary events on the “path” of life: “Your word is a *lamp* to my feet and a *light* to my path” (Ps 119:105). The apostle Peter expressed a similar view of the OT writings: “And we have something more sure, *the prophetic word*, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a *lamp* shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19).

## 2.2. New Testament

There is a similar emphasis in the NT.<sup>10</sup> Jesus himself, in his teachings, his conversations, and his disputes, never responds to any questions with a hint of blaming the OT for being unclear. Even while speaking to first century people who were removed from David by about one thousand years and from Abraham by about two thousand years, Jesus still *assumes* that such people are able to read and to understand rightly the OT.

In a day when it is common for people to tell us how hard it is to interpret Scripture rightly, we would do well to remember that not once in the gospels do we ever hear Jesus saying anything like this: “I sympathize with your frustration—the Scriptures relevant to this topic contain unusually complex hermeneutical difficulties.”

Instead, whether he is speaking to scholars or untrained common people, Jesus’ responses always assume that *the blame for misunderstanding* any teaching of Scripture is not to be placed on the Scriptures themselves, but *on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written*. Again and again he answers questions with statements like these: “Have you not read what David did . . . ? Or have you not read in the Law . . . ?” (Matt 12:3, 5). “Have you not read . . . ?” (Matt 19:4). “Have you never read in the scriptures . . . ?” (Matt 21:42). “Have you not read what was said to you by God . . . ?” (Matt 22:31). “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’” (Matt 9:13). “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10). “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt 22:29). On the road to Emmaus, he rebuked two disciples: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25). The blame for failing to understand is always on the reader, never on the Scriptures themselves.

Similarly, most of the NT epistles are written not to church leaders but to entire congregations. Paul writes, “To the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2); “To the churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:2); “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil 1:1). Paul assumes that his hearers will understand what he writes, and he encourages the sharing of his letters

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<sup>10</sup> The material in this section on the NT is taken, with some modifications, from Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 106–7.

with other churches: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16).

The exhortations to read Scripture *publicly* also affirm an expectation that ordinary believers in ordinary congregations could understand the Scriptures: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13; cf. John 20:30–31; 2 Cor 1:13; Eph 3:4; Jas 1:1, 22–25; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:2; 2 Pet 1:19; 1 John 5:13).<sup>11</sup>

There are even sections that assume that *children* are in the audience, listening to Paul’s letters as they are read and understanding at least part of what is written, for Paul writes, “*Children*, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land’” (Eph 6:1–3).

Whenever the NT authors quote the OT (about 300 times), they assume that they have understood the OT rightly and that their readers will realize that they are understanding it rightly—or at least that there is a right interpretation that the NT authors can appeal to. And this is true not only for individual verses, but also for collections of verses that they compile to prove a certain theme, such as the universal sinfulness of all mankind (in Rom 3:9–20), the majesty and deity of Christ (Heb 1), or the nature of faith (Heb 11).

Should we define the clarity of Scripture merely to say that Scripture was able to be understood *by its original readers* but that does not necessarily mean that we are able to understand it today?<sup>12</sup> No, I am not willing to add such a qualification because Jesus repeatedly holds people responsible for understanding the OT writings, though many of them were written more than one thousand years in the past, and the NT writers similarly expected their readers to know and to be able to understand the OT rightly. Therefore, I think that the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture requires us to believe that it is still able to be understood rightly by readers today.

The appropriate conclusion from these passages is that Scripture repeatedly affirms that it is *able* to be understood—not only certain verses or statements, but the meaning of the whole of Scripture on many topics is able to be understood by God’s people. These affirmations are not limited to understanding the basic way of salvation, or understanding only major themes, or understanding certain topics or certain parts.<sup>13</sup> These are affirmations about the nature of Scripture in any part,<sup>14</sup> apparently grounded in a deep assumption that the Scriptures are communication from a God who is able to communicate clearly to his people.

And such a quality of Scripture seems necessary if God is going to hold us morally accountable for obeying his Word. If he has given us commands that are confusing, or that most people cannot understand, then we might wonder how he can rightly hold us accountable for obeying something we cannot understand.

<sup>11</sup> The section adapted from Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, ends here (see previous footnote).

<sup>12</sup> Some Tyndale Fellowship participants suggested this qualification to me after I delivered this lecture.

<sup>13</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith affirms the clarity of Scripture with respect to those things “which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation” (WCF 1.7). The inclusion of “observed” makes me think that “salvation” might be intended in a broader sense (“the entire experience of the blessings of salvation throughout our lives”) rather than a narrow sense (“initial saving faith”), but I am not sure about this. In any case I do not see in the Scripture passages just mentioned any warrant for restricting the clarity of Scripture to certain topics or certain types of passages.

<sup>14</sup> But see §2.3.3 about the need for translation into the reader’s own language and the recognition that there are still today a few words that we are not sure how to translate.

### 2.3. Qualifications

But there are some necessary qualifications, or we will certainly misunderstand this doctrine as it has been understood by thoughtful writers throughout the history of the church. Qualifications like these are not new, but have been emphasized in responsible treatments of this doctrine at least since the time of the Reformation, as Mark Thompson clearly demonstrates in *A Clear and Present Word*.<sup>15</sup> These qualifications remind us that Scripture does not conform to whatever ideas of “clarity” we might bring to the text. Rather, we need to give careful attention to the text of Scripture and allow it to define in what sense we should understand its clarity.

#### ***2.3.1. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not all at once.***

This first qualification reminds us that understanding Scripture is a *process*. Commands to meditate on God’s law assume that further study will lead to further understanding: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate* on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh 1:8). “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and *on his law he meditates day and night*” (Ps 1:2; cf. Ps 119:15, 23, 48, 78).

The frequent prayers for understanding in Psalm 119 also indicate that fuller understanding comes with further study. For example, “Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end” (Ps 119:33).

Even the apostles only *gradually* came to a fuller understanding of the application of OT ceremonial laws to Gentile believers, for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was the culmination of a process of seeking consensus in understanding this issue. And once the leaders gathered in Jerusalem, resolution took some time: “*And after there had been much debate*, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe” (Acts 15:7). Next Barnabas and Paul spoke, then James spoke, and then they wrote a letter: “It has seemed good to us, *having come to one accord*, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul” (Acts 15:25). “*For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements” (Acts 15:28).

Paul summarizes this process of gaining fuller understanding in writing to the Corinthians: “For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; *I hope you will understand fully*” (2 Cor 1:13, RSV). And deeper understanding is given to those who are more mature in their faith: “Yet *among the mature* we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor 2:6–7). “But *solid food is for the mature*, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14).

A useful analogy, then, might be to picture the clarity of Scripture as a journey to a distant mountain that we see clearly from afar but see in more detail—and understand more of what we see—as we journey toward the mountain over many months and years. We can see it from the beginning of our Christian lives, and we truly see and understand something about it, but a lifetime of seeking deeper understanding will be repaid with a lifetime of growth in knowledge and wisdom.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Nottingham: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

We might even imagine various signs on the mountain. Some, like “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31), are written in *huge font* that can be seen from a great distance. Other signs become visible shortly after the journey has begun, and teach us to trust God and obey him daily. Yet other signs appear in small font, not visible at first, and when we come close enough to read them, they announce topics such as “predestination” and “millennium” and “the future of Israel” and “preaching to the spirits in prison” and “the relationship between God and evil.”

And even when we can read those topics on the signs, we find that a partial explanation is in yet smaller print, and a fuller explanation is in tiny print. And then at the end of that tiny print we find statements that say, “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Rom 9:20). “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29). “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (Job 38:2–4). And then we say with Job, “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further” (Job 40:4–5).

Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood, *but not all at once*. Growth in understanding is a lifelong process. Clarity is a property *of Scripture*, not a property of its readers, who vary widely in their understanding.<sup>16</sup>

### ***2.3.2. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without effort.***

The same verses above on meditation affirm that *effort* is involved, just as “Ezra had set his heart to *study* the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Ezra presumably already knew the Law of the Lord, but he studied in order to understand it more fully.

And the clarity of Scripture does not mean that it is all *easy* to understand! Some parts are more difficult than others, as even Peter acknowledges:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. *There are some things in them that are hard to understand*, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Pet 3:15–16)

Peter does not say there are things impossible to understand, but hard to understand.

### ***2.3.3. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without ordinary means.***

The Westminster Confession of Faith says that “in a due use of the ordinary means” even “the unlearned” may “attain unto a sufficient understanding” of those things in Scripture “which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation” (WCF 1.7).

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<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Gregg Allison for first emphasizing to me how the focus of this doctrine must be on the nature of Scripture, not the misunderstandings of its various readers. See Gregg Allison, “The Protestant Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture: A Reformulation on the Basis of Biblical Teaching” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995).

What are such “ordinary means”? I am going to suggest several, perhaps a longer list than commonly comes to mind:

1. *The use of a translation of the Bible in one’s own language.*<sup>17</sup> People cannot understand a text if they do not know the language in which the text is written (cf. 1 Cor 14:10–11, 16).

The need for a translation brings up one specific difficulty: There are some places in Scripture where we still are not sure what a certain Hebrew or Aramaic or Greek word means. One example is *selah* in the Psalms (it occurs 71 times in Psalms and three times in Habakkuk).<sup>18</sup> Most modern translations just print it as a transliterated word “Selah” and add a footnote saying that the meaning is uncertain, but it probably is a musical or liturgical term.<sup>19</sup> Does this kind of problem modify or correct the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture?

I certainly am not claiming that the meaning of a word is “clear” when we don’t know what the word means! Therefore we might say, with greater precision, “Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood, but not without ordinary means, *including translation into the reader’s own language*,” and that qualification implies, in the specific details where we have a yet-unknown word, that we *probably* do not know the meaning. Yet I say “probably” because context is a great help, and context makes it likely that the word indicated some kind of pause in reading or singing—we have a general sense of the word from its placement, as well as from cognate terms. And we still know that the surrounding verses contain praises, or prayers, or words of lament, and *selah* does not substantially change those meanings. To take another example, we are uncertain of the identity of some of the precious stones listed in Exod 28:17–20, but we know many of them and we know that the uncertain words refer to other precious stones.

Therefore I would say that Scripture is able to be understood *everywhere where we are able to translate it accurately*; moreover, that the yet-unknown words are relatively few in comparison to the whole scope of Scripture, and that even where the meaning of a *word* is unknown, the sense of the *passage* as a whole is usually quite understandable.

2. *Listening to teachers of the Word.* God has given the gift of teaching to the church (1 Cor 12:28).<sup>20</sup>

3. *Reading commentaries where available.* These are merely the written form of what is taught by teachers in the church.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I am grateful for a thoughtful e-mail from David Instone-Brewer that prompted me to add translation to this list of means of interpretation.

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Daniel Hill for bringing up the difficulty of unknown words such as *selah* and for discussing it with me at some length.

<sup>19</sup> Most translations indicate that it probably is some kind of musical or liturgical direction. The lexicons are uncertain whether it means “pause” or “interlude” or “lift up” (i.e., lift up the volume or pitch of singing) or something else.

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to David Reimer and Gordon Wenham for helping me to realize that this category of “teachers” may be quite broad, including not only the officially recognized pastors and teachers in a church, but also fathers and mothers who impart a biblical worldview to children, and more mature believers who serve as spiritual “fathers” and “mothers” to new Christians.

<sup>21</sup> Points 3, 4, and 6 in this list all give support to the need for advanced academic work of the type done at places like the Tyndale House Library here in Cambridge and for the published writings that frequently result from the research done at Tyndale House. Therefore it seems to me that a clear benefit for the work of the kingdom of God comes out of any support that believers give to Tyndale House, for such giving contributes in an unusually effective way to a better understanding of the Bible by the church around the world.



4. *Some awareness of the wisdom contained in the church's history of interpretation.* This is useful even if it comes not firsthand but through reading commentaries that reflect some knowledge of that tradition.

5. *Seeking understanding in fellowship with others.* This may occur in small group Bible studies (or at Tyndale Fellowship conferences!).<sup>22</sup>

6. *The use of modern tools such as concordances, Hebrew and Greek lexicons, grammars, and sources of historical background information.* These help modern readers understand more precisely the sense of the original language and the historical context in which a passage was written.<sup>23</sup>

Historical background information can certainly *enrich* our understanding of individual passages of Scripture, making it more precise and more vivid. But I am unwilling to affirm that background information can ever be properly used to nullify or overturn something the text actually says. In addition, I am reluctant to affirm that additional historical background information is ever necessary for getting a proper sense of a text.

On the other hand, information about the meanings of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words in the Bible does have to be obtained from the vast linguistic resources found in extra-biblical literature, resources that I consider God's good gift to the church for the purpose of enabling us to understand the Bible more accurately.

So what is the difference? I think (but I am not certain) that it is possible to maintain a distinction between (a) *lexicographical resources* in ancient literature and inscriptions that I think to be *necessary* for understanding the words of Scripture and (b) resources that provide *historical background information* (such as archaeological evidence and historical evidence from ancient texts) that I think to be *helpful* for improving our understanding but never necessary for gaining a correct understanding of the sense of a text. The difference (if it can be maintained) is the difference between what is needed for *translation* and what is useful for *fuller understanding*.<sup>24</sup> For example, a translation will tell me that Ezra journeyed from Babylon to Jerusalem (see Ezra 7:9), and background information will tell me what the terrain was like and that it was a journey of about 900 miles (1,448 km). This does not change my understanding of the passage (it still means that Ezra traveled to Jerusalem), but it does give me a more vivid sense of the journey.

To conclude this qualification of Scripture's clarity, the need for these six "ordinary means" in understanding Scripture should not surprise us. God speaks to us in community, and the communities

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<sup>22</sup> I could add that this is one reason that I have been an active member of the Evangelical Theological Society in the United States, which has a similar purpose to the Tyndale Fellowship. I encourage evangelical scholars to participate in the ETS meetings and to read papers because there is always valuable and sometimes intense interaction!

<sup>23</sup> Gregg Allison draws attention to a process of explaining the meaning of foreign words that is found in Scripture itself (these verses come from a detailed teaching outline on clarity that Gregg Allison sent me): "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)' (Matt 1:23). "Taking her by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha cumi,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise'" (Mark 5:41). "Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus" (Acts 4:36). There is also some explanation of possibly unfamiliar customs: "Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. So when the redeemer said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself,' he drew off his sandal" (Ruth 4:7–8).

<sup>24</sup> I think this distinction can be maintained even if there are a few examples that might not fall neatly into either category.

of God's people have various people with various gifts. Use of these means is, in the providence of God, a way we learn to depend on one another.<sup>25</sup>

**2.3.4. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the reader's willingness to obey it.**

A *willingness to obey* should also be considered necessary to the right understanding of Scripture:

But be *doers* of the word, and *not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (Jas 1:22–25)

And Ps 119:34 connects a prayer for understanding with a desire to obey what is understood: “Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.” By contrast, Jesus spoke of some of his Jewish opponents’ unwillingness to receive what he was teaching: “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word” (John 8:43).<sup>26</sup> Paul implies that the moral and spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian church prevented him from imparting deeper wisdom to them (“solid food” and not “milk”):

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. *I fed you with milk, not solid food*, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? (1 Cor 3:1–3)

The practical implication of this qualification is that Christians who begin to practice willful, repeated sin (and even—or especially—pastors and scholars who begin to practice willful, repeated sin!) will likely soon begin to lose sound judgment in interpretation and will become less and less able to understand Scripture rightly.

**2.3.5. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the help of the Holy Spirit.**

In Psalm 119, the frequent prayers for understanding imply a need for God's help: “*Open my eyes*, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Ps 119:18). “*Make me understand* the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works” (Ps 119:27). “*Give me understanding*, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart” (Ps 119:34). “Your hands have made and fashioned me; *give me understanding* that I may learn your commandments” (Ps 119:73).

The NT expresses a similar perspective on the need for divine help in understanding:

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<sup>25</sup> For a thorough discussion of the various means used in interpretation see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (2nd ed; Downers Grove: IVP, 2006). For an extensive analysis of modern (especially postmodern!) theories of meaning, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> The words “bear to hear” translate the Greek verb ἀκούω, “hear,” in the sense of “hear and receive,” “hear and respond appropriately.” The NET says, “it is because you cannot accept my teaching.”

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* (Luke 24:44–45)

The *natural person* does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are *spiritually discerned*. (1 Cor 2:14)

But *their minds were hardened*. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read *a veil lies over their hearts*. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (2 Cor 3:14–16)

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers*, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:3–4)

But why do we affirm that it is specifically a work of the Holy Spirit to help us in understanding? Probably because of the emphasis on the Holy Spirit as a teacher: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).

### ***2.3.6. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without human misunderstanding.***

Perspicuity is a property of *Scripture*, not a property of its readers. Perspicuity affirms that Scripture is *able* to be understood rightly, not that it will *always* be understood rightly.

Every believer in this age retains some measure of sin, which distorts our understanding. Moreover, our understanding is partial because we are finite. For both of these reasons, we are liable to some misunderstanding.

The disciples failed to understand some of Jesus’ teachings:

“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” But *they did not understand this saying*, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. (Luke 9:44–45)

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” *His disciples did not understand these things at first*, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. (John 12:13–16)

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for *as yet they did not understand the Scripture*, that he must rise from the dead. (John 20:8–9)

In addition, there will always be some in the church who *willfully misunderstand* and distort what Scripture says: “There are some things in them that are hard to understand, *which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction*, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16; cf. 2 Pet 3:3–6).

The clarity of Scripture guarantees, then, that it is *capable* of being understood rightly, not that all believers will understand it rightly. The clarity of Scripture is a doctrine about its *understandability*, not about how various people actually understand it.

Much of the work of scholars who belong to the Tyndale Fellowship indirectly bears witness to a deep confidence in Scripture's ultimate understandability. We write articles and commentaries even about those passages that seem most puzzling, and this activity indicates some expectation that the passages can be understood. Why would we write long articles about preaching to the spirits in prison in 1 Pet 3:18–20, for example, unless we thought (as I did)<sup>27</sup> that our articles would persuade readers that the passage *can* be understood rightly?

### ***2.3.7. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but never completely.***

If all of God's people are always to be like the "blessed man" of Ps 1 and "meditate" on God's law day and night, then this implies that we will *always* be able to learn more from it. The other encouragements to God's people to meditate on Scripture (see §2.3.1 above) similarly imply this.

There is an *initial* level of understanding available to first readers of the Bible and available to some extent to children, and there are *deeper* levels of understanding that come with further reading and growth in Christian maturity:<sup>28</sup> "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Heb 5:14).

A real-life example of how there is always more to be learned from Scripture happened to me during the year I spent here at Tyndale House (1985–86) writing a commentary on 1 Peter.<sup>29</sup> There are only 105 verses in 1 Peter, and someone might think that a year would be more than enough time to understand it fully. But at the end of the year, when I completed the commentary, I realized that there was still much more that I could learn from 1 Peter if I only had more time. Another example happened last year when I was editing the *ESV Study Bible* and came to the notes on Ezekiel (written by David Reimer, also a member of the Tyndale Fellowship). Somewhere in the middle of these notes it struck me that never in my lifetime will I come to understand as much as David Reimer understands about Ezekiel—and that is only one book of the Bible.

Why is there always more that we can learn from Scripture? One reason is that it is the product of the infinite wisdom of God. Another reason is that understanding Scripture rightly is not merely a matter of understanding the individual sentences and paragraphs, but also a matter of understanding how *each verse* of Scripture relates to every other verse of Scripture, and how *each combination of*

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<sup>27</sup> See Wayne Grudem, "Christ Preaching through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19–20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature," *TJ* 7:2 (1986): 3–31.

<sup>28</sup> Grant Osborne recognizes that there are levels of understanding Scripture, as implied even in the title of his book *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. He writes, "the average person is again justified in asking whether biblical understanding is increasingly being reserved for the academic elite. I would argue that it is not. First, there are many levels of understanding: devotional, basic Bible study, sermonic, term paper or dissertation. Each level has its own validity and its own process. Furthermore, those who wish to learn the hermeneutical principles that pertain to these various levels may do so. They are not restricted to any 'elite' but are available to all who have the interest and energy to learn them. Basic hermeneutics can and should be taught at the level of the local church" (*The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 27).

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Tyndale NT Commentaries; Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

*several verses* relates to every other combination of several other verses or teachings, and how all of these relate to every situation of life, for all of history.

As David says of God's knowledge of his ways, so we might say of comprehensive knowledge of his Word, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it" (Ps 139:6). Isaiah writes, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8–9).

We might say, then, that *we do understand Scripture* because it is able to be understood, and *we are always seeking to understand Scripture more fully* because it is always able to be understood more fully. Both are implications of its clarity.

But do these seven qualifications to clarity constitute the "death of a thousand qualifications," making the whole concept essentially meaningless? Certainly not, for these are sensible qualifications appropriate to understanding an intricate and complex book. They are far different from saying that Scripture is (a) internally contradictory so that no clear message can be understood or taught or (b) in the final analysis baffling, like the sayings of the Delphic Oracle, or simply nonsense, like the writings of a lunatic that make no clear sense at all.

### ***3. Why Did God Give Us Scripture Like This?***

To review: Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but (1) not all at once, (2) not without effort, (3) not without means, (4) not without the reader's willingness to obey it, (5) not without the help of the Holy Spirit, (6) not without human misunderstanding, and (7) never completely.

#### **3.1. Why Is Scripture Clear?**

The theological reason for affirming the clarity of Scripture concerns the nature of God. God created human language; he cares for his people; and he communicates clearly with us. As Mark Thompson says,

While the doctrine always remained the clarity of *Scripture* . . . it is richly theological in the sense that it speaks about God and his activity amongst us. Even if we were to move forward into the seventeenth century . . . a commitment to the relevance of God's *presence*, his sovereign *power* and his rich *benevolence* remains.<sup>30</sup>

#### **3.2. Then Why Do We Need These Qualifications?**

But then why does further understanding require time, effort, means, and dependence on the help of the Holy Spirit? Why did he not give us something simpler, something where our understanding would be instantaneous and automatic?

Perhaps for several reasons:

1. *The complexity of the subject matter.* God communicated to human beings in Scripture with the purpose of guiding the entire belief system and the lifelong conduct of billions of different people in hundreds of cultures throughout centuries of history. Communication sufficient for this task must necessarily be quite extensive and intricate. An infinite God is telling us about himself and his purposes in all creation! The subject matter is vast.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 157 (emphasis added).

2. *The value of relationship.* God delights to teach us in relationship with himself. The prayers for understanding that are found in Scripture (see section §2.3.5 above) indicate an awareness that Scripture is rightly understood *only in personal relationship with God*, only in a context of *prayer* for his presence and his help in right understanding.

3. *The value of a lifelong process.* God causes us to delight in the *process* of growing in likeness to him. Growth in understanding Scripture is merely part of the larger process of growth in sanctification, and God in his wisdom has ordained that sanctification is a process, a lifelong journey.

God seems to delight in process, for he delights in gradually disclosing more of his glory over time. He took delight in creating the world not in one day but in six. He took delight in promising that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, and then in preparing the way for thousands of years so that “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4). He has taken delight in building and purifying his church for the past two thousand years. And he takes delight when we continually increase the knowledge of himself and his ways through his Word: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and *increasing in the knowledge of God*” (Col 1:9–10).

The process of understanding more of Scripture—and more of God—is one that will never end in this life. I expect that it will never end even in the age to come. We are finite and we can rejoice in the unending and delightful process of learning more about our infinite Creator.

#### **4. Objections—Considered Briefly**

It is not the purpose of this lecture to deal at length with objections to this doctrine that come from outside the evangelical world, objections that I and many others have answered extensively in other writings. But I think it appropriate to mention briefly three major categories of objections.

##### **4.1. Theological Liberalism**

In classic Protestant liberal theology, the Bible is not thought to be the words of God as well as man, but merely a collection of human witnesses to the work of God in people’s lives. J. I. Packer writes that, in most theologically liberal thinking, one finds “a view of the Bible as a fallible human record of religious thought and experience rather than a divine revelation of truth and reality.”<sup>31</sup>

According to this view, it is only natural to expect to find that Scripture contains *numerous conflicting meanings*, because it was written by *numerous human authors* who lived in widely differing Hebrew, Greek, and Roman cultures and who had widely differing ideas of God. While this viewpoint may affirm that specific individual writings are relatively clear, it would not affirm clarity as a characteristic of Scripture as a whole, nor would it affirm clarity as a result of any divine authorship by a God who communicates to us in the words of Scripture. (I realize that this viewpoint constitutes the dominant intellectual atmosphere in the universities in which many members of the Tyndale Fellowship live their professional lives, even though it is not their own personal viewpoint.)

In response, this viewpoint is based on a fundamental difference in how we understand the nature of Scripture. I have addressed the question of the simultaneous human and divine authorship of

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<sup>31</sup> J. I. Packer, “Liberalism and Conservatism in Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Sinclair Ferguson and David Wright; Leicester and Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 385.

Scripture at some length in other writings,<sup>32</sup> but I cannot address it in detail here except to say that such differing views of the nature of Scripture will understandably lead to differing views of the clarity of Scripture. Therefore a confidence that the message of Scripture can actually be known with regard to many doctrines can often indicate someone's confidence in the divine authorship of Scripture as well. Belief in Scripture's clarity is a telltale indicator of a prior belief in Scripture's divine authorship.

#### 4.2. Postmodern Hermeneutics

According to much postmodern hermeneutics, there is no absolute truth, nor is there any single meaning in a text—meaning depends on the assumptions and purposes that an interpreter brings to a text. Therefore, *claims* to know what Scripture means on any topic are just disguised attempts to exert power over others. Mark Thompson notes that postmodernism has developed the suspicion stated in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), “that all claims to know what is true are in reality covert attempts to manipulate people.”<sup>33</sup>

Thompson gives a much more detailed explanation of this position than I am able to provide,<sup>34</sup> but by way of brief response, I agree with Thompson that such a denial that the meaning of Scripture can be known is ultimately an attack on the character of God—his goodness, his power, and his ability to communicate clearly to his people. It is inconsistent with the assumption of the understandability of Scripture that is found in Deuteronomy's instructions to parents, in the Psalmist's exhortations to meditate daily on Scripture, in Jesus' repeated expectations that his hearers should know and understand Scripture, and in the willingness of Paul and Peter to address entire congregations with the expectation of being rightly understood. Postmodern insistence on indeterminate meaning stands in sharp contrast to the views the biblical authors themselves urge upon us at page after page.

In addition, scriptural authors frequently base an argument on the idea that a text means one thing and not another thing. For example,

We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was *not* after, but before he was circumcised. (Rom 4:9–10)

That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were *not* written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord. (Rom 4:22–24)

Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?” (Heb 2:5–6)

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. (Heb 4:8)

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<sup>32</sup> See Wayne Grudem, “Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 19–59. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapters 3–5.

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–47.

By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Heb 11:3)

### 4.3. Roman Catholic Teaching

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that the correct interpretation of Scripture must come from the teaching officers of the church:

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This means that *the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.*<sup>35</sup>

But neither the teachings of Jesus nor the NT epistles give any hint that believing readers need an authoritative interpreter of Scripture such as the Bishop of Rome. Not even in the first century did the apostles suggest that ordinary believers needed an authoritative interpreter in order to understand Scripture rightly. The Scripture remains clear enough that it is able to be understood, now as in all previous ages, by ordinary believers who will take the needed time and effort, employ ordinary means, and rely on the Holy Spirit's help.

## 5. Implications of the Doctrine of the Clarity of Scripture

The implications of this doctrine are numerous and immensely valuable.

### 5.1. The Meaning of Scripture Can Be Known

The clarity of Scripture implies, first, that various texts of Scripture—and the Scripture as a whole—have a meaning, and that meaning can be known.

1. Therefore, the clarity of Scripture assures us that we can proclaim the gospel-message with confidence, for we can know what it says and what it means.

2. Therefore, the clarity of Scripture reminds us that we as Christians should all be reading Scripture daily for our whole lives.

3. Therefore, the clarity of Scripture encourages us that we can teach *biblical doctrine* to our churches. We need not limit ourselves, for example, to teaching “Pauline theology” or “OT Theology” (both of which are valuable in their own right), but we should be able to teach “whole-Bible theology,” and so should every pastor in every church.

4. Therefore, the clarity of Scripture encourages us that we can teach *biblical ethics* to our churches—not just “Pauline ethics” or “Mosaic ethics” or “Old Testament ethics” (all of which are valuable in their own right) but “whole-Bible ethics,” with clear application to ordinary people's lives today.

These two points (#3 and #4) show why the *clarity* of Scripture is absolutely essential to any effectual authority of Scripture in people's lives. Without the clarity of Scripture, someone could say, “I believe fully in the absolute divine authority of Scripture, but I have no idea what it requires me to believe or

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<sup>35</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 27 (§85; emphasis added).



how it requires me to live.” In this way, if Scripture has no clarity, its authority is effectively nullified in real life.

5. At this point, I am going to make an appeal to those with advanced training in OT or NT studies: Consider using some of your research and writing to help the church learn what the *whole Bible* teaches about some of the important issues of the day, especially the ethical issues. I am afraid that there is a temptation to speak only to the wider academic community that does not share a belief that the whole of Scripture speaks clearly to doctrinal or ethical topics and, therefore, never to publish anything that claims to explain what the entire Bible teaches the church today about some topic or another.

I wonder, in fact, if it is sometimes the case that *the more people know* about how to interpret the Bible with academic precision, *the less willing they are* to explain to the church what the whole Bible says? Who then is supposed to do this? Only the pastors, with less training than the professional Bible scholars? Or only the laypeople, with less training than the pastors? Is that really what God intended for us? If the teaching of Scripture is able to be understood, not only in its parts but also in the whole, then shouldn't those with the most training be giving the church examples of how to understand the whole?

If we as evangelical scholars do not do this, I'm afraid that the clarity of Scripture—and much of its message—may be covered up and hidden in our generation, not by a priesthood that keeps the Bible in a Latin language that nobody else can read, but by a new scholarly “priesthood” that by its actions implies that nobody today is sufficiently well trained to teach the church what the whole Bible says about anything. The loss to the church would be immense.

## 5.2. Translations Should Be Encouraged

The second implication of the clarity of Scripture is that the church should be constantly giving people the Bible in their own language, that is, in translation.

In contrast to the Qur'an, which Islam teaches cannot be properly translated, the Bible itself contains the justification for its own translation because the NT authors frequently quote directly from the Septuagint, a Greek *translation* of the OT, and use it as the word of God. By this process they justify the work of translation of Scripture into other languages.

And so the conviction that people should be able to have a *translated* Bible in their own language is based in large measure on this very doctrine, the clarity of Scripture. If Scripture is *able to be understood* by ordinary believers (not perfectly, but quite well) and if Scripture is *able to be translated* and gives warrant for its own translation, then the church should eagerly translate Scripture into the languages that people speak and understand today.

This conviction has actually changed history. A conviction about the clarity of Scripture led Wycliffe and Tyndale and others to risk their lives in order to translate the Bible into English. A conviction about the clarity of Scripture led Martin Luther to risk his life and spend nearly a year in hiding in order to translate the NT into German and later the OT as well. A conviction about the clarity of Scripture has led thousands of Wycliffe Bible translators and many others to devote their entire lives to the translation of Scripture into thousands of other languages.

But the need to translate does *not* imply that translations of the Bible should be rendered in the simplest street language immediately understandable to twelve-year-olds or even immediately understandable to non-Christian adults. This is because the Bible itself as written to its original audiences was not written in the simplest language possible (think of the difficult Greek of 2 Corinthians, for

example, or Hebrews, Acts, or 2 Peter), and for the most part was not written primarily to unbelievers but to believing communities of God's people.

The most faithful translation into contemporary language, therefore, should be a translation that, for its *primary readership*, aims at adult believers, which was the primary audience for most of the NT when it was originally written. In today's terms a Bible translation should aim primarily at adult Christian readers as its target audience.

I appreciate the desire behind "dynamic equivalence" translations—a desire to make Scripture more clear to readers. My objection is that too often such translations simplify a passage so much that details of meaning that could be rendered into English are simply left out. Such a process ultimately undermines readers' confidence in their ability to understand Scripture because Sunday after Sunday their pastors have to correct the text with additional details of meaning that are not found in their dynamic-equivalence translations. To take one example, 1 Kgs 1:10 in the NLT says, "So David *died* and was buried in the city of David." But then the pastor explains, "The Hebrew text actually says, 'Then David *slept with his fathers* and was buried in the city of David,' which is a rich image that hints at future resurrection and reunion with ancestors who had died." Or 2 Cor 5:7 in the NIV says, "We *live* by faith, not by sight," but the pastor explains, "The Greek text actually says, 'We *walk* by faith, not by sight,' where walking is a metaphor that conveys the ideas of life as a journey toward a goal, life as something in which we make regular progress."

Soon the listeners are bound to object, "If you believe the Bible is clear, why not let me see what it actually says? I can certainly understand 'sleeping' as a metaphor for dying and 'walking' as a metaphor for life. If Scripture is able to be understood—in all its richness—then why not let me see as much of its richness as is possible in the English language?"

### 5.3. Bible Reading Should Be Encouraged

The third implication of the clarity of Scripture is that churches should strongly encourage personal Bible reading by every believer as well as regular small-group Bible studies.

In addition, in every nation the church should be in the forefront of advocating universal literacy. In northern Europe one of the great consequences of the Reformation was a great emphasis on universal literacy. Both boys and girls were taught to read because parents wanted their children to be able to read the Bible and to teach it to their children. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, where it is believed, leads directly to universal literacy in a nation.

Sadly, Roman Catholic Southern Europe did not hold to this doctrine or follow this pattern of training children to read. The authoritative interpretation of Scripture was given to the faithful by the priests, so laypeople were not encouraged to read Scripture for themselves, lest they misunderstand it.

Such contrasting beliefs regarding Scripture led to widespread differences in the general literacy of a population so that the rate of illiteracy in England in 1900 was only 3%, but it was still 48% in Italy, 56% in Spain, and an astounding 78% in Portugal.<sup>36</sup> It should be added, however, that more recent Roman Catholic teaching has encouraged widespread reading of Scripture by laypeople.

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<sup>36</sup> David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York: Norton, 1999), 250 (citing Gabriel Tortella, "Patterns of Economic Retardation and Recovery in Southwestern Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Economic History Review* 47:1 [February 1994]: 11).

#### **5.4. Preaching and Teaching in the Church Should Be a Process of Appealing to People's Ability to Understand the Text**

The fourth implication of the clarity of Scripture is that Bible-teaching should be a process of repeatedly pointing to the words of the text (or highlighting the words on PowerPoint!) in order to explain and apply them. Preaching and teaching should not give the impression that a good sermon or lecture consists mostly of gems of wisdom that only highly trained scholars can discover.

Where does the right attitude come from? The attitude of pastors toward their congregations in preaching is often an imitation of the attitude they learned from their instructors in Bible college or seminary. If a lecturer conveys an attitude that says, "My goal is to show you how impossible the task of interpretation is for all but the greatest minds (such as my own)," and then burdens students with an impossible list of exegetical tasks that will require a month to complete for any verse, it will inculcate in most students a seminary disease called "hermeneutical paralysis," a sense that they can never be sure what Scripture says—the opposite of the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. And it will inculcate in the elite few top students an imitation of this haughty attitude that will be passed down to entire churches.

But if a lecturer conveys an attitude that says, "My goal is to improve your skill in interpreting Scripture, something you as an adult Christian already do quite well," and then if the lecturer explains the immense set of exegetical tools available when they are needed (and gives opportunity to put them to use), then there is an appropriate deference given to the clarity of Scripture and the fact that God intended it to communicate well to ordinary believers.

#### **5.5. Ordinary Christians vs. "the Experts"**

As one final point of application, I would encourage ordinary Christians to be suspicious of "experts" in some field who attempt to lead you away from what seems to be the plain meaning of the text of Scripture. For example, I confess that one reason I never found the "cessationist" argument regarding miraculous spiritual gifts very persuasive was that it was just so hard to derive from the sense of Scripture that seems so evident when people read it without the background of the debate over spiritual gifts in mind. Do we really think that every example of a miracle in Acts and every mention of miraculous gifts in the epistles are put there to show us what the church today is *not* supposed to be? If that were God's intention, he surely did not make it easy to discover! And so it is with many other doctrinal and ethical matters: If there is something that God thinks it important for us to believe or obey, then surely he would not make it nearly impossible for all but the most advanced experts to find in his Word!<sup>37</sup>

### **6. Conclusion**

The clarity (or perspicuity) of Scripture is no minor doctrine.

1. It provides the basis for giving us the Bible in our own language.
2. It provides the basis for thinking we can read the Bible and understand it.
3. It provides the basis for thinking that we even have a gospel-message to proclaim.

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<sup>37</sup> I realize that at this point some may respond that clarity on such matters is not in the text but in the eye of the beholder!

4. It provides the basis for thinking that we can know what God wants us to believe, and how he wants us to live.

5. It provides the basis for thinking that detailed study of Scripture, and even extensive academic study of Scripture, has great value, because it will eventually yield even fuller understanding of a Bible that is an infinite storehouse of wisdom and knowledge.

6. It assures us that our infinite Creator, whom we seek to know and to worship, has loved us enough to speak to us in words that we can understand—and understand not only with our minds but with our hearts. Through these words of God, we know and follow him. And thus we experience in our lives what Jesus tells us will happen: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

# Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?

— Dane C. Ortlund —

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**D**oes “Christocentrism” betray an asymmetrical trinitarianism that neglects the Father and the Spirit? The spate of calls for “Christ-centeredness” in evangelicalism’s past few generations collude with the twentieth century’s revived trinitarianism to prompt this question. After laying out the tension with a brief historical overview, we will bring the teaching of the NT to bear upon the question. This will result in two specific reasons that there is a kind of Christocentrism not only compatible with but necessitated by orthodox trinitarianism. A brief concluding section identifies five concrete dimensions to a healthy “Christocentrism” that simultaneously affirms orthodox trinitarianism.

## ***1. A Brief Historical Review***

Augustine allegedly wrote that to deny the Trinity is to risk losing one’s salvation, while to attempt to understand the Trinity is to risk losing one’s mind.<sup>1</sup> John Calvin wrote of the Triune God, “Here, indeed, if anywhere in the secret mysteries of Scripture, we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation.”<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards called the Trinity “the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries.”<sup>3</sup> Yet in spite of its mysteriousness, this doctrine comprises the ecumenical rule of faith and lies at the heart of all Christian confession. Despite longstanding and at times vociferous difference between the East and the West concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit, trinitarian dogma provides one of a very small number of doctrinal convictions around which all Christians of all times in all places are united.<sup>4</sup> At the heart of Christian confession is the belief in one God who exists in three persons, distinct yet eternally and equally divine.<sup>5</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity, moreover, has been undergoing widespread recovery in Western theology over the past century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Guides to Theology; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford L. Battles; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.13.21.

<sup>3</sup> “Discourse on the Trinity,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 21: *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith* (ed. Sang Hyun Lee; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 134.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., the recent effort of James H. O. Kombo to bring an orthodox understanding of the Trinity to bear on the Eastern African context in *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought: The Holy Trinity, Theological Hermeneutics, and the African Intellectual Culture* (Studies in Reformed Theology 14; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> See the Athanasian Creed or the Belgic Confession. In spite of Karl Barth’s protestations, this essay will retain the language of “person” in referring to each member of the Trinity, rather than Barth’s *Seinsweise* or “modes of being” (see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975], I/1:370).

<sup>6</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, “The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today* (ed. Christoph Schwöbel; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1–30; Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The*

Alongside affirmations of the Trinity, however, church history is littered with appeals for some kind of “Christocentrism”—which for now we regard as “a way of constructing theology or an approach towards the doctrine of revelation in which the person and work of Christ plays a determining or central role.”<sup>7</sup> Augustine’s thought has been classified in this way,<sup>8</sup> as has that of Luther<sup>9</sup> and Calvin.<sup>10</sup> Edwards has been described as utilizing a Christ-centered framework for understanding both history<sup>11</sup> and the Bible.<sup>12</sup> “Christocentrism” is of course one of the enduring legacies of Barthian thought, considered by George Hunsinger to have been “the most basic point in all of Barth’s theology”<sup>13</sup>—an assertion made all the more interesting in light of Barth’s instrumentality in reviving a robust trinitarianism in the wake of nineteenth-century German higher criticism.<sup>14</sup> J. C. K. von Hofmann, though less well known than Barth, has been similarly described as employing a coordinated trinitarian *and* christocentric theological perspective, particularly regarding history.<sup>15</sup> Oscar Cullmann’s *Heilsgeschichte* is, if nothing

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*Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Triune God of the Gospel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25–27.

<sup>7</sup> Pan-Chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study of Paul Tillich’s Thought* (Studies in Philosophical Theology; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 37.

<sup>8</sup> Basil Studer, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?* (trans. Matthew J. O’Connell; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1997), 39–65; Mark Ellingsworth, *The Richness of Augustine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 49–50.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Robert C. Schultz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 79–81; Eric W. Gritsch, “Luther as Bible Translator,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70; Stephen Chester, “It Is No Longer I Who Live: Justification by Faith and Participation in Christ in Martin Luther’s Exegesis of Galatians,” *NTS* 55 (2009): 315–37.

<sup>10</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 149; cf. 156; Stephen Edmondson, *Calvin’s Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 168–81; Eric J. Alexander, “The Supremacy of Jesus Christ,” in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology* (ed. Burk Parsons; Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2008), 109. Barth contrasts the Christocentrism of Luther and Calvin with that of A. Ritschl and Schleiermacher in *CD* 1/2:350–51.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 115–18. Avihu Zakai (*Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], 58, 70–71) compares the conversions of Augustine, Luther, and Edwards, arguing that while that of the former two was more christocentric, Edwards’ was more theocentric—a point that ought not to be extrapolated out from the conversions of each of these saints to their theologies as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> Glenn R. Krieder, *Jonathan Edwards’s Interpretation of Revelation 4:1–8:1* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 287–89; Douglas A. Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word: A Model of Faith and Thought* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 105.

<sup>13</sup> George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 283. See Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel* (trans. B. E. Hooke; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 17–20. The most recent secondary contribution to understanding Barth’s Christocentrism is Henri Blocher, “Karl Barth’s Christocentric Method,” in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 21–54. Cf. Hans Küng’s statement in an explication of Barth’s christology: “Only when the whole of dogma is seen in Christ and hence in the Trinity is it truly Christian dogma” (*Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* [trans. T. Collins, E. E. Tolk, and D. Granskou; New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964], 123; emphasis original). Cornelius Van Til comments on Barth’s Christocentrism, and Küng’s appropriation of it, in *Christianity and Barthianism* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), 366–67.

<sup>14</sup> On which see Michael J. Ovey, “A Private Love? Karl Barth and the Triune God,” in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 199–201.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew L. Becker, *The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 23; cf. 143.

else, Christ-centered.<sup>16</sup> Other thinkers dubbed “christocentric” include Friedrich Schleiermacher,<sup>17</sup> Søren Kierkegaard,<sup>18</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar,<sup>19</sup> and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>20</sup>

Christian theologians of all stripes, then, mainly Protestant but also Roman Catholic, have been described as Christ-centered in some way. To be sure, the precise way in which each of the above thinkers is “christocentric” varies significantly. The reasons for which, say, Schleiermacher, Barth, and von Balthasar have been christened “christocentric” diverge significantly from one another. Nevertheless the descriptor is a common one, perhaps traceable to the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), the Greek text of which allots 15 words to describing the Father, 28 to the Holy Spirit, and 110 to the Son. Contextual and polemical factors doubtless influenced this apportioning, yet churches today have little trouble reciting the words as ours, seventeen hundred years removed from the Arian controversy in which the creed was birthed.<sup>21</sup>

More germane to the purposes of this essay and the audience of this journal, “Christocentrism” is heralded not only in the larger theological ocean but also within the evangelical tributary, especially within the past half century or so. Contemporary evangelicalism repeatedly calls us to be “Christ-centered” in our approach to Scripture and life. The late Edmund Clowney, former president of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, is as responsible as any these past few generations for reinvigorating the classically evangelical focus on Christ. In several books and articles, as well as in his own teaching and preaching, Clowney commended an understanding of Scripture that saw Christ as the key to the whole Bible, Old Testament and New.<sup>22</sup> Bryan Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* argues for a similar kind of Christocentrism.<sup>23</sup> A key influence in Chapell’s work is that of Sidney Greidanus, who has developed a christocentric method for reading and preaching the Bible.<sup>24</sup> Dennis E. Johnson has recently worked out a similar approach,<sup>25</sup> and Zack Eswine

<sup>16</sup> So J. Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul’s Thought* (trans. Loren T. Stuckenbruck; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), xiii. See Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (trans. Floyd V. Filson; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); idem, *Salvation in History* (trans. Sidney G. Sowers; New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> Hans Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher: Divergence and Convergence,” in *Theology and Narrative: Selective Essays* (ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 177–99.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Rose, *Kierkegaard’s Christocentric Theology* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Dermot Power, *A Spiritual Theology of the Priesthood: The Mystery of Christ and the Mission of the Priest* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 156; Victoria S. Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: Von Balthasar’s Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology* (Studies in Philosophy and Religion 21; Boston: Kluwer, 2000), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly, “The Christocentric Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *Our Apostolate* 23 (1975): 238–60. For a fuller list of thinkers dubbed “christocentric,” though without citation, see Richard A. Muller, “A Note on ‘Christocentrism’ and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology,” *WTJ* 68 (2006): 254.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 1; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (trans. Margaret Kohl; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 97.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., his *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); idem, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005; cf. idem, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), esp. 118–19; *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Cf. Richard P. Belcher Jr., *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from All the Psalms* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007).

deconstructs the misperception (and, at times, valid allegation) that christocentric preaching focuses too exclusively on the individual's conscience and forgiveness.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, entire expository series have been devoted to a christocentric reading of Scripture, such as *The Gospel according to the Old Testament* series.<sup>27</sup> Preaching such as that of Timothy Keller (pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City) and Sinclair Ferguson (pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina) shares the core conviction concerning the crucial need to focus on Christ.<sup>28</sup> Moving from homiletics to hermeneutics, Vern Poythress' *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*<sup>29</sup> and several works by Graeme Goldsworthy<sup>30</sup> have commended Christ-centered interpretation to the evangelical world.

To be sure, all the above writers, evangelical or otherwise, advance "Christocentrism" in diverse theological domains—hermeneutics, salvation history, revelation, homiletics, and so on. Even among evangelicals we must be careful not to pigeonhole those mentioned as if they all set forth precisely the same understanding of what it means to be "christocentric." And while the focus in evangelical "Christocentrism" is hermeneutics and preaching, even here there is divergence as to what precisely is meant by such a label.<sup>31</sup> Yet to acknowledge diversity is not to deny the common conviction that Christianity is in some sense Christ-centered. We will give our own understanding of exactly how we are to be "christocentric" below. At this point we can say that the common denominator to the evangelical projects mentioned thus far is a conviction that the Bible will be properly understood, faithfully preached, and rightly applied only if the enfleshed second person of the Trinity is seen as the integrative North Star to Christian doctrine and practice.

## 2. Rejections of Christocentrism

The immediate question is whether Christocentrism inculcates an inherently imbalanced trinitarianism. Does a hermeneutic that centralizes Christ (hermeneutically, homiletically, or otherwise) neglect the Father or the Spirit? Why should our reading and preaching of the Bible be *christocentric* and not *paterocentric* or *pneumacentric*?

Adolf von Harnack, for instance, famously proclaimed that "the Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son."<sup>32</sup> And while it is his focus on Christ for which Barth is rightly remembered, his (along with Karl Rahner's) specific understanding of the Trinity may tend toward an unnecessary centralizing of the Father. Barth and Rahner, employing the philosophical

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See a collection of christocentric sermons in a volume edited by Johnson, *Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund P. Clowney* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1999– .

<sup>28</sup> See Johnson's helpful discussion on Keller in *Him We Proclaim*, 54–61; Sinclair Ferguson, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel-Centered Life* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2007). The audio of a D.Min. course taught at Reformed Theological Seminary by Clowney and Keller entitled "Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World," which lays out a Christ-centered homiletical method, can be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/preachingchrist>.

<sup>29</sup> Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1991.

<sup>30</sup> *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002); *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> For a fuller list of works propounding a christocentric approach to the Bible and theology (through 2007), see the bibliographies in Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 433–46, 491–93.

<sup>32</sup> *What Is Christianity?* (trans. T. B. Saunders; New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 144.



framework of German Idealism, portrayed God as absolute subject, the Father being that subject and the Son and Spirit (in Barth's terms, "revelation" and "revealedness") the setting forth of that single locus of self-consciousness. This idealist view of God that identifies the Father as absolute subject may, despite its otherwise rigorous emphasis on the Son/revelation, overly centralize the Father.<sup>33</sup>

Others are concerned with the potential neglect of the *Spirit* inculcated by a unique focus on Christ. According to Pan-Chiu Lai, Christocentrism "cannot avoid the pitfalls of downgrading or minimizing the role of the Holy Spirit."<sup>34</sup> Catholic theologian Yves Congar has repeatedly called for the renewal of a doctrinal appreciation of the Holy Spirit in an attempt to avoid "christomonism."<sup>35</sup> Within Protestantism, Clark Pinnock proposes "viewing Christ as an aspect of the Spirit's mission, instead of (as is more usual) viewing Spirit as a function of Christ's."<sup>36</sup> Some segments of Pentecostalism and other charismatic circles might also be described as "pneumacentric."<sup>37</sup> And in Pauline scholarship, N. T. Wright has recently reiterated his conviction that the Son is being emphasized to the neglect of the Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

Or, as still others have suggested, why center on any of the three persons of the Godhead instead of simply being *theocentric*, focusing on the unity of the Godhead and thereby keeping each person equally in view?<sup>39</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not sustained engagement with any of the writers mentioned thus far, let alone interaction with broader discussions between East and West regarding the propriety of the *filioque* clause.<sup>40</sup> Rather we reflect briefly on the NT itself, asking if a certain kind of Christocentrism emerges from its pages that remains wedded to an equally robust trinitarianism.

<sup>33</sup> This is, of course, a contentious area of Barth studies that is currently heatedly discussed among Barth scholars; see, e.g., the recent exchange between Jeffrey Hensley and Paul D. Molnar in vol. 61 (2008) of *Scottish Journal of Theology*, especially p. 102 of Molnar's contribution, "What Does it Mean to Say that Jesus Christ Is Indispensable to a Properly Conceived Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity?" For an identification of the Father as absolute subject, see Barth, *The Christian Life* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 57; cf. his statement in *CD*, IV/2:443: "the Divinity ascribed to Jesus is to make clear, impart, and carry out who God the Father, *God in the proper sense* is" (emphasis added); note also Barth's apparent endorsement of Harnack's above statement (*ibid.*), as well as Barth's eschewing of the "so-called Christocentrism, of which Pietism was so fond and still is" (*ibid.*, 453). A key criticism of this dimension of Barth's trinitarianism has been made by Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, esp. 62–64, 139–48. Cf. Joy Ann McDougall's explication of Moltmann's criticism of Barth's trinitarianism in her *Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 88–89. On Rahner, see, e.g., his sustained insistence that the NT's use of *theos* refers to the Father, not to the Triune God (*Theological Investigations*, vol. 1: *God, Christ, Mary and Grace* [trans. Cornelius Ernst; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961], 125–48).

<sup>34</sup> *Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., "Pneumatologie ou 'Christomonisme' dans la tradition latine?," *EthL* 45 (1969): 394–416.

<sup>36</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 80.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Chestnut, "Specialized Spirits: Conversion and the Products of Pneumacentric Religion in Latin America's Free Market of Faith," in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (ed. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary; Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 72–92.

<sup>38</sup> N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 10–11, 106–7, 188–89, 252.

<sup>39</sup> So Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (American Society of Missiology 7; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 145–204; John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 16–19; Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 187–88. Cf. Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 44–45.

<sup>40</sup> Eastern Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky is well-known for his criticism of the West's focus on Christ (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976], 64–65, 242–43).

### 3. *New Testament Christocentrism?*

We will not review the data for an understanding of the Trinity in the NT here; numerous helpful studies exist.<sup>41</sup> We focus rather on the other half of the equation, noting the statements within the NT that conspicuously spotlight Christ.

A cursory glance through the NT reveals some striking statements that speak of the supremacy of Christ at points where reference to the Triune God may seem to have been just as (or even more) appropriate. In Acts, for instance, Jesus sends his apostles out with the simple instruction, “You will be *my* witnesses” (Acts 1:8).<sup>42</sup> Philip, we learn, does precisely this in Samaria, where he “proclaimed to them the Christ” (8:5). Why are the Father and/or the Spirit not equally proclaimed?

Paul’s statement to the Corinthians—“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”—may seem similarly reductionistic (1 Cor 2:2; cf. 1:22–23; 2 Cor 2:12; Eph 3:8). In the opening verses of 1 Cor 15, too, “the gospel,” that which is “of first importance,” is defined in strikingly christological terms (vv. 1–8; cf. Rom 1:1–6). Toward the opening of 2 Corinthians, Paul reiterates that Silvanus, Timothy, and he simply proclaimed “the Son of God, Jesus Christ” (1:19). Later in that epistle, Paul surprises us by speaking of our inevitable appearance “before the judgment seat of *Christ*” (2 Cor 5:10). The trinitarian benediction that closes 2 Corinthians places Christ first (cf. Heb 9:14),<sup>43</sup> and many epistles close with an exclusively christological blessing: Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Jude, and 2 Peter. In Galatians, Paul’s boast consists simply in “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). The closing of Ephesians, a letter rife with implicit trinitarianism,<sup>44</sup> speaks of peace and love coming “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” yet immediately speaks of the love of believers simply as love for “our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:23–24). And three times in the first chapter of Philippians, Paul speaks of the content of what is preached (whether from false motives or true) as simply “Christ” (1:15, 17, 18)—the one, we might add, at whose name all creatures will one day bow (2:9–11). In Colossians, Paul says of Christ, “*Him* we proclaim” (1:27–28). Paul exhorts Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8). Is the Triune God slighted by not being equally represented in such preaching? Such passages as these prompted Geerhardus Vos to speak of Paul’s “christologizing of the gospel on the grandest of scales. From the beginning to the end man’s salvation appears to Paul not merely associated with Christ, but capable of description in terms of Christ.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> E.g., B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 143–65; C. F. D. Moule, “The New Testament and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Evangelical Theology* 88 (1976): 16–20; Bruce N. Kaye, “The New Testament,” in *One God in Trinity: An Analysis of the Primary Dogma of Christianity* (ed. Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland; Westchester: Cornerstone, 1980), 11–26; Gordon D. Fee, “Paul and the Trinity: The Experience of Christ and the Spirit for Paul’s Understanding of God,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49–72; Arthur W. Wainright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001); Ben Witherington III and Laura Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son and Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 333–35, 439–40, 459–60, 472–73, 487–95; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity in John’s Gospel* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 24; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> 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.

<sup>43</sup> Noted by Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 73–85.

<sup>45</sup> “The Theology of Paul,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*

Such an emphasis on Christ surfaces elsewhere in the NT. It is Jesus Christ whom the writer to the Hebrews affirms to be “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). And John’s epistles, in a similar vein, teach that one’s orientation to Christ determine one’s orientation to God as a whole (1 John 2:22; 4:2–3, 15; 2 John 9).

Stepping back and viewing the entire canon, finally, while the Bible unsurprisingly begins simply with God (Gen 1:1; perhaps, implicitly, the Triune God, in light of the first person plurals of Gen 1), it ends on a christological note: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (Rev 22:20–21).

Such passages do not simply speak of Christ but do so in such a way that may seem out of sync with what we know of the tri-unity and co-equality of the persons of the Godhead. More examples could be proliferated. Graham Cole, for instance, notes the puzzling paucity of reference to the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s Supper and baptism in the NT; baptism is done, he notes, either in the name of the Son or that of the Trinity.<sup>46</sup> How does such NT Christocentrism avoid sliding into some kind of unhealthy and lopsided trinitarianism? How does a focus on Christ fit together with an unflinching (and historically hard won) affirmation of the co-equality, co-divinity and co-eternity of all three persons?

#### 4. *Toward a Solution*

This paper suggests two basic lines of thought in moving toward an answer. Christocentrism can happily co-exist with orthodox trinitarianism because (1) it is only through Christ that we know of the Trinity, and (2) the Trinity itself is Christ-centered. As we view the Trinity through Christ and Christ through the Trinity, we find orthodox trinitarianism and Christocentrism not only compatible but mutually reinforcing.

First, Christocentrism is not only permissible but necessary if we are to know of the Trinity, for *it is through Christ that we come to learn of the triunity of God*. The incarnate Son is the epistemological channel by which we come to know of God’s triune existence. Jesus said that “no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22; John 5:23; 6:40). Similarly, Hebrews opens by declaring that “in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son. . . . He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (1:2–3). Jesus “is what the Father has to say,” as C. S. Lewis put it<sup>47</sup>—*a recurring theme of the Fourth Gospel*. “Whoever sees me sees him who sent me,” Jesus explains (John 12:45). Jesus likewise answered Philip’s audacious request to see the Father later in this Gospel: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The distinction-between-yet-divine-unity-among multiple persons within the Godhead can be perceived only because one of the persons of the Triune God took on flesh and blood.

One hundred years ago, B. B. Warfield declared that we can never know of the Trinity apart from Scripture.<sup>48</sup> So it is. It is also true, however, that we cannot know of the Trinity apart from Christ—as

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(ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 360.

<sup>46</sup> Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology; Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 222–24. On the christocentric nature of the Lord’s Supper in the first generations of the church, see also Adolf Schlatter, *The Church in the New Testament Period* (trans. Paul P. Levertoff; London: SPCK, 1961), 72–74.

<sup>47</sup> *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 174.

<sup>48</sup> “Doctrine of the Trinity,” 133–35.

Warfield himself went on to affirm.<sup>49</sup> Several theologians have argued this, most notably Karl Barth.<sup>50</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, too, sees trinitarianism and Christocentrism as complementary since christology is the epistemological key to comprehending the Trinity.<sup>51</sup> The Son makes the Trinity conspicuous to human eyes. If he had not come as the Jewish Christ, how could we have known of the great salvation planned by the Father and applied by the Spirit? Gregory of Nazianzus, Calvin, Owen, Pannenberg, and Schillebeeckx are others who have noted the way in which we come to know of God's triunity only through Christ.<sup>52</sup> "God is triune life," writes von Balthasar. "But as far as we are concerned, we only know of this triune life from the Son's incarnation."<sup>53</sup>

Second, *the Trinity itself is Christ-centered*.<sup>54</sup> God the Father and God the Spirit are both said to direct attention toward God the Son in the NT. In John 8:54 Jesus says that "it is the Father who glorifies me, of whom you [Jewish leaders] say, 'He is our God.'" Similarly, Jesus' high priestly prayer begins, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. . . . Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:1, 5; cf. v. 24; 8:54; Acts 3:13; Eph 1:23; 2 Pet 1:17; Rev 1:6). To be sure, John 17 speaks of two-way glorification between the Father and the Son. We must maintain balance in our treatment of the NT's Christocentrism; for not only does the Father glorify the Son, but the Son also glorifies the Father. Time and again the glory of both the Father and the Son are intimately coordinated, particularly in John (1:14; 5:19–23; 8:49–50; 11:4; 13:31–32; cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Phil 2:10–11).<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the NT oscillates so frequently between the Son and the Father as the more immediate object of glorification that it becomes unthinkable to envision one person of the Trinity being glorified *and not* the other persons. To glorify one is to glorify all, for all are God—one remembers the notion of perichoresis in Augustine and the Cappadocian explication of the co-inherence of the persons. We must not conceive of the Father's glorifying the Son as in tension with its reciprocal, for to glorify the Son is to glorify *the Father's* Son and to glorify the Father is to glorify *the Son's* Father (cf. Matt 16:27; Rom 15:6). We are simply noting the strain of biblical teaching that spotlights the Son as the member of the Triune God sent forth—visibly, historically, conspicuously—to accomplish humanity's redemption, a spotlighting freely affirmed by the Father.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 148, 167.

<sup>50</sup> CD, I/1:318–20; VI/1:202–10. Cf. Marc Cortez, "What Does it Mean to Call Karl Barth a 'Christocentric' Theologian?" *SJT* 60 (2007): 127–43.

<sup>51</sup> *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 65, 74–75, 97.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 227–28; Philip Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 124; cf. 66; John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God* (ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor; Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 196–200; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (trans. G. W. Bromiley; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:300; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (London: Collins, 1979), 658–60. Cf. Luther's comments in his "Table Talk," *LW*, 54:155; Jonathan Edwards, "Jesus Christ Is the Shining Forth of the Father's Glory," in *The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Michael D. McMullen; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 230–36, 244.

<sup>53</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (London: Chapman, 1961), 193.

<sup>54</sup> See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 182; Bruce A. Ware, "How Shall We Think About the Trinity?" in *God Under Fire* (ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 262–64. Butin appears to understand Calvin's trinitarianism in a similar way (*Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 124), though he is eager not to allow Christocentrism to overshadow the "larger trinitarian frame" of Calvin's thought (127). Edwards preached that Christ is "the eternal and infinite delight of the Father himself" ("Those Who Love Christ Shall Receive of Him a Crown of Life," in *Glory and Honor of God*, 252).

<sup>55</sup> On 1 Cor 15:28 in particular, see the helpful discussion in Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 86–89.

This glorification of the Son is even more clearly attributed to the Spirit. Jesus says in John 15:26 that when the Spirit comes, “whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me” (cf. 1 John 4:2–3; 5:6). Here all three persons of the Trinity are referenced, and both the Father and the Spirit—more precisely, the Spirit as he proceeds from the Father—are described as intentionally drawing attention to Jesus.<sup>56</sup> A major theme of John’s Gospel (as well as 1 John<sup>57</sup>) is the Spirit’s role in witnessing to Jesus. The Spirit “will glorify me,” said Jesus (John 16:14). Paul wrote that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Elsewhere the apostle speaks of those who “worship by the Spirit of God” as being the very ones who “glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:3). In short, the Spirit himself is Christ-centered.<sup>58</sup> A fundamental role of the Spirit is to magnify Christ. Not only does the Spirit proceed from Christ (and the Father) rather than Christ from the Spirit, but one crucial mission of the Spirit is to spotlight Christ. Perhaps the perceived need to come to the defense of the Spirit in light of recent christocentric emphases is misplaced.<sup>59</sup>

An added dimension to both the above general points that does not fit neatly under either of them is the way in which the deeply counterintuitive heart of the Christian faith—the sheer freeness of God’s acceptance and favor utterly apart from human contribution—is materially accomplished by and therefore exemplified most clearly in the life, death, and resurrection of the incarnate second person of the Trinity. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world” (1 John 4:9; cf. 1 Tim 1:15–16). Particularly helpful here is John Owen’s magisterial work on the Christian’s unique fellowship with each person of the Trinity. Speaking of our communion with the Son, Owen writes that “there is not the least glimpse of [God’s love for sinners] that can possibly be discovered but in Christ.” He then quotes 1 John 4:9 and comments of God’s love: “This is the only discovery that God has made of any such property in his nature, or of any thought of exercising it toward sinners—in that he has sent Jesus Christ into the world.”<sup>60</sup> Owen goes on at length to argue that “pardoning mercy” is discovered “by Christ alone”—“that pardoning mercy which is manifested in the gospel . . . is wholly treasured up in him and revealed by him. . . . [G]ospel grace and pardoning mercy is alone purchased by him, and revealed in him.”<sup>61</sup>

The unique glory of Christianity is the gospel of God’s grace toward those who acknowledge, rather than strive to make up for, their moral failing—and this grace, as Owen poignantly explains, shines forth most luminously in the work of the Son. Owen is careful at numerous points to avoid spotlighting the Son in a way that divorces him from the Father and the Spirit, repeatedly affirming the perichoretic interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity—to speak of one member is, in a sense, to speak of all. Yet Owen helps us to see that the supreme manifestation in Christ of all God’s saving purposes points toward a christocentric understanding of the gospel.

To sum up: Each of the theologians mentioned toward the beginning of this essay must be tested as to whether theirs is an appropriate Christocentrism. This essay does not intend uniformly to lump

<sup>56</sup> See Warfield, “Doctrine of the Trinity,” 152; Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 35–36; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 473 (cf. *ibid.*, 489–91).

<sup>57</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 475–76.

<sup>58</sup> See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008), 3:572; Kombo, *Doctrine of God*, 258–60.

<sup>59</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 80; Lai, *Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> *Communion with the Triune God*, 186.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 187. I am grateful to Gavin Ortlund for drawing my attention to these passages in Owen. Cf. Edwards, “It Would Have Been Better for Some if Christ Had Never Come to Save Sinners,” in *Glory and Honor of God*, 270.

together all those dubbed “christocentric.” Nevertheless, the NT teaches a kind of Christ-centeredness that is not only compatible with orthodox Trinitarianism but necessitated by it, since we come to know of the Trinity only through Christ and, reciprocally, because the Trinity itself is Christ-centered. We comprehend the Triune God through the lens of Christ (adequately, not exhaustively) and Christ through the lens of the triune God. And Owen has reminded us that it is in Christ’s work, orchestrated by the Father and effectually applied by the Spirit, that the great hope of the Christian faith—fully and freely accomplished redemption—lies. The distinction that many make between an appropriate “Christocentrism” and an unhealthy “christomonism” is therefore appropriate.<sup>62</sup> It is the former we are endorsing; that is, by “Christ-centered” we are not suggesting a focus on Christ to the neglect of the Father and the Spirit but to the deeper understanding of the Father and the Spirit. Congar’s maxim “No Christology without pneumatology”<sup>63</sup> is well-taken. Still, the unease some have expressed about Christocentrism is largely unnecessary, for we *are* called to be soundly Christ-centered.<sup>64</sup>

### 5. *What Kind of Christocentrism?*

What sort of Christ-centeredness, then, is appropriate? All through this essay we have noted the way theologians and Scripture “in some sense” affirm the propriety of centralizing Christ. This essay opened with a preliminary (and necessarily vague) definition of Christocentrism as “a way of constructing theology or an approach towards the doctrine of revelation in which the person and work of Christ plays a determining or central role.” We will now be more specific. What follows are five brief comments regarding the precise nature of a healthy Christocentrism.

1. *Hermeneutical Christocentrism.* Mature Christian interaction with the Bible necessarily reads and interprets it through a christological lens in which the incarnate Christ is seen to be the ultimate interpretive key to accessing the full meaning(s) of the biblical text. This is not to neglect the necessary illumination of the Spirit for faithful and fruitful reading; we are dealing with a self-conscious literary strategy that in no way denies the Spirit-dependent illumination prerequisite to authentic understanding and edification. A slew of literature might be mentioned here regarding christocentric hermeneutics, with many diverse and carefully nuanced views—some have been mentioned above. For our purposes we simply note what Jesus himself underscored when he explained to two depressed disciples that his own suffering and glorification fulfilled “all that the prophets have spoken”—and then, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25–27; cf. John 5:39–40, 46–47). “God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets,” Peter likewise preached, “that his Christ would suffer” (Acts 3:18; cf. vv. 21, 24; 1 Pet 1:10–11). The OT is united preparation for Christ; the NT is united witness to him. Jesus Christ is the “center” of Scripture in the sense that he is “the focal point that gathers all the rays of light that issue from Scripture.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> E.g., Lai, *Trinitarian Theology*, 38; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 178–80; Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 196.

<sup>63</sup> Yves M. J. Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (trans. David Smith; London: G. Chapman, 1986), 1.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Gerald O’Collins, “The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13. Cf. Elizabeth T. Groppe, *Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63.

<sup>65</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (trans. Donald Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 58. Cf. idem, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2: *The Variety and Unity of the Apostolic Witness to Christ* (trans. John E. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 58; James D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 25–26, 117.

Perhaps a more descriptive term than “christocentric,” then, in describing an evangelical hermeneutic, might be “christophotic” since Christ is the light (*phōs*) that illumines all of Scripture, or the even more clunky “christokleidic” since he is the interpretive key (*kleis*) by which the entire Bible is unlocked.

2. *Salvation-historical Christocentrism*. Closely related to the preceding point, which refers to how one understands the Bible, here we have in mind how one understands history, though of course the two significantly overlap. Salvation history—“the totality of reality seen as history which interprets ostensibly immanent phenomena as the historically visible expression of God’s personal sovereign purpose”<sup>66</sup>—is christocentric in the sense that Christ is the pinnacle from which all salvation history is to be viewed, the filter through which all salvation history passes, and the goal in which all salvation history culminates (Rom 16:25–26). He is the glue that holds all of history together in a meaningful way—a point expressed with particular elegance by Jonathan Edwards.<sup>67</sup>

3. *Homiletical Christocentrism*. Our brief foray into the NT highlighted the strikingly recurrent way in which Christ alone is set forth in *proclamation*. In Samaria Philip “proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:5). “Him we proclaim,” wrote Paul (Col 1:28). The apostle’s Christocentrism in Phil 1 is set in the context of *preaching* Christ (vv. 15, 17, 18). Time and again Christ is centralized as what is proclaimed, heralded, announced. Whittle away at Paul’s *euangelion*, and eventually one is left with this core reality: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.<sup>68</sup> Preaching on the christological portion of the creed, Luther remarked, “The whole gospel is contained in this article, for the gospel is nothing else but the preaching of Christ.”<sup>69</sup> To preach on any passage of the Bible, therefore, Old Testament or New, without relating the text at hand to Christ, is not merely an incomplete sermon but a failure to provide the key—often latent, sometimes explicit, always present—by which the biblical witness is to be expounded.<sup>70</sup> As Daniel Hyde has recently reminded us, moreover, Christ is not only the object but the subject in faithful preaching. Christian preaching is nothing less than Christ himself proclaiming his gospel through the preacher.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation-Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 113.

<sup>67</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 9: *A History of the Work of Redemption* (ed. John F. Wilson; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and see Edwards’ comments on this volume (originally a series of sermons) in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16: *Letters and Personal Writings* (ed. George S. Claghorn; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 727–28; idem, Miscellany 760 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18: *The Miscellanies: 501–832* (ed. Ava Chamberlain; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 406. See also Vos, “Theology of Paul,” 360; Théo Preiss, *Life in Christ* (trans. Harold Knight; SBT 13; London: SCM, 1957), 67–70.

<sup>68</sup> See B. B. Warfield, “The Christ that Paul Preached,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 235–52. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 103; Michael P. Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves: Paul on Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), esp. 154–63. Richard B. Gaffin’s study on the resurrection in Pauline theology (*Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* [2d ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987]) provides a salutary reminder that proclaiming Christ includes his entire work, his resurrection no less than his crucifixion. See also Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 136–71; Peter Stuhlmacher, “Christus Jesus ist hier, der gestorben ist, ja vielmehr, der auch auferweckt ist, der zur Rechten Gottes ist und uns vertritt,” in *Auferstehung—Resurrection* (ed. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger; WUNT 135; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2001), 355–57; Michael Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification, and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 40–59. J. Gresham Machen called Christ’s resurrection “the central fact of Paul’s gospel” (*The Origin of Paul’s Religion* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1925; repr., 1978], 145).

<sup>69</sup> *LW*, 51:165.

<sup>70</sup> See Charles Spurgeon’s exhortation to christocentric preaching in his *The Soul Winner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 78; also Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 74–77.

<sup>71</sup> Daniel R. Hyde, *In Living Color: Images of Christ and the Means of Grace* (Wyoming, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2009), 100–101.

4. *Evangelistic Christocentrism.* Though cognate to homiletical Christocentrism, here we have in view the work of all believers, not just preachers. For all Christians, relationships with non-believers must keep one goal as central: to hold out before them Christ. This is not anti-trinitarianism. It is faithfulness to the injunctions and examples of the NT. The NT's repeated theme of christocentric proclamation is again relevant here. While no power and clarity in communicating the gospel will prove effectual apart from the secret influences of the Holy Spirit, it is fundamentally Christ and him crucified that we are to present to our unbelieving friends and neighbors.

5. *Sanctifying Christocentrism.* Growth in godliness must conscientiously center on Christ. In the believer's self-consciousness the engine of increased degrees of holiness is fixing one's eyes on Christ and his finished work. The wise orchestration of the Father and the internal sanctifying influences of the Spirit are equally necessary in the total picture of spiritual growth, but neither constitutes the critical object of contemplation in the way Christ does.<sup>72</sup> It is in Jesus Christ that we most clearly and objectively view the heart of the gospel—that which is, according to 1 Cor 15:3, of first importance: “Christ died for our sins” (cf. Rom 5:6–8; 1 Pet 3:18). *And it is this gospel that generates growth.*<sup>73</sup> Before defining the gospel in this passage, Paul reminded the Corinthians that not only did they receive the gospel but they also “*have stood* [ἔσθήκατε]” in it and “*are being saved* [σώζεσθε]” by it (1 Cor 15:1–2). The gospel that Christ died for our sins is the daily meat and drink of growing Christians. It is not a ticket in, to be torn up; it is the air breathed, to be increasingly enjoyed. In confronting Peter's ethnic partiality, Paul wrote not that Peter—already a believer—needed to cultivate more effective discipleship strategies, but that his “conduct was not in step with *the truth of the gospel*” (Gal 2:14; cf. John 6:29; Col 1:6; 2 Pet 1:9). All three persons of the Trinity are integral to a believer's final salvation; had the Father not planned and executed the incarnation (Eph 1:3–6), Christ could never have helped us; and if the Spirit were not to apply salvation by uniting us to Christ, the Son's work would forever remain outside us (Rom 8:9–11; 1 John 4:13).<sup>74</sup> Yet if they hope to grow, Christians must fix their eyes on Jesus in a unique way vis-à-vis the Father and the Spirit (cf. Heb 12:1–2). The Son is central not only to the inauguration but also the working out of the Christian life.<sup>75</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Does Christocentrism—that is, christologically circumscribing how we read the Bible, view history, preach God's Word, share the gospel, and progress in holiness—reflect an asymmetrical trinitarianism? No—at least not an unhealthy one. As we submit our minds to the manifold witness of the NT and

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<sup>72</sup> Wright's appeal to trusting in the Spirit and not only in the Son is out of sync with the NT, which calls us to fix our eyes on Jesus. This gaze is made antecedently effectual by the Spirit, yet nowhere does the NT call us to *trust in* the Holy Spirit as we do in the Son, as Wright suggests (*Justification*, 107, 188).

<sup>73</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:528; 4:193–96, 242–52, 257–58; G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 64, 77–78, 93; William E. Hulme, *Counseling and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1956), 179–80, 184; Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 25; Bryan Chapell, “The Necessity of Preaching Grace for Progress in Sanctification,” in *All for Jesus: A Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary* (ed. Sean Michael Lucas and Robert Peterson; Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006), 47–60; J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 134; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 41–43, 55–57.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

<sup>75</sup> Duane A. Litfin explores christocentric education and whether such a descriptor neglects the Father or the Spirit, concluding it does not—Christ-centered education “posits the Son, the second Person of the Godhead, as the unifying key to all that humans can know or understand, such that in the end nothing can be adequately grasped apart from him” (*Conceiving the Christian College* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 37; cf. 64–65).



follow its lead in contemplating the Trinity through a christological lens and Christ through a trinitarian lens, we see that orthodox trinitarianism and self-conscious Christocentrism are not only congruent but mutually reinforcing.<sup>76</sup> While cheerfully affirming the co-equality, co-eternality, co-divinity and soteriological co-necessity of Father, Son, and Spirit, a Christ-centered approach to the Bible, history, and Christian living is not only illuminating for us but incumbent upon us in light of God's own self-revelation in Scripture.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Gerald Bray may neglect the appropriate Christocentrism called for in the NT in *The Doctrine of God* (Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove: IVP, 1993). In the section dealing with the unique personhood of the Son, Bray devotes his energies to the errors of Christocentrism (focusing on Barth [189–93]), and in his concluding chapter, entitled “Constructing an Evangelical Theology,” there is no mention of a need for any kind of Christocentrism (225–51). Muller’s sentiment that “Christocentrism” is an “imprudent” appellation for Protestant theology expresses a concern mainly that nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of Christocentrism not be anachronistically pressed on fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century thinkers, especially Calvin (“Note on ‘Christocentrism,’” 257–60).

<sup>77</sup> I am grateful to Paul Alexander, Brian Dennert, Brian Martin, Matt Newkirk, and Gavin Ortlund for their sharpening comments on an early draft of this essay.

# Bearing Sword in the State, Turning Cheek in the Church: A Reformed Two-Kingdoms Interpretation of Matthew 5:38–42<sup>1</sup>

— David VanDrunen —

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Among the many biblical passages that provoke controversial questions about Christian non-violence and cooperation with the sword-bearing state, perhaps none presses the issue as sharply as Matt 5:38–42. When Jesus prescribes turning the other cheek, giving up the garment, and going the second mile as an alternative to the *lex talionis*—the eye-for-eye principle of strict, proportionate justice—he addresses a key element of justice not only in the Mosaic law (Exod 21:22–25; Lev 24:18–21; Deut 19:21) but also in the Noahic covenant of Gen 9 and in countless human legal systems, such as the Law of Hammurabi and the Roman Law.<sup>2</sup> Applied literally and universally, Jesus' words leave little room for Christian participation in the coercive enforcement of justice in civil society. Yet NT texts such as Rom 13:1–7 continue to speak positively about civil government and its justice and about Christian submission under its regime. Interpreting Matt 5:38–42 in light of the broader biblical witness, therefore, has proven to be an arduous and controversial endeavor.

In recent years a number of eloquent writers have defended a rather literal reading of Matt 5:38–42 and surrounding verses. This often entails a non-violent or pacifist position that avoids cooperation with the civil state, though ordinarily its advocates seek not to withdraw from society but to develop a radical, peaceful, counter-intuitive strategy for effecting social transformation.<sup>3</sup> Into the present day, however, most Christian theologians have held that Christians may be faithful to the Sermon on the Mount even while circumspectly supporting the coercive enforcement of justice. They often defend this view through highlighting the hyperbolic character of verses such as 5:38–42, which Jesus did not necessarily intend to be performed literally.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper originally given at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics, Cambridge, UK, in September 2008. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent wide-ranging study of the *lex talionis* as a principle of justice in a variety of legal systems, see William Ian Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For the application of the *lex talionis* in the Code of Hammurabi, see §§196, 197, 200 in G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 2:77; for the Roman Law, see §8.2 of the Twelve Tables, available at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/twelve\\_tables.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/twelve_tables.asp).

<sup>3</sup> Among many examples see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 317–46; Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 132–40; and Walter Wink, "Jesus and the Non-violent Struggle of Our Time," *Louvain Studies* 18, no. 1 (1993): 3–20.

<sup>4</sup> Among recent examples see Nigel Biggar, "Specifying the Meaning: Jesus, the New Testament, and Violence," in *Recognising the Margins: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne* (ed. Werner Jeanrond and Andrew Mayes; Dublin: Columba, 2006);

My sympathies are clearly with the latter line of thought, though I defend the compatibility of the Sermon on the Mount with the continuing legitimacy of civil authority in a distinctive way. In this article I argue both for a strong—even literal—reading of Matt 5:38–42 and for the ongoing legitimate role for the sword-bearing state and Christian cooperation with it. Recognizing the *lex talionis* as the principle of strict retributive justice is crucial for my argument. Jesus truly decreed that the coercive application of the *lex talionis* was not to be pursued. Yet in doing so he did not intend to undermine civil authority or to prohibit Christians from supporting the work of the state. In Matt 5:38–42, Jesus announces that the pursuit of retributive justice has no place *in the kingdom of heaven*. Though the kingdom of heaven is ultimately an eschatological realm, to be fully revealed in the age to come, in Matthew Jesus points to *the church* as the particular community that embodies the kingdom’s way of life here and now. Many recent scholars argue against interpretations that limit the application of the Sermon on the Mount to the church.<sup>5</sup> Christians, indeed, are citizens of the kingdom in all that they do and should always seek opportunities to express the Sermon’s ethic of forgiveness and reconciliation. Nevertheless, I argue that in Matt 5:38–42 Jesus defines the unique character of his church and does not redefine (or eliminate) the state or his disciples’ basic responsibilities toward it. The state is to continue its work of coercively enforcing justice in civil society, with Christians’ support. But the church is a community that shuns the application of the *lex talionis*. In anticipation of the eschatological kingdom, the church is not only a non-violent community but also, even more importantly, a community defined by an ethic of forgiveness and mercy rather than by retributive justice.

I also claim that a two-kingdoms doctrine as commonly expressed in historic Reformed theology provides an effective theological framework for appreciating these exegetical conclusions. Though most people today do not readily associate Reformed Christianity with a two-kingdoms doctrine, the early Reformed tradition did develop two-kingdoms categories similar to, though also distinct from, the Lutheran tradition. I argue that this Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine better captures Jesus’ teaching in Matt 5:38–42 than does either a Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine or the neo-Calvinist paradigm popular in contemporary Reformed thought.

In order to make these arguments, I first consider some of the important context for Matt 5:38–42 earlier in the Gospel of Matthew. Then I address Jesus’ pronouncement that he has come to fulfill the law, and I interpret Matt 5:38–42 in this light. Finally I discuss how a Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine serves to put this biblical text in proper and useful theological setting.

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Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993), 131–32; D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 49–52; Jan Lambrecht, “The Sayings of Jesus on Nonviolence,” *Louvain Studies* 12, no. 4 (1987): 297–300; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, (3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988–97), 1:540–42, 566; and Stephen Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:17–48,” *CTR* 6 (1992): 48–50.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. Raymond O. Zorn; trans. H. de Jongste; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), 323, explicitly rejects the idea that Jesus’ commands in the Sermon have a “sphere of validity” in a “particular sector of human life,” such as the church (though I would not embrace phrases such as “sphere of validity” and “particular sector of human life” as a felicitous way to describe my own view). Also compare Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J. Bradford Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42–43, who argues against the idea that the Sermon is intended for those inside the church or for disciples to act differently toward those inside/outside the community.

### ***1. The Coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven: The Context of Matthew 5:38–42***

Interpreting and applying Matt 5:38–42 responsibly requires reading it in context. These five verses appear in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, which in turn appears in the context of Matthew's larger story about Jesus' ministry and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. In this section I first identify some important contextual considerations in the chapters leading up to the Sermon in Matt 5–7 and then I highlight some significant contextual factors in the Sermon itself. In these texts the evangelist focuses our attention upon the coming of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:38–42 must be read against the background of Jesus' spectacular appearance and the establishment of his eschatological kingdom.

A very significant event prior to the Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matt 4:12–17: Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been thrown into prison; he goes as a light shining in dark lands; and he begins to preach that the kingdom of heaven is near. The significance of John's imprisonment can hardly be overestimated. Matthew 3 portrays John as an OT prophet, yet John himself tells us that one greater than he is about to come (3:11–12). Matthew immediately identifies Jesus, through the account of his baptism, as the one who is greater than John (3:13–17). The sequence in Matt 4 is striking: John, the OT prophet, is arrested and his ministry ends, and *only at that point* does Jesus begin his own ministry. Something very important has ended and something even more important has begun. John is the *last* of the OT prophets (11:13–14), and when he passes from the scene an eschatologically new era commences.

Matthew's opening description of the coming of the kingdom after John's arrest is nothing short of spectacular. The end of the old era has yielded to something radically new. Jesus first goes to a land of darkness described as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:13–16). Though in accord with OT prophecy (Isa 9:1–2), this begins the Matthean theme of the Gentile inclusion that far surpassed anyone's expectations. Then after calling his first disciples, Jesus goes around not only teaching but also casting out demons and healing multitudes who were sick (4:23–24). Israel's prophets had performed miracles, but the sheer variety and intensity of Jesus' work is something the people had never seen. The end of Matt 4 tells us that huge crowds from all over flocked to Jesus.

Highlighting the spectacular newness of the coming of the kingdom is Matthew's peculiar nomenclature: Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of *heaven*. I do not believe that there is any good reason to think that the kingdom of heaven in Matthew refers to something other than the "kingdom of God" in the other Synoptics, but the difference in terminology still demands explanation. The prominence of the themes of "heaven" and "earth" in his gospel suggest that Matthew was not avoiding use of the divine name out of deference to his Jewish readers but that he had crucial theological purposes in mind.<sup>6</sup> Suffice it to say here that this kingdom that Jesus proclaims is not an earthly kingdom. His kingdom is an eschatological realm that breaks into this earth from another world. Readers' impression of the heavenly nature of this kingdom is intensified when Jesus goes up on a mountain to begin his Sermon (5:1). In the OT, the mountain was the place where heaven met earth, the place where God dwelt.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an extensive argument along these lines, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Among many OT examples are Pss 24, 48, and 87 and Isa 2:2–3. This theme clearly continues through Matthew's gospel, where every mountain scene conveys what the ascended Jesus is presently doing in heaven (see 14:23; 15:29; 28:16). Hence the Sermon on the Mount is a message from heaven to earth. Davies and Allison call the mount of Matt 5–7 a symbolic

This background concerning Jesus' appearance and the announcement of the kingdom of heaven in Matt 3–4 prepares us to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is all about Jesus and his kingdom.<sup>8</sup> Jesus ascends the mountain to teach as a second and much greater Moses (5:1) and at the end of the Sermon the crowds are astounded, not so much at the content of the teaching as at *Jesus himself* and the unique authority with which he taught (7:28–29). The opening and closing Beatitudes proclaim people blessed precisely because the kingdom of heaven is theirs (5:3, 10), and throughout the Sermon Jesus repeatedly points to the kingdom as what is sought and experienced in following the Sermon's exhortations (5:19–20; 6:10, 33; 7:21). The Sermon on the Mount does not legislate a universal human ethic. It sets forth a way of life for those who know and acknowledge Jesus and to whom the kingdom belongs. It is noteworthy that though the crowds are evidently within earshot (hence 7:28–29), he actually teaches only his disciples (5:2), those who have already followed him (see 4:18–22), and it is striking that those who receive these commands *already possess* the kingdom of heaven (5:3, 10) and *are already* the salt of the earth and light of the world (5:13–14). Jesus has arrived, the kingdom of heaven has drawn near, and disciples graciously plucked by Jesus from the midst of fallen humanity have been told that they are blessed before receiving a single command.

## 2. *The Lex Talionis and the Fulfillment of the Law*

With our eyes focused upon the eschatologically charged coming of Jesus and his kingdom we now turn to the interpretation of Matt 5:38–42 itself. This text falls in the midst of Jesus' words about the law and the prophets (5:17–20) followed by the so-called antitheses (5:21–48). As befits the character of his coming, Jesus does not give commands that *clarify* the Mosaic law. He gives commands that are, in many cases, new and different from the Mosaic law, yet which simultaneously reflect the eschatological *fulfillment* of the law accomplished through his coming. In 5:38–42 Jesus abolishes the *lex talionis* from his kingdom because his own work satisfies its just demands once and for all.

Crucial for understanding 5:38–42 is Jesus' programmatic statement in 5:17 that introduces his subsequent commands: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." A common reading of this verse in my own Reformed tradition is that Jesus is about to clarify the Mosaic law in response to Pharisaical corruption of Moses.<sup>9</sup> While this reading has the virtue of guarding against denigration of the Mosaic law, it is not an adequate interpretation of Jesus' words. A general difficulty with this reading is that it fails to reckon with the radical, eschatological newness of the coming of Jesus and his kingdom so emphasized in the preceding texts in Matthew considered above. Matthew 5:17 itself reinforces this sense of eschatological newness. The first use of the key Synoptic phrase, "I have come," for example, hints at Jesus' heavenly origin (and hence his authority to say what he is saying) and indicates that Jesus is about to reveal a central

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mountain, the mount of revelation (*Matthew*, 1:423).

<sup>8</sup> According to Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (trans. Norman Perrin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 20–26, 30, the Sermon has to be read as *didache* preceded by something else, namely, the *kerygma* of the gospel. The protasis "Your sins are forgiven" should be added to every command of the Sermon.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, chap. 7, presents a classic and extended argument for the Sermon as *interpreting* the Mosaic law. Along similar lines, John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (trans. William Pringle; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:281–83, says that the scribes and Pharisees confined the law to outward duties only and that Christ intended to correct false interpretation of the law and restore its pure meaning, having no design to alter or innovate anything in the law.

purpose of his ministry.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Jesus' denial that he has come to abolish the law or the prophets indirectly offers further evidence of the spectacular newness of the kingdom of heaven: apparently what has transpired thus far in Matthew's story has given some people the impression that Jesus *has* come to abolish something in the OT.

More concretely, the way in which Jesus' commands unfold in 5:21–48 is ultimately incompatible with reading them as clarification of the Mosaic law over against corrupt Jewish interpretation. For one thing, all six of Jesus' "You have heard" statements either quote or paraphrase the actual teaching of the Mosaic law, not contemporary Jewish interpretation of it.<sup>11</sup> Jesus presents his exhortations in comparison with those of the Mosaic law itself. Second, however much the first two antitheses are amenable to the view that Jesus is purifying the interpretation of the law, the last four antitheses cannot reasonably bear such a reading. Jesus does show the inward demands of the prohibition of murder and adultery in the first two antitheses, but whereas the Mosaic law prescribed procedures for divorce, oath-taking, just retaliation, and destruction of enemies, Jesus proscribes these very actions. To say, for example, that what Moses really intended by writing "keep your oaths" was that the Israelites should not swear at all strains the imagination. Jesus' statement about divorce in 5:31–32, furthermore, cannot be an elaboration of the OT law since it presumes that the death penalty is not applied against adulterers.

A better reading of 5:17 is that Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets by accomplishing all of the things that the OT prophesied. To this point in his gospel Matthew has already labored to show that Jesus' actions constitute a turning of the ages and bring to pass what the OT foretold and anticipated (1:22–23; 2:5–6, 15, 17, 23; 3:3, 15; 4:4, 6–7, 10, 14–16), and this theme continues in all sorts of ways subsequent to the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>12</sup> Jesus' words in 5:18 confirm an historical and eschatological interpretation of "fulfill" in 5:17 by saying "until heaven and earth disappear" and "until everything is accomplished" (or "comes to pass"). Jesus therefore indicates in 5:17 that he is neither abolishing the Hebrew Scriptures nor simply purifying them from corrupt interpretation. By his deeds and here also by his words, Jesus brings the law and the prophets to historical and eschatological fulfillment.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, as the kingdom of heaven is something strikingly new, so the Sermon on the Mount, the ethic of this kingdom, proclaims a way of life that is eschatologically new. It is different from the way of life under Moses, though in a manner that accomplishes rather than thwarts God's larger purposes in giving the law and the prophets. How, exactly, does this shape our interpretation of Jesus' handling of the *lex talionis* in 5:38–42?

First, we must consider how Jesus' commands in 5:38–42 are *different* from the *lex talionis* as imposed in the Mosaic law. The "eye for an eye" formula appears three times in the Mosaic law and is evidently a cornerstone of its jurisprudence. It was likely not intended to be applied in an overtly

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<sup>10</sup> See Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). According to Warren Carter, "Jesus' 'I Have Come' Statements in Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 60 (2001): 44–62, the 'I have come sayings' in Matthew are meant to connect to the mission announced in 1:21–23 concerning salvation from sin and the presence of God.

<sup>11</sup> This claim is not obvious with respect to the last statement, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." I take this to be a paraphrase of Israel's obligation to wage *cherem* warfare against the Gentile occupants of the Holy Land. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:549–50, who argue that the sentiment of hating enemies is indeed present in the OT.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., 8:1–4; 8:5–13; 9:14–17; 11:7–14, 20–24; 12:1–8, 18–21, 38–42; 13:16–18; 15:21–28; 16:1–4; 21:33–46; 23:37–39.

<sup>13</sup> For a summary of the exegetical options concerning "fulfillment" in 5:17, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:485–86. For arguments generally supportive of the interpretation that I offer, see, e.g., Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:481–509; and Westerholm, "The Law in the Sermon on the Mount," 52–53.

literal way, but represented a key legal principle: justice was to be strict, proportionate, and retributive.<sup>14</sup> As such it encapsulated, on a personal level, the central Mosaic theme that Israel would be justly rewarded in the land if they faithfully obeyed God's law and would be justly (severely) punished if they disobeyed.<sup>15</sup> However exactly one interprets Jesus' command not to resist the evil-doer (5:39–42)—to which I return below—Jesus is certainly not instructing his disciples in the most effective way to impose strict retributive justice against those who harm them. Jesus is legislating a principle *different* from the principle of proportionate justice.

In fact, matters of justice and OT judicial life are raised by all six of the Mosaic commands that Jesus mentions in Matt 5:21–48. The one who murders will be liable to judgment (5:21). A legal bill or certificate is required for divorce (5:31). A central purpose of OT oaths was to secure truth-telling in court (5:33; see Exod 22:11; Num 5:19–21). And the command to hate one's enemy—through *cherem* warfare against the Gentile occupants of the Holy Land—was the ultimate expression of God's retributive justice against the abomination of sin. Jesus even seems to ratchet up the forensic tension as Matt 5 moves along. Oaths ensured that trustworthy evidence would be presented to the court; the *lex talionis* provided a basic standard of justice for rendering the verdict; and *cherem* warfare was the implementation of strict, merciless justice on a macro level.

Jesus' commands stand in sharp contrast. His kingdom is marked by the absence of judgment.<sup>16</sup> Its citizens' way of life is so pure that there is no possible ground for anyone to bring judgment against them, and when others are in conflict with them they seek *reconciliation* with the wrongdoers, not judgment against them. The Mosaic law occasionally touched upon internal matters of the heart, but its primary focus was on external matters. Its purpose was to establish and regulate a theocracy, a geopolitical entity in which justice was maintained among its inhabitants. But this radically new kingdom that Jesus has announced is of a very different nature. It does not break into history as a theocratic, geopolitical realm and thus focus on external conduct and seek the strict enforcement of justice.

The disciples of Jesus certainly do not murder or commit adultery, but they also shun sinful anger and lustful glances, matters which are beyond the jurisdiction of any civil justice system. Instead of seeking legal termination of troublesome marriages, they seek to maintain marital relationships. Instead of going to court to establish truth by oath, they tell the truth at all times. Instead of implementing just retaliation against the tortfeasor, they themselves bear the proportionate payback. Instead of wiping out the foreigner from the holy land, their love extends indiscriminately. The Mosaic law, it should be noted, *required* theocratic Israel to pursue precise and proportionate justice in external matters through oath-taking, the *lex talionis*, and *cherem* warfare. These commands were bound up with the nature and purpose of the old covenant community. But Jesus announces that in his kingdom there is perfect and holistic righteousness and no pursuit of precise and proportionate justice in external matters through

<sup>14</sup> Among recent studies of the *lex talionis* in the Mosaic law, see James F. Davis, *Lex Talionis in Early Judaism and the Exhortation of Jesus in Matthew 5.38–42* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), chap. 3. For counter-arguments to his thesis that the Mosaic *lex talionis* was originally meant to be applied literally, see, e.g., Meredith G. Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," *JETS* 20 (1977): 197; and Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 149–50. On the *lex talionis* as a principle of proportionate justice, see generally Miller, *Eye for an Eye*; and David VanDrunen, "Natural Law, the *Lex Talionis*, and the Power of the Sword" (forthcoming, *Liberty University Law Review*).

<sup>15</sup> For various explorations of this theme, see *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Westerholm goes through the antitheses one by one and notes that the things prescribed in the law are foundational and necessary for human society, but Jesus' commands transcend them in ways that human legislation could not accomplish. See "The Law in the Sermon on the Mount," 52–55.

these various means. Jesus' kingdom is of a radically new and different nature and these things have no place within it.

My interpretation of 5:17, however, indicates that Jesus' commands in 5:38–42 not only are *different* from the Mosaic *lex talionis* but also reflect the eschatological *fulfillment* (rather than simple abrogation) of it. How is this the case? It is significant to note that Jesus does not tell his disciples to ignore and walk away from the person who harms them, but to take a second slap, to give up a second garment, to go a second mile. The *lex talionis* prescribes a second action that is proportionate to the first action: the person who causes the injury is to receive the same injury in return. Jesus' words in 5:38–42 preserve the twofold action and the proportionality of the *lex talionis*. The difference is that he exhorts his disciples to bear the second, retaliatory action *themselves*.<sup>17</sup> A proportionate penalty is still borne, but the wronged party rather than the wrongdoer endures it. This reflects the larger Matthean theme that Jesus' disciples must imitate Jesus in his suffering at the hands of sinners. Jesus has already told them that suffering is their lot in the present age (5:10–12), and later he explains that as he will go to the cross so also they must bear the cross (16:24–26). Matthew's gospel alludes to, though does not explain in detail, the substitutionary atonement, Jesus' dying on behalf of his people to secure the forgiveness of their sins (see 20:28; 26:28).<sup>18</sup> Human beings, as it were, slapped God in the face through their sin, and God responded with the *lex talionis*—not by justly slapping them back but by bearing that retaliatory slap himself through Jesus. God's saving action in Jesus satisfies retributive talionic justice once and for all. By bearing in their own bodies the just penalty due to wrongdoers in order to bring healing and reconciliation, Jesus' disciples are privileged to show forth God's gracious action toward them in Christ. In this way Jesus' words in Matt 5 reflect not the abolition but the fulfillment of the *lex talionis*. The way of life of Jesus' kingdom is, quite literally, marked by refusal to seek just retribution against the wrongdoer and willingly suffering for the sake of Christ.

### ***3. The Kingdom of Heaven and the Establishment of the Church***

The conclusion to the previous section highlights an important point: Matt 5:38–42—and the entire Sermon on the Mount—is to be put into practice here and now. The Sermon's ethic is indeed heavenly and not of this age. It prescribes an ethic of holistic perfection (5:48), and the hungering and thirsting of Jesus' disciples for righteousness awaits future satiation (5:6). Yet Jesus emphasizes that his commands should be obeyed in the present (5:19–20; 7:20–21, 24–27), and the very way in which he articulates his kingdom's ethic presumes the presence of the sin and conflict of this world. The Sermon, therefore, is a heavenly ethic that the citizens of the kingdom seek to implement in the present evil age. How, specifically, are the non-violent and non-retributive commands of Matt 5:38–42 to be carried out here and now? The answer to this question depends significantly upon Matthew's teaching about the *church*.

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<sup>17</sup> A similar point is made by Michael Winger, "Hard Sayings," *ExpTim* 115 (2004): 272: "The principle of proportionate retribution, carefully noted in Matthew, is up-ended: in each of the examples the injured person neatly doubles the injury received, as though following the rule but supplying himself the eye that is to be given for the eye, the tooth for the tooth. The calculation is the same; the price is paid; but the retribution—the thesis and point of the commandment—is cancelled out. Judicial process is acknowledged, yet ignored . . ." Also relevant may be Westerholm, "The Law in the Sermon on the Mount," 46: since the Sermon must be read in light of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and since the kingdom of heaven is about righteousness, we must remember that Jesus offered his life for the forgiveness of sins (see 1:21; 20:28; 26:28).

<sup>18</sup> Note the relation of Mark 10:45 (a parallel to Matt 20:28) with the *lex talionis*, as discussed in Simon Gathercole, "The Cross and Substitutionary Atonement," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11 (Summer 2007): 70–71.



Understanding the application of 5:38–42 first requires recognition that the Sermon is not an individual code of conduct but the way of life of a kingdom, of a community. The Mosaic law was not an individual code of conduct but could be practiced only in the context of the community of theocratic Israel, and thus too the commands of Jesus can be carried out only in the context of participation in this new and unique heavenly kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount itself does not identify how and where this heavenly kingdom is to find communal expression in the present age. We must again read 5:38–42 in the broader context of Matthew’s gospel and the whole NT.

Matthew’s gospel makes clear, first of all, that social-political life in general is not the communal context in which the kingdom of heaven is made manifest and experienced, and thus where its non-violent and non-retributive ethic is to be implemented. Jesus commends the great faith of a centurion (8:10), yet gives not the slightest hint that this faith is incompatible with his inherently violent occupation. Other places in the NT are similar (see Acts 10:1–11:18). Later in Matthew the Pharisees give Jesus perfect opportunity to strip Caesar of his legitimate civil authority. But though Jesus strips Caesar of divine pretensions, he implicitly acknowledges his authority to levy taxes (enforcement of which requires the threat of coercion) (22:15–22). Elsewhere the NT affirms this authority much more explicitly (see Rom 13:1–7). The whole of Matthew’s gospel, therefore, indicates that Jesus’ prohibition of the *lex talionis* in his kingdom does not mean the end of ordinary civil order or the end of his disciples’ participation in the coercive enforcement of civil justice.

In hindsight Matt 5 itself seems perfectly compatible with such a conclusion when we remember that the *lex talionis* was the foundational principle of justice not only in the Mosaic covenant but also in the Noahic covenant of Gen 9: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” The *lex talionis* is a good, righteous, and upright judicial standard. Matthew 5 proclaims only that the coming of the kingdom brings the *Mosaic covenant* to a consummated conclusion. The coming of the kingdom means the end of the Mosaic theocracy and the *Mosaic lex talionis*. Jesus says nothing about his kingdom altering the civil order that the Noahic covenant promised to *all* living creatures (Gen 9:9–10, 12, 15–17) as an “everlasting” covenant to be in effect “as long as the earth endures” (Gen 8:22; 9:16).<sup>19</sup> It seems that the eschatological ethic of the heavenly kingdom must be practiced by Jesus’ disciples here and now even while coercive civil justice continues uninterrupted and his disciples have some share in it.

If Matt 5:38–42 leaves the civil judicial order intact then where is its non-retributive ethic particularly to be manifest? The Gospel of Matthew points us to the *church* as the community where the life and power of the kingdom of heaven were to be experienced by Jesus’ disciples. Matthew does not equate the kingdom and the church, but he points to the church as the manifestation of the kingdom in the present age.<sup>20</sup> Matthew 16:18–19 and 18:15–20 are key, the only places in the four Gospels

<sup>19</sup> Here I follow a long line of Reformed theologians who interpret the Noahic covenant as a covenant of common grace rather than of special, saving grace. Among modern proponents, see A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1945), 11–100; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3: *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 218–19; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 56, 62–63; and Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age, 2000), 164, 244–62. I defend this position in David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, forthcoming), chap. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Though the position that I defend here is different in some respects from that of Ridderbos, as cited above, his basic summary of the relationship between the kingdom and the church is agreeable to me, as far as it goes: “The *ekklesia* is the community of those who, as the true people of God, receive the gifts of the kingdom of heaven provisionally now already since the Messiah has come, and one day in the state of perfection at the *parousia* of the Son of Man” (*The Coming of the Kingdom*,

where the word ἐκκλησία appears. The fact that the first of these passages immediately follows Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, a crucial turning-point in Matthew's gospel, leaves little doubt that this introduction to the church is of no small importance to the evangelist's larger message.

These passages set forth several aspects of the relationship between the church and kingdom. First, in bestowing "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" upon the church through Peter (16:18–19), Jesus houses the power and authority of his kingdom in the church's ministry. If the use of these keys refers to the work of a steward, then the administration of the affairs of the heavenly kingdom is executed from earth in the church.<sup>21</sup>

Second, the pregnant words, "whatever you bind on earth *shall have been bound* in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *shall have been loosed* in heaven" (my translation),<sup>22</sup> disclose both the nature of the keys (and hence the church's ministry) and the relationship between the kingdom in heaven and the church on earth. Given contemporary Jewish use of the expression, "binding and loosing" likely refers to authoritative teaching.<sup>23</sup> Hence the exercise of the keys seems to be what is sometimes called "the ministry of the word." At least in the context of 18:18, furthermore, "binding and loosing" pertains especially to admission to and expulsion from the kingdom. Hence the exercise of the keys in the church through faithful and authoritative teaching and response to it determines kingdom membership. More precisely, the use of the future perfect ("*shall have been bound/loosed*") indicates that what is first true in heaven becomes manifest on earth. The judgment once and for all rendered in heaven on account of Jesus' vicarious death becomes effective on earth through the exercise of the church's keys.

Third, this sense that the church is the community where the kingdom of heaven touches and manifests itself on earth is confirmed in 18:19–20: "I tell you that if two of you *on earth* agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father *in heaven*. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." In the humble assembly of the church on earth the power of God in heaven is revealed. No wonder that this is the case: the king of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus himself, promises to be among this assembly.

Fourth, the nature of the disciplinary procedure outlined in 18:15–17 powerfully confirms all of this. I argued above that the so-called antitheses of Matt 5 describe a kingdom whose way of life is

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354). A potential objection to the way that I associate the kingdom and the church in what follows is the parable of the weeds (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43), which identifies "the field" where the good and wicked intermingle as "the world." This is arguably not subject to a church-centered interpretation of the kingdom; see Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 345–46. For a counter case, with which I am inclined to agree, see Robert K. McIver, "The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43) and the Relationship between the Kingdom and the Church as Portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 114 (1995): 643–59.

<sup>21</sup> How exactly to understand the keys and their work is debated. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 81, argues that the keys are those of the house-steward (not gate-keeper) and hence pertain to administration of the affairs of the house in general (compare Isa 22:22; Rev 3:7), which means in turn that the things done on earth are recognized in heaven; thus, it must be possible to call the church the kingdom. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 359–60, takes a somewhat different view, that of entry into the kingdom through opening and shutting. Joel Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18–19)," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 451, notes the predominance of the halakic interpretation of 'binding and loosing' (referring to teaching authority), even among those taking a disciplinary view of 18:18. In my judgment, 18:18 should shed light on how we should read the same phrase in 16:19, suggesting that administering the house and determining membership are in view in Matt 16. Perhaps several of the varying interpretations of the keys are aspects of the broader truth, if authoritative teaching in the church (a ministration of the Scriptures) is "the keys" and through this ministration of the Scriptures entry (or non-entry) into the kingdom is secured.

<sup>22</sup> In defense of taking this as a future perfect periphrasis, see, e.g., Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom," 448–49.

<sup>23</sup> Again, see Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom," 451.

marked not by seeking justice when sin and conflict arise but by seeking reconciliation and restoration. Matthew 18:15–17 describes exactly this way of life put into practice *in the church*. The emergence of sin and conflict provokes not retributive justice but *three* attempts at reconciliation (and the surrounding pericopes, 18:10–14 and 18:21–35, reinforce the centrality of mercy and forgiveness in Jesus’ kingdom).<sup>24</sup> The only weapons ever wielded are the keys—the word of God—and never a sword. Even when “excommunication” becomes necessary in the extreme case, it does not take the form of punishment or retaliation but of recognizing what has already been decreed in heaven, namely, that a person is simply not a citizen of the kingdom. Additionally, the instruction to “treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” indicates that how Jesus’ disciples will conduct themselves in relation to others in the church will be different from how they deal with others outside the church.

In light of these things we may conclude that though Matt 5:38–42 does not strip civil authority of its legitimacy or prohibit Jesus’ disciples from either submitting to it (e.g., through paying taxes) or supporting its work (e.g., through military service), this text does demand a rather literal implementation of its commands. The retributive justice expressed in the *lex talionis* has no place in Jesus’ kingdom. The church, the present manifestation of the life and power of the kingdom of heaven, should be characterized by the reconciliatory and forgiving—rather than violent and retaliatory—ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. The “church” here in Matt 16 and 18 focuses not upon the people of God scattered in the world through the week but to the institutional and formal gathering of those people, particularly in worship and discipline. This ecclesial community is uniquely to embody the non-retaliatory ethic of the kingdom of heaven.

This interpretation resonates with the rest of the NT. Acts and the epistles tell us a great deal about the formation and character of the church, but 1 Cor 5 and 2 Cor 2 deserve special note. These chapters concretely describe the early church’s implementation of the disciplinary procedure set forth in Matt 18, which itself reflects 5:38–42. The goal of what Paul commends is reconciliation and forgiveness rather than retaliatory justice (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 2:6–11). The instrument of discipline is only the word, not the sword (1 Cor 5:3–5). And the whole process presumes a distinction between the world and the church and between the Christian’s relationships with those in the church and with those in the world (1 Cor 5:9–11). Here is a later NT example, then, of how the ethic of the kingdom of heaven is to be manifest uniquely in the church here and now.

#### ***4. Matthew 5:38–42 and the Two Kingdoms***

In the previous sections I have argued that Jesus set forth a non-violent and non-retaliatory ethic not designed to overturn the pursuit of civil justice but intended to shape the way of life of his church, the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven in the present age. The question remains how best to communicate this exegetical claim theologically. I suggest that a two-kingdoms doctrine, as developed in historic Reformed theology, provides very helpful theological categories for articulating my conclusions from Matt 5:38–42. Furthermore, my interpretation of Matt 5:38–42, if sound, provides important biblical foundation for this doctrine.

Speaking of a *Reformed* two-kingdoms doctrine may seem odd to many readers, for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the two-kingdoms doctrine is often taken as a distinctively Lutheran idea.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See the helpful observations on this point in McIver, “The Parable of the Weeds,” 652–53.

<sup>25</sup> Among recent examples explicitly contrasting the Reformed tradition with the Lutheran two-kingdoms tradition,

On the other hand, the dominant paradigm in many Reformed circles in recent years has been various versions of a neo-Calvinist or transformationist vision, which tends to emphasize the universal extension of the kingdom of God in conjunction with God's present redeeming of all things in Christ.<sup>26</sup> I have argued in detail elsewhere that there is in fact a Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms that is similar to, though also distinct from, the Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine.<sup>27</sup> Here I will simply summarize that Reformed doctrine and then suggest why this paradigm better captures Jesus' teaching in Matt 5:38–42 than does either the Lutheran two-kingdoms or contemporary Reformed neo-Calvinist paradigms.

The traditional Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms teaches that God rules all things in his Son, yet does so in two fundamentally different ways. As the creator and sustainer, through his Son as the eternal Logos, he rules over all human beings in the *civil* kingdom. This civil kingdom consists of a range of non-ecclesiastical cultural endeavors and institutions, among which the state has particular prominence. As redeemer, through his Son as the incarnate God-Man, God rules the other kingdom, sometimes referred to as the *spiritual* kingdom. This spiritual kingdom is essentially heavenly and eschatological, but has broken into history and is now expressed institutionally in the church. Both kingdoms are good, God-ordained, and regulated by divine law, and believers participate in both kingdoms during the present age. From this distinction between two kingdoms by which God rules the world, Reformed orthodox theology derived a series of distinctions between political and ecclesiastical authority. One key distinction was that while the state wields power through the physical sword, the church exercises authority only through the non-coercive ministry of word and sacrament.

One way in which this historic Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine differed from traditional Lutheran formulations lies in the application of the law-gospel distinction. Lutherans have often associated the kingdom of God's left hand (generally analogous to the Reformed conception of the civil kingdom) with the law (that is, what God commands) and associated the kingdom of God's right hand (generally analogous to the Reformed conception of the spiritual kingdom) with the gospel (that is, what God promises). To many Lutherans this meant that areas of the church's life that bore the character of law—such as ecclesiastical government or discipline—belonged to the kingdom of the left hand, and thus in many Lutheran lands the civil government took oversight of them.<sup>28</sup> In distinction, the Reformed

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see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33–36; and David M. Smolin, "A House Divided? Anabaptist and Lutheran Perspectives on the Sword," in *Christian Perspectives on Legal Thought* (ed. Michael W. McConnell, Robert F. Cochran, Jr., and Angela C. Carmella; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 374–81. Also see John M. Frame, *The Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008), 609–13, who treats it as primarily a Lutheran idea (admitting that Calvin held a view very similar to Luther's two-kingdoms doctrine).

<sup>26</sup> This vision has been articulately defended recently, e.g., in Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); and Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> See David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For a few examples from Reformation and post-Reformation Reformed theologians, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19.15; 4.20.1; George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming; or, The Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated* (London: 1646; reprinted Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1985), 85–114 (Book 2, Chaps. 4–7); and Francis Turretin (1623–87), *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; trans. George Musgrave Giger; 3 vols.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992–97), 2:486–90.

<sup>28</sup> On ecclesiastical government in Lutheran lands, see Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution, II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2003), 40–41, 58; and John Witte Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 110. Luther famously developed his understanding of the "two kingdoms" and "two governments" in Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Walther I. Brandt; Philadelphia:

typically saw ecclesiastical government and discipline as vital aspects of the identity of the church, the present institutional manifestation of the spiritual kingdom. The church was to take full responsibility for its government and discipline and not cede jurisdiction to the state. For the Reformed the church as the spiritual kingdom of Christ was characterized by both law and gospel (though by the law primarily in its “third use,” that is, as a fitting response to the gospel).

This Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine, as I have briefly summarized it, finds strong exegetical foundation in Matt 5:38–42, read in its Matthean context. Jesus announced the coming of his kingdom. Like the spiritual kingdom of historic Reformed theology, this was a heavenly and eschatological kingdom, yet one breaking into this present age and finding institutional expression in the life and ministry of the church. This kingdom, furthermore, like the Reformed spiritual kingdom, has a distinctive ethic characterized by forgiveness and reconciliation, not by retributive justice. It is promulgated not through the violent coercion of the sword but by the word and sacraments, the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom in Matthew, finally, came not to abolish civil enforcement of justice or Christians’ participation in that work, but to establish a distinctive ecclesial community in anticipation of the full manifestation of the kingdom on the last day. The Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine expresses these ideas as well. The church exists not to replace the state or to usurp and modify its functions, but recognizes civil authority as already established by God and serving useful, though temporal, purposes in the present age.

The Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine captures the teaching of Matt 5:38–42 better than the Lutheran doctrine, in short, because it recognizes that a distinctive ethic is a crucial aspect of the kingdom of heaven, an ethic that should be beautifully manifested in the discipline of church. Church discipline, which drives at the repentance and reconciliation of sinners, is decidedly different from the retributive justice enforced by the state. The state, which owes its existence not to the coming of the kingdom in the work of Christ, but to God’s providential upholding of the world through the Noahic covenant, does not have the resources to minister forgiveness to wayward rebels. At the same time, I suggest that a Reformed two-kingdoms doctrine also captures the meaning of Matt 5:38–42 better than a contemporary neo-Calvinist or transformationist paradigm. The kingdom of heaven came not in order to redeem all institutions and spheres of life in this present world, but to redeem sinners and to gather them into an ecclesial community, until the day when the civil institutions of this age are brought to a sudden end. In Matthew Jesus announced a kingdom way of life strikingly different from the state’s task of enforcing retributive justice, yet did not question the ongoing existence of civil authority and believers’ participation in its work. Had Jesus intended the state to be transformed by the ethic of the kingdom of heaven, the state would presumably have to give up its work of coercive enforcement of retributive justice, for Matt 5:38–42 proclaims that this has no place in his kingdom. Yet in Matthew Jesus himself indicates that the state has continuing authority to pursue this work, a point that Paul makes explicitly (e.g., Rom 13:1–7).

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Muhlenberg, 1962), 45:81–139. Important studies of Luther’s concept of the two kingdoms include Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms* (trans. Karl H. Hertz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (ed. and trans. Roy A. Harrisville; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 314–24; and William Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

### 5. *Concluding Practical Reflections*

The issues under consideration in this article raise many practical questions about the Christian life in the church and world. I conclude by offering a few brief reflections on some important practical issues.

First, Christians concerned to follow the commands of Jesus in the Sermon must be passionate first and foremost about the life and ministry of the church. They must expend their energy in faithfully proclaiming the gospel and bringing the peaceful, reconciliation-seeking way of life to bear within the church community. The church must express the reality of the kingdom of heaven, making disciples as it baptizes and teaches (28:19–20).

Second, while Christians' passion for the kingdom through the church relativizes the importance of and their interest in the ordinary affairs and institutions of this world (e.g., Matt 6:19–21, 25–34; 8:18–22; 10:34–39; 12:46–50; 13:44–46; 19:16–30; 24:37–41), they continue to have obligations within it. Christians remain citizens of the kingdom of heaven at all times and must certainly seek ways to express their Christ-like spirit of love and forgiveness in all sorts of activities. How exactly they will do this cannot be specified in advance. But they must remember that enforcement of justice through the threat of coercion remains the primary means by which civil order is maintained. The civil kingdom continues to exist as a legitimate divine institution. To despise, ignore, or undermine it is not faithful Christian discipleship.

Finally, the legitimacy of self-defense depends upon the context: am I being assailed as just another citizen of the civil kingdom or as a disciple of Jesus and hence as a member of the church? If an individual Christian is threatened by a burglar who breaks into his home to steal his property, this is an ordinary civil matter, and the Christian (who, in this setting, just happens to be a Christian) is free (and perhaps even obligated?) to defend himself or seek coercive legal remedy. But if an individual Christian is threatened because of her Christian faith, because she is identified with Christ as a member of his church, then is non-retaliation perhaps the appropriate response? The context of Matt 5:38–42 suggests an affirmative answer. Jesus most likely envisions his disciples being slapped, stripped, and conscripted not in ordinary civil disputes but specifically *as his disciples*: “Blessed are those who are persecuted *because of righteousness*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you *because of me*” (5:10–11).<sup>29</sup> The apostolic example suggests that Christians, in the face of state action, may peaceably appeal to the civil government to abide by its own laws (e.g., Acts 22:25–29). The apostles, however, never retaliated when government officials treated them unjustly and never pursued legal action against those who persecuted them. The disruption of the civil kingdom may be avenged by the sword but the persecution of the kingdom of heaven may not.

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<sup>29</sup> See Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 28–29, on the relation between the persecution of the disciples in 5:38–42 and their identity as Jesus' disciples. He associates this with Isa 50:6 and notes that Jesus prophesied that his disciples would face the fate of the prophets (which helpfully connects this discussion to Matt 5:12). Davies and Allison draw a similar connection with Isa 50:6. They note that the imitation of Christ is implicit in Matt 5:39–40, since he was struck and slapped and had his garments taken from him. They also note that no pragmatic motive is invoked in Matt 5:41 and that the question whether the world will be transformed is never addressed (*Matthew*, 1:544–46). Furthermore, Jesus' suffering is associated with his disciples' suffering in Matt 16:24. I would also note that if 5:38–42 is about suffering for the sake of Jesus and his kingdom then the fulfillment of the *lex talionis* in Jesus' death becomes all the more plausible.

# “Deliver Us from the Evil One”: Martin Luther on Prayer

— Mark Rogers —

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We must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther was a pastor-theologian. He worked out his theology in the midst of teaching, preaching, participating in public controversy, and meeting all kinds of pastoral needs. Due to the shape of his life and ministry, his theology has not come down to us in a systematic form.<sup>2</sup> We have received his theology through his polemical and pastoral writings as well as his preaching and teaching. Some may lament the lack of systematization in Luther’s theology, but one of the fruits of Luther’s life and ministry is that this eminent theologian, well-trained in the languages with a deep understanding of the Scriptures, wrote on many practical issues that today’s systematic theologians rarely address. For example, Luther’s writings comfort women who had suffered miscarriages, encourage the dying, counsel the tempted, encourage the suffering, and much more.<sup>3</sup> In his voluminous works, Martin Luther addresses many “practical” matters with the full-orbed, biblical theology of a theologian, the passion of a persecuted Reformer, and the heart of a parish pastor.

One of the issues on which Luther wrote and taught extensively was prayer. The Reformation era witnessed massive theological and ecclesiastical shifts, but it also brought significant changes in the way both church leaders and common Christians viewed prayer and piety. Philip and Peter Krey explain that as the Reformation progressed, Luther’s understanding of devotion “moved away from its professionalization in the monastery into the home.”<sup>4</sup> As theology changed, monasteries broke up,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray, 1535,” in *Luther’s Works* (henceforth *LW*) (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; 55 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958–86), 43:194; *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (*Weimarer Ausgabe*) (henceforth *WA*) (127 vols.; Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), 38:359.30–35.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lohse makes precisely this point in his recent work on the theology of Martin Luther (*Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999]). He structures his book with the first half organized around the chronology of Luther’s life and the second around theological foci. In this way, he seeks to take into account the historical circumstances of Luther’s life and the way it shaped the development of his theology.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Martin Luther, “Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage, 1542,” *LW* 43:243–50; *WA* 53:205–8; idem, “That Parents Should Neither Compel nor Hinder the Marriage of Their Children and that Children Should not Become Engaged Without Their Parents’ Consent, 1524,” *LW* 45:379–93; *WA* 15:163–69; idem, “Whether One May Flee From the Deadly Plague, 1527,” *LW* 43:113–38; *WA* 339–79; idem, “That a Christian Should Bear His Cross with Patience, 1530,” *LW* 43:179–86; *WA* 32:547–48; idem, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die, 1519,” *LW* 42:95–115; *WA* 2:685–97.

<sup>4</sup> Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey, “Editors’ Introduction to Part III,” in *Luther’s Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 2007), 184.

canonical hours ceased, and nuns and priests married, there became a need for a new paradigm for prayer.

Luther put his pen to paper on many occasions in order to teach people how to pray in a way consistent with the evangelical theology. In 1519, Luther published a sermon entitled *On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession*. He was concerned about the way the people were observing Rogation week (an annual church festival) and focused his sermon on the proper way to pray during the observances and processions of that week. That same year Luther published *An Exposition on the Lord's Prayer*, which teaches “the very nature of prayer in simple terms of everyday human life.” It went through thirteen German editions between 1519 and 1522. In 1522, Luther sought to advance evangelical piety and provide a substitute for popular Catholic prayer books with his own *Personal Prayer Book*. He followed the form of earlier prayer books but replaced the content with evangelical theology, moving from law to gospel to prayer. After the disappointing visitations of 1527 and 1528, Luther wrote the Small Catechism and Large Catechism as tools for pastors and fathers to use to improve the knowledge and worship of those entrusted to their charge. Luther's catechism, which was similar in content to the *Personal Prayer Book*, included an explanation of the Lord's prayer as well as instructions to fathers for daily family prayers. Several years later Luther's barber asked him for advice on how to improve his prayer life. Luther's largely autobiographical advice on how to maintain a daily prayer life was published in 1535 as *A Simple Way to Pray*.<sup>5</sup> Luther dedicated it to “Peter, the Master Barber.” Throughout his ministry, the topic of prayer appeared regularly in his sermons. Nowhere is this clearer than in his 1537 sermons on John 14–16, where Luther's mature theology and advice on prayer spans over two-dozen pages in the American edition of his works.<sup>6</sup>

This selection of Luther's writings on prayer does not come close to exhausting everything he wrote on the subject. It does, however, provide a sufficiently representative sample of his writings on prayer, both in regard to time and genre. It spans from 1518 to 1538 and includes everything from sermons to personal advice to catechisms. This article examines these writings on prayer and answers two questions: What was Luther's theology of prayer? And what was Luther's practical instruction for prayer?

The first section, which focuses on Luther's theology of prayer, demonstrates how Luther's belief in salvation by grace alone through faith alone shaped his view of prayer, and it shows what Luther believed the primary motivations for prayer should be. The bulk of this section, which represents the distinctive contribution of this article, will focus on what Luther thought the role of prayer should be in the context of the spiritual warfare he believed was raging all around him.

The second section outlines Luther's practical advice on how to pray, focusing especially on his catechisms and how he encouraged Christians to develop a spontaneous and continuous prayer life with the help of the Lord's Prayer. I conclude by drawing a few lessons from Luther's theology and instruction for contemporary ministry and Christian living.

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<sup>5</sup> For a good pastoral application of this work, see Carl Trueman, “A Lesson from Peter the Barber,” *Themelios* 34 (2009): 3–5.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, “On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession, 1519,” *LW* 42:83–93; *WA* 2:175–79; idem, “An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer for Simple Laity, 1519,” *LW* 42:15–81; *WA* 2:80–130; idem, “Personal Prayer Book, 1522,” *LW* 43:3–45; *WA* 10<sup>4</sup>:375–428; idem, The Small Catechism (1529), in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 345–76; idem, The Large Catechism (1529), in *The Book of Concord*, 377–480; idem, “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW* 43:187–211; *WA* 38:358–75; idem, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14–16, 1537–38,” *LW* 24:1–422; *WA* 45:465–733, 46:1–111.



## ***1. Luther's Theology of Prayer: Praying in Christ Alone, by Faith Alone, in the Devil's Face***

During his years as an Augustinian monk, Luther prayed often. Regular hours in prayer were required of monks, and Luther often spent entire Sundays without food or drink in order to catch up on the canonical hours he had neglected due to his other responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> Prayer was mainly an obligation, a duty required in order to gain or maintain favor with God. For Luther, it was often a burden. When Luther left the monastery and developed an evangelical theology, his view of prayer changed. Prayer was no longer a compulsory good deed, required to satisfy the pope and maintain favor with God. Luther learned that we gain acceptance with God only by his grace and through faith, and it transformed the way he prayed and taught others to pray.

### **1.1. The Prayer of Faith**

Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand describe the evangelical Luther's view of prayer well: "Prayer is the conversation of the dependent and trusting child, who is eager to voice both thanks and requests with the loving Father, who in turn is eager to hear from his children."<sup>8</sup> Luther no longer thought rules or the desire to maintain favor with God should motivate prayer. Instead, he called believers to "ask [God] boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father."<sup>9</sup> The first two words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father," are crucial in Luther's view of prayer. Calling on God as "Father" stirs God's heart more than any title, and brings with it the idea that we are children, which stirs his heart again. Luther teaches to recognize our position as children of God as we approach God in prayer. This recognition encourages confidence in the efficacy of prayer, strengthens weak faith, and assures us that we approach God as an overflowing giver rather than demanding tyrant. For example, Luther encourages this prayer: "Now through your mercy implant in our hearts a comforting trust in your fatherly love, and let us experience the sweet and pleasant savor of a childlike certainty that we may joyfully call you Father, knowing and loving you and calling on you in every trouble."<sup>10</sup>

Praying as a child of God reminds us that God has already accepted us. This foundational fact of prayer is inseparable from the foundational doctrine of the Reformation: justification by grace alone through faith alone. Dennis Ngien explains, "Just as in justification we are declared righteous on account of God's efficacious word, so in prayer we have his word that he will certainly answer and heartily grant us what we ask for."<sup>11</sup> Praying sinners must banish all thought that our prayers merit favor with God. The truth is that "we are worthy of nothing for which we ask, nor have we earned it." In fact, "we daily sin much and indeed deserve only punishment."<sup>12</sup> Unlike all "Turks, and Jews, and monks, and hypocrites," who come to God thinking that God will hear their prayer based on their goodness, "A genuinely

<sup>7</sup> Leonhard Ludwig, "Luther, Man of Prayer: As a Fellow Christian," in *Interpreting Luther's Legacy: Essays in Honor of Edward C. Fendt* (ed. Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 163–65; Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 195.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 214.

<sup>9</sup> Luther, Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 356.

<sup>10</sup> Luther, "Personal Prayer Book," *LW* 43:29; *WA* 10<sup>11</sup>:395.20ff.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis Ngien, *Luther as a Spiritual Adviser: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther's Devotional Writings* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007), 112.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 358.

Christian prayer must issue from the spirit of grace, which says: ‘I have lived my best; therefore I implore Thee not to regard my life and my conduct, but Thy mercy and compassion promised me in Christ, and because of this to grant me the fulfillment of my prayer.’<sup>13</sup> This is why Christ commands believers to pray in his name. It is only by him and through him that we can come to God. Therefore, Christians come to God seeking help, not with any stored up merit, but with faith alone, trusting that Christ has made us acceptable to God. Since Christ has died and God is our Father, we can come to God believing that he is willing to give freely to meet all our needs. Faith in Christ is the foundation of Christian prayer.

## 1.2. Motivations to Pray

In addition to the foundation of faith, Luther regularly points to several biblical motivations that should move Christians to prayer. First, Luther repeatedly says that people should pray because God commands it. We do not pray after meeting certain requirements or only at certain times or if we are good enough. “The first thing to know is this: It is our duty to pray because of God’s command.”<sup>14</sup> Luther points to the second commandment, the Lord’s Prayer, and many other places in the Bible to show that God wills that we pray. This commandment is as serious and as binding as that against murder or adultery. Therefore, this warrants both fear and hope. We must not take this commandment lightly. Instead, “We must understand that God is not joking, but that he will be angry and punish us if we do not pray.” On the other hand, since God commands prayer, we can be sure that he will not “allow our prayers to be futile or lost, for if he did not intend to answer you, he would not have ordered you to pray and backed it up with such a strict commandment.”<sup>15</sup>

The second biblical motivation to pray is that God promises to answer prayer. In Ps 50:15, God says, “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you,” and in Matt 7:7–8, Jesus promises that if we ask, God will give. Luther writes, “Such promises certainly ought to awaken and kindle in our hearts a desire and love to pray.”<sup>16</sup> Between God’s command and God’s promise, we know that God has not only called us to pray but also assured us that his heart is willing to hear and answer. Paul Althaus summarizes these motivating factors well: “Courageous faith asks God for something because it trusts in his promise; it receives its final, decisive, and effective motivating power from obedience to God’s gracious but very serious commandment.”<sup>17</sup>

The assurance that comes from God’s command and promise should lead Christians to pray with faith and boldness. Luther compares God to an “inexhaustible fountain” that overflows more and more as it gives. God always wants to give more than we have the faith to ask for. “He desires nothing more from us than that we ask many and great things of him,” and is angered if we do not ask and demand confidently. God is like a rich ruler who “commanded a poor beggar to ask for whatever he might desire and was prepared to give lavish, royal gifts, and the fool asked only for a dish of beggar’s broth.” When we pray like this beggar, we receive much less than we could, but even more importantly, faithless prayer “is a great reproach and dishonor to God,” who “offers and pledges so many inexpressible blessings.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John,” *LW* 24:88; *WA* 45:541.3–9.

<sup>14</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 441.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Robert C. Schultz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 366.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 447.

In order to pray rightly, with faith, the believer must have a promise from God. We should then “reflect on this promise and remind God of it, and in that way be emboldened to pray with confidence.”<sup>19</sup> Faith is so vital to the efficacy of prayer that Luther often emphasizes the importance of saying “amen” at the end of a prayer. For example, he advises his barber,

Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say “yes” to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, “Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth.” That is what Amen means.<sup>20</sup>

Praying to the Father in Christ’s name and ending with an amen is designed to encourage faith and motivate people to pray to God, who “offers us more than we are able to ask for.”<sup>21</sup>

A third motivation to prayer is that “God takes the initiative and puts into our mouths the very words and approach we are to use.”<sup>22</sup> This happens in two ways. First, the Psalms, and even more so the Lord’s Prayer, were given by God to guide our prayers and teach us how to pray according to God’s will. We can be confident that as we pray what Jesus taught us to pray, God will answer our prayer. Second, the Holy Spirit is our guide in prayer. At times, Luther says we should disregard our normal course of prayer when “an abundance of good thoughts comes to us.” We should listen in silence, for “the Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers.”<sup>23</sup>

A fourth motivation to prayer that appears regularly in Luther’s writings is the Christian’s great need of help. In the Large Catechism, Luther explains why the reformers rejected the prayers of the monks and priests: “Not one of them thinks of asking for the least little thing. . . . They only thought, at best, of doing a good work as a payment to God, not willing to receive anything from him, but only to give him something.”<sup>24</sup> Unlike the monks and priests, readers of the catechism should think about their own needs and then come to God with specific requests, naming exactly what they desire. This alone is true prayer. Luther addresses the problem of prayerlessness by calling catechumens to consider their helplessness: “We must feel our need, the distress that drives and impels us to cry out. Then prayer will come spontaneously, as it should, and no one will need to be taught how to prepare for it or how to create the proper devotion. . . . For we are all lacking plenty of things: all that is missing is that we do not feel or see them.”<sup>25</sup> In a 1519 sermon, he encourages those who sometimes let their sinfulness keep them from prayer. Rather than seeing their unworthiness as a hindrance to prayer, it should drive them to pray with confidence and faith:

We pray after all because we are unworthy to pray. The very fact that we are unworthy and that we dare to pray confidently, trusting only in the faithfulness of God, makes us worthy to pray and to

<sup>19</sup> Luther, “On Rogationtide,” *LW* 42:87; *WA* 2:175.7–9.

<sup>20</sup> Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW* 43:198; *WA* 38:362.30–36.

<sup>21</sup> Luther, “On Rogationtide,” *LW* 42:87; *WA* 2:175.17–18.

<sup>22</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 443.

<sup>23</sup> Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW* 43:198; *WA* 38:363.11–15.

<sup>24</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 443–44.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

have our prayer answered. . . . Your worthiness does not help you; and your unworthiness does not hinder you. Mistrust condemns you; but confidence makes you worthy and upholds you.<sup>26</sup>

God’s command, promise, and instruction, combined with a realization of our sinfulness and need, should motivate us to a life of faith-filled prayer.

### 1.3. Prayer as Spiritual Warfare

In the study of pastoral ministry in the Reformation, much is made of educational, sociological, political, and institutional factors. Too often, historians ignore a factor that Luther mentioned more than any other: the devil and spiritual warfare. One of the most prominent features of Martin Luther’s theology is his developed and integrated diabolology. Heiko Oberman’s seminal work *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* has done much to correct the picture of Luther as the first modern man and to remind us of Luther’s firm belief in the supernatural, especially the power of God and the reality of the devil. Oberman presents Luther as a man who believed he was living in the last days. He saw the last days as times of intense spiritual warfare and strife in which the devil was aggressively attacking believers, thus necessitating faith and prayer in order to stand. Oberman argues that Luther’s regular mentioning of the devil is far from a strange leftover of medieval superstition. Instead, it is integral to his theology and way of life. Oberman writes, “Christ and the Devil were equally real to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end.”<sup>27</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire’s study of the devil in Luther’s *Table Talk* demonstrates the important role the devil played in Luther’s thinking. Eire points out that the six-volume Weimar edition of *Table Talk* lists 447 references to the devil, a number much higher than topics like the Bible, gospel, grace, and prayer. Eire describes Luther as an “Augustinian monk, [who] saw his world as a battleground in which the soldiers of Christ [monks and priests] stood bravely in the front lines against hordes of demons, and that he drew upon monastic tradition for a vivid theory of diabolical temptation for a well-defined arsenal with which to wage battle.” Luther carried on this battle after he left the monastery, but in the process, he transformed it. Since every Christian is a priest, he taught, “Every Christian [is] on the front lines, equipped with a new arsenal of weapons that were at once familiar and radically different.”<sup>28</sup> This frontline warfare motif pervades Luther’s writings on prayer. Some works on Luther and prayer fail to mention the devil at all, and most give only a brief mention to this theme despite the fact references to the devil and spiritual warfare are abundant in Luther’s writings on prayer.<sup>29</sup> One of the aims of this article is to provide a more in depth treatment of the role of the devil in Luther’s theology of prayer.

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<sup>26</sup> Luther, “On Rogationtide,” *LW* 42:89; *WA* 2:176.129–37.

<sup>27</sup> Heiko A Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 104.

<sup>28</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire, “‘Bite This, Satan!’ The Devil in Luther’s *Table Talk*,” in *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of Steven Ozment* (ed. Marc R. Forster and Benjamin J. Kaplan; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 74–75.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Martin E. Lehmann’s *Luther and Prayer* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1985) fails to mention the devil even once. Timothy Wengert’s recent article on prayer in Luther’s Large Catechism devotes two paragraphs to Luther’s mention of the devil and “the serious, eschatological struggle in which prayer is caught up” in Luther’s theology (“Luther on Prayer in the Large Catechism,” in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology* [ed. Timothy J. Wengert; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 197). Charles P. Arand (*That I May Be His Own* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 2000], 165–66) devotes two pages to explaining that Luther’s treatment of the Lord’s prayer in the Large Catechism presents prayer as decisive in the “struggle between faith and unbelief, between God and Satan,” and notes that the “din of battle dominates as the theme of Luther’s exposition of the Lord’s Prayer . . . almost from the beginning.” While a close reading of Oberman’s biography will reveal

When Luther's understanding of the gospel changed, his view of the devil's attacks transformed as well. Before, it seemed the devil's main strategy was to tempt Luther to commit heinous sins and depart from the law of God. After Luther's evangelical discovery, Eire explains, "Satan now tempted him with doubt, the opposite of faith. And it was always easy to doubt one's own righteousness."<sup>30</sup> Satan tempts Christians to doubt their salvation and attacks their conscience by reminding them of their great sinfulness. Luther teaches people to pray that God would help them withstand the accusations and assaults of the accuser. In the *Personal Prayer Book*, he writes the following prayer: "Silence that evil spirit—the cruel backbiter, accuser, and magnifier of our sin—now and in our last hour, and in every torment of conscience . . . Do not judge us according to the accusations the devil or our wretched conscience brings against us."<sup>31</sup> For the evangelical Luther, the believer is saved by faith alone, and is now engaged in a fight of faith. Therefore, we must call out to God for help to hold tightly to the gospel as the devil attacks our faith.

Another change in Luther's diabolology was in the object of the devil's fury. The devil now attacked all people, not just the spiritual elite. Eire writes, "Whereas the devil had formerly concentrated most intensely on a distinctive clientele behind cloister walls, Luther's devil plagued everyone who was near to Christ with equal ferocity."<sup>32</sup> The front lines of spiritual battle had moved from the closed-down monasteries and into the peasant's house. Every believer was a priest, and was under attack. In fact, the nearer one drew to Christ, the fiercer the devil's assault would become. Therefore, all Christians should expect to battle the devil: "We who would be Christians must surely expect to have the devil with all his angels and the world as our enemies and must expect that they will inflict every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where God's Word is preached, accepted or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be far behind."<sup>33</sup> A final change in Luther's diabolology appears in the way he thought believers should fight the devil. Rather than depending on "sacramentals, like holy water and sacred salt," Christians now fought only by the Word of God and the prayer of faith.<sup>34</sup>

In the Large Catechism, Luther teaches that the devil is always actively opposing everything Jesus tells us to pray for in the Lord's Prayer:

For no one can believe how the devil opposes and obstructs [the petitions'] fulfillment. He cannot bear to have anyone teach or believe rightly. It pains him beyond measure when his lies and abominations . . . are disclosed and exposed in all their shame, when they are driven out of people's hearts and a breach is made in his kingdom. Therefore, like a furious foe, he raves and rages with all his power and might.<sup>35</sup>

Since the devil wants his kingdom to advance and his will to be done, and since he always lives to thwart the purposes of God, believers must pray without ceasing that God's kingdom would come and his will be done. Luther says also that the other petitions in the Lord's Prayer are all "directed against

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much about how Luther prayed and viewed the devil, Oberman does not offer a concentrated examination of the role of the devil in Luther's writings and theology of prayer.

<sup>30</sup> Eire, "The Devil in Luther's Table Talk," 79.

<sup>31</sup> Luther, "Personal Prayer Book," *LW* 43:36; *WA* 10<sup>11</sup>:104.16–21.

<sup>32</sup> Eire, "The Devil in Luther's Table Talk," 90.

<sup>33</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord's Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 448–49.

<sup>34</sup> Eire, "The Devil in Luther's Table Talk," 90–91.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, The Lord's Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 448.

our chief enemy, the devil.” When Christians pray for their daily bread, we are praying against the devil who is working to take away everything we need for life and godliness. Not only does Satan want to hurt the church, and thereby undermine spiritual order, “but he also prevents and impedes the establishment of any kind of government or honorable and peaceful relations on earth,” whereby necessities for life are made accessible.<sup>36</sup> Satan is determined not just to rob faith, but also to take food, health, and home. Therefore, Jesus says to pray for daily bread. Regarding the petition, “forgive us our debts,” Luther says that we all sin daily because we live in the world and because “the devil is after us, besieging us on every side . . . directing his attacks against all the previous petitions, so that it is not possible always to stand firm in this ceaseless conflict.” When discussing the petition, “Lead us not into temptation,” Luther teaches catechumens to pray not only, nor even mainly, to avoid temptations to the flesh. Since “the devil . . . baits and badgers us on all sides, but especially exerts himself where the conscience and spiritual matters are concerned,” we should petition for protection from temptations to unbelief and doubt.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Luther deals with the last petition in the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us from the evil one,” opting to translate τοῦ πονηροῦ as “the evil one” rather than the more generic “evil.” Referring to this petition, Luther makes explicit what is evident throughout his exposition of the Lord’s Prayer. He says, “[The petition] seems to be speaking of the devil as the sum of all evil in order that the entire substance of our prayer may be directed against our arch-enemy.”<sup>38</sup> Some translations since Luther—including the KJV and ESV—have rendered ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ as “but deliver us from evil,” choosing to consider τοῦ πονηροῦ an abstract noun rather than a personal noun, and therefore leaving the article untranslated. Many contemporary scholars, however, echo Luther, interpreting the petition in Matt 6:13 as referring to Satan, “the evil one.” For example, D. A. Carson points out, “Matthew’s first mention of temptation (4:1–11) is unambiguously connected with the Devil,” and the preposition ἀπό (“from”) usually refers to persons.<sup>39</sup> It is likely that Luther’s pre-modern worldview, which gave much more credence to the active presence of demons in the world, may have helped him to render the phrase more in line with the biblical author’s original intent than some modern English translations of the Bible. What is certain is that Luther’s beliefs about the devil and his activity pervasively influenced Luther’s theology and practice of prayer.

Luther cautions Christians to brace for more intense attacks from the devil as we grow in the faith and actively advance the gospel. The devil is not the only thing opposed to God’s purposes and our good. In addition to the world, “[Satan] enjoys the advantage of having as an ally within our own hearts that great piece of Adam, who is too lazy by nature, too sluggish, and too tired to engage in a battle like this and always draws us back, thus making it especially hard . . . to fight to the finish.”<sup>40</sup> Perseverance to the end is always the goal for Luther, but with so many obstacles, without and within, how is this possible? We must never think we are strong enough or mature enough to withstand the devil’s opposition by our own strength. For “such is life that one stands today and falls tomorrow,” and “even if at present I

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 452, 454.

<sup>38</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Creed, *Book of Concord*, 435.

<sup>39</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 174. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 79–80; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 251.

<sup>40</sup> Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John,” *LW* 24:383; *WA* 46:76.18–20.

am chaste, patient, kind, and firm in faith, the devil is likely at this very hour to send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely endure, for he is an enemy who never lets up or becomes weary; when one attack ceases, new ones always arise.”<sup>41</sup>

Luther is not trying to scare people into religiosity or spirituality. His design in regularly emphasizing the incessant attacks of the devil is not to destabilize or create insecure Christians. His goal is the exact opposite. Luther’s purpose in talking about the devil and human weakness is to drive us out of ourselves and towards God. “We are far too weak against the devil and all his might and forces arrayed against us, trying to trample us underfoot.” Since this is true, “Therefore, there is nothing for us to do on earth but to pray without ceasing against this archenemy. For if God did not support us, we would not be safe from him for a single hour.”<sup>42</sup>

In his sermon on John 16, Luther says that just as Satan works to hinder the spread of the gospel, he also strives to keep Christians from praying. Satan knows that prayer is powerful and that we have “no greater and no more powerful defense against all his might” than prayer. Luther points out three specific strategies the devil uses to keep people from prayer and then offers strategies for countering the devil’s temptations. First, and most commonly, the devil suggests that it is not a good time to pray. The devil whispers, “You are not yet ready to pray! Wait a half-hour or a day, until you are in a better condition to do so or have first accomplished this or that.’ Meanwhile the devil is there to distract you during that half-hour, and during the entire day you no longer think about praying.” The second obstacle the devil regularly presents is to remind people of their sinfulness. He comes alongside a stricken conscience and fans the flame of doubtful thoughts, telling people they do not deserve to live, let alone receive anything good from God. The third way the devil attacks prayer is to make the believer doubt that God actually hears or wants to answer. Satan presents thoughts like this: “My dear friend why do you pray? Observe how quiet it is about you. Do you suppose that God heeds your prayer?”<sup>43</sup> By striking the faith of the Christians and making them doubt the goodness and willingness of God, he strikes down prayer and wins the victory.

If we are going to win the larger spiritual battle, we must win the battle fought with the devil over prayer. Regarding the first obstacle mentioned above, Luther advises,

Cultivate the habit of falling asleep with the Lord’s Prayer on your lips every evening when you go to bed and again every morning when you get up. And if occasion, place, and time permit, pray before you do anything else. In this way you get ahead of the devil by surprise and without warning, whether you are ready or not, before he catches up with you and makes you wait. For it is better to pray now, when you are half-ready, than later, when you are not ready at all.

Regarding the second obstacle, Satan’s assault on the conscience, he says to jump over doubts about unworthiness and pray anyway. Even if someone is just coming from committing sin, they should immediately turn to God in prayer and never let their sin keep them from going to God for even a moment. If we wait to pray until we are worthy, we will never pray. Again, he urges hearers to let our sin and need drive us to the God of grace, rather than away from God. Regarding the third obstacle, the doubts that God is willing to hear and answer prayer, Luther recites the first three biblical motivations to prayer mentioned above, “Behold, you could repulse the devil and all his false suggestions by basing

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<sup>41</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 453, 455.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 444, 455–56.

<sup>43</sup> Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John,” *LW* 24:385, 386; *WA* 46:78.15–18, 46:79.11–13.

your prayer on these three things: God’s command, His promise, and the manner and words Christ Himself taught. These things the devil cannot deny or annul.”<sup>44</sup> Here we see how prayer and the Bible work together in Luther’s pastoral theology to fight off the advance of the devil. When the devil accuses of sin or tempts one to doubt the goodness of God, we should turn, not to our own internal feelings of God’s favor or our own external demonstration of righteousness, but to the truth of God’s word. God’s command and promise is the only sure foundation in the ongoing fight of faith.

## 2. Practical Advice

Martin Luther wrote both his Small Catechism and his Large Catechism soon after the visitations of 1527 and 1528. The reports of biblical ignorance and unreformed worship appalled Luther, and moved him to write the catechisms.<sup>45</sup> He designed them to increase biblical knowledge among common Christians and advance the evangelical interpretation of the Scriptures. William R. Russell argues, “For Luther, informed prayer is the goal or purpose of catechesis.”<sup>46</sup> The end goal was proper piety, or right living before God in light of evangelical truth. Gustav K. Wiencke, in his examination of Luther’s *A Simple Way to Pray*, concurs with Russell that the book “reveals a lifelong use of the catechism, not as a textbook of doctrine, but as a daily resource for prayer.”<sup>47</sup>

The structure of Luther’s Small Catechism is instructive. The Ten Commandments are followed by the Apostle’s Creed, and then the Lord’s Prayer. Luther explains the rationale for this order most clearly in an earlier work, saying that a person must first know what is required (Ten Commandments). Then, second, when we see our failure to meet the requirements, we must know where help and grace can be found (Creed). Third, we must know how to obtain the strength we need to live the Christian life (Lord’s Prayer).<sup>48</sup> Luther compares this process, which he sought to bring all catechumens through, to the process of identifying, prescribing, and treating a physical ailment. Timothy Wengert summarizes it this way: “This movement from diagnosis of the human condition (sin) through the Law, to treatment through the announcement of God’s mercy and grace, to the reception of medication through prayer marked all of Luther’s catechesis and even his private prayer.”<sup>49</sup> So Luther intends that prayer be learned in the context of law and gospel. Prayer is a means of seeking help to obey the law and cling to the gospel. Prayer, according to Luther, is gospel-centered. Rather than being focused primarily on physical or temporal needs, prayer’s main benefit is in seeking strength to persevere in believing and advancing the gospel, and Luther’s catechism seeks to teach people to pray in this way.

Luther intended the catechism to be used in homes as fathers taught their wives and children to pray. For example, the heading over the Lord’s Prayer in the catechism reads, “The Lord’s Prayer: In a very simple way in which the head of a house is to present it to the household.”<sup>50</sup> In another section it reads, “How the head of the house is to teach the members of the household to say morning and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., LW 24:387, 388; WA 46:79.28, 46:81.1–4.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the Lutheran visitations that began in 1527, see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *Luther’s Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernestine Countryside* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979), 8–30.

<sup>46</sup> William R. Russell, “Luther, Prayer, and the Reformation,” in *Word & World* 22 (Winter 2002): 50.

<sup>47</sup> Gustav K. Wiencke, “Editor’s Introduction” to *A Simple Way to Pray*, LW 43:190.

<sup>48</sup> Luther, “Personal Prayer Book,” LW 43:13; WA 10<sup>11</sup>:377.4–13.

<sup>49</sup> Wengert, “Luther on Prayer,” 183.

<sup>50</sup> Luther, Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 356



evening blessings.”<sup>51</sup> Much indeed was expected from fathers in training children to pray. Luther knew that if the evangelical religion was to be integrated into the lives of the people, evangelical theology and piety had to infiltrate the homes. The Small Catechism made that clear, specifically calling out heads of households to train their families.<sup>52</sup>

The Lord’s Prayer was the essential training tool for Luther. He used it as the framework for teaching people to pray in his catechism as well as his other writings on prayer. He also found it most useful for his own personal prayer life, on one occasion saying it was “even better than the Psalter, which is so very dear to me.” Luther teaches that the Lord’s Prayer is meant to encourage further petitions based on its principles, rather than merely be recited. He encourages the reader to dwell on each petition, listening and letting one’s heart flow out toward all the needs that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. In *A Simple Way to Pray*, he also encourages people to use the Ten Commandments as a guide for prayer. He writes of his own personal prayer time as an example: “I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.”<sup>53</sup> If time permits, he says, one could utilize the Creed in the same way, thus making the entire catechism, effectively a prayer book.

For Luther, prayer is by no means merely a private matter. Each church service is to include prayers of thanksgiving and intercession. In fact, he names prayer as one of the marks of the church: “A Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God’s Word and prayer, no matter how briefly.”<sup>54</sup> When the church—always under attack from the evil one—comes together it must lift up its voice together, “For indeed, the Christian church on earth has no greater power or work against everything that may oppose it than such common prayer.”<sup>55</sup> As in the catechism, so in the worship service; the truth of the gospel should lead to faithful prayer. After hearing the word preached, the church must “unite in giving thanks to God, in praising him, and in praying for the fruits of the Word.”<sup>56</sup> For Luther corporate prayer is precious and powerful, and cannot be neglected if the individual believer or the church hopes to persevere.<sup>57</sup>

Although Luther encourages corporate prayer, the use of written prayers, and the memorization of biblical texts as a help to prayer, he comes down strongly against what he calls “vain repetitions.” He condemns “the kind of babbling and bellowing that used to pass for prayers in the church,” but was not really prayer at all. Repeating the same prayer every day is not always bad, and he encourages such practice in the catechism. But he qualifies the benefits of using memorized prayers, saying that they are helpful only “when properly used.” They are designed to “serve as an exercise for young children, pupils, and simple folk,” but the goal is that the heart would unceasingly go up toward God in all circumstances. “To pray . . . is to call upon God in every need.”<sup>58</sup> Luther’s goal is not mere knowledge of the catechism. That is only a starting point, a kind of training wheels for the Christian prayer life. Luther calls for a

<sup>51</sup> Luther, Small Catechism, Sacraments, *Book of Concord*, 363.

<sup>52</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Preface, *Book of Concord*, 383.

<sup>53</sup> Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW* 43:200, 208; *WA* 10<sup>11</sup>:361.18ff.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther, “Concerning the Order of Public Worship, 1523,” *LW* 53:11; *WA* 12:35.19–21.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Luther, “A Treatise on Good Works, 1520,” *LW* 44:71; *WA* 6:239.3–4.

<sup>56</sup> Luther, “Concerning the Order of Public Worship,” *LW* 53:12; *WA* 12:36.12–13.

<sup>57</sup> For more on Luther’s view of prayer in the church, see Lehmann, *Luther and Prayer*, 94–105.

<sup>58</sup> Luther, Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, *Book of Concord*, 441.

lifestyle of prayer. Believers “should form the habit of praying daily for our needs, whenever we are aware of anything that affects us or other people around us.”<sup>59</sup> We should make prayer “the first business of the morning and the last at night.”<sup>60</sup> Luther urges believers to be guided by the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer and compelled to earnestness by our own need, and thereby to develop a faithful and continuous life of prayer.

### 3. Conclusion

There is much that we can learn from Martin Luther’s writings on prayer. For Luther, prayer was to be offered by faith in Christ, with boldness as children of God, and always against the devil and his evil devices. Sadly, the phrase “in Jesus’ name” at the end of Christian prayers has too often become a throwaway line, with no more meaning than to alert those listening that they may open their eyes. Luther reminds us that coming to God through Christ is the only way we can pray and shows us in the Scriptures how the knowledge of our standing in Christ can make us incredibly bold and confident in prayer. Regularly reading Luther’s gospel-centered writings on prayer would almost surely bear the fruit of both greater faith and more frequent praying in the lives of Christians today.<sup>61</sup>

Luther is well known for his biting sarcasm, crude language, and sometimes vitriolic polemics. These factors may lead some to overlook his tender appeals to sinners with weak consciences and struggling faith. Luther’s writings on prayer reveal an understanding of religious experience unmatched by many twenty-first-century theologians. His emphasis on the Christian’s position as a beloved child of God before a dear Father, as well as his patient advice for those struggling to persevere, demonstrates Luther’s pastor’s heart and his ability to illumine the powerful meaning bound up in common words like “our Father” and “amen.” Pastors and theologians alike could benefit greatly from spending time with this pastoral Luther.

While Luther is helpful in all of these areas, probably his most significant contribution to contemporary understandings of prayer is his treatment of the devil and spiritual warfare. Luther’s calls to prayer come always alongside reminders of our need. Too often Christians feel strong and self-sufficient. We often forget that we are weak and that we have a mighty enemy. This sinful self-sufficiency has left many churches silent before the open doors of heaven. In so many parts of the church, we have forgotten that we are at war and therefore rarely call out desperately for help.

Finally, Leonhard Ludwig observes that Luther “does not furnish a speculative treatment of a topic but the powerful demonstration of a life steeped in prayer.”<sup>62</sup> Luther, the pastoral theologian, presents us with an example of theology forged in the furnace of pastoral ministry and personal devotion to God, along with rigorous study. Luther’s teachings on prayer betray a man who knew how to pray. During the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Luther’s friend Veit Dietrich wrote to Melanchthon from the Coburg Castle, where Luther was hiding out:

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>60</sup> Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray,” *LW*: 43:193; *WA* 38:359.4–5.

<sup>61</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of this study, careful reading of Luther’s written prayers themselves will bear similar fruit. For an inexpensive, accessible volume of Luther’s prayers, see Herbert F. Brokering, ed., *Luther’s Prayers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Ludwig, “Luther, Man of Prayer,” 163.

I cannot sufficiently admire the singular steadfastness, the happy attitude, the faith and hope of this man in serious times. . . . There is not a day on which he does not devote at least three hours, the very ones most suitable for studying, to prayer. Once I was fortunate to overhear his prayer. Good God, what faith in his words! He speaks with the great reverence of one who speaks to his God, and with the trust and hope of one who speaks with his father and friend.<sup>63</sup>

Reading Luther not only draws us more deeply into a life of prayer, but also reminds us that those who speak of the things of God speak best when they know the God of whom they speak.

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<sup>63</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 166.

PASTORAL PENSÉES

# Power in Preaching: Delight (2 Corinthians 12:1-10) Part 3 of 3<sup>1</sup>

— Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. —

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We want to understand how the power of God comes into our preaching. It is becoming clear that what ties these studies together is humility. Humility in the act of preaching *decides* to submerge Self so that Christ crucified is the only object of admiration (part 1). Humility in a preacher's relationships *desires* people not for what they can give him but what he can give them (part 2). And now we see that in a preacher's personal life, humility *delights* in thorny weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon him. Charles Simeon wrote in a letter to a friend, "Another observation, in a former letter of yours, has not escaped my remembrance—the three lessons which a minister has to learn: 1. Humility. 2. Humility. 3. Humility. How long are we learning the true nature of Christianity!"<sup>2</sup>

Why does power in preaching matter at all? A. W. Tozer gives us one reason:

Since *power* is a word of many uses and misuses, let me explain what I mean by it. First, I mean spiritual energy of sufficient voltage to produce great saints again. The breed of mild, harmless Christians grown in our generation is but a poor sample of what the grace of God can do when it operates in power in the human heart. The emotionless act of "accepting the Lord" practiced among us bears little resemblance to the whirlwind conversions of the past. We need the power that transforms, that fills the soul with a sweet intoxication, that will make a former persecutor to be "beside himself" with the love of Christ. We have today theological saints who can (and must) be proved to be saints by an appeal to the Greek original. We need saints whose lives proclaim their sainthood, and who need not run to the concordance for authentication.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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/Audio\\_Resources/Mullins\\_Lectures.aspx](http://www.sbts.edu/resources/Audio_Resources/Mullins_Lectures.aspx)). Parts 1 and 2 ("Power in Preaching: Decide [1 Corinthians 2:1–5]" and "Power in Preaching: Desire [1 Thessalonians 1:2–5]") were published in *Themelios* 34:1 and 34:2 (2009).

<sup>2</sup> H. C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (1892; reprint, London: IVP, 1956), 65.

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Tozer, "Power in Action," in *Heartcry: A Journal on Revival and Spiritual Awakening* (Summer 1997), 8–9.

### ***“I am content” or “I delight in”?***

Our study begins with a question of translation. The ESV of 2 Cor 12:10 reads, “For the sake of Christ, then, *I am content* with weaknesses . . .” But the NIV reads, “That is why, for Christ’s sake, *I delight* in weaknesses . . .” Is Paul claiming contentment or enjoyment? εὐδοκέω can mean “delight in.” It is the word used in Matthew 17:5 when the Father says at the Transfiguration, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am *well pleased*.” The Father was not merely contented; he was delighted. And I am persuaded that this stronger translation of εὐδοκέω is required in our passage for two reasons. First, 2 Cor 12:10 is restating the strong point of 12:9: “Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses.” Paul’s enthusiasm goes beyond contentment. Second, the phrase “For the sake of Christ” at the beginning of 12:10 requires “I delight” rather than “I am content.” Why? Because of who Christ is. J. I. Packer begins his book *Knowing God* in this way:

I walked in the sunshine with a scholar who had effectively forfeited his prospects of academic advancement by clashing with church dignitaries over the gospel of grace. “But it doesn’t matter,” he said at length, “for I’ve known God and they haven’t.” . . . [Not] many of us ever naturally say that in the light of the knowledge of God which we have come to enjoy past disappointments and present heartbreaks, as the world counts heartbreaks, *don’t matter*. For the plain fact is that to most of us they do matter. We live with them as our “crosses” (so we call them). Constantly we find ourselves slipping into bitterness and apathy and gloom as we reflect on them, which we frequently do. The attitude we show to the world is a sort of dried-up stoicism, miles removed from the “joy unspeakable and full of glory” which Peter took for granted that his readers were displaying (1 Peter 1:8). “Poor souls,” our friends say of us, “how they’ve *suffered*”—and that is just what we feel about ourselves! But these private mock heroics have no place at all in the minds of those who really know God. They never brood on might-have-beens; they never think of the things they have missed, only of what they have gained. . . . When Paul says [in Philippians 3] he counts the things he lost “dung,” he means not merely that he does not think of them as having any value but also that he does not live with them constantly in his mind; what normal person spends his time nostalgically dreaming of manure?<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, for a contextual reason in 12:9 and for a spiritual reason in the words “For the sake of Christ,” I emend the wording of the ESV from “I am content” to “I delight” in 12:10. It is the key word in the passage.

### ***Thesis***

Paul is opening up to us his personal life, even his private thoughts and feelings behind his preaching and out of which his preaching flowed. And here is my thesis from this passage: *Our greatest breakthrough to spiritual power will come through the worst experience of our lives.*

### ***The Context of 2 Corinthians 12***

In 2 Cor 10–13 Paul is defending his ministry. He feels embarrassed to do so, but he also feels trapped. Here is what’s happening. Paul’s ministry is under attack in Corinth by men he spoofs as

<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), 20–21.

“super-apostles” in 11:5. These false teachers are moving through the Corinthian church, boasting of their spectacular spiritual experiences and putting Paul down as inferior. The immature Corinthians are dazzled. Their growing attachment to the super-apostles puts them in danger of falling away from Jesus himself (2 Cor 11:3–4). Paul must rescue them, but he has been made the flashpoint of controversy in a personal way. So he cannot help the Corinthians refocus on Christ without also becoming self-referential in his appeals. He is in an awkward position. On the one hand, if he asserts his spiritual qualifications, his critics will point at him and say, “See? What did we tell you? *He’s* the arrogant one!” On the other hand, if he downplays his credentials, then they’ll point at him and say, “See? What did we tell you? He’s a second-stringer.” Either way, the Corinthians’ spiritual integrity before Christ hangs at this moment on their relational stability with Paul. He has no choice but to defend himself for their sake. But the way he boasts is surprising. He boasts, all right, but about unboastable things. He does step onto the turf of the super-apostles, but he plays the game by different rules.<sup>5</sup>

We come then to chapter 12, where we find Paul boasting. He reclaims bragging rights in the hearts of the Corinthians by revealing the kind of mind-boggling spiritual experience his opponents were trotting out, but he turns the tables on them. God gave him a guided tour of heaven, but then for fourteen years Paul said nothing about it. He never wanted to seem above others. Now when he is forced into divulging his sacred privilege, he feels so awkward that he backs into it in a third-person way: “I know a man in Christ who . . .” (12:2). According to 12:6, Paul prefers to be known only for what people can see in him and hear from him for themselves. He prefers to be seen as just another Christian guy. Why? Because he knows how divine power comes down—not through privileged experiences but through common ordinariness and even suffering. Extravagant experiences are not Paul’s platform for spirituality; everyday life is, even a hard life. Paul isn’t demeaning his experience in the third heaven. God gave it. But that high and holy moment was not where Paul broke through to new power in his ministry. That happened in the worst experience of his life—getting his thorn in the flesh and then learning to live with it.

Whatever the thorn was, it was horrible. Let Paul’s metaphor draw you in. You’re coming down from a mountaintop experience, walking a trail back down to “the real world.” Your heart is flooded with heavenly joys beyond all your powers of description when suddenly you stumble and fall and instinctively put your hand out to catch yourself, and you ram a thorn right up into your hand. In one instant your joy is driven away by piercing pain. You stop, examine your hand to see how to pull the thorn back out. But it has penetrated too deeply. In fact, that thorn never comes out of your hand, it never stops throbbing, and it never will stop for the rest of your life. Every day, whatever else you’re doing or trying to do 24/7, whatever else you’re thinking about or trying to think about moment by moment, the thorn is always and cruelly *there*. That horrible reality was Paul’s “new normal.”

### *A Messenger from Satan and a Mercy from God*

Why did that happen? Paul explains it at two levels simultaneously. At one level, it came out of hell’s Dirty Tricks Department—“a messenger of Satan.” The fact that Paul experienced it as a *messenger* from Satan might imply that his physical anguish was accompanied by fiery dart-thoughts like, “You had this coming to you, Paul. God is finally catching up with you. Your life is over, you worthless piece of trash.” Satan meant it to harass Paul. That verb in 12:7 (“a messenger of Satan to harass me”) is in the present

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<sup>5</sup> See D. A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Grand Rapids, 1984; reprint, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13*, 2007), 1–29, for an introduction to the context.

tense, implying a steady pounding. But this attack from Satan was, at the same time, at a deeper level, also a mercy from God. The Lord meant it to keep Paul's feet on the ground after his vision of heaven. In fact, the gracious purpose of God wraps around the fiendish purpose of Satan as the phrase "to keep me from becoming conceited" appears both at the beginning and at the end of 12:7. The divine origin of his thorn, along with its hidden privilege, is also implied in the passive verb "was given." God is the hidden agent there. It's why Paul goes to the Lord for relief in 12:8: "Lord, I could do so much more for you without this."

### *The Power of Weakness*

Understandably, Paul sees two options as he looks into his future: (1) go on living with his thorn and be less useful to Christ or (2) get rid of the thorn and be more useful to Christ. He does not yet see a third option: keep the thorn, add in God's all-sufficient grace, and become more empowered than ever before. On his way there, Paul goes to the Lord three times to make his case, because his thorn is not just inconvenient; it is unendurable. Frequently in the gospels people come to Jesus for healing, and he gives it. Paul asks the same Lord for healing not once, not twice, but on three occasions of pleading prayer. What happens? Each time the risen Lord gives the same answer: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). That is not the answer Paul wants to hear, but it cracks his heart open to more power from beyond himself.

What the Lord teaches us all is that in this life weakness is the (definite article) fundamental human experience. Weakness is the platform on which we have all our other experiences. We never grow beyond weakness in this life. Indeed, weakness is where we receive power. Karl Plank writes,

The study of virtually any aspect of Paul's theology must eventually consider this language [of affliction], not because of its abundance as much as its fundamental character. Deeply enmeshed in the fabric of his gospel and his way of seeing the world, the language of affliction does not provide simply another theological topic in the Pauline compendium. Rather, it exposes the ground on which the apostle does theology.<sup>6</sup>

It also exposes the ground on which he does life and ministry and preaching—with power enough for any weakness.

The lexicons inform us that the word translated "is sufficient" means, not surprisingly, "to be enough, to satisfy, to be a match for." The Lord is saying to Paul,

I'm never going to pull that thorn out of your hand, as long as you live. But my grace—my friendship, my nearness, my promises, my presence, my truth, my smile—all that I am will match all you are suffering. Your pain, and the weakness it reduces you to, will be the very avenue through which I bestow my power. If your experience of life were undisturbed, if you were always at ease, if you felt no temptation to despair of yourself, you would trust yourself and you would exalt yourself and thereby disempower yourself, and your wonderful experience of heaven would become your ruin. Paul, my power will become yours most perfectly in the humbling experience of weakness.

So Paul saw weakness not as evidence against himself but as the way of power and the wonderful surprises that only God can orchestrate. It is his way for us all. The super-apostles knew nothing of it. All they understood was trying to be impressive, which they were, but that kind of fraudulent power

<sup>6</sup> Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 4.

threatened the integrity and the very future of the Corinthian church. Authentic Christianity does not produce a race of supermen who rise above need; the most perfect expression of authentic Christianity in this age is divine power received with the empty hands of human weakness and poverty and pain. Without a thorn, would we even open our hand? But with our thorn and his grace, maybe we should feel a little guilty for having such an advantage in ministry!

After his third try with the Lord, Paul finally accepts it. In fact, he more than accepts it. He likes it. He is happy with the new arrangements: “Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (12:9). He doesn’t conceal his weaknesses, because he is not threatened by them. Paul understands that his life is telling a story different from the one he had thought. The real story of his life is an old one and a glorious one.

The verb translated “rest upon” appears nowhere else in biblical Greek. But Paul seems to be alluding to the Shekinah glory hovering over God’s people in their wilderness wanderings. The Bible says that Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud of God’s glory had settled on it (Exod 40:35), but in the New Covenant the afflicted Christian believer becomes the place where the glory dwells. Obviously, Paul is no masochist. He does not like the pain. But the power and presence and glory of Christ are more than worth it. So Paul is not feeling sorry for himself. He feels privileged. How can the world defeat a man who finds power in weakness, progress in setbacks, and opportunity in confinement?

If God has a purpose of grace for you and your ministry—and he does, beyond all you can ask or think—you do not need to go looking for your thorn; it will come find you. Something will enter your life, something unforeseeable, even unthinkable, something about which right now you would say, “No, that could never happen, not in my worst nightmare”—and then it will happen. This is inevitable. It’s when God will prove to you how wonderfully, even surprisingly, his power can rest upon you. It’s what the world needs to see in us. It’s what the church needs to see in us—not the weakness of power but the power of weakness. When people are looking for spirituality today, do they know where God has actually located it? How many people do you know who are thriving in the all-sufficiency of Christ from deeply personal familiarity? That’s where we come in. We are not just preachers of gospel truth; we are living proof of gospel power when life is impossible. God will prove it through you. He will show many people through you that his power is enough for anyone facing anything—and not with bitter resignation, not with self-pity, but with reverent delight. People will see it in you, and they will put their hope in God.

Finally, in 12:10, Paul broadens the relevance of the grace of Christ beyond his own experience of the thorn to everything we will face: “For the sake of Christ, then, I delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” You can see how Paul is making an inventory of problems we all experience with a fill-in-the-blank open-endedness. The list could go on and on, but we get the point. What does Paul refer to? “Weaknesses” include, of course, his thorn in the flesh, but the paradox of power-in-weakness also applies to “insults”—arrogant mistreatment from others, slights, and slanders. The paradox applies to “hardships,” needs going unmet and burdens going unlifted. The paradox applies to “persecutions,” intense pressures to knuckle under and compromise. The paradox applies to “calamities,” limitations and confinements. Let the list grow longer and longer, add to it everything we ourselves will ever face, and the risen Lord says to us as well,

My grace is sufficient for you. You feel inadequate, even overwhelmed, but don’t worry about it. When you are defeated, I am victorious for you. When you are confused, I am clear-headed for



you. When you are fearful, I am unstoppable for you. My glory will hover over you, and my power will flow through you. All I ask is that you give your weakness to me, and I promise to give you my power.

All over the country today are preachers—faithful, intelligent, sincere, learned, fun, godly, conscientious men—some you know personally, others you know by name, and sometimes these apparently successful men are in fact thinking, “How can I go on? I have nothing more to say, nothing more to give. All I have right now to offer the Lord is my exhaustion and defeat and discouragement and sadness and humiliation and [whatever].” The Lord says to these men, “I can work with that. When you are weak, whenever you are weak, then and only then you are strong.” Charles Hodge comments, “When really weak in ourselves, and conscious of that weakness, we are in the state suited to the manifestation of the power of God. When emptied of ourselves, we are filled with God.”<sup>7</sup> That is when we learn emotional alignment with Paul, who says, “I delight in what Christ is doing for me.”

### Conclusion

How do we get there? How do we live there? The key is the opening phrase of 12:10: “For the sake of Christ.” Let those words be the death of our self-focus and the birth of something new and deep and happy and resilient. It’s when what happens to me is no longer my primary concern in life, however intuitive that is to the flesh. It’s when my motives for ministry change from “For my own sake” to “For the sake of Christ.” Face-saving is secondary; Christ-displaying is primary. Saving my precious hide is secondary; living dangerously for Christ is primary. “It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4). No preconditions. No holding back. All-out for Christ! This is humility, and it sets our hearts free. I have a video of the Blue Angels Navy pilots. They’re all top guns, but when they review a film of a performance and their team leader guides them through improvements, their standard reply is, “Just glad to be here, sir.”<sup>8</sup> It’s a privilege just to be on that team. So it is with us as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Just glad to be here, Sir.” There comes a time when we stop asking the Lord to take the problem away, and we settle into a deeper delight in his overruling power. There comes a time when we look at the death of our dreams and think, “Now I have the privilege of seeing what only Christ can do.” It’s when God gives us the gift of weakness and we are glad just to be involved with him in any way at all. Your real life is your own God-given opportunity to see the miracles he can accomplish through a weak preacher.

In his book *Humility*, Andrew Murray applies this passage to our lives with reverent wisdom:

Let us look at our lives in the light of [Paul’s] experience and see whether we gladly glory in weakness, whether we take pleasure, as Paul did, in injuries, in necessities, in distresses. Yes, let us ask whether we have learned to regard a reproof, just or unjust, a reproach from friend or enemy, an injury or trouble or difficulty into which others bring us, as above all an opportunity of proving how Jesus is all to us, how our own pleasure or honor are nothing, and how humiliation is in very truth what we take pleasure in. It is indeed blessed, the deep happiness of heaven, to be so free from self that whatever is said of us or done to us is lost and swallowed up in the thought that Jesus is all.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 289.

<sup>8</sup> *Blue Angels: Around the World at the Speed of Sound* (A&E Networks, AAE-10037, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness* (London: Nisbet, 1896), 83.

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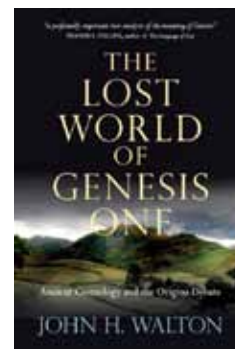
— OLD TESTAMENT —

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John H. Walton. *The Lost World of Genesis One*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 192 pp. £25.00/\$16.00.

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Anyone familiar with John Walton's Genesis commentary will already have an idea of the argument of this book, although it is more developed here. Walton argues that Gen 1 concerns itself not with material creation, but rather with the establishment of functions in the created order. The book is not overly technical (no knowledge of Hebrew is assumed), and Walton offers suggestions for further reading at the ends of several chapters. This is helpful, given that he spends a significant amount of space discussing Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythical texts—a subject with which most readers lack familiarity. His major lines of evidence are as follows (modified from p. 163):



1. Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts are typically concerned with function, rather than material origins.
2. The Hebrew term *bāra'* (“to create”) refers to the assignment of functions.
3. The beginning state of Gen 1:2 is one that lacks function, not materiality.
4. The first three days establish the major life-sustaining functions of time, weather, and food.
5. In days four through six God assigns functions to plants and animals.
6. The refrain, “It was good,” is a comment on function.
7. God’s rest on the seventh day implies that he is taking up residence in his temple, since “everyone” in the ancient world knew that “deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple” (p. 72).

Walton is to be commended for his rigorous adherence to historical-grammatical exegesis, refusing to affirm anything about the text that cannot be demonstrated exegetically. This is why in discussing the application of science to Genesis, he opines, “Reading the text scientifically imposes modern thinking on an ancient text, an anachronism that by its very nature cannot possibly represent the ideas of the inspired human author” (p. 109). Those concerned about the implications of Walton’s position on the doctrine of biblical inerrancy must note that he consistently champions his view as a “literal” reading, representing the “face value” of the text (chap. 11).

Chapters 13–18 are dedicated to issues ranging from intelligent design to public education, and he does an excellent job in this section. In chapter 16, he addresses the question many will be asking: Under his view, is Genesis compatible with biological evolution? Walton is open to Christian acceptance of this historically divisive theory. He writes, “One could accept biological evolution as providing a descriptive mechanism putatively describing how God carried out his purposes” (p. 153). Those highly committed to an anti-evolutionary polemic will have trouble with this chapter. However, Walton does not advocate uncritical acceptance of biological evolution, nor does he himself clearly adhere to it. At the very least, those who do not concur with him on this issue will gain exposure to the thought process of a biblically faithful and informed scholar of this persuasion.

One possible weakness in Walton’s argument is his insistence on reading Gen 1 in *purely* functional terms. Might it not be that Genesis is concerned with both material existence and function, perhaps with

an emphasis on the latter? He takes up this challenge in chapter 10, claiming that a “material origins” perspective lacks positive support. But is this true? No doubt, much of the language of Gen 1 concerns God’s commanding his creation to act: “Let the earth sprout vegetation” (v. 11), “let them be for signs and seasons” (v. 14), “let the waters swarm” (v. 20), etc. But is the same true of God’s declaration, “let there be” (*y<sup>h</sup>hî*, vv. 3, 16, 14), as well as his acts of separation (vv. 7, 9), and his setting of the lights in the firmament (v. 15)?

Further, his discussion of the meaning of *bāra’* is not entirely convincing. He cites thirty-four of the thirty-eight occurrences of the verb in the Qal stem, noting, “no clear example occurs that demands a material perspective . . . though many are ambiguous,” and “a large percentage of the contexts require a functional understanding” (pp. 42–43). He then uses added support from extrabiblical creation accounts to tip the scales towards a functional understanding. This argument is vulnerable in several places. First, the many ambiguous examples should give us reason for pause. Second, it is not clear that the parallels he mentions actually do possess a purely functional ontology. Third, the verb *‘āśā* (“to make”) is also used in Gen 1. Though Walton correctly notes that this term can simply mean “to do” (p. 65), fitting with his functional view (e.g., 2:2–4), how would we then understand it in 1:7, 11, 12, 16, 25, or 26 (e.g. “Let us *do* man in our own image”)?

There are a few other areas that need clarification, such as Walton’s contention that time itself is created on day two and whether the evidence for a cosmic temple in Gen 1 is as powerful as he contends. However, the book’s many strengths outweigh its weaknesses. John Walton has written a work that pastors and non-specialists will find understandable. It will challenge many to think about Genesis in the way Christian scholars have been championing for many years now—as an ancient document, speaking to people with an understanding of the world very different from our own. Hopefully, it will open the doors to a conversation that is long overdue.

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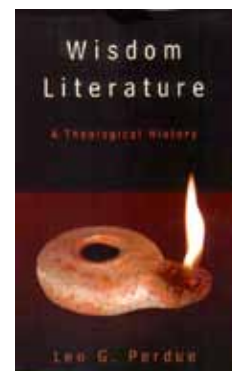
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Leo G. Perdue. *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007. 415 pp. \$39.95.

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In *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History*, Leo Perdue, a prolific writer and highly regarded scholar, gives a comprehensive overview of wisdom literature with the aim of providing a theological history. For those familiar with Perdue’s work, it will come as no surprise that creation is the central theological theme of wisdom literature, an argument which is laid out in detail in his volume *Wisdom and Creation* (Abingdon, 1994). In the present volume, Perdue attempts to trace the historical development of wisdom theology within a socio-historical framework in order to provide a social and historical context for the theologies of the sages. His main conclusion is similar to his earlier work: ‘creation, expressed through cultural metaphors, is the central theological theme of the sages’ (p. 37).

In chapter 2, he begins by surveying the major OT theologies and other works on the theology of wisdom literature in modern scholarship, and it becomes apparent quickly that he



is dissatisfied with the traditional views of Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westermann, Walther Eichrodt, and others, who ‘ignore’ creation as the major theme and maintain that salvation-history, election, or covenant are the major themes in the OT. For Perdue, not only is creation the major theme of wisdom literature, but other themes, such as election and covenant, can be understood only in the light of divine creation and providential rule over cosmos and history, both in OT theology and in wisdom literature.

The bulk of the book is devoted to in-depth discussions of the individual wisdom books. The chapters are generally organised into three parts: the historical and social setting, the literary structure, and the historical theology of each book. In chapter 3, an analysis of the book of Proverbs, Perdue begins by providing a very helpful summary of the history, literature, and scribal traditions of Egypt. He then proceeds to discuss Israel’s engagement with Egypt and the influence that this had on the sapiential literature. The rest of the chapter focuses on the portions of Proverbs that address the theme of creation. In chapter 4, Perdue addresses the book of Job, the redaction of which he dates to the exilic period. First, he outlines the history of the Babylonian conquest, Jewish life in captivity, literary activity, and wisdom culture in Mesopotamia, all of which, he argues, influenced the book of Job to varying degrees. This is followed by a lengthy discussion of the literary structure of Job, some detailed exegetical observations, and a few general concluding remarks. In chapter 5, Perdue extends the discussion beyond the traditional wisdom books to examine select wisdom psalms (1; 19; 119), scribalism in sapiential literature, and the meaning of Torah in the exilic and early Second Temple period. Perdue argues that the Torah is the theological center of Jewish wisdom in the Persian period and ‘takes on significant cosmological and moral characteristics that actualize divine creation, providence, and human righteousness’ (p. 160), which is his basis for incorporating the Torah psalms into the discussion. In chapter 6, a lengthy introduction to Hellenistic history and culture is followed by an extensive discussion on the theology of Qohelet, which, Perdue argues, has been heavily influenced by Hellenism. He contends, for example, that the skepticism of Qohelet is related to the historical and social context of the Hellenistic period, specifically, the Skeptics of the Greek academies and Egyptian grave autobiographies. In the final chapters, Perdue continues to venture beyond the traditional wisdom corpus—Proverbs, Job, Qohelet—to consider the apocryphal books of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. He justifies the inclusion of the apocryphal books by arguing that they ‘provide insight into the religious worlds of ancient Israel and early Jewish sages,’ which is ‘the basis for the shaping of contemporary theology’ (p. 8), but he makes clear that his intention is not to write a theology for the church.

The strength of the book lies undoubtedly in the introductory sections to each chapter, where Perdue provides detailed background material (historical, social, and cultural) for each wisdom book or category, but this is also a potential limitation. In placing each book within a specific setting—some of which are still disputed—he bases his entire theological analysis of each book, and the theology of the sages as a whole, to the socio-historical situation of the presumed time periods. Another possible weakness is his tendency to overreach to connect metaphors, myths, and allusions in the wisdom corpus to the single theme of creation, something which is especially apparent in the section on Job.

In sum, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* is a comprehensive overview of the wisdom books with special attention to the historical contexts and theological dimensions of each book. There are points where some will undoubtedly disagree; nevertheless, it is an important contribution that is both creative and challenging, and it should be welcomed by all who are engaged in OT studies.

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Samuel L. Adams. *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instruction*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 125. Leiden: Brill, 2008. xiii + 314 pp. \$168.00.

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As the title indicates, Samuel L. Adams charts transitions in wisdom thinking during the Second Temple period, beginning with Proverbs against its ancient Near Eastern background, moving on to Ecclesiastes, then Ben Sira, and finally a more recently discovered and less well-known wisdom text from Qumran called 4QInstruction. In particular, Adams is interested in the important issue of retribution as it develops during the Second Temple Period. He sees a clear, linear development during this time period that begins with no belief in the afterlife to a warm embrace of the idea. Indeed, the development is so clear that one wonders whether it reflects reality.



The discussion of retribution in wisdom literature begins with concepts of a mechanized connection between act and consequence in both Egyptian literature (Brunner) and the book of Proverbs (Koch). Along with a majority of wisdom interpreters today, Adams questions whether there ever was a rigid idea that acts lead to their consequences naturally. I would agree, especially in the book of Proverbs, that though God is not always explicitly mentioned as the agent of retribution, his role is assumed. If wisdom and reward appear to be naturally connected to folly and punishment, the reason is that God has created the world to work that way.

More to the point of the main thesis of the book, Adams also argues that the authors of Proverbs have no belief in the afterlife. Of course, the book is filled with promise of life for the wise and of death for the fool, but Adams argues, along with the majority of modern scholars, that life is “length of days” rather than endless life. He believes rightly that the promise of life is a motivational feature of proverbs rather than a pronouncement of what will certainly be the case. In other words, if people act wisely in the prescribed ways, then they are acting in a way that enhances life, all other things being equal. He uses this lack of belief in the afterlife to date Proverbs to the early post-exilic period in a way that might lead a reader to wonder whether this kind of argument is circular. On the one hand, he is arguing for an evolution of wisdom thinking on the afterlife from Proverbs to 4QInstructions, but the reason he believes Proverbs is early (as opposed to late) postexilic is that it lacks afterlife theology (or at least this is the “clincher” for Adams). As for such a lack of belief, it is too bad that Adams chose to interact with a dated and discredited advocate of the view that Proverbs has at least an incipient sense of the afterlife (Dahood) and not more recent works (Waltke; Longman).

According to Adams, the lack of belief in the afterlife in Proverbs is simply a reflection of common opinion in the early postexilic period. When we come to Ecclesiastes, though, we have reached a new stage in the discussion. Qohelet also rejects the idea of an afterlife, but he must argue against it. Adams is well aware of the debates about the dating of the book. Though most today believe it is a postexilic book, it is not clear whether it is early or late postexilic. Adams argues well against those who believe it must be dated in the Persian period (Seow), but when it boils down to it, the only reason he confidently dates it in the Hellenistic period (ca. 200 BC) is its approach to the afterlife. Again, one must question the legitimacy of using the afterlife to date the book and appealing to the book to establish the evolution of the concept of the afterlife in wisdom literature.

Ben Sira shares Ecclesiastes’ rejection of the afterlife as an answer to retribution. In this, Adams argues that Ben Sira is critically interacting with other contemporary opinions, for instance, that

provided by 1 Enoch. Where Ben Sira differs from Qohelet is in maintaining a more positive view about retribution. Even in death, the righteous find their reward, not in an afterlife, but in a well-deserved positive reputation.

Adams' survey concludes with a close examination of 4QInstruction, a Dead Sea text that exhibits a robust view of the afterlife that will sound familiar to those who read the NT.

All in all, *Wisdom in Transition* is a fascinating and well-written presentation of the thesis that wisdom literature evolved in its treatment of retribution, moving from Proverbs' lack of interest in the afterlife to the full embrace of the concept as an answer to how the wise are finally rewarded and fools punished.

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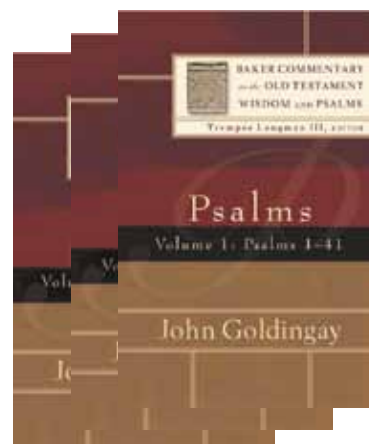
John Goldingay. *Psalms*. 3 vols.: *Psalms 1–41*, *Psalms 42–89*, and *Psalms 90–150*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006–2008. 2,195 pp. \$144.00.

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John Goldingay, David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, has written a useful exegetical, expository, and applicatory commentary on the Psalms. He opens up the commentary by highlighting five introductory issues: the Psalms and history, the Psalms as poetry, the Psalms and worship, the Psalms and spirituality, and the Psalms and theology. The following aspects of his approach are of interest to the reviewer because they shape Goldingay's approach to the Psalms.

1. Goldingay postulates that Jewish leaders collected prayers and praises that were widely known and used at the Temple (1:21) in order to "provide God's people with 150 examples of things one could say to God" and to shape the community by giving it "a teaching manual for worship and prayer" (1:23). The book of Psalms is a witness to "the history of the people of God, the history of the leaders, and the history of individuals" (1:24).

2. Goldingay argues that the historical background of the individual psalms is lacking or not important to the message of the psalms. He questions the authenticity of specific historical allusions in the heading or in the text on the ground that they lack specificity (1:24–25). He generalizes the references to historical connections (Moses, David, Solomon) in the headings by speaking about "the petitioner," "the worshipper," or frequently "the psalm." Further, the names in the headings suggest to him an imaginary framework for reading the psalms. For example, in reading Ps 90 one should imagine "Moses . . . (as) an appropriate person . . . uttering a plea for Israel, as he did that at Sinai" (2:23–24). His position on the Korahite and Asaphite psalms is ambivalent. Of the former, he comments "These are presumably the Korahites. . . . The heading may indicate that these psalms were composed by members of this group and/or formed a part of its repertoire" (2:701). He comments on the Asaphite psalms that the headings may "imply the conviction that they were composed by Asaph" (2:696). As for David, he concludes that the headings with the name of David were added subsequently to the composition of



the psalms when David “became a hero for Bible readers” (1:29). He restates this point in the Glossary of volume 3: “It is unlikely that any of these Davids personally wrote any of the Psalms. It [the mention of David] may often invite us to imagine David using the Psalm” (3:754). He sees little “pattern or logic in the links with David in the latter part of the Psalter” (3:293), but others have argued the opposite (Childs, Howard, McCann, VanGemeren, Westermann, Wilson, Zenger). Goldingay admits that there are evident groupings and thematic connections between individual psalms, but he follows the rabbinic dictum that there is no structure in the book of Psalms. He concludes that the only structure is the genre of the Psalter (prayer and praise) that opens up the world of the spirituality of the ancient community (1:35–37).

3. Goldingay reveals his commitment to modernity in the section, “The Modern Quest” (1:30–32). The modern quest occupies itself with the growth of the Davidic tradition in the Psalter. The exploration of the tradition is for a twofold purpose: the search for the historical context of texts and the reconstruction of Israelite religion. Goldingay confesses that he is not directly interested in the former, but is convinced that “the modern believing community” (1:31) must face the nature of Israel’s religious contributions. The “power and authority” (1:31) of the Psalms lies in the perpetual witness to the communal belief that the prayers and praises of the psalms transcend the particular occasion or person. The power and authority of the Psalter does not derive from knowing the human author, but from hearing the voice of God in the Psalms. His bifurcation of the divine from the human dimensions of Scripture is not surprising. More surprising is Goldingay’s suggestion that many of the authors were women and later headings notwithstanding, the reader must imagine feminine concerns to come to the fore when reading the psalms (1:32–33).

4. Goldingay’s discussion of the distinctive features of Hebrew poetry reveals a critical assessment of modern attempts at changing the Hebrew text to conform to modern expectations of what poetic lines should look and sound like. He further encourages modern readers not to abstract a conceptual or doctrinal reading that separates the text from the experiences of modern readers (1:43–44), but instead to enter into the lyrical and metaphorical language of poetry, strange as it may sound to modern ears.

5. Goldingay treats spirituality separately from the theology of the Psalter in order to bring out both the human and divine dimensions of the Psalms.

a. Under the former he places prayer, confession, trust, anger, and praise (1:58–68). Goldingay’s comments on worship and prayer reverberate throughout the commentary. With his emphasis on liturgy and worship, Goldingay deviates from a growing number of scholars who take the main purpose of the Psalter to be pedagogical. Psalm 1 as an introduction does not set the agenda of the Psalter, but rather it “constitutes a preemptive strike” (1:90) by its opening on a note of happiness during times of adversity and protest or lament. He admits that acceptable worship requires a lifestyle of wisdom, but “Psalm 1 hardly invites us to see the Psalter as a teaching about right living.” (1:91). Even individual prayers are set within the context of corporate worship (1:49).

b. Under the latter he develops God’s involvement with his creation. He writes, “Theologically, the psalms are the densest material in the entire OT.” By “dense” he means rich, complex, and multifaceted. He looks at three areas: God’s involvement in the world (Israel, the king, and messiah), God’s concern with life and death, and the relationship of the Psalms to the NT.

i. Because of God’s involvement in all aspects of life and his sovereignty extending to the whole of creation, the psalmists correlate his involvement with individuals, the people of God, and the nations (1:70–72). They declare “that the real world is one where Yhwh reigns, and sends worshipers out into

that world to live with the conviction” (1:71). Goldingay intends to listen to the voices of the psalmists without interference from the NT. He holds that the early church read a “new significance” into the Psalms (1:72). I agree with him that the psalms are not predictive prophecy, but is the relationship between OT and NT as strained as he sees it? There is a providential connection between the Psalms and the NT (so Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001]), and intertextual patterns connect the two testaments (see Frances Young, “Typology,” in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* [ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce, and D. E. Orton; Leiden: Brill, 1994], pp. 29–48). Moreover, the Psalter has an eschatological hope in which David figures prominently (see David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* [JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: JSOT, 1999]). For Goldingay hope lies primarily in Yahweh’s commitment to the godly community, and less so to the Davidic king. He argues that the Lord’s commitment to David is suspended because “that throne has been unoccupied for over 2500 years” (3:297). Instead, he advances the argument that the Psalms contribute to the OT witness for the democratization of the Davidic ideal in the post-exilic era: “They (the kingship psalms) became open to appropriation by the people as a whole in the present instead of having their fulfillment for an individual king postponed until the future” (1:73). Let me return to the relationship of OT and NT at the end.

ii. He views the situation of dead believers in the OT and NT to be similar. They are in Hades, asleep as it were, waiting for the resurrection of the body (1:74–75). He objects to the overly positive portrayal of the afterlife in Christian circles and argues in favor of taking this life more seriously.

The commentary on each psalm follows this pattern: Translation, Interpretation, and Theological Implications. Under *Translation*, Goldingay offers an original translation with a strophic analysis and select grammatical, syntactic, and textual notes. Under *Interpretation*, he first offers helpful insights into the psalm as a whole (genre, stylistic and poetic devices, structural connections, theological insights, and interpretive comments of a general nature) and then explains select aspects of each strophe. Under *Theological Implications*, Goldingay may suggest his own theological insights (e.g., see Ps 103) or those of others (e.g., see Ps 130). Terms that require repeated explanation are marked with an asterisk and defined in the glossary, located at the end of each volume. One will also find a subject and author index in each volume. The latter reflects Goldingay’s extensive reading bridging the ancient and modern writers on the Psalms.

The reviewer is grateful for Goldingay’s fine contribution that spans exegesis, exposition, theological reflection, and application. He expresses reservations with some of Goldingay’s views of the place of David in the Psalter, the role of imagination in reading the headings, the editing of the Psalms, and the feminine voice in the Psalter. Yet apart from these caveats, Bible students, church leaders, pastors, and Bible teachers will greatly benefit from this set.

One of the nagging issues that remains, however, is the relationship between the Psalter and the NT. Positively, Goldingay clarifies several issues where the psalmists’s attitudes appear to be incompatible with Christian teaching, such as imprecations and anger. His treatment of these psalms, or sections thereof, counter Christian biases against the OT by bringing out similar expressions in the NT. He observes, “What the OT and NT do is fill out the nature of biblical faith for each other. It is not the case that theological insight develops through Scripture in such a way that the NT provides a kind of theological filter by which unacceptable aspects of the Psalms or other aspects of the OT can be strained out by being reinterpreted” (1:76). Thanks, Goldingay. Well put. I also agree with his emphasis that the

NT cannot be read without a deep familiarity with the OT and that the NT writings allude extensively to the theological world of the OT (1:76).

Nevertheless, Goldingay keeps the two worlds of OT and NT apart. The use of the OT text on the lips of Jesus and the apostles takes on a different meaning. He comments that they do “not take up the meaning of the verse in its context, the meaning it would have had for its writer or for believers who used it in OT Israel” (1:76), but “they do so in a way that ignores those words’ intrinsic meaning when the Holy Spirit first inspired them” (1:77). By distinguishing meaning (OT) from significance (NT), Goldingay remains modern in his approach to the OT.

In the commentary that follows, I have often noted the way the NT quotes the psalm, but in the light of considerations just outlined, I do not attempt to show that this reworking corresponds to the Psalms’ own meaning. Nor do I make the NT the filter or lens through which we read the Psalms. A modern aspect of the commentary is that I want the Psalms to speak their own message and to let them address Christian thinking, theology, and spirituality rather than be silenced by a certain way of reading the NT that fits modern Christian preferences. (1:78)

(See also Goldingay’s article “Hermeneutics,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings* [ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008], pp. 267–80.)

Is it really possible to read the text within its own context? If so, what is that context? Evidently not the canonical context as suggested by Childs and others (see E. Zenger, “Der Psalter als Wegweiser und Wegbeleiter: Ps 1–2 als Proömium des Psalmenbuchs,” in *Sie wandern von Kraft zu Kraft: Ausbrüche, Wege, Begegnungen: FS Bischof Reinhard Lettmann* [ed. A. Angenendt, H. Vorgrimler; Kevelaar: Butzon & Bercker, 1993], pp. 29–47). While he makes a serious attempt at reconstructing the reception of a text by the community, can one read the OT text as a Christian with commitments to the modern scholarly reading of the OT without equal commitments to the pre-modern reading of Jesus, the apostles, the church fathers, and classical Christian writers? Another approach suggests that interpretation of texts is always intertextual and that a Christian reading of the OT engages not only with canonical connections within the OT, but also with the NT. Canonical interpretation encourages the diachronic interface of reading texts at a number of levels (intertextuality): the text by itself (in its co-text and context); the text in connection with other texts of a similar genre, tradition, or theme; the text in a collection or book; and the text in subsequent interpretations (the NT). See the helpful article by P. E. Koptak on “Intertextuality” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings* (pp. 325–32).

In conclusion, I shall illustrate Goldingay’s approach by looking at his commentary on Ps 110, a psalm extensively cited in the NT. He connects it with Ps 2 as twin psalms (3:291) and argues that both psalms offer no prospects of a future messianic king. He comments on Ps 2, “The psalm implicitly forestalls ideological appropriation in another way” (1:106). In his commentary on Ps 110, he observes, “There is no indication that it speaks of a future king, nor any necessity to reckon that it would be interpreted messianically by the time the Psalter reached its present form” (3:292). He rejects the NT appropriation of this psalm because “as a whole it does not fit him (Jesus) and most of its application to him in the NT requires it to be understood in a way that would not correspond to its meaning in any OT context” (3:292). He clarifies his position: “In light of Jesus’ coming, the Holy Spirit inspires people to see *significance in the OT that was never there before*” (3:299, emphasis mine). What is that OT context? Goldingay vacillates. He constructs a temple context, but admits that the text is not supportive of a liturgical reading. I appreciate his caution in reading the text for what it says: “canonical interpretation

must mean letting different parts of Scripture have their say, not silencing some by others we prefer” (3:300). But the reverse is also true. Some interpretations may filter potential ways of reading OT texts by silencing the hermeneutical challenges the NT poses to the interpretation of OT texts.

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Woodrow Kroll. *Proverbs: The Pursuit of God's Wisdom*. Back to the Bible Study Guides. Wheaton: Crossway, 2007. 96 pp. \$ 7.99.

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The present study guide on Proverbs includes thirteen lessons, each studying different texts. Each lesson begins with a short summary of its contents. The texts from Proverbs are quoted in full, key verses are highlighted, and section headings attached. Three sections then follow: “Go Deeper,” “Consider It,” and “Express It.” Each “Go Deeper” section is followed by the relevant devotional, out of which a couple of sentences are again separately highlighted. Regrettably, in many cases, the “Go Deeper” sections are unconnected to the actual text singled out for the lesson. Moreover, they sometimes establish scriptural links that have very little to do with the actual content and intent of the passage. For instance, in Lesson 5, the selected passage is Prov 6:1–35, which is surprisingly entitled “The Balance of Fear.” It is noteworthy that the passage does not allude to either the fear of the Lord or the fear of/humans. The “Go Deeper” section of this lesson specifies that a person who hates the Lord or rejects his Word will show all seven qualities listed in 6:17–19. However, 6:16 talks about what the Lord hates and not what people might demonstrate in their attitudes when hating the Lord.



The study guide is entitled *The Pursuit of God's Wisdom*. In the first lesson one learns the reasoning behind this title. Apparently, there are two main sources of wisdom, namely, God and the world. Kroll rightly says that Proverbs and the Bible in general are God's sources of wisdom. God's wisdom is unquestionably the right and superior one, whereas the world's wisdom is “wrong” (p. 12). The reader is invited to take a closer look at what makes worldly wisdom wrong. The reason is summed up in one word, namely, “sin” (p. 12). Indeed, Proverbs is a divine guide that aids in the process of discerning the right choices for one's life by furnishing wisdom for all situations and circumstances. Nevertheless, on the basis of Proverbs Kroll is mistaken to claim that all wisdom acquired from the world is “wrong” because it is tainted or characterized by “sin.” Proverbs provides no grounds for such a severe antithesis between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world or the wisdom gained from the created world. God and the world are not presented as opposing sides. Moreover, Proverbs emphasizes that the sages often gained their wisdom from observing the functioning of the whole world, which was created by God. The sages placed a great stress on the fact that God created the world. This is supported by such passages as 3:19–20; 8:22–31, etc. Furthermore, they also asseverated that wisdom may be obtained from a careful observance of this created universe. For instance, in 6:6–11, the sages adduce wise reflections and teachings from observing the customary habits of the industrious ant. This is not strictly an example of divine wisdom but rather a wisdom that has its roots in the world-order that God created; thus, it may be viewed as wisdom obtained from the world. I can only presume that perhaps Kroll's intention was

more to explicate the existing opposition between divine and “worldly” wisdom, which would have been more accurate from the point of view of the Bible as a whole.

Similarly, the study guide would be more successful if it addressed divine wisdom in contrast to folly, relating the latter to its manifestations in the presentations of the various types of fools who embody folly (cf. 1:22, 32; 8:5; 9:4–7; 26:1–12, etc.), such as the “thoughtless/simpletons,” “scoffers,” “dullards/knowledge-haters,” those who “lack-sense,” etc. All the types of “fools” that are encapsulated in this incomplete list, together with the personifications of the Strange Woman and Folly in Proverbs 1–9, would have provided material for a more accurate summary of the teaching and theology of Proverbs as a whole.

Nevertheless, Kroll’s study guide proves to be invaluable in Lessons 6–13, where the titles are better paired with the passages selected for study. For example, Lesson 8, entitled “Wisdom and Couples,” focuses on Prov 5 and rightly highlights 5:18 as the key verse of the pericope.

Overall, it would be fair to say that Kroll’s study helpfully attempts to draw practical insights for the Christian life from Proverbs, but it often fails to grasp the content and intent of this biblical book.

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## BOOK NOTE

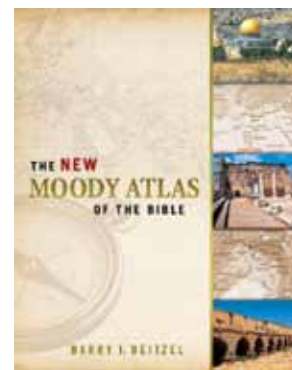
Barry J. Beitzel. *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody, 2009. 304 pp. \$49.99.

One of the best Bible atlases just got better. Barry Beitzel, professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, is an expert in mapmaking, the history of mapmaking, geography, and archaeology. His mapwork appears in the ESV, NLT, NIV, and Ryrie study Bibles as well as the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* and *Life Application Bible*.

Beitzel has significantly revised his classic *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*. The 1985 edition has 95 maps, and the new edition has 118, all new and digitized. The 100,000-word text is completely rewritten, well-documented, and longer than the 1985 edition by forty-eight pages. The atlas divides into two parts—the land’s physical geography and historical geography—and omits the brief third section from the 1985 edition on “The History of Biblical Mapmaking.” It uses high-quality paper and is 3.6 pounds and 11.3 x 8.6 x 1.3 inches.

Understanding the Bible’s geography is important, argues Beitzel, because “God prepared *a certain kind of land*, situated at *a particular location*, fashioned to elicit *a specific and appropriate response*” (p. x, emphasis in original). I am not aware of another atlas that more accessibly and dependably recounts the Bible’s storyline in light of its geography. It is both practical and academic without sacrificing either.

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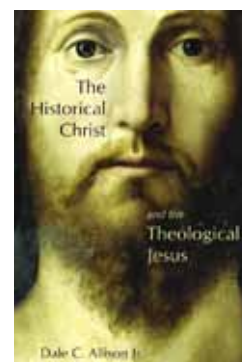
— NEW TESTAMENT —

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Dale C. Allison Jr. *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 126 pp. £10.99/\$16.00.

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Dale Allison's *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* is a curious book. The product of lectures given at Duke University in 2008, the book involves reflections on the quest for the historical Jesus, which Allison has come to regard as mostly futile in terms of either guiding our historical understanding of Jesus or as a service to the church. What makes this decidedly negative judgment on the quest so significant is that Allison has been one of the more prolific and competent American experts in the field.



The problems in the pursuit are manifold for Allison. (1) The quest has produced a plethora of Jesuses. This indicates that there is no clear methodological process or controls. (2) There is the problem of what the interpreter brings to the task that impacts his judgment. Here we get the famous observation that often what emerges is a Jesus much to the individual writer's tastes. (3) History is able to yield only so much since our sources are limited and reaching back into the past is difficult and complex. (4) History should not hold sway over theology. Its results are too insecure and the possibility of central shifts is too real. More than that—and this emerges from the rest of the book—much in the Gospels is not history to begin with, but metaphor and parable, making the nature of the Gospels themselves an obstacle to rooting our understanding of Jesus in history.

All of this might make one think Allison has turned his back completely on historical study, but this is not correct. He argues that although we can be sure of very little about what Jesus exactly said, we can establish his emphases based upon what the general patterns in the Gospel tradition give us. He argues that trying to parse between what Jesus said and what the church added is near to impossible, but we can get a sense of what Jesus was about by looking at the general impression Jesus left in the tradition as a whole. Such a general impression is surely on the right track, or else the tradition becomes unusable at all to get back to Jesus. So what we have is a suggestion that the Jesus in the macro-level of the tradition yields far more to us than the microanalysis of pericope units. Allison remains open on miracles, not so much as a matter of historical analysis, but because human experience is just too full of such experiences to dismiss them. Allison goes on to affirm a Jesus who taught an apocalyptic hope in the kingdom and who focused on God as Father more than king. This Jesus is a “coincidence of opposites” who calls us to be engaged in the world even as he looked for God to bring a new world, which Jesus left mostly undefined. We have a Jesus who is far less than Nicea, but who is also hardly the figure of the Jesus Seminar. Jesus did have some kind of a messianic self-understanding. We have an errant Jesus, who expected a soon-to-come kingdom that did not come. We have a Jesus for whom we have no genuine context for his sayings to analyze what they really are saying. In short, Jesus remains a stranger and enigma to us, much as Schweitzer once argued.

What are we to make of Allison's take on the quest? There are three points he makes very effectively in his well-written and entertaining study. (1) There are limits to what historical Jesus studies can yield.



This is not the fault of those pursuing such study; it comes with the limits of what history can yield. These limits do mean that simply defining our understanding of Jesus to what history can show is to build a case on a less than adequate foundation. The impact of Jesus is also part of the story about him. The Gospels give us this as well as Jesus, and we are better off for it. (2) The danger in pursuing Jesus historically is that our own hopes and subjectivities get so in the way that it colors our analysis and judgments about what we do have in front of us. This is always a danger in the process, and it is why the conversation and debate about the material is so important. It is the only way to keep oneself in a position to see potential blind spots. (3) There also is something to be said for paying attention to the tradition as a whole in its emphases to get at what Jesus was about. Analysis of units alone is not the way forward.

However, there also are some real problems with where Allison lands. (1) To place the Gospels primarily in genres that speak of parable and myth is certainly to view these texts in ways far different than the authors and communities that originally produced them. Much like deconstructive historical Jesus scholars undercut the content of the Gospels in a divide-and-conquer method of handling the material, so Allison's emphasis on this kind of genre-focus also removes the material from the frame in which it was originally placed. To try to recover the theological and human value of the material while casting aside the frame seems to put asunder the very type of linkage he wishes to maintain when he observes we have both history and impact in our sayings and stories about Jesus. It also rejects the very key frame the evangelists themselves had for the material. If the impression of the general tradition is accurate, then why did the early church impacted by this tradition so vigorously defend Jesus as a real historical figure whom they had genuinely experienced both in his life and teaching as well as in his resurrection? If I may appeal to the general tradition at one level, then why not also at this level? (2) Another inconsistency, it seems to me, is to appeal to the general character of the tradition without having a means of substantiating any details. In Allison's critique of the criteria, which surely do have problems and limitations, he appears to have come to the point of despairing whether any details can be affirmed other than the general impression the entire tradition yields. Yet surely in a discipline that is full of judgment, historical study can and must attempt to sort out the details of texts, even if it must do so with a greater sense of humility about what it can achieve than normally comes with the territory. Microanalysis of the tradition can yield more than the meager results Allison affirms. It not only gets us to a messianically inclined Jesus; it can, I think, get us to a Jesus who saw himself vindicated by God to the degree that he would share God's presence and lead the judgment one day. Such an understanding yields a christology far closer to Nicea than Allison allows.

In sum, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* is an interestingly honest book about the limits of historical Jesus study written by one who knows the field. This book will make you stop and think, making it well worth the read, even if in the end one's sense is that Allison's current position is as full of difficulty as the positions he critiques.

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Paul Barnett. *Finding the Historical Christ*. After Jesus 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. xi + 299 pp. £14.99/\$22.00.

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This book is a stout defense of the historical Jesus as the historical Christ, a point indicated clearly by the title. In contrast to many historical Jesus studies where the distance between Jesus and the Christ is portrayed as a gulf that is either difficult to cross or that needs much revision to navigate, Barnett argues that Jesus had a messianic self-consciousness and that the sources of the Gospels give evidence of a careful treatment of history.

The book has ten chapters. Using the credal statements of the NT as a launching point, Barnett argues that the messianic perspective about Jesus is deeply embedded in the tradition. He also contends that there were four early missions from the church that had a four-fold Gospel that was presented as one Gospel. In this emphasis Barnett follows the work of Martin Hengel. He also surveys non-Christian treatments of Jesus from Josephus, Tacitus, and Pliny. The implications of the testimony from Josephus are not as developed as they could be in terms of the miraculous work of Jesus. He argues for a biographical thread about Jesus emerging from Jerusalem with Peter having a major role as the figure behind Mark's Gospel. This thread also shows up in Acts. He contends for a model of orality that he calls repeated memory, distinguishing it from the models of Bailey, Dunn, Gerhardsson, and Bultmann. In looking at Luke's prologue, he argues that the Gospel writers did have biographical concerns about their presentation of Jesus. He offers a strong defense of historicity in John's Gospel. His survey of Pauline teaching on Jesus focuses on what he learned from Jerusalem, how Jesus' life is an example to Paul, and how Jesus' teaching is echoed in Paul. All of this shows that the life of Jesus mattered to the early church. In turning his attention to how the Galilean ministry is presented, Barnett argues that nothing was omitted and that there are key overlapping themes which show Jesus' kingdom-eschatological hope, his mighty works, and his parabolic teaching. In all of this we see an emphasis that points to Jesus as the Christ, something that becomes focused in Jesus' last week as he points to his coming vindication to God's right hand.

This is a fine study. Its key points are mostly well argued. But there are quibbles to be made with the tightness of the case at points. The impression one has of Peter's centrality to the entire tradition seems overstated. He certainly was a key player, but the role of the apostolic community as a whole seems underemphasized in this emphasis. Certainly the emphasis we see on Peter in Barnett is not mirrored in the reports of the early church. He is but one key player. The extent to which the Gospel of Thomas is Gnostic-dependent is very debated, since it lacks the key cosmological story of that emphasis. This point does not undercut his observation that this gospel is not as relevant to the discussion as some wish to make it, but it does remind us that Thomas is more of a hybrid than some more conservative studies are wanting to acknowledge. Finally, the handling of oral tradition as simply repeated memory seems to underplay the slight variations we get in the reporting of Jesus' speech (and that of others). To be sure, the gist of the sayings is consistent, but this reviewer was not persuaded that a case for a distinct way of handling orality had been made convincingly.

In sum, this is a serious and well-organized study of the historical Jesus with a case being made at a macro-level and through the remains of the traditions that Jesus had a high messianic self-understanding.



Those who see a need for micro-level study of specific key units and details will want to see more, but others (like Martin Hengel and the IBR Jesus Group) have and will supply this level of argument.

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Bart Ehrman. *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*. New York: HarperOne, 2009. 292 pp. \$25.99

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Bart Ehrman's *Jesus, Interrupted* by his own admission says nothing new. It packages what scholars have been saying about issues in the Bible in a very public way for two decades. As Ehrman points out, these issues go back centuries—and the positions he defends have been advocated for a few centuries. What the book does is put many of these well known examples in one place, laid out so anyone reading the Bible has to face up to them. In a real sense, *Jesus, Interrupted* is an “in your face” book for those who have a high regard for the Bible. Saying in effect, “Take that,” Ehrman tackles an array of textual issues. His chapters discuss supposed contradictions he sees in the text, the point of variant readings, debates about authorship, treatment of issues tied to the historical Jesus, and discussion about orthodox Christianity emerging later than the first century out of an originally more diverse situation.



In fact, folks like Augustine and Origen were aware of the kinds of issues he raises. Answers and debates around what Ehrman raises have been around for a long time, but one reading this book would never really know what the real conversation is about in these kinds of examples. Ehrman begins his study on a biographical note. He often does this in his books to tell how, becoming enlightened, his position changed. He notes that when he learned the historical critical method in place of the devotional method, he discovered the Bible was full of contradictions and discrepancies. He came to see it as a completely human book with Christianity being a religion that is completely human in its origin and development. His experience portrays the core thesis of *Jesus, Interrupted*. Ehrman has become a one-man band seeking to make clear what everyone should know about the origins of the Christian faith—its roots can be explained on completely human terms.

However, one can say Ehrman rigs the rules to get here. We cannot speak of the divine in any of this, he says, because historians cannot handle that kind of data. This represents a convenient limitation on what he can speak about (even as he makes all kinds of pronouncements about what is taking place and who is responsible). This book is valuable not for the points it makes, but for what it represents, a statement by a noted university professor who effectively communicates his understanding for how Christianity should be seen. Ehrman is an excellent example of how Christianity is being presented in the public square to many today. His works regularly make the New York Times best-seller list and receive prominent attention in popular bookstore chains.

One has to wonder what the motive is for writing a book when an author admits to providing nothing new in it. He claims he seeks to inform. One of the things Ehrman does effectively is communicate the tensions he sees. This book is really about packaging. What has made Ehrman somewhat of a

phenomenon is that he writes clearly and makes complex issues of biblical study accessible to so many (although it is very much with his twist on things). However, to leave the assessment with this point would be to ignore the case Ehrman tries to make. Let's look a little deeper at how this presentation works.

Ehrman wishes to challenge the conservative writers and the perspective they represent. These writers actually have engaged all the "non-new" points Ehrman makes, even highlighting themselves the "human" side of the Bible's production. However, reading Ehrman one would never know that. Ehrman works partly by caricature, partly by selectivity, and partly by setting rules where God cannot be invoked in a historical discussion. God cannot even be brought into the possibility of consideration in an interpretive spiral because "miracles are not impossible," just very much unlikely and a least likely explanation (read a "next to impossible," so virtually unusable, category).

I think what is most bothersome in this book is the way it sets up discussions. It pursues a topic for several pages, often noting in one or two quick and embedded sentences that the point is not as devastating as the impression given by the rhetoric of the whole section. Such qualification involves a quick almost aside that qualifies things so the author has cover. But it becomes a faint cry in light of the more skeptical thrust of the whole work. The result is to launch a discussion in a direction that implies more than the evidence really gives, leaving a greater impression about what is said than the author claims in the qualification. More than that, by excluding other key factors, the discussion leaves the impression of making a point clear that actually is not as cut and dried as the presentation suggests.

It would take a book to go through the many, familiar examples Ehrman raises—and that could be done. There are responses, scholarly credible ones, to virtually all the examples he raises. Let me take on one in detail that also was highlighted in his promotional video on Amazon.com. My point is to suggest that things are not always what they seem when they are set forth in *Jesus, Interrupted*.

In the video Ehrman claims (and then writes in the book) that Jesus dies in despair in Mark but as one in control in Luke. He argues these are diverse and contradictory portrayals. The key, he argues, is to appreciate the difference between Mark citing Ps 22:1 and Luke's appeal to Ps 31:5. Now here is what Ehrman does not indicate to readers or does not develop for his readers in terms of applying the significance of key facts to this example. Fact 1: Most scholars agree that Luke used Mark. Both Ehrman and I agree with this point about Luke's use of Mark. But he does not apply this fact to this example. I will show why it is important below. Fact 2: Mark speaks of a second cry from the cross in his account. Fact 3: Jesus in Mark (and in the Mark that Luke works with) has been predicting his death and choosing to face his death long before depicting the pain of the cross. Fact 4: Jesus supplies the very testimony against himself at the Jewish trial scene that leads into his crucifixion in Mark 14:62, hardly the act of a completely despairing man. I make this last point because Ehrman wants to preclude a citation of Ps 22:1 being uttered to point to the entire lament that is Ps 22, including the resolution of vv. 19–31. This example of reading (almost in the very flat, excessively literal fundamentalistic straw-man manner he wants to criticize) happens throughout the book. This is just an especially good example of it. In the midst of discussing Luke, he claims Jesus has no substitution of sin in his theology, ignoring the explicit statement in Acts 20:28 (remember we are discussing Luke's theology here as the basis for his changes). Another feature of Ehrman's approach is that he consistently appeals to what are possible readings of texts in combination while chiding those who combine things differently and more harmoniously. Remember we are speaking of writers who respected each other enough to be using their material.

What I would claim from this example is (1) Luke does highlight Jesus' control of the situation to a degree Mark does not (so Ehrman and I would agree here that this is true). However, conservatives have affirmed the different emphases between Gospel writers for years (I even wrote a book working through these kind of examples in the Gospel tradition called *Jesus according to Scripture*), and numerous commentaries by scholars (not all conservative) could see such differences without going on to create the theological distance Ehrman does between Mark and Luke. (2) Luke, knowing of the second cry in Mark, supplies what else Jesus said in a process not unlike the way in which a lawyer or an investigator might follow up on such a detail. Now we could discuss and debate whether Luke made this second saying up (as I suspect Ehrman might argue) or whether he had access to sources (as I am inclined to think), but my point is that one can easily read Luke as supplementing Mark here, not completely rejecting Mark's portrait of Jesus. Luke could do so while omitting reference to Ps 22:1 because its content was already known from Mark. It is important to note that Luke's locale of this Ps 31:5 utterance comes at the spot where the second cry comes in Mark. (3) Thus, the theologies of the cross are not in as great an opposition to each other as Ehrman claims. Rather what we have are emphases. In Mark, Jesus goes triumphantly to his death genuinely fully suffering, with the second evangelist presenting Jesus as an example, even to the point of despairing yet turning in the end to God. (If Jesus is as despairing as Ehrman suggests, then Jesus ceases to be the example Mark sets forth.) Luke shows a Jesus also in control, something the other passages in Mark also indicate.

In sum, this book is significant because of the kind of statement it represents, not for the way it makes its case. It also reflects a challenge to those who think differently about Scripture than Ehrman does. More of us need to be writing to this kind of an audience with a style that makes accessible to a lay person the resolution of the kinds of issues Ehrman raises. Jesus does not need interrupting; he needs to be understood.

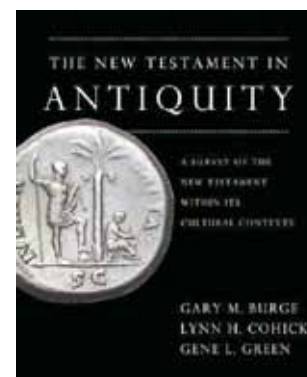
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Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick, and Gene L. Green. *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 479 pp. £30.99/\$49.99.

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The authors of this survey, three Wheaton College professors, have provided Christian college faculty with a fresh base-text for their undergraduate NT introduction or entry-level graduate survey courses. Each author contributes in his or her area of expertise, creating a strong collaboration that avoids the unevenness of a single-author survey. Many of the features included in this text are typical of the most recent NT surveys—engaging and informative color-photographs and maps, sidebars citing important primary source materials, and end-of-chapter discussion questions. What sets this volume apart from the proliferation of NT surveys is its combination of critical engagement with the pressing issues of NT studies, accessible format, and commitment to an evangelical perspective. The authors' self-stated goals



in writing the book are academic rigor, broad accessibility, contextual sensitivity, and confessional faithfulness (p. 9).

The text is organized into twenty-seven chapters of varying lengths (10–27 pp.). As expected, the survey begins with background material. It differs from others, however, in the amount of space devoted to the ancient context. Since one of the book's contributions is its attention to the Greco-Roman and Jewish settings, the authors have chosen to devote the first 164 pages to backgrounds, beginning with the broad Greco-Roman and Jewish historical context and gradually narrowing to the story of Jesus. The student first encounters the exposition of the NT text with the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 8, followed by the remaining Gospels and Acts. After a chapter focusing on the life and theology of Paul, his epistles are discussed, beginning with Galatians as the first epistle written and proceeding chronologically. The General Epistles receive similar treatment; the authors lead the group with James and combine Jude with 1 and 2 Peter. The final chapter is devoted to the transmission of the NT text after the completion of its writing; it broaches issues of textual criticism, canon formation, and translation theory.

Several attributes contribute to the value of this text. The overall perspective is decidedly evangelical (traditional dating and authorship prevails), but leaves in-house debates open for discussion and engagement (e.g., the discussion of the New Perspective on Paul [p. 264] and the genre of Revelation [p. 427]). The authors consistently address these issues charitably and even-handedly, and at times openly share their personal views (e.g., the meaning of “head” in 1 Cor 11 [p. 306]). The regular appeal to the cultural context for informing interpretations brings greater clarity and significance to otherwise opaque or insignificant details in the text of Scripture (cf. the question posed to Jesus about paying taxes [p. 156]). Although many survey texts include photographs and illustrations, the photographs in *The New Testament in Antiquity* are exceptional, not merely gratuitous; they contribute to a better understanding of the world in which the NT was penned. These qualities make the text commendable and useful within the evangelical community across confessional lines.

This elegantly written text accomplishes the four stated goals effectively for the “alert undergraduate” students that the authors teach (p. 9). Professors may find a judicious use necessary when teaching in settings where the students' intellectual curiosity is less broadly shared or where the NT course is the first Bible course of a general education sequence. Specifically, some students may find the significant space devoted to cultural backgrounds exhilarating while others may struggle to remain engaged until they embark upon the reading and study of the NT text itself. In addition, the level of engagement with critical issues may be more than some students can meaningfully digest. For these situations, the text is adaptable to the specific pedagogical needs. The text is not only usable in the academy, however. It could be used profitably as a reference for Sunday school teachers or a NT reading guide for the interested laity in the local church. In whatever way it is used, the authors have provided a valuable and up-to-date tool for the Christian community.

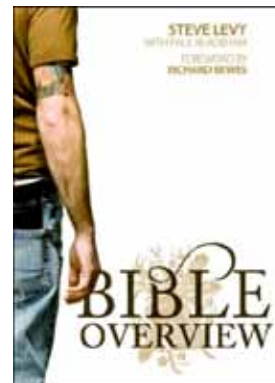
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Steve Levy. *Bible Overview*. Geanies House: Christian Focus, 2008. 336 pp. £6.99/\$11.99.

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As the pastor of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Swansea, Wales, Steve Levy writes a Bible primer that reflects his pastoral concerns and systematic-theological approach to understanding the metanarrative of Scripture. His ultimate goal is that the reader would “delight in the Bible” and “thirst after reading God’s Word, all of it, and delight in every single bit” (p. 11). The writing style is casual and non-technical, making it particularly well-suited for new Christians, especially new converts in their teens or twenties. He writes in short, vivid sentences, begins each subsection with an anecdote, and avoids theological terms and controversies. He addresses the task with a singular interpretive method and a pastor’s heart, arguing in concert with many of the Reformed creeds; the OT saints are to be regarded as the “church,” and the gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed to the OT saints in anticipation of his atoning work.



The book is organized in eleven parts, each part having three to six subsections. One unusual feature is the ordering of the OT books. Most often, a Bible overview written to be helpful for new converts follows the English Bible order of the OT books. Levy opts to follow the order of the Hebrew Bible—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. It is likely that he uses this ordering because it dovetails nicely with his hermeneutical key; everything written about Jesus in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings needed to be fulfilled (p. 16; cf. Luke 24:44).

The first subsection of Part One, “The Bible’s about Jesus,” introduces his systematic approach, which grows out of the assertion that Jesus is present in all of Scripture. Parts Two through Eleven guide the reader through the theological content of Scripture, albeit somewhat unevenly, from the covenant with Abraham to the missionary mandate of the church. For example, the most space is given to the Former Prophets, Genesis–2 Kings (120 pp.). Eighty-three of those pages are used to expound Genesis—31% of the entire book. Although Genesis is admittedly a theologically important book, it is also popularly regarded as one of the more interesting books to read. By contrast, the Latter Prophets (Isaiah–Malachi, less Lamentations and Daniel) total twenty pages. Here lies the problem; for the first-time reader, books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel pose the greatest challenges, and it is for these sorts of difficult sections that Levy desires to provide the key to understanding (cf. p. 9). Yet is his brief treatment sufficient to clear the fog from the mind of the overwhelmed?

The book evinces the predictable strengths and weakness of a brief, popular-level survey informed by systematic theology. It is an accessible and compelling read that gives a broad overview of the story of God’s work with his people throughout history. The weaknesses of this overview are its brief treatment of some portions of the Bible and an under-nuanced biblical theology. Paul Blackham contributes a “Frequently Asked Questions” appendix that answers the inevitable questions raised by a brief overview written by a pastor with young believers in view. With clarity and charity, he addresses differing theological viewpoints, accounts for the discontinuities between the OT and NT, and appeals to historic Reformed confessions to demonstrate the soundness of the hermeneutic applied by Levy. The book also includes three other appendices: quotes from church history selected by the author, Bible readings with study questions that follow the organization of the book, and an abbreviated list of OT quotations in the NT.

Levy helps the reader to understand the story of the Bible as a unified disclosure of the Son of God from Genesis to Revelation. Whether the author achieves his ultimate goal is difficult to assess; creating a thirst for the Bible can be measured only in the experience of the reader. One thing, however, is clear: Levy communicates his pastoral heart and passion for the Bible on every page.

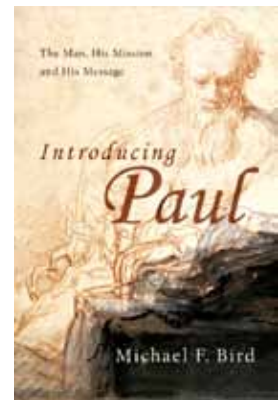
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Michael F. Bird. *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 192 pp. £8.99/\$20.00.

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Michael Bird distills many of the current issues in Pauline scholarship for undergraduate students and others who would like a “bird’s eye view” of Paul, as the title of this book’s British version indicates. The book summarizes many of the key issues in Paul’s life and thought. Beginning with an introduction to Paul’s life, he surveys the OT background to Paul’s thought, provides a concise summary of each letter, and then moves to a discussion of some key issues in Pauline theology. Bird devotes two chapters to the Pauline gospel, followed by one chapter each to eschatology, monotheism, and ethics. He concludes with a two-fold summary of Paul’s “spirituality,” arguing that since the center of Paul’s thinking is “the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus,” then the Christian life is one of increasing “gospelization” (p. 162). This process takes two shapes: cruciformity, following Christ to the cross, and anastasis, following Christ in the power of the resurrection.



Although this book is under two hundred pages, Bird has managed to summarize well most of the key issues in Pauline scholarship. He covers the major details of important issues such as the New Perspective on Paul, the imperial cult, the meaning of “righteousness,” inaugurated eschatology, Paul’s view of homosexuals and women, and several other key topics. Moreover, while summarizing the details of these issues, Bird usually presents a good case for his position without getting bogged down in the details that could so easily overwhelm a newcomer to many of these discussions. Bird’s ability to provide clear and thorough summaries without unneeded complexity is perhaps the greatest strength of the book.

Another strength of this work is a good balance between familiar theological topics, such as justification, imputation, and the already and not yet, and topics that might be less familiar to some, such as the Caesar cult and the sometimes neglected renewal theme in Paul’s theology. Finally, this is a very accessible and readable book. Given that Bird’s target audience is laypersons and undergraduate students, he seems to have hit this mark rather well.

While we could, and perhaps should, continue to list other strengths of Bird’s work, I will mention just one place in the book that raised a question in my mind. In his discussion of Paul’s view of women, Bird is happy to affirm both the teaching ministry of women and Paul’s general “patriarchal perspective” (p. 159). Given that this discussion was preceded by a larger treatment of sexual mores, I was surprised that Bird did not give the role of women more attention. A somewhat larger explanation of this issue



would have been a welcome addition, especially for many evangelicals who, while having general clarity about sexual ethics, continue to wrestle with the role of women. However, this question is not necessarily a disagreement, but simply an area where further clarity may have helped to sharpen an already fine work.

In short, this book is a valuable and timely contribution. Whether or not one takes issues with some of Bird's exegesis, the book is a fine introduction to the current shape of Pauline studies. In comparison with another recent introduction to the Pauline epistles by Brevard Childs (*The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]), Bird takes seriously both the history and the theology of the Pauline epistles. Therefore, *Introducing Paul* would serve as a fine textbook in an undergraduate or seminary course or as a great way for any other student of the Bible to catch up on the current conversation.

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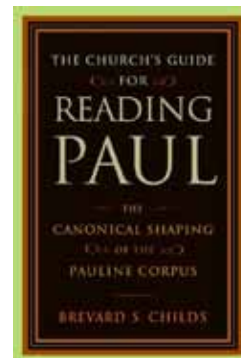
Brevard S. Childs. *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 276 pp. £18.99/\$28.00.

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In this posthumous volume, Brevard Childs applies his well-known canonical model to the Pauline corpus. After setting the stage by rehearsing major trends in the study of the Pauline epistles, Childs suggests how his own model can be applied to these letters. In short, he applies to the "canonical Paul" a modified version of Martin Kähler's distinction between *Historie* as an objective record of events "as they happened" and *Geschichte* as the "New Testament's witness to Jesus Christ" (p. 12).

By giving special attention to Romans and the Pastoral Epistles, Childs argues that a proper reading of the Pauline letters will focus on the "canonical shaping" of the corpus. Childs defines this "canonical shaping" as the process by which the church gathered the letters of Paul, ordered them, and interpreted them. On the basis of this shape, the church can interpret the letters as they now stand in the canon. Thus, "Paul's message has been extended and given a new form from its initial reception as it was assigned a new function within the Pauline corpus" (p. 75). In particular, Romans became the introduction to the corpus, the Pastorals, the conclusion, and the rest of the letters, a witness to the development and outworking of Pauline theology. As a parallel to common discussion about the historical and canonical Jesus, with the canonical shaping of the Pauline epistles, their *Historie* and particularity are ultimately subsumed in the church's reading of them in light of their *Geschichte* and canonicity.

Childs devotes most of the book to a series of "exegetical probes" into the Pauline epistles. In this exercise, he examines eight major texts and/or themes: apostleship, Abraham, the Spirit, the community gifts and worship, the church offices, the weak and strong, Romans 9–11, and the apocalyptic shape of Paul's theology. He then concludes with a brief discussion of the "canonical frame" of the Pauline corpus, i.e., Luke-Acts and Hebrews, and a short summary of his argument.



In order to illustrate his “exegetical probing,” we will highlight Childs’s discussion of church offices. In his discussion of the development of these offices, Childs focuses on the Pastorals. After outlining the debate between Ernst Käsemann, who insisted on a strong distinction between the Pauline charismatic leadership and the calcified structures of the Pastorals, and Heinrich Schlier, who argued for a strong continuity between the historical Paul and the Pastorals, Childs applies his own model to the debate. Not surprisingly, he argues that we need not accept either extreme; rather, we must read the Pastorals as part of the Pauline corpus in its new canonical context. Thus, among other roles, “the Pastorals do not function as a substitution of Paul, much less of his rival, but like John the Baptist, they serve as a pointer to the real source of continuing revelation, to the Scriptures, to Paul, and to the rest of the New Testament’s evangelical proclamation” (166).

By way of evaluation, there is much to commend about Childs’s approach. First, he attempts to deal seriously with the whole of the Pauline corpus and the NT for that matter. He does not simply relegate the “pseudo-Paulines” to the dustbin of scholarly study. Similarly, Childs is not satisfied with the fragmented historical critical approach that ruled NT scholarship for so long. Also, we can commend Childs for his desire to deal seriously with the concerns of the church, both ancient and modern. He respects the process of canonization and the millennia-old role of the twenty-seven books of the NT.

When turning to more critical assessments, we can first note that much has been written elsewhere about Childs’s approach and method (see Richard Schultz, “Brevard S. Childs’ Contribution to Old Testament Interpretation: An Evangelical Appreciation and Assessment,” *Princeton Theological Review* 14 [2008]: 69–93). Therefore, we need not enter into much detail concerning the methodological critiques of the canonical approach. However, it is important to mention that perhaps the most significant weakness of Childs’s method is his embrace of Kähler’s method. Given the NT’s explicit appeals to what could be classified as *Historie* by Kähler, it is difficult to accept his distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* on any significant level.

As it relates more directly to Pauline studies, this same critique must also be applied. If we must, as Childs suggests, distinguish the historical Paul from the canonical Paul, then we lose a significant ground upon which Paul built his authority. On more than one occasion, he appeals to the facts of history to support his authority and arguments (see, for example, 1 Cor 15:3–11; Gal 1:11–2:10). Without such grounds in place, Paul’s arguments lose much of their authority. Moreover, Childs’s use of the Pastorals is particularly problematic and seems to be inconsistent with his approach. It is unclear to me how a consistent canonical reader can both take the canonical message of the Pastorals seriously and simultaneously consider them “a pointer to the real source of continuing revelation, to the Scriptures, to Paul, and to the rest of the New Testament’s evangelical proclamation.”

If one cannot make a case for the historical reliability of the Pauline letters, and not simply on the basis of *Geschichte*, then it seems that a significant argument for their authority is lost. In short, while Childs’s approach continues to be a valuable and stimulating method for biblical studies, at the end of the day, it does not seem to be the only or best guide for the church to read Paul.

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Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 330 pp. £16.99/\$26.00.

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This volume of the McMaster New Testament Studies comprises mainly revised papers originally presented at the 2003 H. H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. The only exception is the final essay by A. J. Köstenberger, which acts as a summary and critique of the other papers.

Porter, the editor, introduces the book and summarises each contribution. The next two essays deal with general introductory comments and should be read by all who intend to consider more deeply this particular field. D. L. Stamps (“The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament as a Rhetorical Device: A Methodological Proposal”) discusses the NT authors’ use of the OT as a rhetorical device for persuasion. Stamps attempts to steer away from the intent of the NT authors in quoting from the OT to consider how such quotations or allusions would be understood by the NT’s audience. Furthermore, Stamps attempts to contextualise this quest against the background of Hellenistic literature, including rhetoric, rather than solely against contemporary Jewish exegetical practice. This particular attempt, while thought-provoking, perhaps falters due to the lack of satisfactory evidence.

Starting with the assertion that there was ‘no sense of a canon during the early church,’ R. T. McLay (“Biblical Texts and the Scriptures for the New Testament Church”) discusses how we know that a NT writer is quoting the OT and what versions the NT writers were using. Using Heb 1:6 and Odes 2:43 as his paradigm, McLay states that the NT writer relied on the LXX rather than the MT or Qumran. This reviewer found Köstenberger’s analysis of McLay’s argument balanced and helpful.

The next eight essays deal with the corpus of the NT and follow the canonical sequence. The papers are certainly stimulating though sometimes they cast greater light on the particular interests of the contributors. On occasion, the idiosyncratic approaches left this reviewer slightly exasperated. Nevertheless, any scholar who wishes to consider the use of the OT in a particular NT book should certainly consult the corresponding essay in this volume. The copious footnotes and excellent indices should also prove a fruitful jumping off point for all who wish to go deeper. Anyone studying the use of the OT in the Pastorals, General Epistles, and Revelation will be grateful to Köstenberger for his twenty-five-page whirlwind tour.

Köstenberger’s final essay reviews and critiques the papers of the other contributors. This critical reflection is a new addition to the series and will help the reader focus his or her thinking and provoke further discussion. Furthermore, even if one disagrees with his conclusions, it is an excellent example of gracious interaction and penetrating analysis.

The natural space limits of the volume combined with the nature of the Colloquium result in a volume that at times feels disjointed. The contributors approach their subjects from a variety of working presuppositions and generally discuss only their allotted part of the canon. Some essays, while still stimulating, feel particularly restricted and are thus less helpful.

This volume remains a valuable contribution and an accessible starting point for those interested in this complex field of study. It is certainly not the final word on the topic as the editor himself



acknowledges (p. vii). However, this collection may well stimulate others to reconsider the use of the OT by the NT authors. If it does, then we will all be indebted.

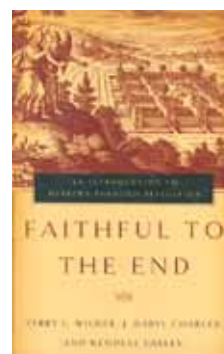
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Terry L. Wilder, J. Daryl Charles, and Kendell Easley, eds. *Faithful to the End*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007. 330 pp. £16.99/\$34.99.

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As the academic year gathers its relentless pace, lecturers and teachers of the NT are often caught on the horns of a dilemma. “Do I teach Romans or Hebrews?” Far too often the “end of the NT” (Hebrews through to Revelation), while not ignored, is disappointingly neglected. A quick perusal of old class notes and handouts confirms this common experience. The authors of this volume have seen the need to address this issue and to provide a suitable introduction for these books of the NT aimed at lecturers and students.



Each letter is examined in its respective context, and the usual issues of authorship, destination, recipients, provenance, and purpose are discussed in turn. This allows for a uniform pattern to be employed throughout. However, the contributors also freely discuss those key themes and areas of interest unique to each particular book. This they do succinctly and clearly. Time is taken to discuss some of the contributions made by the more important scholarly works. Furthermore, the full footnotes and balanced bibliographies at the end of each chapter allow the student to pursue those avenues of study that have piqued their interest.

This is a very useful introductory resource. The book is clear, most of the major themes of each biblical book are discussed, and the content is well presented. Even when one disagrees with the authors' own particular conclusions and emphases, they generally present their case in a balanced and irenic way.

The authors have succeeded in providing a volume that could be used as both a reference book and as a course textbook. Indeed, there is much here that would benefit a minister in preparing a series of sermons and Bible studies. One fears, however, that unless prompted to do so, cash-strapped students may decide to purchase only a standard introduction covering all the NT. While understandable, this would be a pity.

The authors should be thanked for being faithful to “the end.” Hopefully their faithfulness and hard work will stimulate lecturers to prepare and deliver courses on Hebrews through to Revelation for the benefit of both the academy and, more importantly, the church.

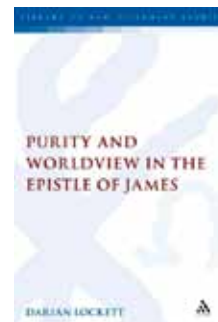
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Darian Lockett. *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James*. Edited by Mark Goodacre. Library of New Testament Studies 366. London: T&T Clark, 2008. 221 pp. £70.00/\$130.00.

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Darian Lockett's revised and published thesis on *Purity and Worldview in the Epistle of James* is a much-needed addition to the field of Jacobean research. Taking one very specific theme of the epistle, a theme crucial for the greater theology of perfection, Lockett helpfully untangles a great deal of the confusion surrounding the language of purity, particularly how one is deemed pure. In his introduction he raises the question of how purity language has been interpreted as either ritual or metaphorical purity, and then he shows how these simplistic categories have been (wrongfully) applied to the epistle of James. From there his first chapter is a lengthy discussion of purity language: the categories scholars have used to understand it and the methodologies used for determining how purity language functions. While insightfully critiquing other scholars, Lockett settles on two categories from Mary Douglas to apply to a reading of James: "danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system [and] danger pressing on the external boundaries" (p. 65). Next, he approaches the text of James with an extended examination of several critical issues in the epistle's structure. He argues for the importance of reading James *as a letter* to a precarious Diaspora audience, highlights a correct reading of its paraenetical structure as a series of contrasts intended to motivate the reader to correct choices by walking the reader through the text, and ultimately highlights why Jas 1:2–27 should be read as an introduction of the key themes of the text.



This is where the book truly hits its stride, for Lockett walks the reader through the text to show the function of each passage and how it fits within a general theme of contrasting choices as well as how the text seeks to move the reader to the right choice at each point. Without overstating the case nor falling into the easy trap of a simplistic two-ways reading, Lockett argues that a driving motivation for James is perfection in contrast to double-mindedness, where perfection is "to display total and unvarying commitment to God and to do good works and develop the character prescribed by the 'law of liberty' and the wisdom from above" (p. 104). This perfection, however, is "directly affected by their degree of cultural separation from the dominant value system," for purity is "directly affected by proximity to 'the world'" (p. 105). This, therefore, is his justification for his focus on purity. From here, chapter 4 focuses specifically on purity language in the text, recalling his discussion of Douglas. While acknowledging that purity language is not necessarily common in the epistle, he shows how it appears at crucial times, relates to the language of friendship, and stands in contrast to "the world" (*kosmos*). From these textual conclusions, he is able to deduce that purity language in James is not ritual or metaphorical, but a specific type of boundary keeping from the influence of the world (which is itself the domain of the devil). As he puts it, purity language functions "as a *figurative label for social/ideological location*" (p. 120), revealing James' concern to build a pure community amidst a tainting environ.

Having concluded that "purity is a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition in order to achieve perfection" (pp. 143–44), Lockett turns to the final question of whether this purity James seeks is sectarian or accommodating of the surrounding culture. Again, he avoids a simplistic answer, using Barclay's three scales of "assimilation, acculturation, and accommodation" to help (p. 150). After examining the text's depiction of audience, opposition, and author, Lockett concludes that James's purity language functions to "persuade James's readers to maintain (or create) firm value boundaries between them and the wider culture" at the points of "patron-client relations with the 'rich'" and the "inappropriate and deceitful use of the tongue" (p. 183). It is these two points specifically at which the *kosmos* could taint

his audience, and so it is at these two points that the author seeks not to create a sectarian divide for his audience but a wise separation from the surrounding culture.

Overall, Lockett's book is well researched, readable, and highly informative. He takes several divergent discussions and integrates them into one coherent argument. If there is a weakness in this book, it is perhaps that Lockett sometimes spends so much space covering various fields in depth that points begin to feel like more of a literature survey than his own study. Occasionally, most likely as a result of this, the structure does not flow as the same text from James can be repeated several times or a tangential discussion intrudes on an argument. Those criticisms are slight, however, when compared with the clarity with which he introduces the social-scientific arguments, critiquing the imprecise ways people have dealt with the purity language in general as well as in James in a very helpful way for the person trying to get a handle on the language more generally. And one of the biggest strengths of the book is Lockett's consistent emphasis on the communal nature of James, refusing to take an individualistic approach to moral purity. His balance of individual moral purity with the consequences of the taint of the *kosmos* on the community makes this book a crucial read not only for the James scholar but also for the person seeking to better understand the Christian life.

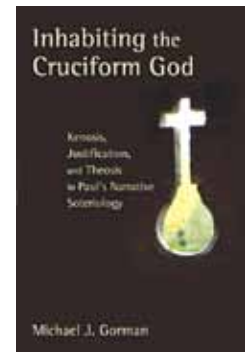
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Michael J. Gorman. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 105 pp. £13.99/\$24.00.

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At the risk of engaging in a ridiculously overdrawn generalization, one might say that the current theological climate is characterized by a distaste for distinctions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the study of Paul's theology, where the traditional distinctions between justification and sanctification, faith and works, and judicial and participationist categories are all under attack from a variety of fronts. All three of these distinctions, quite important in traditional Protestant theology, are discarded in Michael Gorman's stimulating study of Pauline theology. Gorman, a Methodist who teaches at a Roman Catholic school (the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland), argues that the notion of "theosis," the idea of participation in the being of God, undercuts and makes irrelevant these distinctions. Gorman thinks that theosis, a concept usually associated especially with the characteristic approach to Christian theology in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, is central to Paul's theology and provides a way to understand Paul and his significance more accurately.



The heart of Gorman's argument may be summarized in a syllogism:  
Christ's self-giving on the cross reveals the very identity of God;  
Christians participate in Christ's self-giving death;  
Christians therefore are identified with the very being of God.

Gorman establishes the first premise through a careful reading of the famous christological passage in Phil 2:6–11, a text that he argues embodies Paul’s “master story” (p. 12). Key to his interpretation of this passage is his claim that the clause “although he was in the form of God” in v. 6 has a deeper structure that can be translated “because he was in the form of God.” Christ’s self-giving, or “kenosis,” then, is revelatory of God’s very being.

It is in the course of establishing the second premise that Gorman demolishes traditional Pauline distinctions. The long debate between defenders of a fundamentally “juridical” reading of Paul, focused on justification and associated with traditional Protestantism, and advocates of a fundamentally “participationist” reading (e.g., Albert Schweitzer and E. P. Sanders) is resolved by identifying them. Paul operates with a single “soteriological model”: co-crucifixion with Christ is the means by which humans are restored to right covenant relations. This is, in fact, justification, which, far from being a narrow juridical category, means “restoration to right covenantal relations” with God and others (pp. 52–53). Sanctification, or holiness, is therefore not distinct from justification, but its “actualization.” And the faith we exercise in activating this relationship is not to be sharply distinguished from “works” or love: for Paul, faith is “grace-enabled participatory response” (p. 81) that goes beyond mere assent or trust.

Having established the basic logic of Paul’s “theotic” approach, Gorman goes on to show that (1) holiness, a central concern of Paul, is best understood in terms of theosis, and especially a theosis that focuses on the essentially cruciform nature of God; and (2) the cruciform identity of God and our being taken up in that identity lead logically to the Christian embrace of non-violence.

Gorman is motivated in writing this book and in developing his more unitive understanding of key Pauline categories by a concern for what he labels (à la Bonhoeffer) “cheap justification”: “justification without justice, faith without love, declaration without transformation” (p. 41). Who, looking around at the state of the church, would deny that the concern is a legitimate one? And Gorman is not the first, by a long shot, to blame the traditional Protestant teaching of a purely juridical “justification” by “faith alone” for contributing to this sad indifference to true holiness. But his solution to the problem is worse than the problem. To be sure, the participatory language of Paul has too often been undervalued. While it was basic to Calvin’s soteriology (though, of course, not the way it is for Gorman!), union with Christ has often been neglected in many soteriological formulations that present justification too much as a “bare” transaction. And perhaps “theosis,” properly defined, is a helpful category to introduce into discussions of Paul’s theology. The problem, however, is the neglect of the genuinely juridical categories in Paul at the expense of the “participationist” ones in Gorman’s reading. As most scholars now acknowledge, “justification” language *is* juridical or forensic. Gorman does not really deal with this linguistic argument, but gets around the problem by arguing for parallels between justification, on the one hand, and, for example, union with Christ and reconciliation on the other. But the key texts involved here (Gal 2:15–21 on the one hand and Rom 5:9–10 on the other) do not prove what Gorman thinks they do. He too quickly moves from the obvious *association* of these themes to their *identification*. His argument for the fundamentally cruciform character of God has stronger support and deserves more consideration than it is usually given. Even here, though, one must ask if the exegetical support for the idea is solid. Can the key participle in Phil 2:6 really mean *at the same time* “although” and “because”? Gorman appeals to “deep” as opposed to “surface” structure, but the deep structure receives only fragile support (for instance, with an argument from a dubious parallel; see pp. 23–24).

Gorman is right to lament the tendency to separate justification from holiness of life, faith from love and good deeds. But by merging the categories as he does, Gorman misses what I think are some critical Pauline distinctions and also opens wide the door to the opposite error of a righteousness that is built on the very insubstantial foundation of our own continuing efforts. I find the traditional (rightly understood) Protestant insistence on a necessary and organic connection between the *distinct* concepts of justification and sanctification and faith and works a more satisfactory reading of Paul and a better answer to the problem of Christian indifference to holiness.

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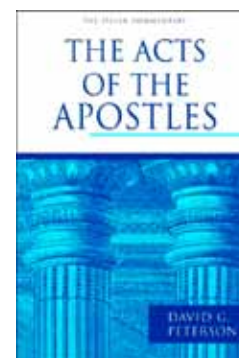
David G. Peterson. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. lv + 846 pp. \$65.00.

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In the preface to his new commentary on Acts, David Peterson presents himself as a pastor-teacher to readers. He explains that he has aimed to distill scholarly work for a wider public and to understand Acts in relation to contemporary gospel-ministry. He discusses concerns about divisive issues (e.g., priorities for mission and the work of the Holy Spirit) related to Acts and recognizes discomfort with preaching from narrative for many teachers of the Bible. Judged against these pastoral concerns, Peterson has written a fine introduction to Acts.

Peterson begins by addressing major issues in scholarship about Acts. Who was the author? When was it written? What is its genre? Is it historically reliable? How does narrative criticism elucidate the book? What is the relationship between the Western, Byzantine, and Alexandrian textual traditions? Peterson's approach resembles a NT Introduction chapter on Acts; he presents the most widely discussed answers to those questions, then offers his own conclusions on which view is most convincing. To summarize, Peterson concludes that the author is Luke, the second-generation Christian physician mentioned in NT epistles. Luke probably wrote Acts in the mid-seventies, but perhaps the early sixties. Acts is both a confessional and reliable history, written in the style of Jewish and Greek historiography; it is a "theological history," focused on the fulfillment of biblical promises and purposes. Although it represents a different genre from Luke's Gospel, Acts is its sequel; they cohere thematically, narratively, and theologically.

The last two points are significant in that, first, they represent a sharp deviation from the approach of the two most recent English commentaries on Acts, one written by Richard Pervo and the other by Mckel Parsons, which do not affirm such unity between Luke and Acts and whose interests do not lie in matters of historicity. Second, the conclusions that Acts is a theological history and that it follows the Gospel of Luke provide the justification for what may be the most helpful part of the introduction, an essay on ten key theological themes in Acts. Not meant to be a comprehensive list, its scope is limited to theological themes for which Peterson perceives development from Luke's Gospel. These ten are God and his plan; Jesus as Messiah and Lord; the Holy Spirit; salvation; the gospel; the atoning work of Jesus; witness and mission; miracles; magic and the demonic; and the church. This essay, by Peterson's own admission, contains limited interaction with alternative views, but it provides an excellent theological





summary of Acts for Bible teachers. It offers a solid base from which to understand Acts as a whole, rather than atomistically, and a meaningful context into which an intimidated teacher can place historical and literary matters.

Providing such an introduction is no mean accomplishment, and it may come at a cost to the scholar who wants more detailed argumentation for these themes, as well as interaction with more recent and diverse secondary literature. This possibly illustrates the challenge of writing a commentary that aims to blend “scholarship and pastoral sensitivity” as the Pillar series does; if not, it certainly reflects the challenge of writing a comprehensive, detailed commentary on a book as long as Acts.

Overall, however, Peterson handles the challenge of writing for both scholars and pastors quite well. The commentary is organized in outline form, with helpful introductions to sections and subsections. He bases his study on the Greek text, converses articulately and graciously with major voices in scholarship, and provides appropriate material from primary sources. His lucid writing makes the reading enjoyable and easy, a welcome feature for both the scholar and the pastor. Peterson also maintains a thread of ministry-minded, sometimes homiletic, conclusions to many sections. For example, discussing Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders, he writes, “Covetousness spoils relationships and hinders the work of the gospel, since those who are seeking to advance themselves materially will be tempted to evaluate their contacts and ministry opportunities in economic terms” (p. 573). It might be added that for these points of application some kind of systematic treatment of the prescriptive/non-prescriptive nature of Acts could be useful (this would align with Peterson’s focus on hermeneutics and contemporary application) for readers who wonder why, for example, we should follow Paul’s Areopagus model by speaking within our hearers’ ideological framework (pp. 504–5) but generally not expect to see signs and wonders with our preaching (p. 383).

Peterson’s comprehensive and coherent commentary is a welcome addition to recent Acts scholarship. A pastor or theological student who wants a well-written introduction to major issues and themes in Acts, with an eye toward application of the text for the contemporary church, will certainly appreciate this contribution.

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Stephen H. Travis. *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought*. Colorado Springs: Paternoster; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009. xiv + 383 pp. \$24.95.

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Stephen Travis has revised and updated his 1986 book in this new work. The book covers a lot of ground: retribution in the OT and Jewish literature (chaps. 2–3); judgment and retribution in Pauline theology (chaps. 4–13); judgment and retribution in the Gospels (chaps. 14–17); and judgment and retribution in Revelation (chaps. 18–19). The book is rounded out with an introduction (chap. 1) and a conclusion (chap. 20). The fundamental thesis of the book is that divine judgment is not fundamentally retributive, even if it has retributive overtones at times. The survey of the OT and Jewish literature is cursory. Though Travis sees a retributive element in both the OT and the other Jewish writings consulted, he downplays such in the NT.



Travis focuses on Paul in his study, arguing, for instance, that God's wrath is a consequence of human sin and should not be construed in terms of an affection or emotion in God. Still, he maintains against Dodd that God's wrath is personal, though the focus is on personal relationships rather than retribution. God's wrath works itself out in personal relationships (being excluded from God's presence), and those who are punished experience the consequences of their sins. In such instance retribution is not in view, Travis claims, because retribution cannot occur at the level of personal relationships. Furthermore, retribution is excluded if there are intrinsic consequences (rather than extrinsic) for what one does. Once one grasps Travis's definition of retribution and perceives how he works it out in the chapter on wrath in Paul, the argument of the remainder of the book follows rather nicely. In virtually every case he argues that the judgment or reward in view cannot be understood as strictly retributive, since the text focuses on personal relationships and the intrinsic consequences of the actions taken. One might think that Revelation stands out as an exception, but even here Travis maintains that the symbolic language must not be pressed and that Revelation is in essentially the same orbit as the Pauline letters and the Gospels.

A number of interesting and important topics surface in the book, and it should be said that Travis's tone is charitable throughout the book. There is a fascinating chapter on whether believers, according to Paul, can be perfect during this life. Travis discusses in his study of both Paul and the Synoptics whether or not there are rewards distinct from (and therefore above and beyond) eternal life, arguing that the reward texts refer to eternal life itself—not some additional reward. He asks whether believers can finally apostatize and concludes that the biblical text answers that question in the affirmative. Similarly, he claims that the evidence in support of eternal and conscious punishment is unpersuasive. In a book that discusses so many texts, it is inevitable that there will be disagreement here and there. So, contrary to Travis, I would argue that it is clear that genuine believers will never apostatize and that the final punishment is eternal and conscious.

The fundamental question, however, is whether Travis's concept of retribution is persuasive. I would argue that his thesis fails. He actually sets up the book in such a way that retribution is ruled out from the outset since he says retribution cannot exist where there are personal relationships, and obviously any relationship with the God of the Bible is personal. Such a statement is a fundamental misstep right from the beginning of the book. God as the sovereign Lord and King is personal, and yet he may punish another person retributively (by paying back what they deserve). Another flaw is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic consequences, as if the former rules out retribution. Again Travis presupposes the conclusion in his premises by claiming that there can be no retribution if the consequences are intrinsic. But such a distinction is foreign to the worldview of the biblical authors, for all consequences are the outworking of God's sovereign and personal will, and hence the punishment may still be retributive, even though it is also depicted as the result of one's actions. Travis opts for an either-or, when the biblical text (cf. 2 Thess 1:5–10) demands a both-and.

Travis attempts to separate himself from Dodd by repeatedly saying that even though judgment and reward are non-retributive they are still personal. One can appreciate his attempt to correct Dodd, but it remains unclear how God is personal on Travis's terms. How is God's judgment personal in Travis's scheme when the focus is on the intrinsic consequences of what occurs, which he separates from God's affections? Indeed, the claim that God's wrath does not have an affective component is unpersuasive. His skirting over the massive OT evidence on the matter is quite unfortunate. And when it comes to the NT, he repeatedly makes reductionistic arguments. For instance, he claims that the wrath of God

in Rom 2:8 cannot be retributive since the reward is eternal life (Rom 2:7)! How the conclusion drawn follows is quite mystifying. Similarly, he often remarks that if a NT text borrows retributive imagery from the OT, then we must not press the language of retribution, for it is traditional. But it can just as easily be argued that the language of tradition is adopted because the NT author believed it accurately represented (even if it is symbolic) God's retributive punishment.

Travis has some fine insights in particular texts, but his rejection of retribution becomes the lens through which the NT is read. Given Travis's view of retribution, we are not surprised, though disappointed, that he sees little emphasis on penal substitution in the NT. The thesis of the book, ultimately, must be assessed as unpersuasive.

Thomas R. Schreiner

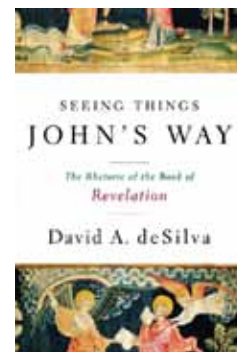
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David A. deSilva. *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009. xiv + 393 pp. £31.04/\$49.95.

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While virtually no one would quibble with the assertions on this book's back cover that the last book of the Bible is "challenging and complex" or that deSilva offers "a provocative exploration," some may wonder if it is too much to claim, "This volume will redefine the study of the book of Revelation." However, a close reading will reveal that deSilva, professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary, is pushing research on Revelation forward in important ways and enabling his readers to add some significantly useful tools to their exegetical tool belts.



His first chapter begins with a survey of interpretive methodologies that groups the historicist, futurist, and preterist approaches together in reading "Revelation as a collection of predictions in search of fulfillment" and describes the idealist viewpoint as reading "Revelation as an allegory communicating timeless truths." Over against these, deSilva opts for the "contemporary-historical" approach, which asks how John's original audiences in the seven churches would have understood this writing.

DeSilva utilizes a rhetorical analysis of Revelation that studies how the author "has mobilized particular means of persuasion to a particular end or ends" (p. 14). Thus, this approach draws on the principles of classical rhetorical criticism from the handbooks contemporary with the time period when Revelation was written. DeSilva includes a helpful introduction that explains the methodology used by this approach and is careful to point out that a text such as Revelation must not be forced to fit any predetermined theory; the resources of classical rhetoric are to be used in a heuristic way rather than normatively.

Chapter two explains that the first step of rhetorical analysis seeks to determine the rhetorical setting addressed by the text. DeSilva gives a good overview of the social situations of the seven churches, emphasizing that the diversity of their circumstances means that John is faced with more than one rhetorical situation. In regard to the debated question concerning the extent of persecution these churches faced, he notes, "Every reference to the outside world in the seven oracles involves hostility,

antagonism, or social tension” (p. 53). While martyrdom may not have been the pervasive reality in the churches at the time John wrote, they had faced it in the past, and John anticipated that they would face it in the future as well (pp. 53–54).

Chapter three examines John’s rhetorical goals. In light of the multiple rhetorical situations of the seven churches, he uses multiple rhetorical genres. “Epideictic goals (continued adherence to cherished values) or deliberative goals (a call to desist from some course of action and /or embrace another course of action) may vary from locale to locale, even from hearer to hearer” (91). While the topics of forensic rhetoric are present, they are used in the service of deliberative rhetoric (p. 89; in this analysis deSilva parts ways with Ben Witherington and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza).

Chapter four explicates John’s view of the cosmos, which defines the nature of reality that he wishes his audience to understand. The literary genre of the apocalypse is particularly suited to his purposes. “John’s principal rhetorical strategy involved getting a glimpse of, and communicating effectively, the bigger picture that reaffirmed the Judeo-Christian worldview, and the values and practices that worldview sustained, interpreting the dominant culture and its legitimation structures from within that worldview” (pp. 336–37). Here, as in other chapters, deSilva makes good use of theories from the social sciences (e.g., Clifford Geertz and Peter Berger) to illuminate the meaning of the text. In sum, the imminent coming of Christ in judgment presents a crisis that confronts John’s audience and is one to which they must properly attend.

Chapters five and six discuss how John constructs his own authority (*ethos*) vis-à-vis the rival voices vying for the attention of those he addresses. It is clear that for those who accept John’s claims to relay what he has received from God (cf. the way that Rev 1:1–3 is constructed) this text speaks with an authority that is immense. His pervasive use of the Hebrew Scriptures also buttresses his claims to authority. In chapters seven and eight, deSilva provides a fascinating analysis of the way appeals to emotion (*pathos*) are used in Revelation, treating particularly the emotions of “fear and confidence, friendship and enmity, and shame and emulation” (p. 192).

Chapters nine and ten examine John’s use of enthymematic-argumentative reasoning (appeals to *logos* or reason) to persuade his audience. While these arguments show elements of structure and lead to convincing conclusions, they build on shared assumptions between John and his Christian audience which “will only work within Christian culture and would be likely to be dismissed, even ridiculed, outside of early Christian congregations” (p. 255). Revelation 14:6–13 is analyzed in depth as an example of how these types of arguments work within the book. Chapter eleven treats Revelation’s “narrative logic” and John’s use of intertexture (“the pervasive interweaving of texts from the sacred tradition shared by John and his audiences” [p. 297]). A final chapter deals with the treatment of women in the book of Revelation and how the message(s) of the book can be brought forward into the twenty-first century and applied to the situations in which the contemporary church finds itself. The book concludes with a bibliography and indices of ancient texts, modern authors, and subjects.

Overall, this book is well-organized, and most chapters end with helpful content summaries. Several chapters include material that was previously published in journal articles, but some of these articles listed on pages xi–xii are not included in the bibliography under deSilva’s writings. A few typographical errors exist (e.g., the text on p. 59n102 is repeated in the text on p. 68, and Geertz’s publication date is incorrectly listed as 1975 [p. 96n11]).

Obviously, in interpreting a book like Revelation, many will want to disagree with various particulars of deSilva’s interpretations. However, his use of exegetical questions conducive to a fully rhetorical

reading (see the master list of questions on pp. 25–27, but also various places throughout the book like p. 96) stimulate further research and provide the potential for fresh insights on current debates (cf. his suggestions in regard to the two witnesses in Rev 11 [pp. 223–25]) and the identity of the 144,000 in Rev 7 [pp. 225–27]). This is a book that will repay careful study by all who seek to hear what John heard and see what he saw.

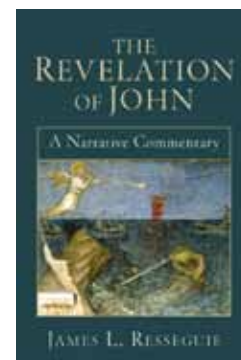
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James L. Resseguie. *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. 288 pp. £15.52/\$24.99.

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The last book of the NT canon is a complex piece of literature with epistolary, prophetic, and apocalyptic characteristics. Its sometimes confusing but always fascinating visions have evoked many diverse interpretations of this difficult book. James Resseguie, professor of New Testament at Winebrenner Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), helps point the way forward for interpreters with this mid-length commentary that recognizes that the Book of Revelation is also a narrative. Thus, Resseguie provides a close literary reading of Revelation that builds on the concepts articulated in two of his earlier books, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) and *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).



According to Resseguie, a narrative commentary pays careful attention to the way the author has put this work together. “Form and content are an indissoluble whole, and the way John tells his story—the imagery, settings, metaphors, and so forth—is as important as what he has to say” (p. 17). Two emphases emerge in that the narrative is examined as a “unified whole” and careful attention is given to the nuances and subtleties of the text such as “the structure, rhetoric, setting, characters, point of view, plot, and the narrator’s style and his repertoire,” that is, “intertextual allusions, the social and cultural location of the narrator, the political environment, and the evaluative or ideological point of view of the narrator” (pp. 17–18). While these terms from narrative criticism may sound intimidating to those unfamiliar with this methodology, Resseguie has not written this commentary for specialists. Since his intended audience is “upper-level undergraduate students, entry-level seminary and graduate students, and pastors and lay persons who want to read Revelation once again as a compelling story of intrigue” (p. 12), he begins his study with a helpful, forty-three-page introduction that functions as a primer on narrative criticism as applied to Revelation. In addition, Greek terms are placed in the footnotes, always accompanied by transliteration.

The commentary on the text is divided into sections that proceed chapter-by-chapter throughout the book instead of verse-by-verse, with the prologue (1:1–8) and epilogue (22:6–21) each given separate sections, and Rev 2–3 and 8–9 both analyzed as units of text. As an aid for further reflection, eight photographs of Albrecht Dürer’s woodcuts from *The Apocalypse of Saint John* (1496–98) are included

throughout the commentary, visually illustrating various scenes from John's visions. Finally, the book concludes with a bibliography, subject index, index of modern authors, and a Scripture index.

In a biblical book where it is easy to get bogged down in complex debates over details, Resseguie offers a refreshing close reading of the overall narrative that orientates the reader to the overarching thrust of John's visions. Consequently, this commentary's focus and length does not lend itself to detailed analysis of text-critical issues, dating, authorship, social situation, or extended discussions of the various exegetical options. However, Resseguie frequently points his readers in the footnotes to other sources in the secondary literature on Revelation that discuss these matters more completely. Thus, the student of Revelation may look to Resseguie for the big-picture approach, but will need to consult other commentaries that perform in-depth exegesis of the textual details. Additionally, Resseguie occasionally performs the helpful service of notifying his readers when other scholars disagree with his own reading of the text or provide a different approach (e.g. pp. 45n73, 47n79).

In regard to some of the more important interpretive debates that every commentator must struggle with in Revelation, Resseguie understands the book's structure as a "literary progression" (but not a strict linear chronology) instead of a nonlinear recapitulation approach (pp. 54–59). He provides a fascinating reading of the book's masterplot as "a quest of the people of God to find their way home, to the new promised land. After exile from the garden of Eden, how can humankind find its way back to paradise? John develops and elaborates this masterplot through allusions to the exodus and exile" (pp. 46–47). Based on the relationship between two points of view, inner reality (what John hears) and outward reality (what John sees), the 144,000 in Rev 7:1–8 should probably be identified with the innumerable multitude in 7:9–17 (p. 137). Revelation 11:13 depicts an actual response of genuine repentance to the witness of the suffering church (p. 166). In Rev 20:4–6, Resseguie finds two bodily resurrections instead of the viewpoint that the first one is spiritual in 20:4 (p. 247). He follows Richard Bauckham in his understanding of the meaning of the millennium, concluding that John is not interested in some of the details which we ask about today. The main point is that "from an above point of view God's ways are vindicated and the martyrs are victorious" (pp. 245–46).

In sum, Resseguie offers a unified, coherent reading of Revelation as a narrative (cf. the similar method but sometimes differing results of David Barr's *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998]). His opening primer on narrative criticism as it is applied to Revelation is especially useful (e.g., see his intriguing discussion of numbers and numerical sequences [pp. 28–32]) and will provide students and pastors with a good understanding of the benefits gained by this type of reading. However, in order to better understand Revelation, this methodology should be used in conjunction with other ways of studying the book, and the reader will want to make good use of the suggested resources in Resseguie's footnotes.

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Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett, eds. *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. xvii + 506 pp. £87.00/\$175.00.

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*Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (henceforth, *Trajectories*) is the second volume printed in commemoration of the 1905 publication by the Oxford Society of Historical Theology entitled *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*. One hundred years later Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett have edited a series of essays in two volumes in commemoration of the publication of the landmark work. These two volumes “are intended to update, develop, and widen the scope of the issues” considered in the book published in 1905 (p. v).

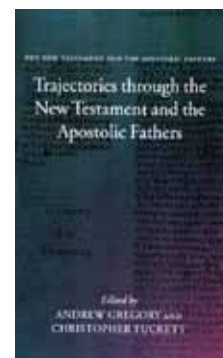
Like its companion volume, *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, *Trajectories* is important for all those who are interested in Christian origins. While many within today’s church think of Christianity in terms of the NT alone, the documents that follow the NT, known as the Apostolic Fathers, have much to tell about beginning indicators for a NT canon, NT background, early Christian history, what Christian beliefs became prominent, and how Christian beliefs were transmitted in the church.

*Trajectories* is concerned with a sampling of ideas and issues that arise when these two bodies of literature are compared. While it is sensitive to citations and allusions from the NT, issues of verbal agreement are the concern of its companion volume. *Trajectories* is interested in examining thematic relationships. This is a necessary and important addition to the comparison between the NT and the Apostolic Fathers since thematic agreement is not necessarily found by the examination of verbal indicators.

The essays within *Trajectories* are grouped together in eight separate sections. Part one contains one essay on “Paul in the Apostolic Fathers.” The second part has two essays concerning “Gospel Traditions in the Apostolic Fathers.” “Christology in the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers” is the third part and has two essays. There are four essays in part four entitled “Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers.” The fifth part is exclusively devoted to the *Didache* and has three essays. Part six holds four essays regarding Ignatius. The seventh part has two essays on Polycarp with his letter to the Philippians. The eighth and final section contains two essays on the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

While the series of essays is not meant to be comprehensive, it would be of help if the sections of this volume were more balanced. Considering that *First Clement* is one of the most important books of the Apostolic Fathers, a section devoted to this epistle would be helpful. A second or third essay within the section concerning Paul and the Apostolic Fathers would also bring this section into better proportion with the surrounding sections.

The essays within *Trajectories* are generally above the undergraduate student or pastor. Several essays present new material on the *Didache* and its relation to the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James. Two essays consider the relationship between Polycarp’s Letter to the Philippians and the Epistle to the Philippians. Two essays open up the relationship between the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the NT. Generally, such topics are above the concerns of church life, but they will be of interest for those who are pursuing a deeper knowledge of the Apostolic Fathers or graduate study.



What would be beneficial for the pastor or undergraduate student is to have the fruits of some of this volume popularized for the church. One article that would be helpful for a popular audience is Thomas Weinandy's article concerning "The Apostolic Christology of Ignatius of Antioch: The Road to Chalcedon." This article finds Ignatius' view of Christ as a forerunner to the council of Chalcedon's decisions in A.D. 451. Because of popular books like Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* and other publications, some within the church are being led to doubt that Christ's divinity was proclaimed early within the Christian church. Weinandy presents passages from Ignatius' seven letters that illustrate the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ and that these two are in unity. Weinandy concludes that Ignatius' viewpoint of Jesus as Christ is the "first step along the road that leads to Chalcedon" (p. 73). When some have been popularizing the idea that Christ's deity was in doubt or decided late in the fifth century by power figures within the church, it would be helpful to have an article like Weinandy's popularized that clearly depicts a martyred Christian's opinion in the second century in agreement with the Council of Chalcedon.

David Wright's article on the issue of infant baptism would also be a help for students and pastors. The title of the article, "The Apostolic Fathers and Infant Baptism: Any Advance on the Obscurity of the New Testament?" raises the issue clearly. Wright then moves methodically through the article. He begins by examining explicit and implicit references to infant baptism and then considers references to baptism in general within the Apostolic Fathers. He then considers references to children and theological statements that might indicate that children were baptized. He then reflects on the interpretation of certain key texts in the NT and references to circumcision within the Apostolic Fathers. Wright then concludes, "The Apostolic Fathers do not strengthen the case for judging that infant baptism was practiced in the New Testament churches. If anything, they weaken the case. A critical question remains as to how we should interpret their silence" (p. 133).

Readers of *Trajectories* should not expect that the methodology in each essay will always be friendly to those from an evangelical background. David Reis's article "Following in Paul's footsteps: *Mimēsis* and Power in Ignatius" carries an anti-authoritarian bias. Reis suggests that Paul and Ignatius both use imitation language as a rhetoric of coercion. While Reis rightly recognizes a similarity between Paul and Ignatius, his article unfortunately neglects the hardship and sacrifice that Paul and Ignatius endured for their message.

*Trajectories* is an important addition to those interested in the presence of the NT in the Apostolic Fathers and a necessary complement for those interested in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*. For those who are pursuing further studies in early Christianity, this will become a foundational volume for tracing similar ideas from the NT within the Apostolic Fathers.

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— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

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James T. Dennison Jr., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523–1552*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008. 820 pp. \$50.00.

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James Dennison has provided an invaluable compilation of sixteenth-century Reformed confessions, some of which are appearing in English for the very first time. Prior to each confession Dennison has written a short introduction in which he articulates the bibliographical, political, and theological circumstances surrounding each confession. As Dennison states, “In the highly charged political atmosphere of the sixteenth century, the confessions also reflect the complex vicissitudes of the ecclesiastical politics of the era” (p. xi). Dennison has arranged the confessions chronologically and each confession is tied to a major Reformer (Zwingli, Calvin, etc.) or Reformation city (Geneva, London, etc.). Dennison begins with Zwingli, including Zwingli’s Sixty-Seven Articles (1523), Short Christian Instruction (1523), *Fidei ratio* (1530), and *Fidei Expositio* (1531), as well as those confessions influenced by Zwingli, namely, the Ten Theses of Bern (1528), 1528 East Friesian Preachers’ Confession, and First Confession of Basel (1534). Moreover, Dennison incorporates several confessions either written by Calvin or those close to Calvin. These include William Farel’s Summary (1529), Tetrapolitan Confession (1530), Bern Synod (1532), Lausanne Articles (1536), Consensus Tigurinus (1549), Vallérandus Poullain’s Confession of the Glastonbury Congregation (1551), Calvin’s Catechisms (1537, 1538, 1545), Geneva Confession (1536/37), and Consensus Genevensis or Calvin’s Eternal Predestination (1552). Dennison’s volume also integrates Reformed confessions from England, such as the Anglican Catechism (1549), London Confession of John à Lasco (1551), and Large Emden Catechism of the Strangers’ Church (1551). Finally, Dennison incorporates other Reformed confessions that have gone unnoticed, such as the Waldensian Confession (1530) and Synod of Chanforan (1532), Waldensian Confessions of Mérendol (1541 and 1543) and Provence (1543), Bohemian Confession (1535), First Helvetic Confession of 1536 (in contrast to Bullinger’s famous Second Helvetic Confession thirty years later), Juan Diaz’s Sum of the Christian Religion (1546), Valdés’s Catechism (1549), and Rhaetian Confession (1552).



The major strength of the volume is seen in the theological continuity that exists between each confession. First, most of the confessions highlight the Protestant-Catholic divide of the sixteenth century which led to the Protestant Reformation. Today, due to ecumenical pressure and the evolution from traditional to liberal Catholicism, such a divide is overlooked, but Dennison’s volume reminds Protestants and Catholics alike that at the heart of the divide is disagreement over the gospel itself, namely, whether one is justified by works or by faith alone. Therefore, even in a post-Vatican II world, the five *solas* of the Reformation emphasized in these confessions remain relevant and stand to be reaffirmed by Protestants to the disdain of the Catholic Church. Moreover, not only do the confessions expose the chasm that separates Catholics from Protestants on issues like *sola fide*, but the confessions also condemn Rome’s idolatry of Mary, the elevation of images and statues, the sale of indulgences, not to mention penance, purgatory, priestly celibacy, the authority of the papacy, transubstantiation of the Eucharist, and ascetic legalism.

Second, the confessions also demonstrate that the Protestantism birthed from the sixteenth century had at its core a Calvinistic soteriology. The Reformation was not only a negative reaction to the Catholic Church but a positive turn to Augustine and the doctrines of grace. Therefore, though there were exceptions, to be Protestant was to be soteriologically Augustinian. Protestant evangelicalism today is a conglomeration of Calvinists and Arminians (and in some circles Open Theists), but the fact remains that the beginning of Protestantism was characterized by a robust, Augustinian theology as seen in Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and Calvin's *Eternal Predestination*. Many of the confessions highlight the meticulous sovereignty of God over creation, the unconditional nature of predestination, the utter inability and depravity of man, the efficacy of grace in calling and conversion, and the power of God in unfailingly preserving his elect to the end. Consequently, these confessions demonstrate that an affirmation of the doctrines of grace was at the nucleus of what it meant to be a Protestant Reformer, regardless of whether one lived in Geneva, London, Zurich, or even Spain.

Third, these Reformed Confessions are global in nature. As Dennison states, "Presented here is a display of 'confessional' Calvinistic theological thinking in the Old and New World during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Transylvania to New England, from Brazil to Poland" (p. xii). It is nothing short of amazing that these confessions not only spread throughout the world, but that a "Calvinistic theological thinking" evidenced in each of the confessions was sustained even across geographical and linguistic barriers.

Fourth, Dennison enlists Calvin's *Eternal Predestination*. Followers of Calvin will appreciate this addition because its inclusion demonstrates that Calvin was not a disgruntled predestinarian seeking to monopolize the church, but was a pastor-theologian whose predestinarianism was both affirmed and advocated by his church in Geneva. In other words, Calvin's treatise against Bolsec, Georgius, and Pighius was not the lone cry of an authoritarian Protestant pope, but rather the joint effort and endorsement of a Protestant ecclesiastical body that sought to protect the sovereign prerogative of God rather than conditioning God's choice upon man's free will.

One minor weakness to Dennison's compilation is, as Dennison admits (p. xi), the absence of citation, documenting the sources used to introduce each confession. Understandably, the massive size of the work limits space, but Dennison's introductions would be improved if he were to cite the most definitive resources for each confession, thereby providing the reader with the documentation needed for further research.

In conclusion, Dennison has compiled and introduced a set of Reformed confessions and catechisms, many of which have been without an English translation. Volume one will prove to be no small tool for research on the Reformation, and all forthcoming volumes should be welcomed by those in the Reformed tradition.

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Fisher Humphreys and Philip Wise. *Fundamentalism*. Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2004. xi + 113 pp. \$15.00.

Every author has a perspective. Fisher Humphreys and Philip Wise disclose theirs by dedicating a book on Fundamentalism to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and President Jimmy Carter. Not surprisingly, the authors turn out to be Southern Baptists who are unsympathetic toward the conservative leadership. While the book offers some analysis of Fundamentalism, its agenda is to editorialize about Southern Baptist conservatives.

The authors distinguish fundamentalism (minuscule “f”) in general as social phenomena from Fundamentalism (majuscule “F”) as an historic, Christian movement. They open their book with a description of fundamentalisms in general. According to the authors, fundamentalisms are religious movements that selectively employ tradition and react against modernity. Fundamentalists believe that their faith and community are under attack. They demonize their opponents, follow authoritarian males, and idealize the past. They draw careful boundaries to separate insiders from outsiders, and they seek to control their society.

Humphreys and Wise argue that Christian Fundamentalism emerged when American evangelicalism lost its cultural hegemony. They suggest that Fundamentalism began as a reaction against four secularizing phenomena: the Enlightenment, biblical criticism, evolution, and liberal theology. Attempting to organize militant opposition to these trends, Fundamentalists developed a loose coalition in which nobody held authority to draw up a definitive list of fundamentals.

According to Humphreys and Wise, Fundamentalist leadership shifted after the 1920s from scholars like J. Gresham Machen to preachers like Bob Jones and John R. Rice. The movement disappeared from public view, but Fundamentalists were quietly rebuilding its infrastructure. During the 1940s, Fundamentalism gave birth to the less separatistic and more intellectually responsible evangelical movement led by Billy Graham. Finally, in the 1970s Fundamentalism re-emerged as a political power on the Right.

The authors devote just one chapter to the exposition of Fundamentalist theology. They offer a useful summary of *The Fundamentals*, suggesting that this series offered a defense of only selected fundamental doctrines. Then they turn their attention to the various five-point summaries of fundamental doctrines. Here Humphreys and Wise opine that the doctrine of inerrancy has done more to erode confidence in the Bible than to help it. They also express reservations about treating the substitutionary atonement as a fundamental of the faith. They agree that the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Jesus are important, as are miracles in general, but argue that an overemphasis on historicity rather than the meaning of these events is misplaced. The authors also pointedly disagree with treating premillennialism as a fundamental doctrine, though they do not cite sources in which Fundamentalists have done this.

Fundamentalist theology is problematic for Humphreys and Wise, but Fundamentalist attitudes are downright frightening. Among these attitudes the authors list suspicion (as a habit of mind), fear (of secularism and education), anger (cultivated as a motivator), and separatism (the rejection of others). In contrast to these attitudes, the authors encourage the spirit of trust, love, and unity.

Just over halfway through the book, Humphreys and Wise turn the discussion toward the Southern Baptist Convention. They note that at one time the SBC rejected Fundamentalism, but they believe that the conservative takeover has brought Fundamentalist values into dominance. This seems to be the



real burden of the authors—to connect the Fundamentalist themes and attitudes of the past with the conservative SBC leadership of the present.

How should non-Fundamentalists relate to Fundamentalists? Humphreys and Wise recommend an attitude of kindness and forgiveness, but also one of resistance. They concede that some moderates may have been so badly hurt that they will have to disengage from Fundamentalists. On the whole, however, the authors believe that the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provides a model for resisting Fundamentalism through argument and especially organization.

Humphreys and Wise do believe that Christianity must affirm fundamentals, but not the ones that Fundamentalists have listed. What do the authors see as fundamental? Their examples include biblical authority but not inerrancy, the incarnation but not the virgin birth, God's power but not the historicity of miracles, the mutual love of spouses but not the submission of wives to husbands.

What Humphreys and Wise overlook is the fact that Fundamentalists did not invent the notion of fundamentals. Rather, they inherited a centuries-long discussion of essential doctrines and practices. This discussion grew out of the Protestant Reformation and included voices from virtually every branch of evangelical Christianity. The emphasis upon fundamental doctrines antedates the Enlightenment, biblical criticism, evolution, and liberal theology.

To their credit, the authors maintain an even and charitable tone. By focusing upon the social factors and attitudes that supposedly characterize Fundamentalism, however, they produce a study that is decidedly partisan. Their partisanship takes a particularly political twist when they import their observations about Fundamentalism into the Southern Baptist situation.

Humphreys and Wise see as great a threat in Fundamentalist rigidity as they do in liberal flexibility. This bias colors their discussion and leads to a definite rejection of the conservative SBC leadership. Although the authors favor the version of toleration represented by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, they do advocate conversation with Fundamentalists. Some Fundamentalists, at least, would welcome that conversation, if only to dispel some of the stereotypes that the authors have perpetuated.

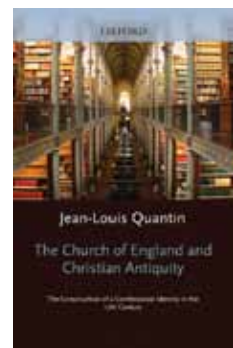
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Jean-Louis Quantin. *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*. Oxford-Warburg Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xii + 511 pp. £85.00/\$175.00.

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The relationship between Scripture and tradition remains of primary importance to every Christian believer and Prof. Quantin of the Sorbonne, Paris has produced a formidable guide to showing how this relationship manifested itself in the construction of a particular confessional community, that of the Church of England. Elizabethan divines are shown to be very much part of a wider international Reformed community, indeed, their conceptual framework, “for all subsequent assertions of Anglican singularity, was virtually indistinguishable from continental Reformed orthodoxy” (p. 87). They utilised the Church Fathers primarily to refute the Roman Catholic charges of novelty, but refused to confer too much authority



on to tradition. The Fathers' role was thus seen to be that of helpful guides and useful interpreters of Scripture, but with no intrinsic authority. Restoration divines would later argue that tradition established the Canon of Scripture, something strongly objected to in classical Protestant theology. English Protestants were very aware that doctrines of individual illumination could easily lead to Anabaptist excesses, but this had to be balanced against Rome's veneration of tradition as authoritative. Protestants would point out that the Fathers themselves stressed the differences between their writings and Scripture and not many would believe the Fathers on millenarianism and the necessity of infants' receiving Holy Communion. Protestants could therefore employ a nuanced and selective utilisation of the Fathers when it suited them. For example, Augustine was heavily quoted on grace, but quietly ignored on issues such as baptismal regeneration.

Quantin is correct in often pointing out the polemical and controversial nature of sixteenth-century theology when all sides quoted the Fathers, simply because in the context of these debates, no recognised authority could be left unchallenged. The received hermeneutical tradition of interpreting the Fathers meant that many of the Fathers' errors could be excused in terms of distinguishing when they spoke in heat, rhetorically, and when they spoke dogmatically. Many Protestants simply saw this as dishonest evasion and special pleading for clearly erroneous views.

The seminal figure of Richard Hooker is viewed from a broadly Protestant perspective, but his historical sense was a real advance. He based his case against the Puritans more on the continuity of the Church, rather than on antiquity *per se*. It was only in avant-garde thinkers of the late seventeenth century that reference to antiquity came to prominence and a confessional identity distinct from that of Rome and continental Reformed theology appeared. An "Anglican" identity could thus be seen to emerge, though the term is still anachronistic before the nineteenth century. Quantin warns that advocates of patristic authority could be found within the various confessional strands within the Church of England and therefore generalisations about use of the Fathers should be avoided.

Quantin resolutely and deftly demolishes Anglo-Catholic perspectives, which seek to discern an "Anglican" mindset or approach to the Fathers and erroneously seek a deep reverence for antiquity in Elizabethan times which never was. Middleton's 2001 work *Fathers and Anglicans* comes in for particular criticism: "a compendium of Anglo-Catholic historiographical commonplaces. It has a wholly unhistorical conception" (p. 7). Such isolationist or exceptionalist approaches, which seek to study the Church of England divorced from wider continental streams of thought, are soundly rebutted. (In fairness, Quantin is also scathing of more evangelical authors such as Atkinson's 1997 work on Hooker [p. 93]). Throughout this impressive work *le professeur* is admirably direct in his opinions (e.g., "a fantastic misinterpretation of the evidence" [p. 214]; "irritatingly judgemental" [p. 248]) and is always willing to call a spade a spade, or, as the French say, *appeler un chat un chat*.

Quantin's formidable reading, both in terms of breadth and depth, of the primary sources allows him to trace the convoluted evolution of approaches to the Fathers in the English Church. The French Calvinist Jean Daillé's *Use of the Fathers* becomes a touchstone of Protestant orthodoxy, or as the author puts it, "a doctrinal litmus test" (p. 327). Firmly within the context of continental Reformed theology, Daillé showed that the consensus of the Fathers was a pernicious myth and something which Protestants must resist to be faithful to the Bible. (In 1603 a synod of French Calvinists would go so far as to ban preachers from quoting the Fathers.) Later, more radical thinkers in England would begin to view the Fathers as essential in understanding the beliefs and practice of the Early Church. Then the theory emerged that as miracles had ceased and charisms had been withdrawn, the only reliable guide

remained the exploration of ancient texts, especially those of the Ante-Nicene era. English patristic studies thus took on vital importance in guiding the contemporary church, though there was much debate as to the limits of the patristic period and to which Fathers were assigned particular prominence. Quantin is right to point out the correlative of this tendency to promote patristic learning—an unhelpful concentration of theological thinking in a highly-educated and detached elite. It also highlights the pervasive humanist impulse to uncover the fundamentals of Christianity from pure sources and purge the later accretions and unscriptural additions.

Readers of this volume cannot help but be impressed at Quantin’s mastery of the sources and prodigious multi-lingual reading around the subject. All too often studies of Church of England scholarship and theological development have betrayed an Anglo-Saxon bias and not sought a wider pan-European perspective. Quantin’s contribution to the field is most welcome, and scholars will find many good things in a five-page chronology, seventy-page bibliography, and comprehensive twenty-two-page index. OUP is to be congratulated on publishing such a formidable and well-produced piece of research, and although the expensive price tag will put this book out of the reach of most, it is well worth consulting in college or seminary libraries.

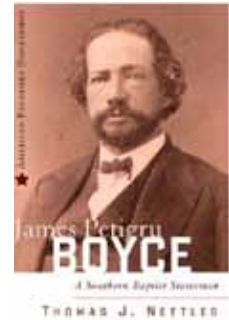
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Thomas J. Nettles. *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*. American Reformed Biographies. Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009. 616 pp. \$29.99.

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the oldest seminary among Southern Baptists, celebrates her sesquicentennial in 2009. No less than four books related to the seminary’s history have been published in conjunction with this significant anniversary. One of these books is a new biography of seminary founder James P. Boyce, authored by Tom Nettles, a noted Baptist historian and professor of historical theology at Southern Seminary. *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman* marks the latest entry into P&R’s excellent American Reformed Biography series. It is now the most comprehensive introduction to one of the leading Southern Baptist theologians and denominational leaders of the nineteenth century.



Nettles follows a basically chronological route as he recounts Boyce’s life and contributions. Boyce’s church background, conversion, and subsequent call to the Baptist ministry were not unlike many of his peers. Conversely, his education at Brown University and Princeton Theological Seminary far exceeded that of virtually all of his fellow Baptists in the South. After stints as a state paper editor and pastor, Boyce became a theology professor at Furman University. It was there that he issued a clarion call for seminary education among Southern Baptists with his now-famous address, “Three Changes in Theological Education.” A quality faculty was recruited, and in 1859 the Seminary was established in Greenville, South Carolina. The Civil War eventually forced the seminary to close, and Boyce and the rest of the faculty served as Confederate chaplains and/or labored in secular vocations. Following the war, Boyce devoted his final two decades to establishing the seminary on solid financial footing, building a strong and orthodox faculty, and writing a systematic theology. He also faced a number of

struggles, both internal and external, as he built his seminary and served the wider Southern Baptist denomination.

Historical theologian that he is, Nettles devotes considerable space to theological matters; two entire chapters are devoted to Boyce's theology. Boyce's commitment to Calvinist soteriology and Baptist ecclesiology informed every part of his ministry. The seminary itself was guided by a confessional statement, *The Abstract of Principles*, a carefully negotiated document that embodied the heart of Boyce's convictions and represented the mainstream convictions of Southern Baptists. The proto-modernism of Crawford Toy and the sectarianism of Baptist Landmarkers undermined the seminary's commitment to Calvinistic Baptist orthodoxy. After the death of Boyce and his friend and successor, John Albert Broadus, the seminary drifted away from Calvinism as many faculty members gradually embraced progressive tendencies like the historical-critical method and heretofore aberrant convictions like Arminianism. The book concludes with a brief reference to the recent theological changes at Southern under the leadership of Albert Mohler, himself a theologian who seeks to embody the emphases of Boyce and the first generation faculty.

Understandably, much of the biography also focuses on the establishment of Southern Seminary, though at times this narrative almost overwhelms the story of Boyce himself. Lengthy block quotes and extended discussions about the school's inner workings result in some cumbersome sections and make an already long biography even longer. Some readers will likely quibble with Nettles's emphasis on Calvinism, though this seems consistent with Boyce's own theology, the majority of his denominational peers (SBC leaders), and the emphasis of the series in which the biography is published. Still others will wish Nettles offered a more critical portrait of Boyce, though this reviewer believes the author's obvious admiration and affinity with his subject steers clear of hagiography and even strengthens the book.

Nettles's biography is a welcome contribution and deserves a wide reading among scholars interested in nineteenth-century Southern Baptists, evangelicalism in the South, Calvinism in America, and the history of theological education. It will also likely be a favorite among those who have ties to Southern Seminary or appreciate the founding convictions and emphases of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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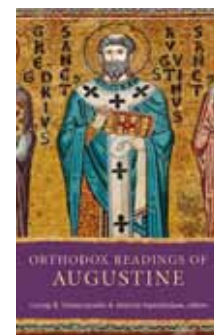
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Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos, eds. *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008. 304 pp. \$23.00.

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The proceedings published from the Orthodox Readings of Augustine Conference address a topic that continues to become more popular and important. There is an ongoing debate concerning if and how the Eastern and Western traditions compare to one another. The first chapter introduces the history of how the East has viewed Augustine. Although he was declared a Saint as early as 553, in recent scholarship Augustine has been labeled the problem with the West, and some even claim that Augustine is the father of modern day atheism. No one from this extreme school was included in the volume. The purpose of the work overall seemed to be to react to the



new paradigm that bifurcates the two traditions and creates an extreme dichotomy that positions Augustine against the East.

There is a variety of articles that range from textual study to theological analysis. Elizabeth Fisher explains the significance of Augustine's *De Trinitate* being translated into Greek. Joseph Leinhard provides evidence that Augustine was familiar with Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus where he quotes their work to defend his own position when debating Julian. Surprisingly, there were very few comparisons between Augustine and these two Eastern Fathers in other essays. Most comparisons were with later Fathers who would have been familiar with Augustine's work or Gregory of Nyssa, the "Cappadocian" who has risen in popularity only in recent scholarship. Daley argues that Maximus the Confessor was influenced by Augustine concerning the doctrines of sin and grace. Reinhard Flogaus shows that Gregory of Palamos depends upon Augustine in his theological writings. These articles all prove that Augustine traditionally has been considered a reliable source for Orthodox teaching and an inspiration to many Greek Fathers. David Tracy presents a history of how Augustine's works have been received from Wittgenstein to Hegel and how Augustine's Christology was at the center of all his work. Andrew Louth concludes the work by presenting the pastoral heart of Augustine that the Eastern Fathers could appreciate and even identify with.

Others argue that Augustine's doctrine has been misunderstood in the Eastern tradition. The major doctrinal issues presented as separating the East and West include the *filioque* clause, the nature of theology, and *theosis*. The *filioque* clause has certainly been a clear difference in the East and West, but may not be as absolute a difference between Augustine and the Cappadocians as Ayres and Behr argue in their articles. The former establishes that simplicity and the Monarchia of the Father are foundational in both traditions. The latter argues that what really separates the two traditions is the East's starting with God as Father and the West's beginning with God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The difference in the nature of theology mainly concerns the difference between *apophatic* and *kataphatic* theology. The difference among the traditions over *theosis* derives from the East's dividing the essence and energy of God while the West does not. Many of the authors, especially Marion, Hart, Bradshaw, and Harrison, demonstrate that these differences are only apparent.

The reasons that comparing the traditions of East and West is difficult are obvious in the work. First, the East does not have a central figure comparable to Augustine. The East has a great number of influential theologians, but no one figure who wrote as extensively and was as influential in so many major doctrinal formulations. Many of the contributors choose different key figures from the fourth to the thirteenth century to focus upon and can compare only aspects of their doctrine to Augustine. Augustine's being such a large figure who wrote voluminously causes another problem. The Augustinian scholars disagree among themselves to the point that it is difficult to know which Augustine is supposed to be compared to the Greek Fathers. This is evident in the disagreement between Hart and Bradshaw.

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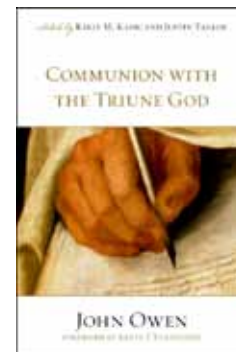


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John Owen. *Communion with the Triune God*. Edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. Wheaton: Crossway, 2007. 448 pages. \$22.00.

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This book represents a reprint of John Owen's classic treatise on the Trinity, which was originally published in 1657. This edition, however, is much more than a reprint. It is chock full of extras designed to enhance Owen's exposition by helping the reader navigate through Owen's dense content *and* verbiage. The twenty-seven-page introduction to Owen's Trinitarian theology is an excellent synthesis of the book. The thirty-page analytical outline is an amazing tool that makes Owen's flow of thought more readily accessible to the reader, which is no small accomplishment. The four-page glossary makes the transition from seventeenth century to the present day much less painful. It is like having a Puritan dictionary at one's fingertips, which the reading of Owen requires even more than other Puritan authors. In other words, this edition is remarkable in that the reader has purchased both a classic theological work *and* a theological tour guide to ensure that Owen's mind and heart will leave an indelible mark upon the reader's mind and heart. Furthermore, the remarkable thing about Owen is that he is such a reliable tour guide in his own right who specializes in introducing readers to the Triune God.



Upon learning what makes this edition of Owen's book so laudatory, one may justifiably want to know what makes Owen's material so valuable. In other words, in the light of so many books on the Trinity, why bother with John Owen? In a nutshell, Owen's great accomplishment is that he explains the distinct role of each member of the Trinity so that the reader can have a distinct relationship with each member of the Trinity. Furthermore, understanding the unique work of each person in the Godhead enables the Christian to give each person a distinct praise for that work. Owen calls to the reader to press onward and upward in order to plant his feet on higher ground where he will experience a deeper relationship with God and enjoy the exquisite pleasures to be found as the reader sees and treasures more of his beauty and majesty. Many rightly read the book as a theological treatise, but too few find it to be a manual for worship.

A few snippets will usefully demonstrate Owen's masterful weaving of theology and doxology. Owen shows that lost humanity rests under the wrath of God. However, one must remember that it is the love of God that saves humanity from the wrath of God. Owen brings many Scriptures to the attention of the reader that highlight God the Father's love (Exod 34:6–7; 1 John 4:8; John 3:16; Rom 9:11–12; Eph 1:4–5; 2 Thess 2:13–14, etc.). This love is most clearly revealed in the Father's sending of His own Son.

This is the great *discovery* of the gospel: for whereas the Father, as the fountain of the Deity, is not known any other way but as full of wrath, anger, and indignation against sin, nor can the sons of men have any other thoughts of him (Rom. 1:18; Isa. 33:13–14; Hab.1:13; Ps. 5:4–6; Eph. 2:3)—here he is now revealed peculiarly as love, as full of it unto us; the manifestation whereof is the peculiar work of the gospel (Titus 3:4). (p. 107)

Owen also dismisses the all-too contemporary idea that Jesus is the loving member of the Trinity who saves us from the Father, the angry member of the Trinity:

Christians walk oftentimes with exceedingly troubled hearts, concerning the thoughts of the Father toward them. They are well persuaded of the Lord Christ and his goodwill; the difficulty lies in what

is their acceptance with the Father—what is his heart toward them? “Show us the Father, and it suffices us” (John 14:8). Now, this ought to be so far away, that his love ought to be looked on as the fountain from whence all other sweetnesses flow. (p. 110)

Furthermore, Owen clears up some common misconceptions about Jesus the Son. Some in the church today act as though they were only dating Jesus. Some act as though they need to impress Jesus and keep him interested in them by Christian obedience. This approach causes Christians to remain unsure of his eternal commitment to us. Christians are married to Christ; they are not dating him. Owen shows that Christ binds himself to us as an all-sufficient Savior and mediator who has purchased our redemption and thus never divorces his bride.

This is the first thing on the part of Christ—*the free donation* and bestowing of himself upon us to be our Christ, our Beloved, as to all the ends and purposes of love, mercy, grace, and glory; whereunto in his mediation he is designed, in a marriage covenant never to be broken. This is the sum of what is intended: The Lord Jesus Christ, fitted and prepared, by the accomplishment and furniture of his person as mediator, and the large purchase of grace and glory which he has made, to be a husband to his saints, his church, tenders himself in the promises of the gospel to them in all his desirableness; convinces them of his goodwill toward them, and his all-sufficiency for a supply of their wants; and upon their consent to accept of him—which is all he requires or expects at their hands—he engages himself in a marriage covenant to be theirs forever. (p. 156)

Kelly M. Kopic describes the essential difference in Owen’s thought between union and communion. Union with God is a unilateral and receptive. Union is a sovereign work of God in which the believer is receptive as an object of God’s grace. Communion with God is mutual and responsive as the believer responds to God’s grace in relationship with Him. Kopic unpacks the practical implications of this distinction:

While union with Christ is something that does not ebb and flow, one’s experience of communion with Christ can fluctuate. This is an important theological and experiential distinction, for it protects the biblical truth that we are saved by radical and free divine grace. Furthermore, this distinction also protects the biblical truth that the children of God have a relationship with their Lord, and that there are things they can do that either help or hinder it. When a believer grows comfortable with sin (whether sins of commission or sins of omission) this invariably affects the level of intimacy this person feels with God. It is not that the Father’s love grows and diminishes for his children in accordance with their actions, for his love is unflinching. It is not that God turns from us, but that we run from him. Sin tends to isolate the believer, making him feel distant from God. Then come the accusations—both from Satan and self—which can make the believer worry that he is under God’s wrath. In truth, however, saints stand not under wrath but in the safe shadow of the cross. (p. 21)

One of the most helpful sections of Owen’s book was his section on worshipping the Holy Spirit. I grew up singing songs of praise to the Father and the Son, but I was always a little unsure how to worship the Spirit. Owen shows us how to worship the Holy Spirit by faith as the distinct object of our worship:

Let the saints learn to act faith distinctly on the Holy Ghost, as the immediate efficient cause of all the good things mentioned—faith, I say, to believe in him; and faith in all things to believe him and

to yield obedience to him; faith, not imagination. The distinction of the persons in the Trinity is not to be fancied, but believed. So, then, the Scripture so fully, frequently, clearly, distinctly ascribing the things we have been speaking of to the immediate efficiency of the Holy Ghost, faith closes with him in the truth revealed, and peculiarly regards him, worships him, serves him, waits for him, prays to him, praises him—all these things, I say, the saints do in faith. The person of the Holy Ghost, revealing itself in these operations and effects, is the peculiar object of our worship. (p. 421)

Owen also gives practical guidance for recognizing the acts of the Spirit that we may adore Him for each distinct act:

Let us, then, lay weight on every effect of the Holy Ghost in any of the particulars before mentioned, on this account, that they are acts of his love and power toward us. This faith will do, that takes notice of his *kindness in all things*. Frequently he performs, in sundry particulars, the office of a comforter toward us, and we are not thoroughly comforted—we take no notice at all of what he does. Then is he grieved. Of those who do receive and own the consolation he tenders and administers, how few are there that consider him as the comforter, and rejoice in him as they ought! Upon every work of consolation that the believer receives, this ought his faith to resolve upon—“This is from the Holy Ghost; he is the Comforter, the God of all consolation; I know there is no joy, peace, hope, nor comfort, but what he works, gives, and bestows; and that he might give me this consolation, he has willingly condescended to this office of a comforter. (p. 422)

In a nutshell, then, I heartily recommend this new edition of Owen’s work on two fronts. First, Owen’s book itself is an absolute masterpiece of theology proper. No work on the doctrine of God gives the reader so much light matched with so much heat. Second, Kapic and Taylor have made this masterpiece more useful and accessible for future generations. John Owen is a gift to the church and the editors have ensured that this gift will be one that keeps on giving.

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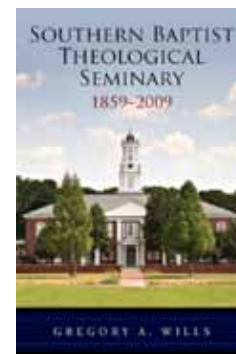
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Gregory A. Wills. *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 566 pp. \$35.00.

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“When schools flourish,” Martin Luther observed, “things go well and the church is secure. Let us make more doctors and masters. The youth is the church’s nursery and fountainhead. When we are dead, where are others [to take our place] if there are no schools? God has preserved the church through schools. They are the preservers of the church” (*Table Talk* [Luther’s Works 54; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], p. 452).

James Tunstead Burtchaell’s 868-page *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) documents how Christian colleges and seminaries have historically slid from being orthodox and engaged with the church to being



unorthodox and disengaged. The 150-year history of Southern Seminary is enthralling because it breaks the rule.

Southern Seminary's story at first seems so predictable: visionary, sacrificial, indefatigable, robustly orthodox pastor-theologians founded it; later presidents and faculty sympathetically continued it but took it in a slightly different direction by tolerating degrees of theological liberalism; successive leadership veered so far off course that they not only tolerated but aggressively promoted theological liberalism. While it is fascinating to learn how this gradual leftward shift occurred within such a conservative denomination in the context of the last 150 years of American church history, it is beyond fascinating to learn how it was reversed in the early 1990s. The story's unlikely ending is what makes it so interesting, and this book does not disappoint.

Gregory Wills is professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, the flagship seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention. His book is the first full-length history of Southern Seminary since William A. Mueller's *A History of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1959). Wills organizes the book chronologically by describing the nine presidential administrations: James P. Boyce (1859–88), John A. Broadus (1889–95), William H. Whitsitt (1895–99), E. Y. Mullins (1899–1928), John R. Sampey (1928–42), Ellis A. Fuller (1942–50), Duke K. McCall (1951–82), Roy L. Honeycutt (1982–93), and R. Albert Mohler Jr. (1993–). Wills focuses most on the seminary's beginnings and significant controversies.

Maintaining James P. Boyce's founding vision for Southern Seminary is the book's most prominent theme. Southern Seminary would look very different today—if it existed at all—if Boyce had created a less effective blueprint for maintaining his vision. The seminary's confession of faith is supposed to ensure its conformity to Scripture, and its board of trustees is supposed to ensure its subordination to the Southern Baptist Convention (pp. 4–5). As the seminary grew older, it looked like these two measures were inadequate to ensure the seminary's orthodoxy.

The second prominent theme is that Southern Seminary's more progressive presidents and faculty related to the more traditional Southern Baptist Convention by using "realistic" diplomacy. Realistic diplomacy was a shrewd, duplicitous means of gradually and patiently infiltrating the seminary and denomination with theological liberalism by cautiously and selectively propagating it. At the heart of most doctrinal controversies was the doctrine of Scripture's inerrancy; conservatives affirmed it, liberals denied it, and moderates affirmed or modified it while (sometimes aggressively) tolerating liberals. Connected to many of these controversies were rifts regarding hiring faculty; it was typically the faculty versus the president, trustees, and denomination or the faculty and president versus the trustees and denomination. One lesson from these controversies is that denominational and educational politics are a necessary evil—often with an emphasis on evil.

This magisterial saga reads almost like a novel, and the many section headings increase clarity and readability. But the book's primary strength is outstanding historiography. Wills did his homework. Footnotes on nearly every page reference primary sources, including thousands of letters, diaries, speeches, periodicals, and interviews. Wills explains his disciplined research schedule in [an interview on June 18, 2009](#):

The trustees asked me to write this book in April 2005. I was able to begin working on it in October 2005, and I submitted the manuscripts in December 2008. The research phase required me to be away a lot. I was probably away at research libraries for three to four months during that first year. Gathering the materials was quite difficult. I went through approximately a million pages

of relevant record. I tried to be in the office between 6 and 6:30 each morning when I was in the writing phase. I would work until 5 [and] then try to spend time with my family until 8 or 9 o'clock. Then I did additional reading on nights and weekends.

(One wonders how much research is ahead for one of Wills's next projects, a history of the Southern Baptist Convention, which may be available in about five years.)

Some might question whether the book is impartial since Wills is a professor at Southern Seminary. Fuller Seminary, for example, asked George Marsden, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, rather than a professor at Fuller to write *their history*. Wills expresses gratitude that R. Albert Mohler Jr., Southern Seminary's current president, gave him "freedom to write the seminary's history without partisan constraints or institutional interference" (p. vii), and while sympathetic with the seminary under Mohler, Wills "attempted to avoid partisan judgments" (p. ix). Wills achieves his goal admirably, though it is clear where his sympathies lie.

Future editions might be more valuable if they included three appendixes: (1) a timeline of significant events in Southern Seminary's history; (2) a list of its nine presidents in chronological order along with their pictures—perhaps their stately paintings that currently hang in the campus's Heritage Hall; and (3) a list of all its professors in alphabetical order. The latter two appendixes could list the years of each person's birth and death as well as years of service at Southern Seminary. The message of this book could reach an even wider audience if it were adapted as the script for a video documentary.

Wills tells Southern Seminary's unusual story in a gripping, inspiring way. It evokes gratitude to God, gratefulness for his faithful servants, sadness regarding doctrinal compromise and error, and a resolve to guard the gospel at all costs. For most of the twentieth century, it looked like Southern Seminary had decisively departed from Boyce's vision. "Under Mohler's leadership, Southern Seminary was once again Boyce's seminary" (p. 547).

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Faith Cook. *Fearless Pilgrim: The Life and Times of John Bunyan*. Faverdale North, Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2008. 476 pp. \$29.99.

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*Fearless Pilgrim: The Life and Times of John Bunyan* is Faith Cook's contribution to the ever-growing list of John Bunyan biographies. The author, who is clearly sympathetic with Bunyan's theology and deeply admires her subject, presents Bunyan's life, ministry, and works within the context of the tumultuous period of English history through which he lived. The first three hundred pages of this volume (roughly two-thirds of the book) recount Bunyan's life up to his release from his major imprisonment (1672). The author relies heavily on *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan's own autobiography, but she does more than merely relate the facts of the aforementioned work; she fills in the details of Bunyan's life that are simply passed over in *Grace Abounding*. In so doing, Cook provides the reader with a full, historically sensitive narrative of the first forty-four years of Bunyan's life. The rest of the work



focuses on the major events and publications of Bunyan's post-imprisonment ministry as an author and the pastor of the Bedford Independent Congregation. This section includes chapters on Bunyan's part in the communion controversy, the circumstances of his second imprisonment, and chapters specifically dedicated to *The Pilgrims Progress* and *The Holy War*. Cook also provides a detailed bibliography and four appendices for further study. The first appendix briefly recounts the build-up to the Civil War; the second is John Gifford's letter to his church before his death; the third is John Bunyan's Deed of Gift to his second wife; and the fourth lists Bunyan's works in the order he wrote them.

Though it is probably best to read *Fearless Pilgrim* as an introductory or devotional biography, Cook's work makes a number of worthy contributions to Bunyan studies. The author's presentation of Bunyan's historical context is arguably the work's greatest contribution. For example, her description of the English Civil Wars and Bunyan's role in them is superb. The narrative abounds with details about troop movements, payment schedules, and even theological currents that moved throughout the Parliamentary Army. Most chapters begin with historical and contextual data, and thus the author's presentation of Bunyan's life is fixed firmly within history, not apart from it.

Cook's biography also deserves praise for its perspective. The author's theological sympathy and profound appreciation for John Bunyan is a plus. In a commentary on John Bunyan's magnum opus, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Barry Horner lamented that much of the work done on Bunyan in recent decades has been done by those who were unsympathetic with his presuppositions and antagonistic to his biblical worldview. Because of this, Bunyan's spiritual struggles as outlined in *Grace Abounding*, for example, are often dismissed as either a neuroses created by the hard logic of Bunyan's high Calvinism or evidence of a mental disorder. Cook's appreciation for Bunyan's theological outlook, however, gives her a perspective on Bunyan's conversion, quest for assurance, and experimental piety that few who do not share Bunyan's presuppositions would be able to achieve. In this respect her work is a needed corrective to some of the biases of contemporary Bunyan scholarship.

Unfortunately, at times the author's deep appreciation for Bunyan becomes hagiographic. For example, in discussing possible literary models and source material for Bunyan's *Holy War*, Cook states, "But despite these possible sources, John Bunyan, like a mighty eagle, soars above all lesser authors. Each of his books bears the characteristics of his own unmistakable genius" (p. 377). Though sentences such as these are rare, they tend to damage the author's arguments and weaken the author's overall presentation.

Despite the hagiographic elements, *Fearless Pilgrim: The Life and Times of John Bunyan* is a biography that is sure to be enjoyed by fans of John Bunyan and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Not only is this work a good introduction to John Bunyan's life and times, it provides a needed corrective to some of the biases of contemporary Bunyan scholarship. Cook provides the reader with a full narrative that is firmly rooted in the turbulent times in which he lived. Furthermore, the author allows Bunyan to interpret his own spiritual pilgrimage from doubt to assurance rather than attempt to analyze Bunyan's psyche from afar. Faith Cook's warm and winsome biography of John Bunyan is a welcome addition to the ever-growing list of John Bunyan biographies.

Bennett Rogers

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

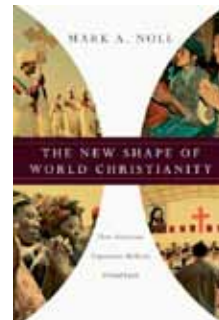
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Mark A. Noll. *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 212 pp. \$25.99.

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Over the past ten years, historians and sociologists like Philip Jenkins, Lamin Sanneh, and Andrew Walls have drawn both popular and scholarly attention to the rapid growth of Christianity in the global South and East. Mark Noll's recent contribution to this important discussion, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*, offers an interpretation of American Christianity's role in the rise of global Christianity. Noll notes that many of the world Christian movements that have grown up in recent years have much in common with American evangelicalism. He argues that world Christianity resembles American Christianity, not primarily because American Christians have directly influenced the shape of world Christianity, but because Christian movements in many places of the world are being shaped by the same kind of social circumstances that shaped American evangelicalism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



In the first part of the book, Noll sets the context by providing a brief sketch of the present shape of world Christianity. He uses a series of statistics to illustrate that a majority of Christians now live in South America, Africa, and Asia. For example, more Christians attended church last Sunday in China than in all of “Christian Europe.” After briefly looking at the present state of the church, Noll traces the transition of evangelical Christianity into world Christianity during the nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1914, the percentage of Christians in the world rose from 23 to 35 percent as Western missionaries brought Christianity to many places where it had not existed before. Noll uses this “prehistory” to set up some of the challenges and questions faced by world Christianity today.

In the second part, the core of the book, Noll seeks to explain America's role in creating the new shape of world Christianity. While he rejects the argument that America has controlled or manipulated the shape of world Christianity, he acknowledges that American missionaries have influenced world Christianity and that people of other cultures have voluntarily adopted and adapted Christianity for their own reasons. Still, Noll denies that American Christianity's influence on world Christianity is the chief reason for the similarities between them.

Instead, Noll argues that the primary reason for similarities between American evangelicalism and world Christianity stem from a shared historical experience. Evangelical movements began as renewal movements within European state-church Protestantism in the eighteenth century. The state-church system in the United States gave way to a purely voluntary system in the nineteenth century. At the same time, evangelicals in America also experienced vast new territories and populations that were free of traditional institutions and hierarchical authority. Conversionistic and voluntaristic evangelicalism enjoyed remarkable growth and success as it adjusted to, and was shaped by, the fluid, rapidly changing, and ethnically pluralistic culture of nineteenth-century America. Noll claims that forms of Christianity similar to American evangelicalism are becoming so widespread in the world because Christianity is advancing mainly among societies “where something like nineteenth-century American social conditions have come to prevail—where, that is, social fluidity, personal choice, the need for innovation and a search for anchorage in the face of vanishing traditions have prevailed” (p. 116).

Americans became a majority of the global missionary force after World War II, and non-denominational, evangelical, and Pentecostal believers came to dominate the American missionary force

by the end of the twentieth century. Noll describes this missionary force and traces some direct influence it had. However, he argues that American missionary efforts have been successful, mostly because the “conversionist, voluntarist, entrepreneurial and nondenominational” forms of Christianity reflected by American missionaries “possess an affinity with the rapidly changing economic, demographic, social and cultural character of the world itself” (p. 91). Less traditional and non-hierarchical forms of Christianity have encouraged new believers to run with the gospel and develop local Christianities, which are well suited to influence their culture and spread rapidly.

The third part of the book is comprised of three case studies that describe and draw lessons from interactions between American Christianity and world Christianity. In a mainly descriptive chapter, Noll tracks the evolving awareness of global Christianity among American evangelicals by looking at evangelical periodicals throughout the twentieth century. Noll also examines Korean Christianity and the East African revival that began in the 1930s. He notes that Americans did influence both Korean and East African Christianity, but he also supports his thesis by demonstrating the manner in which cultural forces experienced in America have also shaped the Christianity of these other regions. For example, the instability brought on by wars in Korea parallel similar formative factors in the American religious experience.

One of the strengths of this book is Noll’s repeated assertion and documentation that “the primary agency in recent movements of Christianization has not been the missionaries but the new converts themselves” (p. 106). However, Noll’s decision not to interact with American mission strategy is a weakness. He does note that non-traditional forms of Christianity promoted by evangelical missionaries have given local Christianities the freedom to develop. But he fails to mention that many evangelical missionaries in the past seventy-five years have believed that local believers are more effective in reaching their own culture than are cross-cultural missionaries. This belief led many American missionaries to develop strategies focused on training local leadership to evangelize and start indigenous churches. What Noll describes as the historical pattern in world Christian movements was the explicit strategy of many, if not most, American missionaries. These developments in American missiology may have been just as significant as the sociological factors Noll emphasizes and should be carefully considered.

*The New Shape of World Christianity* is a helpful introduction to the study of world Christianity. In addition to his new interpretations, Noll has also outlined the new shape of world Christianity and provides a “Guide to Further Reading” for those interested in reading more deeply on any aspect of the global church. Noll’s mix of interpretive insight and survey information makes this both an important book for church historians and a helpful book for Christians wanting to grow in their knowledge of the worldwide body of Christ.

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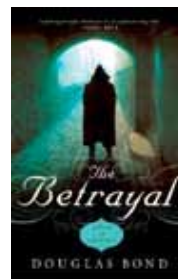
## Book Notes

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Douglas Bond. *The Betrayal: A Novel on John Calvin*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009. 383 pp. \$14.99.

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The *Betrayal* is historical fiction creatively written in the first-person from the perspective of John Calvin's assistant, Jean-Louis. The author, Douglas Bond, heads the English department at Covenant High School in Tacoma, Washington. The novel seems pitched at about the teen-level, although the language includes a mix of archaic words and syntax. It offers a faithful and memorable overview of Calvin's life, and one could profitably read it without any prior knowledge of Calvin. It is easy for people today to forget that Calvin lived in a tumultuous, dangerous context in which politics and theology were intertwined, and *The Betrayal* portrays this vividly.



One could quibble with the plot, which disproportionately focuses on Calvin's early years with the result that it rushes through his later years. For example, it describes the plague in Calvin's town (earlier in his life) in meticulous detail, but it flies through some of the most significant events in Calvin's later life, such as his marriage and some later theological controversies. The plot and characters are almost over-developed at the beginning, but they become under-developed by the end, which seems rushed. The reader has virtually no emotional attachment, for example, to Calvin's wife when she dies. Further, the title of the book does not capture its essence. "Betrayal" is misleading because (spoiler warning!) it does not apply to the last 150 pages. The "betrayal" climax and the plotline's intrigue and creativity begin to wane after page 234.

The novel is filled with insights into Calvin's life that will enhance anyone's understanding of the man and his times. It is a welcome tribute to him in the year of his 500th birthday.

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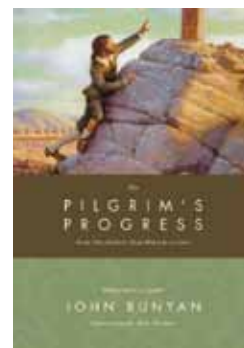
John Bunyan. *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*. Edited by C. J. Lovik. Illustrated by Michael Wimmer. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009. 240 pp. \$24.99.

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Charles Spurgeon read John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* over one hundred times. Many Christians today have not read it even once.

This new edition enhances Bunyan's classic allegory in at least five ways:

1. The text is updated. Lane Dennis, president of Crossway, explains in the publisher's foreword that the text is only "lightly edited": "The intention of both the editor and the publisher has only been to update highly archaic words and awkward sentence structure, while retaining the beauty and brilliance of the original story" (p. 12). So if the translation philosophy of other updates (e.g., by [Judith E. Markham](#)) is more like the NIV or NLT, Lovik's is more like the NASB or ESV.



2. The editor's notes in the back of the book (pp. 224–40) concisely comment on the text with less frequency but more detail than notes in a study Bible.
3. Scripture references are footnoted on nearly every page.
4. Thirty full-color, original paintings illustrate the story and preserve its seventeenth-century setting.
5. The format in general is pleasing to the eye.

This book is also [available as a narrated audio book](#), but it could reach an even wider audience as a *dramatized* audio book. (My family has enjoyed [a dramatized version of the original text](#).)

“What a tremendous thing it would be,” the editor C. J. Lovik remarks, “if a whole generation were to rediscover the deep, eternal truths of Bunyan’s allegory—as an alternative and antidote to the lurid diet of *Vanity Fair* that is everywhere today in movies, videos, literature, and the Internet” (p. 16).

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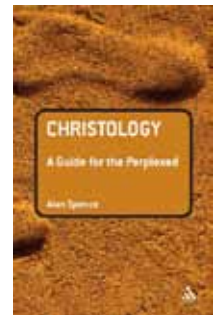
## — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

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Alan Spence. *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Guides for the Perplexed. London: T&T Clark, 2008. x + 174 pp. \$24.95.

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In this recent addition to the Guides for the Perplexed series, Alan Spence presents himself as the host of a dinner party whose task is to introduce latecomers to a group of distinguished guests and the evening’s ongoing conversation. In order for the late arrivals to fruitfully participate in the lively discussion, the host must summarize what each party has contributed and provide an outline of the discussion’s development. In this case, table talk revolves around the person of Christ. Thus, Spence’s goal in this volume is to tell the story of the development of Christology by highlighting the key issues and main players throughout the centuries. The book is divided into two main sections—classical and modern Christology.



The author defines Christology as “the faltering attempt of the Church to provide a coherent conceptual and theological explanation of Jesus’ person, in harmony with the scriptural testimony, which is able to account for his role in its worship and faith” (p. 6). Thus, in *Christology* we are immediately confronted with a paradox—the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. The history of Christology may be viewed as multifarious attempts to deny the former (Docetism) or the latter (Ebionitism), or somehow affirm the two (Orthodoxy).

Spence argues that the primary way the early church made sense of the person of Christ was through the notion of incarnation, the Johannine depiction of the Word of God becoming flesh (p. 17). Incarnation is the metanarrative and interpretative key for Christology. Although the doctrine raises questions regarding the Word’s relationship to God and of God’s immutability, it was best able to do justice to both natures in Christ and, thus, provide a foundation for a proper understanding of the gospel and Christian salvation.

The rest of Part One walks through the Arian controversy (chap. 3), events leading up to Chalcedon (chap. 4), post-Chalcedon debates on the will(s) of Christ (chap. 5), and issues regarding Jesus' relationship to the Spirit (chap. 6). It is this last chapter that proves the most thought-provoking in Part One. Spence writes: "The Gospel narrative of Jesus is that of a man always dependent on divine grace as it is mediated through the Holy Spirit. And the inability to recognize and affirm this perspective clearly is a significant weakness of John's [of Damascus] christology and so it would seem of the ancient church" (p. 63). Indeed, with a fresh focus on Jesus' dependence on the Spirit during his earthly sojourn, one is better enabled to affirm in Christ a humanity that is truly in common with our own (p. 72).

Part Two commences with a discussion of what Spence identifies as the beginning of the breach between classic and modern Christology—Socianianism. These rationalistic attacks on classic trinitarian and christological dogma would be variously expressed in the quests for the historical Jesus (chap. 8), the Christologies of Schleiermacher and Forsyth (chap. 9), and the dichotomies between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith created by the likes of Bultmann (chap. 10).

For North American evangelicals, particularly those seeking to reckon critically with Barth, Spence's presentation and analysis of the Swiss theologian's Christology is especially illuminating. Spence argues that for Barth, "Jesus Christ" is a revelatory and saving event, "not to be identified directly with Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of the Bible or even the Christ of Church proclamation" (p. 134). These presentations of Jesus are creaturely forms by which "Jesus Christ" or the Word of God makes himself present to the church. How Barth differs from classical Christology is that in the traditional schema the Jesus of history, the Christ of faith, and so on, are not different ontological realities or various forms under which the Word is present to the church, but rather are the diverse portraits of the one hypostasis—the incarnate Son of God (p. 135). One among Spence's handful of criticisms is that Barth's theory of Jesus Christ as a divine act is "unable to affirm the indissoluble union of the divine Word with human being" (p. 138). At the very least, Spence provides some terminological/conceptual clarity from which a more fruitful engagement with Barth's Christology (and entire theological edifice) may be undertaken.

The author rounds out his discussion with a plea for an ecumenical Christology, which means taking more seriously the doctrine of the incarnation as the ecumenical interpretation of gospel provided at Chalcedon, and that which provides the most adequate starting point for future reflection on the person of Jesus Christ.

By way of a modest critique, this volume lacks mention of kenotic Christologies as well as the sinlessness of Christ. The former may have added a measure of nuance to the discussion by forming a bridge between a classical incarnational Christology and modern concerns about the humanity of Jesus. A discussion of the latter, common in many Christologies, bears heavily upon any consideration of the true humanness of the Lord. Of course such considerations may be unfair given the editorial decisions that no doubt have to be made for such introductory volumes.

In the end Spence proves to be a fine host to a rather lively party. The balance of breadth in coverage, skill in penetrating to the vital issues, gracious and judicious analysis, and overall accessibility make this book a joy to read. I highly recommend it as an introductory Christology textbook for undergrads and seminary students.

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Charles M. Wood. *The Question of Providence*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008. xiii + 120 pp. \$19.95.

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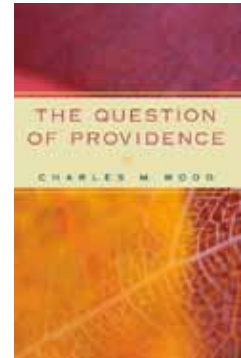
In his recent volume, Charles Wood attempts to shed new light on the venerable, and seemingly problematic, Christian doctrine of providence. His desire is to renew reflection on the doctrine by (1) calling attention to the nature of doctrine and its role in religious communities and (2) reformulating the doctrine of providence in light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the first chapter, Wood examines the nature of doctrine as teaching, belief, and confession. What is common to all three aspects is that they emphasize the instrumental and practical character of doctrine. In this light, he questions if the received doctrine of providence supplies what is necessary to enable faithful Christian understanding of the world as well as enactment therein.

Chapter 2 is a detailed exposition of William Sherlock's *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence*, a work that Wood identifies as the last articulate representative of the traditional doctrine written in English. Attention is given to Sherlock's development of the three main aspects of providence: preservation, concurrence, and governance. According to Sherlock (and much of the tradition), the aim of this doctrine is to provide Christians with encouragement and comfort, while admonishing them to live circumspectly. Wood is not convinced that Sherlock's exposition can indeed accomplish these for most Christians.

The standard understanding of providence since Augustine, so Wood argues in chapter 3, has tended to be overly optimistic, seeing everything that comes to pass as the way it should be—as God's will. Regardless of its prominence in the history of doctrine, it has never received universal approval, especially by those who reckon that it does violence to the gospel. Wood, alternatively, proposes a reorientation of the doctrine in light of the Christian revelation of the Trinity. He argues that the Church Fathers worked hard to develop a trinitarian "grammar" to speak about the nature of God and his works *ad extra*, but did not simultaneously conceive of providence in that light. Providence had little to do with the God revealed in Jesus Christ and more to do with the Supreme Being of philosophical realism. Instead, a Christian understanding of God's relation to the world must take seriously the trinitarian grammar of the fifth ecumenical council, namely, that all things are *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit. If God relates to all things triunely—particularly with this "prepositional logic"—there are at least two implications: (1) God's relation to the world is complex and (2) there is a unity to all of God's works; creation and providence are essentially one act of God.

Chapter 4 explores the relation between the threefold division of providence (preservation, concurrence, and governance) and this trinitarian grammar. Wood's major constructive move is to claim that preservation is *from* the Father, governance *through* the Son, and concurrence *in* the Spirit, thus arguing that the one triadic act of providence is accomplished by the one triune God. Linking preservation to the Father affirms the trinitarian insight that the Father is the source of creation and, therefore, providence. Joining concurrence to the Holy Spirit reminds us of his enablement of all genuine creaturely action, such that everything good is accomplished *in* the Spirit. Finally, attributing governance to the Son qualifies our notions of how God orders the world to accomplish his ends. He does not simply overpower the created order, but suffers with it and achieves his ends through weakness. The final chapter analyzes one recent constructive reformulation of the doctrine of providence.



One illuminating feature of the fourth chapter not mentioned above was Wood's exploration of different ways to construe divine and human action. He challenges limited notions of action by positing at least two additional ways to understand "doing." First, agents can "do" things without "acting" in the strict sense. For example, neglecting, waiting, allowing, hearing, and failing are ways of acting without being "active" *per se*. The second he calls "non-agential" actions, which include the influence of presence, the weight of reputation, and the effects of prior deeds. These "actions" may be described in personal or agential terms, but are neither ascribed to a personal agent nor does one hold an agent morally responsible for them. Actions conceived in these ways open up possibilities for the way we understand divine action and, specifically, divine providence. Wood, unfortunately, does not develop this potentially very fruitful and provocative aspect of his proposal.

It is difficult to argue with calls to think "trinitarianly" about doctrine. However, as with many such appeals, one is left wondering if the proposed solution actually moves us beyond the perceived problems. Apart from ascribing particular aspects of providence to the persons of the Trinity, and offering a "grammar" of sorts, it is not abundantly clear how thinking trinitarianly specifically overcomes any of the existential difficulties (which, incidentally, were assumed and not spelled out) inherent in the received doctrine. Moreover, one wonders if it might be more faithful to the tradition to assert that all three aspects of providence are carried out by all three persons, so that preservation, concurrence, *and* governance are from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

In the end, Wood's volume is to be commended for helpfully providing a starting point for reformulating the doctrine of providence in light of fuller notions of divine action and the reality of the Trinity.

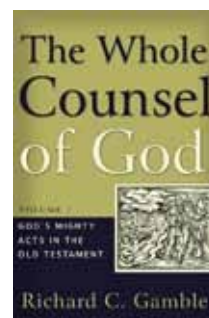
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Richard C. Gamble. *The Whole Counsel of God: God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*. Volume 1. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009. 718 pp. \$49.99.

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*The Whole Counsel of God* by Richard Gamble is a groundbreaking work that treads upon territory that theologians have been talking about for decades but have been reluctant to venture. Gamble presents a different approach to theology, namely, one in which the redemptive-historical framework of Scripture sets the agenda for systematic theology. Gamble begins by outlining his methodology, admitting his indebtedness to Calvin, Owen, Witsius, and especially Vos (p. xxxii). Gamble explains how he is seeking to wed biblical theology with systematic theology, and this first volume, which focuses on the OT, aims "to develop the theology of the OT within the framework of the organic, progressive, historical development of the Bible" (p. 1). Such an aim is obvious in how Gamble works through the OT: Part 2 is from Adam through the flood; Part 3 is from Abraham to Moses; Part 4 covers the prophetic and wisdom-poetic eras; and Part 5 is on how God's people should respond to God's mighty acts. Gamble states, "It is the thesis of these volumes that the Bible itself provides a model for exegesis, and can also supply a model for theological arrangement" (p. 53). Therefore, as Gamble works his way from Genesis to Revelation, theological



issues arise in the text that warrant discussion. For example, in Part 3 (Abraham to Moses), Gamble addresses certain topics as they arise in the text such as God's revelation, God's covenant faithfulness, the sinfulness of humanity, the role of the law for believers and unbelievers, the Trinity, and justification by faith alone.

Gamble's volume has several strengths. First, Gamble seeks to utilize biblical theology for the purpose of systematic theology. Too often biblical theology, with its redemptive-historical framework, is neglected by systematic theology. Consequently systematic theologians can fail to deal with each epoch of redemptive history and thereby fail to show how the entire Bible speaks to any given topic. Gamble avoids such a problem. For instance, in Part 2 (Adam to Noah), Gamble treats the revelation of Scripture, the image of God in creation, God and the problem of evil, the imputation of Adam's sin, trichotomy and dichotomy, and the covenants. Such an approach not only allows Gamble to faithfully expound upon the redemptive-historical context of each book but also allows the reader to see how each book of the Bible is theological in nature. Furthermore, Gamble never hesitates to incorporate future revelation into his present discussion. When Gamble addresses, for instance, the debate between trichotomy and dichotomy within the context of Gen 1, he also brings to bear pivotal NT texts that are decisive on the issue, exemplifying the analogy of Scripture.

Second, Gamble is not afraid to criticize those within his own Reformed tradition. For example, Gamble criticizes Frame's "practical" approach, which defines systematic theology as the application of God's Word to all areas of life (p. 32). The "practical" approach of any text is in fact the "meaning" of that text, or stated otherwise, the meaning of the text is the application of the text. While noting many positives to such an approach, for instance, its rejection of foreign philosophical systems or its rejection of some Reformed authors who raise confessions to the status of Scripture (pp. 34–36), Gamble criticizes the "practical" approach for its indebtedness to John Dewey. Gamble argues that the practical school's belief that meaning is application sounds very similar to Dewey, who says, "Ideas are statements, not of what is or has been, but of acts to be performed" (p. 52). For Dewey there is an "indissoluble connection between learning and doing" (p. 52). Gamble seems to imply that such an approach concedes too much to the practical methodology of Dewey and consequently does not allow the Bible itself to provide the model for theology, the approach Gamble himself seeks to appropriate (p. 53).

Third, Gamble's theology is evangelical in character, as demonstrated in a variety of ways: (1) Gamble readily affirms the historical reliability of events and persons in the OT, a rarity within OT scholarship. (2) Gamble finds seeds of Christ and the gospel in the OT, whether it be God's promise to crush the head of the serpent or to establish the throne of David forever. (3) Gamble looks to OT figures such as Abraham to affirm justification by faith alone.

Gamble's volume is not only evangelical but also an excellent example of robust, God-centered Reformed theology (pp. 632–65). Gamble has a high and exalted view of God, just as the OT writers did, in which God is holy, sovereign, and self-sufficient. Gamble is indebted to the Reformed tradition, arguing for divine simplicity and immutability as well. Such affirmations are refreshing since a majority of evangelicals today reject such attributes in God, which Gamble shows to be inherently biblical. Moreover, concerning salvation, God is not conditioned by the will of man, but God's sovereign will unconditionally elects and effectually calls sinners to himself.

However, there are a couple of weaknesses to Gamble's volume. First, Gamble does not preserve the discontinuity that exists between the covenants. Several examples illustrate such a problem. (1) Gamble assumes that the church not only was in existence with Abraham (where most Reformed

theologians begin) but existed before Abraham (perhaps with Adam and Noah). Gamble's definition of the church is broad and he never explains how the assembly in the OT differs from the assembly in the NT. Nevertheless, there are differences between Israel in the OT and the people of God in the NT, especially racial, political, and geographical, that warrant discontinuity. (2) Gamble argues that the Mosaic Law, specifically the Ten Commandments, is still binding today. However, on the issue of the Sabbath, Gamble never supports his claim from Scripture (p. 411). No doubt, those who hold to a Lord's Day instead of a Christian Sabbath will be deeply disappointed with Gamble's treatment. (3) Gamble fails to discuss the role of the Spirit in the OT as compared to the NT. Is there a qualitative difference (e.g., permanent indwelling) or is the difference merely quantitative?

Second, Gamble overlooks important topics and at times even fails to interact with opposing scholarship. For example, when he comes to the book of Jonah (p. 608), he does not mention the issue of God repenting. Likewise, when commenting on Ezekiel (p. 585), he fails to comment on the new covenant as promised in Ezek 36. Moreover, when Gamble treats God's knowledge and omnipotence (pp. 659–60), there is not one footnote citing open theists. Furthermore, when commenting on creation in Genesis (pp. 161ff.) Gamble lacks any discussion on the complementarian-egalitarian debates that rage over Gen 1. And again, when discussing the doctrine of justification (pp. 669–74), Gamble never interacts with the New Perspective on Paul and how this movement interprets OT passages in their favor. Such omissions are surprising and unfortunate for an otherwise exhaustive volume.

Despite its weaknesses, volume one is a needed contribution to the field of systematic theology. Gamble's effort to write systematic theology within the parameters of the redemptive-historical context of Scripture is commendable, and future volumes are eagerly awaited.

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Alan Spence. *The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of Atonement*. London: T&T Clark, 2007. 126 pp. £16.99/\$27.95.

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Alan Spence, a minister of the United Reformed Church in London, has produced an important book on the doctrine of the atonement. This short book is clearly argued and contains commentary on biblical texts, historical overviews, and sound theological reasoning. Spence critically and graciously engages various ideas and thinkers and is not afraid to go against the consensus if he believes that it is warranted by Scripture.

Two major arguments run throughout the course of the book. First, Spence defends a mediatorial model as a "master-story" that provides a coherent relationship between the various soteriological metaphors found in scripture. In Spence's model, humanity is alienated from God because of sin and remains under his judgment. Jesus makes peace through the cross on our behalf with God the Father, reconciling God and humanity and calling the hearer to repent, trust and believe. Second, justification acts as "the interpretive scheme within which other redemptive themes play a part" (p. 67) and is the "solution to . . . our fundamental plight" (p. 61).

In chapter 1, Spence begins developing his unified theory by outlining what he believes are the three main soteriological types: Jesus as victor, mediator, and exemplar. Each option is a competing



theory of salvation, thus making each mutually exclusive. Spence illustrates this point by contrasting N. T. Wright's victory model to his mediatorial theory. He concludes that victory-language in scripture does not warrant a victory-model like Wright's and that his mediatorial theory is able to include such metaphors.

Chapter 2 evaluates aspects of modern soteriology, interacting with Forsyth, Barth, Kähler, and others. What is missing, in most accounts, is an allowance for the significance or reality of Jesus' human action, and this unfortunate result is due to an inadequate doctrine of the Spirit in Jesus' life. Christology and pneumatology must be brought together. For Spence, Jesus' action as man on our behalf is both biblical and in line with classical Christian thought.

Next, Spence seeks to bring together in chapter 3 the seemingly different accounts of "the Father's loving gift to the world of his Son and Jesus' self-offering to God on our behalf" (p. 39). Through an exploration of the intercessory prayer-life of the ascended Christ and its relationship to Jesus' death and resurrection, Spence asserts that God is the primary and formal cause of reconciliation and salvation whereas Jesus' self-offering is the material cause of the atonement.

The focus of chapter 4 is justification, which "provides the framework for a unified theory of atonement in which Christ's saving ministry is recognized as mediating our peace with God" (p. 67). Justification is the solution to humanity's predicament which Spence defines as guilt, sin, and estrangement from God. Spence further argues that Paul's theology brings together justification, redemption and propitiation and that the three are "mutually dependent" and ultimately form "not three theories of atonement but one" (p. 66).

Chapters 5–6 focus on the nature of faith in salvation, which is closely tied to the biblical understanding of promise. Faith consists of three principles. It is "a gift of God," an "appropriate human response to the gospel," and that which "looks away from itself and towards God alone for salvation" (p. 75). This is in contrast to T. F. Torrance's view, which "argues that everything required for salvation has already been accomplished by Christ" (p. 79). In response, Spence claims that men and women must genuinely trust in the divine promise—the promise of God's Son *for* us and his Spirit *to* us—and the transformation it brings.

In chapter 7 Spence finds inherent problems in Barth's relation of human faith and divine declaration. Barth argues that everyone is justified whether they realize it or not. Thus, faith is a matter of the assurance of what one already possesses. This isolates justification from incorporation into the death of Jesus and does not do justice to Scripture, which speaks of salvation being worked out in the believer's life through the power of the Holy Spirit. Spence even goes so far as to call Barth's view "false and dangerous" (p. 106). Spence ends the chapter with a critique of Wright's view of the covenant, gospel, and atonement, insisting that while the lordship of Christ is the gospel's presupposition, "it is, of itself, not the gospel" (p. 114).

At the end of the book, Spence offers a shorthand statement summarizing the various aspects of the overall narrative in trinitarian form: "*The Father gave his only Son to become as we are so that, in offering up himself on our behalf through the Spirit, he might reconcile us to God*" (p. 118). Spence admits that his book is ultimately an extended and unfinished commentary on the quote with much that still needs to be said.

An unfortunate and inevitable weakness of this book is its brevity. Spence covers a lot of ground in very few pages and at times can leave the reader with unanswered questions. Furthermore, while Spence does not directly engage in the debates regarding penal substitution, I would have appreciated more



attention to this biblical issue and would be interested in how his mediatorial theory would specifically incorporate penal substitution. Nevertheless, whether one agrees or not with Spence's normative mediatorial model, this book is a welcome contribution to atonement literature. It is worthy of wide readership among scholars, students, and pastors who are looking for a clear and passionate defense of the gospel.

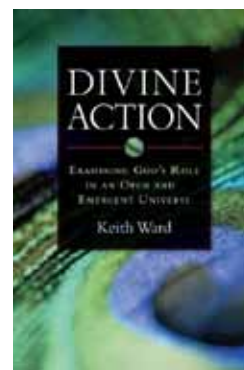
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Keith Ward. *Divine Action: Examining God's Role in an Open and Emergent Universe*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation, 2007. xi + 286 pp. \$19.95.

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I first heard of Keith Ward when I lived in Britain in the late 1980s when Ward took on the skepticism of Don Cupitt, whose 1980 *Taking Leave of God* caused a stir. I therefore expected a strong philosophical case for a fairly traditional view of God's action in the world; and the preface reinforced that expectation: "This book is a defense of a strongly supernaturalist idea of God as a purely spiritual creator of and personal agent in the cosmos, who was incarnate in the person of Jesus, who answers prayers and performs miracles" (p. vii).



The book was originally published in 1990, based on lectures given in 1989, the main changes being the addition of a preface and a list of further reading. In the preface Ward reaffirms that his topic "remains the most central and difficult question for thoughtful Christians who are aware of the findings of modern science." (It is common with contemporary writers on science and faith issues to suggest that the advances of the sciences may challenge deeply-held aspects of our Christian worldview, but in my judgment the really tough questions, having to do with the problem of evil and the nature of human freedom, have always been with us and are not put to us any more forcefully by scientific advances as such—though they may feature prominently in popular philosophizing.)

Ward writes as a philosophical theologian, and people (such as myself) trained in a more exegetically oriented fashion should not expect serious wrestling with biblical passages. Indeed, his writing style at times left me wondering who exactly he envisioned as his proper audience and what criteria he uses for a successful argument. I will return to this question anon.

The book has fourteen chapters. In the first chapter, Ward argues that the statement "God exists" is "a logically necessary truth, in the sense that it cannot be denied without contradiction" (p. 13). Ward shows good judgment when he finishes a very abstract discussion by coming down to earth:

So the sense of divine necessity is not merely an abstract concept: it is an apprehension of the faithfulness of being, of unlimited power, rooted in the experience of worship and confirmed by revelation. (p. 16)

The next chapter, on "Divine freedom and necessity," is a further abstract discussion leading to the following sensible conclusion:

It follows that it would be wrong either to think of God as excluded wholly from particular action within the world; or to think of him as doing absolutely anything he wants at any particular moment of the world's history. (p. 37)

The importance of this is that we are not in a position *a priori* to rule out miracles from God's interaction with his world. Although I am happy with the conclusion, there are steps along the way that foreshadow some of his later argument, namely, the conception of God as not fully sovereign over his creation (p. 33):

One might think, instead, of God bringing some initial state into existence, which has a future development not entirely determinate, but which he can help to determine by the exercise of his supremely imaginative creativity.

Chapters three through seven address the problem of evil. Here he advocates a notion of God's relation to the world that departs in important ways from the traditional Christian view. He seems to agree with modern theologians who no longer accept any account of the fall of mankind and of Satan (p. 40), and he suggests, "If suffering and destruction are ever possible in any world, they are necessarily included in God, not freely chosen by him. Thus God is not free to eliminate the possibility of suffering" (p. 43). He tells us,

[M]any of the conclusions of modern physics delineate a picture of the universe which even more clearly helps one to understand how suffering and destruction are necessary features of a universe in which alone beings like us can exist. (p. 62)

He is referring to notions from chaos theory and quantum mechanics in which "the future cannot be predicted wholly from the physical past" (p. 63). This, he assures us, gives us a "probabilistic physical system, open to the creative shaping of the divine imagination at very many points" (p. 65). Throughout these chapters he seems to equate the unpredictability one finds in modern theories in physics with freedom, which seems to me to be an impossible equation to defend. If I say that my actions are "free" when they are not physically determined, I do not mean that they are *undetermined*. When I "freely" choose to do a moral action, I am conforming my action to some principle that goes beyond the physical.

Ward defends his position with the assertion, "God cannot create a universe in which free creatures always choose the good" (p. 68). He never considers the obvious problem this produces with the traditional picture of everlasting bliss: does he think we will not be "free" in the glorified state? He also ends up with a notion of sin that cannot be squared with the biblical picture: it is no longer an invader in God's god creation; it is now a native.

In chapter 8, Ward takes up the question of "the particularity of providence." Here he is clear:

[M]y suggestion is that disasters happen by nature, that God cannot eliminate all, or even most, of them. But he can save some from disaster. . . . God's providential action does not have human happiness, whatever its character, as its aim. His purpose is to increase true knowledge and love of the Divine nature, without undermining human freedom. (p. 143)

He finishes the chapter with this conclusion: "It is a wholly misleading picture of God which thinks of him as able to heal or help everyone, but as choosing only to help a few people, apparently at random" (p. 153). This last phrase, "apparently at random," is an astonishing caricature of traditional positions.

Does Ward think that this is the only alternative to his view, or that anyone actually holds the position in the way he states it?

Chapter 9 deals with “prayer as participation in divine action.” Ward argues that since the divine plan is largely open, God may consent to do something simply because it is requested. Ward characterizes what he calls the Augustinian-Thomist tradition: “the main problem of prayer is how a changeless God can be affected by prayer at all” (p. 160)—a position he rejects. Now the literature on this topic is enormous, and no one chapter can interact with it all. At the same time, Ward really should show us that he has read what is out there and that he can do justice to it; he has not done so. There is also very little grappling with Scripture.

In chapter 10, Ward argues for the possibility of miracles. He rightly insists,

The sceptical eighteenth century philosopher David Hume performed a great disservice to religion (as he intended to) when he defined a miracle as “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.” (p. 179)

He also helpfully critiques the modernist theology of Paul Tillich. At the same time, when he seems to limit miracles to God acting “in response to the prayer and faith of creatures” (p. 182), he leaves me wondering if he is implying that God cannot take the initiative—neither the Red Sea crossing nor the resurrection of Jesus are presented in a way that matches Ward’s description.

In chapter 11, Ward deals with revelation and pluralism, arguing, “It is not intolerant or absurd to claim that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, there exists a definitive embodiment of God’s own activity for human redemption, which is the matrix for interpreting the Divine activity everywhere” (p. 210). This is good, though along the way he makes some surprising concessions about the inadequacies of the Biblical writers as vehicles of revelation.

Chapter 12 helpfully defends the unique divine incarnation in Jesus, while chapter 13 is a valuable discussion of two key questions: can one legitimately base one’s life on historical accounts, and may we properly derive a doctrine of incarnation from the Gospels? Chapter 14 finishes the book with reflections on the consummation.

Ward’s presentation of his approach did me the service of making me evaluate whether my own views are adequate for the issues he discusses. Thus, even in disagreement—at times strong disagreement—the book did me good.

At the same time, Ward’s overall style of argument suffers from some serious methodological problems, in addition to some of the content problems I have already mentioned. Although he rejects many aspects of traditional theology, he does not show any real awareness of how that tradition has addressed the topics he raises. Perhaps this is because he does not think that the tradition has addressed those topics, or perhaps it is because he thinks that modern science has faced us with challenges that our forebears did not face. In either case I think he is mistaken. Often when he summarizes traditional views, I could not recognize myself in the description, and I wondered whether he had any real contact with an educated traditionalist.

Further, in discussing “suffering” and “evil,” he never really defines them. Is all suffering evil? Is animal death evil, and are all natural catastrophes (such as the extinction of the dinosaurs) evil? I do not know how Ward would answer these nor whether I would agree with his answers, but I do know that he should at least deal with the definitions.

Finally, such appeals to Scripture as there are in the book are normally superficial in their exegesis. Since this is supposed to be a work in *Christian* philosophical theology and since Ward (at times, anyhow) speaks appreciatively of Christian revelation, I am left wondering why he spends so little time on the Bible itself. Partly it seems this is because critical views of the Bible's origin have demoted its content to secondary status, and Ward seems unaware of what this does to Christian faith to begin with. This shows the need for careful exegetes to demonstrate the proper place of biblical material in philosophical discussions.

In sum, I do not know what Ward would do with such biblical passages as Matt 10:29–32 (the fall of a sparrow) or Isa 10:5–19 (Assyria as the unwitting tool of God's purposes). There are tensions here, to be sure, and each of us must decide what he can live with. But Ward's solutions do not seem to leave us with a God who really achieves his holy will. So while I am grateful for his positive affirmations of God's freedom to act in his world, I am confident that one need not abandon conventional Christian metaphysics in order to do so responsibly.

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Stephen J. Nichols. *Getting the Blues: What Blues Music Teaches Us about Suffering and Salvation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008. 192 pp. £9.99/\$17.99.

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Can God's praises be sung in a foreign land? This question is raised in Ps 137, and the answer given is no, at least not when your oppressors force you to sing your own religious music as if everything were all right. But does that mean music should never be sung under oppression or during suffering? Hardly. Indeed, music is often the only appropriate response, next to silence, when everything is not all right. The blues were generated in the cotton fields, on the levees, or on the front porch of a people who has born unspeakable burdens of privation and destitution. Yet the blues is not bitter or vengeful. Plaintive at times, yes, even mournful. But the blues are profoundly hopeful. Both the misery and the hope of the blues are well explored in this fascinating account by Stephen Nichols.



The blues has been called many things. Notoriously, some have called it “the devil’s music” or simply “sinful tunes.” Its critics are both white and black. The black church had become the principal institution giving meaning and hope to the enslaved African people. The church was the strongest single force in the transition from Africans to African-Americans. Even after emancipation, the Christian faith was the deepest consolation for black people, still enduring oppression and racial prejudice. But there was a parallel world to that of the church. Giles Oakley calls it “a world of secular amusement” that lay alongside the church in a difficult relationship. It is in that parallel world that the blues are sung (Giles Oakley, *The Devil’s Music* [2nd ed.; New York: Da Capo, 1997], p. 46). Singers were called to repentance, and parents told their children to stay away from the blues and its associated lowlife. But that world has grown and taken on a life of its own.

Still, there is another side to this dichotomy. First, the sin is not necessarily all on one side. Blues singers can and have asserted that there is plenty of hypocrisy in the church, and that not every preacher

was a righteous person. Someone needs to sing about that. Second, the blues allowed people to articulate feelings and evoke subjects not always directly addressed by the church. For example, lost love. Indeed, abandonment is a constant theme in the blues, and for good reason. Not only do lovers turn away and cause jealousy, anger, and sadness, but white oppressors brought the slaves to North America and as it were abandoned them there to the fate of the cruelty of chattel-slavery in all its guises. Race and lost love are coupled together in African-American folklore. In *I'm Just a Bum*, the great Big Bill Broonzy sings about rejection:

Eeh, when my mother died, my dad give po' me away,  
 When my mother died, my dad gave po' me away,  
 Lord, I'm just a bum baby, that's why I got no place to stay  
 Sometimes I wonder why my dad give po' me away,  
 Sometimes I wonder why my dad give po' me away,  
 Lord, because I was dark-complexioned, Lord they throwed me away.  
 (Originally issued by Bluebird [B6III], 1935)

If the church was the most important outlet for emotions and the strongest advocate for education and status, the church was not altogether unlike the blues world it so often denounced. This is true both in style and content. T-bone Walker comments that the blues in a way comes out of the church. For example, he says that he heard boogie-woogie piano for the first time in the Holy Ghost Church of Dallas. The preacher also preached in a blues-like tone (Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya* [New York: Reinhart, 1955], p. 223).

Many other such connections exist. A number of the greatest blues singers either came out of the church or went back into it. Two of the most remarkable gospel singers who began as bluesmen are Georgia Tom Dorsey (Thomas A. Dorsey, not to be confused with the swing band trombonist Tommy Dorsey) and Blind Gary Davis. Ethel Waters began as a blues singer and ended up singing gospel with the Billy Graham campaigns. It works the other way as well. Sister Rosetta Tharpe sang gospel-tres in nightclubs. Blind Willie Johnson sang "judgments songs" during the great influenza of 1918. J. B. Lenoir and Elmore James were itinerant preachers when they were not performing the blues. Jerry Lee Lewis grew up in the Assemblies of God. Although never becoming a preacher as did his first cousin Jimmy Swaggart, instead he ended up on the rock-and-roll stage, singing the blues.

Much more than these commonalities, the two worlds overlap at the very deepest level. Although a sacred-secular dichotomy did develop, that is not what African-Americans believe at their best. Rather, there is a more heavenly and a more earthly perspective, both under the same Lord. In the blues, there may be a more earthly gaze. But it is never disconnected from worship and first things. This complementarity stems from the diversity in the Bible itself, for example, in the way the wisdom literature of Scripture overlaps with the Psalms. The difference is one of focus, not of fundamental worldview. Ecclesiastes, Job, James, these are so many blues texts from the Scripture: looking at evil square in the face, sometimes puzzling about it, sometimes prophetically denouncing it. The Psalms direct our praise, as well as our deepest concerns, straight to the Lord in worship and meditation. Interestingly, both use a poetic device known as parallelism, in which a line is followed by a second one like it; then a third drives the point further.

In his wonderful book *Getting the Blues*, Stephen Nichols makes many of these connections. It is a kind of Christian apologetic for the blues. He quotes liberation theologian James Cone to the effect that

the blues is hardly the devil's music. The spirituals, Cone argues, provided the raw material for the blues, both musically and thematically. Not that they are identical. But the blues comes from the same soil.

This is a welcome piece of scholarship. It is a curious fact that much of the study of blues has been done by white people. Since World War II a host of British scholars has explored the blues with great dedication. We owe them a great debt since before them very little was known about the blues outside of the work of folklorists such as Alan Lomax (Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues* [Ashgate, 2007], pp. 104ff.). Key authors such as Paul Oliver wrote seminal works introducing Europe and even America to this wonderful music. More often than not, though, such authors are of a Marxist persuasion, seeing blues singers as victims of colonialism, semi-literate, struggling under oppression in a post-colonial context.

Nichols is not the first, of course, to set forth a more balanced, Christian interpretation. In an earlier generation Hans Rookmaaker developed an interpretation of jazz, blues, and spirituals, which was a pioneering endeavor in connecting all three genres to the Christian faith (Hans R. Rookmaaker, *New Orleans Jazz, Mahalia Jackson and the Philosophy of Art* [The Complete Works 2; Carlisle: Piquant, 2002]; the original, in Dutch, was published in 1960). There is also the groundbreaking study, *Blues and Evil* by Michael Jon Spencer, a book to which Nichols refers (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993). Spencer attempts to see the blues as a folk-theological way of grappling with the problem of good and evil in the world, a theodicy.

But Nichols's book brings its own fresh perspective to the study of the blues. The author's experience as both a theologian and a historian of the South contributes nicely to his study of the blues. Extremely well-researched, the book stems also from something of a personal journey. Nichols has traveled to the famed landmarks of the blues, particularly in the Mississippi Delta. Instead of giving abstract theories about the blues, he pauses at length over several of the key ideas, and of course the singers. He explores the history and the myth of Robert Johnson, a sinner, a "son of Adam" blessed with common grace. Johnson gave us such masterpieces as *Cross Road Blues*. While his recorded music is unfortunately not extensive, it is worth its weight in gold. His music was the definitive inspiration on Eric Clapton and the Cream. He discusses Son House, a "man of sorrows," who in his suffering yet knew the outcome of the story, giving us *John the Revelator*, an American masterpiece. There are also the women singers, like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, who are dubbed "women of sorrows." Nichols powerfully weaves in the story of Ruth and especially the plight of Naomi, a sort of OT blues woman! And the book is touchingly dedicated to the memory of Charley Patton, the "Father of the Delta Blues," whom many consider to be one of the twentieth century's most significant musicians.

Nichols covers the Northern migration, although the Chicago blues receives less emphasis than the roots in the Delta. But describing the move North affords him the opportunity to discuss Muddy Waters, and the musicians who experienced the disappointments and hope deferred in the industrial jungle. The final chapters discuss gospel more than they do the blues, which is fine. Among the great candidates for this blues-like spiritual music are my own heroes, Thomas A. Dorsey and Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington. Dorsey returned from the blues to gospel and almost single-handedly moved church music from the spiritual to urban gospel. He gave us such great songs as *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*. Duke Ellington wrote various kinds of gospel songs, including the masterpiece *Come Sunday*, which he worked into his three Sacred Concerts. Some readers will probably be surprised at the Christian faith of the duke, but his life makes no sense without it.

The content is great, but so is the form. I loved the way Nichols weaves theological discussion through the pages of this book in a way that is neither preachy nor abstract or flatly conceptual. Nichols uses the redemptive-historical understanding of Scripture to make sense of the world of the blues, and he tells it like a story, the same kind of story told in the blues. There is original sin; there is the suffering of Christ; there is the resurrection; but these are a part of the fabric, rather than academic imports from on high.

I have only two regrets. The first is a problem common to most books about music: we don't really hear the sounds. The lyrics are absolutely crucial, but the distinguishing feature of the blues is surely the passionate music. No doubt it would have proved prohibitively expensive to provide an accompanying CD. To make up for that, we do have a brief discography to go with each chapter. The reader really should download the music in order fully to "get" the blues. The second is that there is no index. In a book of this nature, the information should be more accessible at a quick glance, at least for serious blues scholars. There are plenty of footnotes, but it would have been helpful to make the names and subjects available without paging through the whole volume each time you need something specific.

But these are minor quibbles with a truly marvelous book. It deserves to be widely read, not only by Christians, who can be encouraged to "get" the blues from a balanced, yet loving presentation, but for unbelievers as well, who may be prone to think of the blues merely as secular entertainment, or as some sort of pure protest music. Can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? Yes, particularly if it carries the misery and the hope of the blues.

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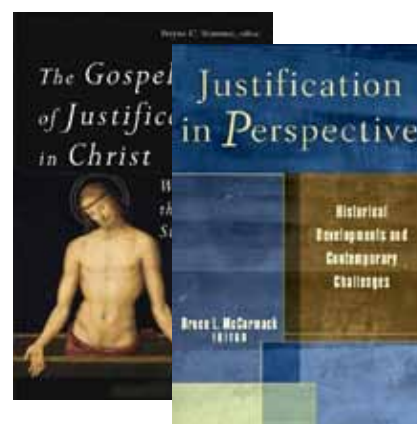
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Bruce L. McCormack, ed. *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006. 277 pp. \$26.00.

Wayne C. Stumme, ed. *The Gospel of Justification in Christ: Where Does the Church Stand Today?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. x + 182 pp. \$17.94.

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The doctrine of justification has received a great deal of attention from across the Christian spectrum over the last few decades. Some want to discard altogether the "forensic" articulation that has held sway as the standard view among Protestants at least since Calvin, while others have worked to reaffirm, bolster, or complement the traditional Protestant view according to fresh readings of Paul, Luther, Calvin, or Barth. Considering Luther confessed grasping the breadth and depth of this doctrine only in "meagre rudiments and fragments," we should not be surprised that in the present day the doctrine of justification is surrounded again in debate. The joyful task of Christian theology to give orderly articulation to the truths of Scripture goes onward.



Looking at the debate, one can see four interpretive angles that have been opened up on the doctrine of justification, and both volumes considered here include contributions that in one way or another survey, attempt to further, or critique each of these angles. The angles are these, and the books will be considered according to their contribution to each: corporate/covenantal, apocalyptic, ecumenical, and *theōsis*.

The *first* seeks to reinterpret justification according to corporate, covenantal categories, shifting justification's meaning from the declaration of an individual's right standing before God to a corporate, covenantal identity. Known generally as the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), its origins might be traced back to Krister Stendahl and later to E.P. Sanders. More recently still, James Dunn and N.T. Wright developed these trajectories along different but often related lines. What they hold in common is a shared conviction that the Pauline message concerning "justification" should be interpreted *corporately* and according to covenantal categories rather than *individually* and according to legal categories.

*Justification in Perspective* engages directly with the NPP through essays by N. T. Wright and Simon Gathercole. This might not be surprising considering the evangelical and Reformed outlook of the contributors. The essays originated as lectures given at the tenth Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, 2003, and, taken together, are characterized as "a progress report on the state of the Protestant doctrine of justification today in the midst of challenge and change" (p. 9).

In his essay Simon Gathercole, a mild opponent of the NPP, engages with the views of his *doktorvater*, James Dunn, as well as those of N. T. Wright. Gathercole is a good example of someone who takes the standard Protestant view in hand and looks back to the sources in Paul in order to offer a fresh and more robust articulation of justification that remains in conversation with recent theology while retaining the shape of the traditional Protestant view. One way of reading Gathercole's essay—and I believe Eberhard Jüngel's work is consonant with this as well (*Justification* [2006])—is to see it as an effort to balance the "subjective" and "objective" aspects of the standard Protestant view of justification. That is, a doctrine of justification must speak not only of the individual's status as righteous before God ("subjective"), but it must give robust testimony as well to the work of the justifying One who *makes the sinner righteous through his declaration*. For example, Gathercole finds Wright's definition of justification as being "reckoned to be in covenant with God" simply too minimal. With an ear to Jüngel, Gathercole wants to offer instead a theological understanding of divine reckoning in order to show that God's justifying act is not only one of *recognition*, but is actually closer to *creation*: "It is God's *determination* of our new identity rather than a recognition of it" (p. 229). In line with this, Gathercole also finds Wright's view of both the *nature* of the works of the law and their *function*, again, too minimal: "Justification, then, is not merely a reckoning as being in covenant membership. It is something bigger—God's creative act whereby, through divine determination, the believer has done everything that God requires" (p. 240).

The *second* interpretive angle on justification might be termed "apocalyptic," and Douglas Harrink's *Paul among the Postliberals* (2003) is one of its most recent iterations. Drinking deeply from recent "apocalyptic" interpretations of Paul (e.g., J. Louis Martyn, Martinus de Boer, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa), Harrink argues that we interpret Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation as God's once-for-all-time act to deliver the universe and humanity from the enslaving powers of sin and death. On Harrink's reading, justification should be understood as having less to do with an *individual's* standing before God ("subjective") and more to do with the event of God's apocalyptic, transformational activity ("objective") by which God vindicates himself and through which the cultural, corporate, and political activities of "justified" individuals is called forth ("Doing Justice to Justification," in *The Christian Century*, June 14, 2005, p. 25).



Harrink's work is addressed by Bruce McCormack in *Justification in Perspective: "Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness."* What Harrink fails to appreciate, McCormack argues, is the forensic context in which Barth's claims about faith and works are situated and which give them their meaning. Through his brief interaction with Harrink and his lengthy exposition of Barth's doctrine of justification, he goes to great length to demonstrate that Barth's doctrine of justification is a radicalization and extension of the traditional Protestant view, but is *not* fundamentally a break from it. Instead, Barth offers the Protestant tradition a view of justification in which God's justifying action remains primary—"justification is complete and effective in Jesus Christ; the awakening of faith adds nothing to this completed action, nor does it give to it an efficacy that it does not have in itself" (p. 196)—but it remains primary in such a way that the importance of the individual's awakening to faith by the Spirit is not depleted.

The *third* angle, "ecumenical," led to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on October 31, 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. Broadly speaking, the Joint Declaration articulated a basic consensus on the doctrine of justification and agreed that the condemnations of the sixteenth century on this doctrine no longer apply. It has been hailed in some quarters as a significant step in the dialogue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans with far-reaching implications for other participants in the ongoing ecumenical movement. Other Lutherans and Roman Catholics, however, found it a disappointment both in what it said and in what it did not say.

The Joint Declaration receives scant attention in *Justification in Perspective* but retains pride of place in *The Gospel of Justification in Christ*. The essays in this collection were taken from the 2002 theology and mission conference at Luther Seminary organized by the Institute for Mission in the USA. The contributors represent a far more diverse cross-section of the Christian tradition than is found in the other volume, including Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Reformed participants. All of the authors here clearly breathe from the same ecumenical air, so most essays deal with issues of ecumenical reconciliation or the dialogue among religions. Margaret O'Gara, Michael Root, George Hunsinger, Steven Paulson, Avery Cardinal Dulles, and Paul Varo Martinson all wrestle specifically with the Joint Declaration and its implications for furthering ecumenical advances.

Though not focused narrowly on the Joint Declaration, Gabriel Fackre's contribution is almost worth the price of the book itself: "Affirmations and Admonitions: Lutheran and Reformed." Most thought-provoking here is Fackre's interpretation of the overall elements of each tradition that actually "shape" their proposals on justification but also on Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, etc. Fackre characterizes them as (1) the Reformed accent on divine *sovereignty* "over" vis-à-vis the Lutheran accent on the divine *solidarity* "in, with, and under" and (2) the Reformed emphasis on the *sanctification* of the believer vis-à-vis the Lutheran emphasis on the *simultaneity* of sinfulness and justification of the sinner (p. 8).

Fackre's characteristics serve as a helpful lens toward *seeing beneath the surface* of Reformed and Lutheran doctrinal commitments and theological reasoning; specifically related to the doctrine of justification this certainly seems to be the case. For example, the relationship between God and creatures can be conceived anywhere along a spectrum of "intrinsicist" / "extrinsicist" options. An extrinsicist account would emphasize the external nature of the divine working, often given shape through Word and Spirit (Western theology). On an intrinsicist account, the activity of God is conceived within the structures of creaturely existence; God works from within the person to enable him or her to act in certain ways (Eastern theology).

The differences between intrinsicist and extrinsicist views rise close to the surface in the *fourth* and final interpretive angle on the doctrine of justification: *theōsis*. The Finnish school of Luther interpretation (known as “The Mannermaa School” or “the Finnish Luther Research”) originated as an ecumenical dialogue between Finnish Lutheran and Russian Orthodox and argues for a reinterpretation not primarily of Paul but of Luther’s reading of Paul. The figures in this program are many, but Tuomo Mannermaa is recognizably the most well-known and prolifically published. The heart of Mannermaa’s Luther interpretation is found in *Christ Present in Faith* (2005).

At the center of Mannermaa’s argument is the rejection of a purely forensic and transactional understanding of justification, which is based heavily on Luther’s Galatians commentary and its delineation of union with Christ. Convinced that Luther’s concept of faith denotes a “real union” with the person of Christ, Mannermaa contends that believers thus participate in the very essence of God. On Mannermaa’s account, the forensic, legal aspect of justification is absorbed into a theology of ontic participation; this is justification-as-deification, not justification-as-declaration.

Carl Trueman, in *Justification in Perspective*, argues against Mannermaa’s proposals based entirely on his interpretation of Luther and Melancthon. One of Mannermaa’s moves is to bifurcate between the two, while Trueman argues that the two positions need not be seen as contradictory or mutually exclusive (p. 89). In *The Gospel of Justification in Christ*, George Hunsinger’s proposal for “Faith as participation” is decidedly consonant with Mannermaa’s work. He looks to Luther and argues for the same prominence of bridegroom over courtroom metaphors as Mannermaa does, then he goes on to insist, also as Mannermaa does, that “We have been made righteous precisely by virtue of our participation in him, and so by grace through faith” (p. 75). I would not want to say that Hunsinger adopts Mannermaa’s interpretation of Luther, but only that other Protestants are making similar cases for a revised, less forensic understanding of justification. One sees a subtle shift away from the extrinsicism side of the spectrum (long found among Reformed theologians) toward a more intrinsicist flavor.

Taken together, these collections provide a useful window into the various angles from which justification has been assessed and hint at the future *prospects* for development. Regarding prospects, some argue that a strong reaffirmation of the standard Protestant view in all its fullness is required, and there is little doubt we will continue seeing a proliferation of Reformed, evangelical reaffirmations of the traditional Reformed perspective on justification in line with those which have recently appeared. Along the same trajectory, but differentiated from the first in its incorporation of certain insights from the New Perspective, another cadre of thinkers will surely attempt a reaffirmation and refinement of the standard view such as we saw Gathercole doing in the essay reviewed here.

Others contend that what the church requires is a fundamentally revised understanding of what justification *indicates* and *to whom* the language of justification applies. In this vein, there is every indication that N. T. Wright and those sharing his fundamental insights will continue working out the implications of their proposals (Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* [2009]) or will further explore apocalyptic angles (e.g., Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* [2009]). And among Lutherans, the views of the Finnish School will likely be read and considered for some time (even if not widely adopted), not least of which because they are given dogmatic form in the systematic theologies of two recent, prominent Lutheran theologians (Robert Jenson and Wolfhart Pannenberg). Likewise, the insights of the Finnish School into Luther’s mysticism have ignited interest among Reformed thinkers to apply the same thinking to Calvin (cf. Billings, *Calvin, Participation and the Gift* [2008]; various essays in Christenson and Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* [2008]).

So what should we make of all the current debate on the doctrine of justification? Perhaps, at the very least, we find reason for both encouragement and caution.

We should be encouraged by the vigorous, serious attention to the biblical text this engagement has aroused and that through it sharp attention is being drawn to *both* the “objective” and “subjective” aspects of justification. For a doctrine of justification to fulfill its duty it should give an orderly account both of the divine “objective” work of justification (however that be conceived) and the “subjective” implications of that work for the identity (ontology) and standing of individuals before God *and* among the people of God as well. To cordon one from the other—either making the focus of the doctrine entirely “objective” or “subjective”—would seem to narrow the scope of God’s action. This tips my hand toward the recent work of Jüngel, McCormack, and Gathercole, which I find offering persuasive amendments to standard articulations. Each argue in their own way that God’s justifying activity be conceived according to the creative, transformative nature of God’s declarative word. In McCormack’s words, God’s word “creates the reality it depicts” (“What’s at Stake in the Current Debates over Justification,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates* [2004], p. 107).

Encouraged, yes, but also cautious. In our eagerness either *to transcend the traditional Protestant view* or *to protect it*, we should remain cautious that we do not overstep Luther’s insight that our “grasp” on the wisdom of faith is in “poor rudiments and fragments” and thereby fail to hear and appreciate the insights of our brothers and sisters across the table. The insights from the NPP serve, at least, to remind Reformed traditionalists that one’s standing before God in Christ includes as well his or her standing *among others in Christ as the people of God*. The fruitful work of various Reformed thinkers to widen the scope of divine justifying action should serve as well to chasten those too hasty to altogether discard the traditional view as a culturally infected “legal fiction.” As the discussion surrounding the doctrine of justification continues, the church can only hope and pray that its servants (theologians) will carry out their service through repeated, careful attention both to the text of scripture and to the pastoral care of the church’s people.

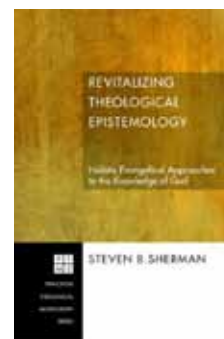
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Steven B. Sherman. *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology: Holistic Evangelical Approaches to the Knowledge of God*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 83. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008. xv + 278 pp. \$32.00.

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Steven B. Sherman is a thoughtful proponent of postconservative evangelicalism. He is among a growing number of particularly younger evangelical scholars who are insisting that the enduring integrity of evangelicalism’s contemporary witness depends upon revising—if not completely rejecting—the approach to theological knowledge that is characteristic of those in the mainstream of what he calls “Enlightenment-enchanted evangelicalism” (p. 132). His study—which is well-organized, generally well-written, and more often than not quite accessible—is a forthright call for evangelicals to reconstruct evangelical theology for the twenty-first century by embracing models of knowing that are grounded in the



nonfoundationalism of “the postmodern cultural condition” (p. 3). As such, *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology* is a constructive proposal that “is about contemporary evangelical approaches to the knowledge of God, considering—and suggesting—ways Christian philosophers and theologians [should] envision and make use of theological knowledge in the postmodern context” (p. xv).

At the heart of Sherman’s call for a revitalized theological epistemology is his insistence that conservative evangelicals “regularly” conceive of theological knowledge in ways that “privilege” the rationalism of the Enlightenment (p. 128). According to Sherman,

Mainstream conservative evangelical theology in the modern period has traditionally approached epistemological questions with definitive—and allegedly indubitable—answers generally based on a modern foundationalist method of biblical interpretation: a system characterized by an unwavering belief in the ability of reason and evidence . . . to provide the church and the world with certain knowledge and truth. (p. 16)

Because he is persuaded that such an approach to the knowledge of God is “practically obsolete” (p. 92) due to the “downfall of modernity’s premier epistemology—foundationalism” (pp. 68–69), Sherman argues that in order to move “the unchanging gospel forward via the changing garb of new historical and cultural contexts” (p. 265), evangelicals must shed the “approach to knowledge” (p. 16) that is grounded in what postconservatives regard as the epistemological hubris of the modern era and embrace instead “more holistic approach[es] to theology and epistemology” (pp. 1–2). Indeed, they must abandon the “extreme focus on objectivity and scientific method” (p. 2) that is characteristic of more “traditionalist” approaches to the knowledge of God and focus instead on “alternative philosophical and theological resources for evangelical thought” (p. 8), including those that move beyond a “modernity-immersed” (p. 100) conception of knowledge by allowing a greater role “for scripture, experience, wisdom, community, and mystery in epistemological matters than conservative evangelical theologians traditionally have permitted” (p. 255). Such an incorporation of “other ways of knowing” (p. 254) will encourage the revitalization of theological epistemology, Sherman concludes, for reducing reason to “one among [many] relatively equal resources” (p. 254), for the knowledge of God “will force evangelical intellectuals beyond the comforts of the familiar territory marked out by modernity: traditionalism, modernist-fundamentalist categories, foundationalism, ahistoricism, aculturalism, acontextualism, propositionalism, triumphalism, objectivism, ethnocentrism, certainty, hubris, et al.” (p. 270). It will also engender a refreshing and healthy ecumenism, for it will foster the recovery of those “premodern ways of knowing [that are typically] associated with ancient, classical, and medieval expressions of Christian faith” (p. 250).

Among the strengths of Sherman’s study, three in particular are noteworthy. The first has to do with his penetrating analysis of “the intellectual journey of . . . Clark Pinnock,” whom he regards as “the father of postconservative evangelical theology” (p. 8). The second concerns his helpful discussion of why he believes “postconservatives and interested others” (p. 202) should embrace Leslie Newbigin’s approach to theological knowledge “as a model for evangelical scholarship” (p. 214). The third—which is most relevant to the ongoing debate between conservative and postconservative evangelicals over the nature of theological method—is related to his careful exposition of precisely why revisionist evangelicals consider traditionalist approaches to the knowledge of God “to be in error (or at least problematic)” (p. 91). In short, Sherman demonstrates that postconservatives consider traditionalist approaches to the knowledge of God to be “unsatisfactory” (p. 91) because such approaches are grounded in what

postconservatives insist is the accommodation of the “alleged faults” (p. 84) of the Princeton Theology. Indeed, more traditional approaches to the knowledge of God are suspect, postconservatives argue, for at least four reasons, all of which find their genesis in what they believe is Old Princeton’s rather credulous endorsement of Scottish Realism.

While Sherman’s analysis of the Princeton Theology is particularly helpful because it outlines the postconservative case against Old Princeton and conservative evangelicalism more generally, nevertheless, it is seriously compromised by the presumption that the Princetonians were more or less oblivious to the holistic nature of theological epistemology. Not only does Sherman presume that the Princetonians were thoroughgoing rationalists, but even more remarkably he suggests that they were “classical” foundationalists (cf. p. xiv n. 3) who presumed that their thinking—and their thinking alone—was neutral and without bias (cf. p. 93). But what if the Princetonians really weren’t the committed rationalists that Sherman and others presume them to be? In other words, what becomes of Sherman’s thesis—let alone the justification for the entire postconservative project—if the theologians that he regards as “*representative* of the general purview of traditionalist viewpoints” (p. 91) really weren’t as indebted to an Enlightenment conception “of what it is to be human, to know, and to believe” (p. 100) as he makes them out to be? Postconservatives should consider these and other important questions with greater diligence, I would respectfully suggest, before they offer proposals that presume to solve problems that are more imagined than real.

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N. T. Wright. *Justification: Paul's Vision and God's Plan*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. 252 pp. \$25.00.

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Tom Wright has done it again. He has produced yet another title in addition to his esteemed and still-in-progress series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Even the growing many who question whether Wright has ventured off course in his retelling of Paul’s doctrine of justification can appreciate his productivity. Put this reviewer in that category.

Wright tackles *Justification* in two parts. “Introduction” addresses perspective, rules of engagement, backgrounds, and definitions in a lengthy prolegomena; “Exegesis” then aims to show his vision of Paul’s vision from Paul’s texts—first Galatians; then Philippians, Corinthians, and Ephesians; and finally, Romans. Wright says, “I am writing this book to try, once more, to explain what I have been talking about—which is to explain what I think St. Paul was talking about” (p. 21). He finds that John Piper, author of *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), as well as Wright’s mounting list of critics, “hasn’t really listened to what I’m saying” (p. 21).

It is easy to pen a quick list of the good in this book. Wright constantly reminds us of *Sola Scriptura*, emphasizes the necessity of exegesis, underscores the corporate nature of Paul’s theology, highlights the role of Israel in redemptive history, wields a wonderful Christology (and registers his disagreement with the Christology of James D. G. Dunn, to whom he has strangely dedicated this book), acknowledges that Romans is primarily about God (p. 40) and that it is “one of the greatest documents ever written



by a human being” (p. 175), and condemns the use of the “loose language” of *salvation by faith*. Wright even refreshingly admits that he, Dunn, and Richard Hays have “not always followed either history or exegesis perfectly” (p. 196), and that he is sorry for giving wrong impressions in the past (p. 180).

But despite the smattering of good, it is disheartening to find that Wright is not yet addressing the issues he must in order to move the discussion forward, thus leaving his inquisitors with the same unanswered questions. The places where Wright creates disappointment and leaves questions can be clustered into a sequence of five groupings.

### **Misunderstanding His Critics**

First, it is disappointing that Wright is not engaging his critics as well as they are engaging him. He mentions Piper by name most frequently, but it is unclear whether it is Piper who remains his target throughout or whether many of his unlabeled criticisms are meant for others. Is Wright really lumping Piper with the anthropocentrists, or is someone else in mind? To accuse Piper of man-centeredness will make even Piper’s harshest detractors scratch their heads. This much is clear in Wright, that for all his complaints about others not understanding him, he does not appear to have given the needed effort to track with Piper, who we might add gives noticeably more energy to writing with clarity. It is also discouraging that Wright anticipates that he can run an “outflanking exercise” (p. 9) at this point in the debate. Has he misread the current list of questions that badly? His opponents have identified his location, marched toward him in full view, and are now only yards away. The time for outflanking has passed. In trying to maneuver at this stage, he only makes himself look unarmed.

We should say that Wright acknowledges that this volume is preliminary and, in many senses, incomplete, with his major work on Paul coming in due course. Additionally, he says he was rushed to press in the midst of ministerial duties. It is unfortunate that such important work needed to be hurried, and a bit unfair to the reader, as well as his detractors. How are we to discern between where he is wrong and where he was forced to be hasty?

Also, it is not clear that Wright understands what the so-called old perspective means by “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.” Whoever said that divine righteousness could be passed across the courtroom? Has he confused the word *impute* with *transfer*? And has Wright overlooked the essential role of the incarnation in the Reformed conception—that it is not the divine attribute of righteousness that counts for the believer in union with Jesus, but the whole-life-lived righteousness of the God-man? Wright unavoidably acknowledges a kind of imputation (without using the word) at the corporate level (p. 76), but must he do so at the expense of applying it to individuals who make up that corporate?

### ***Dikaïosunē Theou***

Second, Wright is bogging down the discussion by continuing to take *dikaïosunē theou* as a technical term for God’s covenant faithfulness without providing a convincing rationale. His justification-revision project may be crumbling on simple linguistics. In taking *dikaïosunē theou* as a technical term, Wright seemingly grants himself the freedom to disregard context when it fits his designs. (The phrase “technical term” in Wright nearly functions as a kind of signal to the reader that he is importing concepts not natively found in the text at hand; the phrase “controlling narrative” appears to be another such marker.) He uses *dikaïosunē* and *pistis* interchangeably when it fits his system and differently when it does not (p. 203). Wright cannot maintain “righteous” as “covenantally faithful” throughout his exegetical chapters, as his treatment of a key text like Romans 3:25–26 demonstrates (p. 206).

Along these lines, Wright's explanation of 2 Cor 5:21 remains unpersuasive because he has not established that *dikaiosunē theou* means covenant faithfulness. Point after point, his exegesis is predicated on his understanding of *dikaiosunē theou*, but he provides no OT (or other) support for his view, merely assuming it as fact (p. 217). He then uses the phrase to draw in the "controlling narrative" of Israel and Abraham where it is not demonstrably in the apostle's mind.

Here we locate a considerable difference between Piper and Wright. Piper may stand to reckon more with Abraham, but Wright has made too much of the patriarch. And in doing so, Wright is unwilling to work any further backward than Gen 12, saying that "Abraham is where it all starts" (p. 217). This gets at a sizeable shortcoming in Wright: He does not go back far enough and ask the ultimate questions. What is God's purpose in creation before there ever was a covenant with Abraham—or ever was creation? Why most ultimately does God mean "to set the world to rights"? Was God righteous before he made a covenant with Abraham? Was he righteous before he created the world? Because Wright begins with Abraham and does not grapple with the ultimate questions, his base is shallow and the structure is unstable.

### Creating Fog

A third disappointment is Wright's lack of clarity. He says that he has been misunderstood, but is the list of readers who are misunderstanding him, in addition to Piper, really this impressive: Don Carson, Stephen Westerholm, Doug Moo, Mark Seifrid, and Simon Gathercole? (And should we assume that the list now includes Doug Wilson, Gerald Bray, Paul Helm, Dan Wallace, and Michael Horton, who all have registered weighty concerns with this new title?) Perhaps it is Wright who is creating the fog and not producing clarity.

There is a distressing lack of frankness in Wright, and part of it is his frequent reference to old-perspective opinions without providing names (however much he has been rushed to press). Who is saying that justification is all of salvation (p. 87) and spans from "grace to glory" (p. 102)? It is not Piper or the others listed above. Whoever it is, Wright needs to give names and page numbers so we can all together correct them in love. Let's hope that what lies behind Wright's nameless interlocutors is not a field of straw men. One way or the other, what is needed in this discussion is not the manner in which Wright engages here, but clear words and straightforward affirmations.

### The Final Judgment

Fourth, Wright's fog may prove most disappointing when he turns to the final judgment. Will he really be able to move the discussion forward by dismissing the difference between "on the basis of" and "according to" in a footnote (p. 121n7)? Is he not then embracing the "loose language" he elsewhere chastises, going soft on his own *Sola Scriptura* refrain, and refusing to answer the very issue that is at stake?

It is legitimate for Wright to ask whether some have left the Holy Spirit out of the discussion, and likely his reason for asking it is that he wants to draw in the Spirit for the production of the believer's divinely empowered (necessary) obedience for the final judgment. In what way, then, is this Spirit-wrought obedience necessary at the final judgment? This is the question Wright must answer, but he continues to be ambiguous and inconsistent at best, if not badly mistaken. On the one hand, he says, "the verdict of the last day . . . has already been announced" (p. 214), but elsewhere he claims that the Christian's whole life lived "leads to the final verdict" (p. 193). Is he creating space for basing the final judgment on Spirit-wrought works by setting up two justifications and divorcing obedience from the

phrase “works of the law”? Is it telling that he leaves out the word “now” in his own translation of Rom 8:1 (pp. 250–51)?

In the end, Wright seems to say it is both: “[T]his lawcourt verdict . . . is announced both in the *present*, with the verdict issued on the basis of faith and faith alone, and also in the *future*, on the day when God raises from the dead all those who are already indwelt by the Spirit” (p. 251). Maybe his reference to Spirit-indwelling is not meant to contradict what Paul says elsewhere—“not because of works done by us in righteousness” (Tit 3:5)—but it is difficult to get around seeing that this is what Wright is implying. He is at least unclear here.

### Exegesis

Fifth and finally, Wright’s exegesis in the book’s second half is disappointing for a scholar of his standing. After his lengthy prolegomena, the hope is that now, at last, we will see Wright’s exegetical foundations with new depth and candor. Frequently in the first half, he has pointed ahead, noting that exegesis is coming; but then, unfortunately, the second part proves to be a substantial letdown. We may note that elsewhere Wright has written a commentary on Romans, as well as many technical articles, monographs, and popular-level books. That he has given the exegesis better attention there may serve in Wright’s mind to excuse his lack of detail here. But it is unfortunate that under the banner of exegesis he mainly attempts to answer his critics (who have challenged him point-for-point exegetically) by restating his big picture—the big picture that depends on the very exegesis he is not adequately providing.

The question remains as to whether Wright is overplaying the role of extrabiblical texts in reading the biblical documents. It is true that “we are bound to read the NT in its own first-century context” (pp. 46–47), but the issue Wright seems to have ignored is what is the Christian’s most reliable window into the first century? The answer is the NT itself. But are the extrabiblical texts functioning as the reliable sources for Wright, while understanding the NT has become contingent? Wright expressly looks for “firm ground in anchoring exegesis” (p. 47) by turning to first-century sources other than the NT. Despite how much Wright gives nod to the authority of Scripture and returns to his much-appreciated *Sola Scriptura* refrain, is his model of exegesis not demonstrating that his doctrine of Scripture is weak in practice?

Exegesis has two different flavors for Wright and Piper. Piper wrestles word by word, proposition by proposition, and then paragraph by paragraph. Wright moves much quicker through large chunks of Paul’s thought, refers frequently to whole chapters and paragraphs, and quotes phrases (often as technical terms) seemingly removed from their immediate context. It is surprising that Wright would remind us that “the text is the text” (p. 249) when he has dealt so little with the actual biblical text in its context. For this reason, Wright’s exegetical chapters are a serious disappointment as his exegesis proves to be a kind of hovering above the text—rarely, if ever, landing, while supplying his own meaning for a phrase here and there that contributes to a coherent whole but neglects to explain the connections between Paul’s propositions and paragraphs. Does Wright not see that the discussion cannot go forward if he will not convincingly engage Paul on Paul’s own terms but instead keeps the text at arm’s length?

The student who takes the time to work through Wright’s exegesis, with both a good English translation and the Greek text nearby, will see that Wright’s claims do not follow Paul’s text proposition by proposition. Wright has selected a few words, phrases, and so-called technical terms, accounted well for them in his system, and then made sweeping claims about whole chapters and paragraphs, relating one to another without pausing sufficiently to mind the conjunctions and show that Paul is thinking the



same way. Reading Wright with Paul's texts open reveals that Wright is not yet demonstrating that he can explain Paul as well as his most careful critics.

Despite the impressive fact that he has published yet again, it does not seem that *Justification* will advance the discussion or benefit Wright's esteem at present or long term. Wright has done much outstanding work in the past, and it is a shame that he may have sullied his name with this disappointing volume.

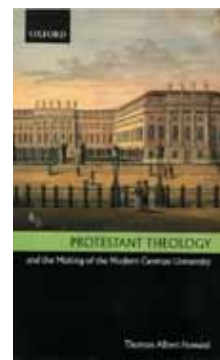
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Thomas Albert Howard. *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xii + 468 pp. £25.00/\$49.95.

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As the title suggests, this work offers a reading that should be understood on two levels; on the one hand Thomas Howard indicates that this study is an exercise in intellectual history and, on the other hand, it is an interpretative foray into the history of Christian theology (p. 39). Few books can be found that offer a reading of nineteenth-century German Protestantism and its university milieu and even fewer are able to combine quite so competently a presentation of both as one finds in this book. Its theological value consists in its 'attempt to shed light on and raise questions about a set of institutional and intellectual developments of abiding significance for understanding the place, predicament, and promise of Christian theology today in the vast and churning ocean of contemporary culture' (p. 39).



The reader will quickly realize that the scope of this piece extends beyond the German context and includes, as seen in the second chapter, a highly detailed analysis of the state of the theological faculty in nineteenth-century Germany as related to its patrimony in the Middle Ages. The description of medieval notions of knowledge as *scientia* and the post-Enlightenment practice of *Wissenschaft* is invaluable. By this point Howard has in his introduction already provided a clear presentation of *Wissenschaft*, and although the term does not lend itself easily to English translation, one should avoid restricting its definition simply as 'science'. Howard suggests that we better understand this multilayered term when we take into account its idealist beginnings in the late and early nineteenth centuries. Quoting R. Steven Turner, the author notes that early nineteenth-century idealist conceptions of *Wissenschaft* are characterized 'not so much as science per se but as a set of beliefs or an ideology about science (*Wissenschaftsideologie*), a devout faith in the mind's duty and capacity to enquire into and represent the basic essence of things, and through such activities to improve human character (*Bildung*)' (p. 28). From here, Howard tracks the development of the definition of *Wissenschaft*, particularly as Immanuel Kant extended his argument that the department of philosophy should assume pride of place in the academy over against the department of theology, leaving the latter with the status of 'trainbearer' instead of its previously held position as 'torchbearer' (pp. 121ff.).

In chapter three Howard turns his attention to the University of Berlin as the first European university that was founded under purely national and secular auspices, 'bearing', he explains, 'the imprimatur of neither emperor nor pope' (p. 130). Securing more distance from the assumed strictures

of its medieval heritage, the presence of theology became more superficial and its influence more negligible. Emboldened more by the twin ideals of *Wissenschaft*, the work of the academic was 'to be nourished in an atmosphere of teaching and learning freedom (*Lehr- und Lernfreiheit*)' (p. 131), which can basically be read as less interference from confessional structures. Friedrich Schleiermacher is the primary resource to whom Howard turns for better explicating the vision of the University of Berlin, and although Schleiermacher might appear to be an obvious choice, his prominence here introduces an element of irony into the story. As Howard explains, 'It is a remarkable fact that a theologian proved to be among the most influential figures in founding a university best known for its scientizing and secularizing influences' (p. 133). Schleiermacher's strategy of putting in place the best faculty possible was governed by the aim of hiring professors whose scholarship and teaching would demonstrate to 'religion's "cultured despisers" the contemporary relevance and intellectual credibility of theology' (p. 193). Ultimately, to confer legitimacy on theology meant that theology had to reflect the current standard of knowledge, that is, *Wissenschaft*.

Chapter four details the shifts in the relation of Church and State following the Prussian Reform era, inaugurated after the momentous events surrounding 1806. In addition to these reforms, the central factor in this changing relation is derivative 'both directly and indirectly from prevalent currents of German idealism' (p. 224), the result of which promotes more of an Erastian relation, wherein churches functioned as organs of state bureaucracy, rather than a relation in which religion exercises its own independence.

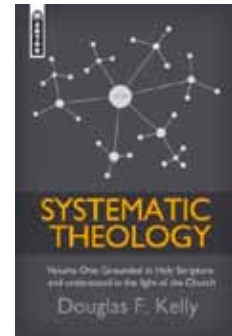
Chapter five is the largest in size and it is here that Howard demonstrates the reach of German academic theology which extends far beyond its own borders. The theological faculty's passage into modernity is one most aptly described as 'Janus-faced', an expression the author believes best helps 'convey both the scholarly virtuosity attained by Protestant academic theology in the nineteenth century and also theology's diminution (and near eviction) in the context of the expanding and modernizing university system' (p. 403).

Howard's concluding remarks include a fascinating thought-experiment wherewith Harnack is interrogated by the theology of the patristic period—the very sources and figures for which his own research is so renowned. The contrast drawn out is, as one would expect, a very telling one. Where theology in the early church was largely a way of reading Scripture 'that furthered one's spiritual advancement and thereby contributed to the life of the church' (p. 406), Protestant theology in nineteenth-century Germany was led and ultimately redefined by the strong impulse of *Wissenschaft*. The importance of this piece derives not only from its precise historical analysis and deft presentation of the material, but also from the questions it asks of the current state of theology, especially as it is practiced in the separated precincts of biblical and systematic departments. Aside from the fissuring of theology into systematic, biblical, historical, and practical subdisciplines, the bigger issue is the continuing presence and acceptance, whether recognised or not, of *wissenschaftliche* theology within our own Anglo-American seminaries and divinity schools.

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Douglas F. Kelly. *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church (The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity)*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008. 624 pp. £22.99/\$39.99.

The last ten years have seen numerous projects in Reformed theology, including brilliant new editions and translations of older works, and several new systematic projects. Douglas Kelly, Richard Jordan Professor of Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte), has offered one of the most recent contributions with this inaugural installment of a proposed three-volume work. While introducing this volume's agenda, Kelly locates himself within the sixteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian self-understanding as "Catholic" and "Reformed." Establishing that God's revelation occurs within the covenant community, he draws from the "rich resources from a wide array of . . . traditions" in his approach to theology (pp. 9–11).



Chapter 1 answers questions about how, where, and to whom God reveals himself, with an appendix on traditional arguments for God's existence (Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus) and another on Thomas Reid's response to Hume on cause and effect as *first principle*. Chapter 2 provides an exposé through ways the church understood natural revelation and a history of religions, providing the context for God's personal revelation. One appendix follows giving depictions of other religions from the biblical and patristic witnesses, whereas another offers ground for the "tentative" possibility of salvation for those who never heard the gospel and are outside the covenant community. Yet Kelly does not minimize the Word and Spirit-endowed community's task of proclaiming the gospel to all. The theme of unbelief continues in chapter 3 via "the Enlightenment" (located from 1650), which began a trend of Western rejection of Christianity. The appendix contains a selection from Dostoevsky's *Demons*, creatively highlighting the Enlightenment's meaning and impact.

A shift towards the doctrine of God takes place in chapter 4, depending markedly on Richard of St. Victor and Stăniloae, and on the church's understanding of the divine name, displaying God's eternal existence as three co-equal loving persons. The appendix of chapter 4 discusses the distinction between God's essence and energies in Palamas, how this prompted Western distinctions between God's essence and attributes, and how the West responded to *deification*. Chapter 5 considers God's transcendence, beauty, majesty and sovereign control contra Moltmann's God who "needs the world" (p. 322). Three appendices give accounts challenging the view of God's transcendent "Lordship," including evolution, Open Theism, the Jesus Seminar's Deism, Gnosticism (ancient and modern), and feminism's challenges to biblical descriptions of God.

That God relates to his people through "covenant" is detailed in chapter 6, as is the church's notion of *regula fidei* in Irenaeus and other patristic writers. The NPP is also briefly treated here (pp. 412–17). An appendix then produces the abstract of Ligon Duncan's PhD dissertation on "covenant" in the Ante-Nicene fathers. Chapter 7 treats God's existence as three persons, with appendices on Augustine's trinitarian analogies and Gausson's interpretations of OT theophanies as Christophanies. Chapter 8 shows where theologians have engaged descriptions of God's oneness and threeness, with an appendix on divergences between Augustine and the Cappadocians. Chapter 9 then asserts full co-equality between trinitarian persons, with a final appendix on the *filioque*, beckoning toward an Eastward move by the West that could "constitute healing for the entire Church" (p. 577).

Overall, Kelly provides a helpful approach to theology. He delivers by grounding theology in Scripture (within a covenantal framework), avoiding the proof-text method of theologians who play careless with the Bible. He draws deeply from the very best of (early) church history, bringing many source-texts together to address issues, building a helpful treasure-trove of historical theology. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to know what Kelly believes. He is less-concerned with contemporary research into the historical figures and sometimes employs anachronisms. And yet this is part of the attempt to recover a Patristic heritage that he laments was lost through the secular Enlightenment (pp. 309–10).

Little interaction exists with contemporary culture and developments in today's academy. Kelly does theology *in* and *for* the church with ecumenical interests. For good or ill, theologies like this could have a unifying effect on the church in the world. Here the influence of Thomas Torrance (Kelly's *doctorvater*) is clear. Oddly, Kelly leaves out interaction with numerous contemporary reformed theologians (Reymond, Frame, McCormack, etc.), although he is ably conversant with twentieth-century theology in its wideness (with a few qualifications—e.g., relegating LaCugna to feminist developments rather than genuine contributions to recent trinitarian thought). It will be interesting to see Kelly work Catholicity into forthcoming ecclesial engagement in the rest of this *Systematic Theology*. Interaction with the Vatican is missing thus far, including how Reformed people should relate to ecumenical creeds.

An introduction to the series (aim and scope), methodological commitments, and the relationship to other recent Reformed works would have been helpful. Perhaps this shows Kelly's method as consonant with how theology has been formulated historically while seeking his own revelationally-based, ecclesially-based contribution. Accordingly, he is more prone to describe his angles than his distinct agenda. And yet, Kelly performs the job of a skilled teacher—taking the reader on a journey exploring categories in the manner theology ought to be conceived (p. 13). Notwithstanding some criticisms (e.g., formatting) that one hopes will be smoothed out in subsequent editions of this volume, and in the series as a whole, this initial work displays incredible depth and breadth, evincing that this entire set, upon completion, will be a great addition to the robust engagement from the broader reformed tradition.

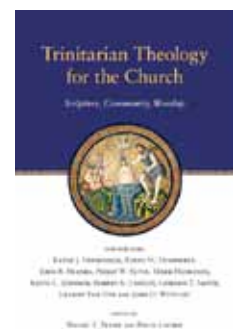
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Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber, eds. *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*. Downers Grove: IVP; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009. 262 pp. £14.99/\$26.00.

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Continuing the vigorous engagement of the annual Wheaton College Theology Conference, this collection of eleven essays results from the seventeenth consecutive conference held April 2008 as “Rediscovering the Trinity: Classic Doctrine and Contemporary Ministry.” As the subtitle of the proceeding published volume indicates, the contents are divided into three parts: (1) Scripture: The Bible and the Triune Economy; (2) Community: The Trinity and Society?; and (3) Worship: Church Practices and the Triune Mission. This layout enables a sketching of one of the most recent attempts at trying to capture the impulses within trinitarian thinking today.



After the editors' brilliant introduction to the current trinitarian situation, Kevin Vanhoozer takes chapters 1–2 for reflections on “Triune Discourse”—nothing new for him. He applies his previous work to finding a “link” (p. 71)—never mind the historical development—between the two ETS doctrinal tenets, the Trinity and inerrancy, claiming they “fit together hand in glove” (p. 75). In his characteristic witty style, he moves through optional models of Scripture and revelation to finally locate a Scripture principle in the “economy of triune communication” (p. 76), which leads one to wonder if the phenomenon of what Scripture *is* has been swallowed entirely in what it *does*—though perhaps for Vanhoozer Scripture *is* what it does. In chapter 3 Edith Humphrey debunks notions about “hierarchical” views of the Trinity (pp. 94–102) and presents a case for beginning a theology of understanding God as having always spoken through the Son.

Part 2 begins with John Franke (chap. 4) presenting the standard case for warmly welcoming relational models of the Trinity, finding them catalytic for mission. Franke is squared-off with Mark Husbands, who argues against both the social model and social analogy in “The Trinity is not our Social Program” (chap. 5), highlighting problems in Volf’s agenda and reading of the Cappadocians.

Keith Johnson (chap. 6) presents the theology of religions offered by Yong, Heim, and Dupuis, suggesting, “Under pressure to accommodate religious pluralism, [they] reinterpret trinitarian doctrine . . . to support their constructive accounts of religious diversity,” instead of holding “a compelling vision of the triune God as the ultimate good” (pp. 158, 160).

In chapter 7, Robert Lang’at (Kabarot University, Kenya) casts the mission endeavor against the priority of trinitarian theology, echoing a catalytic theme seen earlier through the mid-twentieth-century work in South India (cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission*, [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006]), though here being an indigenous voice working within the emerging holiness tradition of East Africa.

Gordon Smith starts the final section on the sacraments (chap. 8). Beginning with the ecumenical *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), he raises the question of the identity of the “actor” in the ordinances. After concluding that it is by the tangible, supernatural acts of grace (i.e., word and sacrament) that one is “incorporated into the life of God” (p. 191), he offers suggestions for cultivating a “truly trinitarian” approach to the Lord’s Supper and baptism, ultimately yielding a “radically christocentric” participation (p. 197). Philip Butin (chap. 9) then draws from Calvin and Barth’s “threefold form of the Word,” arguing that acknowledgment of the trinitarian event of preaching best accounts for divine and human acts taking place during “proclamation” in corporate worship. Leanne Van Dyk (chap. 10) continues the proclamation-theme, suggesting that visible practices of community, service, and faithfulness derive from the inner-life of the Trinity and enable participation in God’s mission in the world. Finally, John Witvliet (chap. 11) suggests ways that the trinitarian renewal can yield trinitarian worship and teaching. While quite rich, this collection of essays may have been different had the original keynote, Miroslav Volf, been able to deliver lectures he was originally tapped for. Instead, the keynote became Vanhoozer, an equally gifted (if not better) theologian, albeit with a topic more than slightly off the beaten path of what Volf might have given as another contribution toward trinitarian theology for the church. Yet Volf’s earlier work “garnered much discussion” at the conference (p. 9n3). The conference seemed similar to the later 2009 meeting of The Society for the Study of Theology on “Trinitarian Theology” (30 March—2 April, The Netherlands) which, while housing social trinitarians and critics of relational models and social analogies (cf. some of these essays forthcoming in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12:1 [Jan 2010]), seemed to evince a growing weakness of relational models for

providing an adequate vision of the transcendent Lord (not to mention the seeming absence of the biblical witness). Indeed, social trinitarians wanting social analogies seem to be missing a step that might be located in a proper Christology (perhaps incarnational or in the *imago Dei* as in Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* [Cambridge: CUP, 2010]), which seems to be a much better way to access trinitarian dogma.

This volume's essays left the present reviewer wondering if the recent trend of trinitarian studies is soon becoming weaned from its Moltmannian captivity (cf. Bruce McCormack, "Trinity of Life and Power: The Relevance of Trinitarian Theology in the Contemporary Age," in *Spirit of Truth and Power*, ed. David F. Wright [Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2007], pp. 17–38; and Stephen R. Holmes, *Christian Doctrines in Historical Perspective: The Holy Trinity* [Milton Keynes: Paternoster, forthcoming 2010]). Yet perhaps the major fruit from the recent trinitarian resurgence is to be found primarily in ecclesiology, as *Trinitarian Theology for the Church* evinces, and not much further. This may mean that results of recent trends in the latter portion of the twentieth century are not to be eschewed as if only bad fruit resulted. But perhaps this emphasis on the social Trinity and the social analogy simply displays a deficiency, perhaps evidencing and beckoning the giving way of recent trends to, say, a resurgent Christology (?), as something equally promising both for theology and the church's life.

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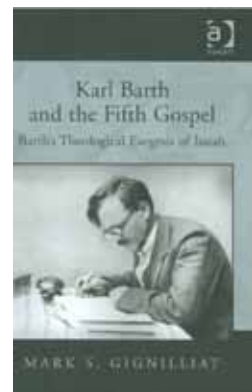
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Mark S. Gignilliat. *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah*. Barth Studies Series. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009. xiv + 167 pp. £55.00/\$99.95.

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In the tradition of Brevard Childs's *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, this book makes an important contribution both to the history of the interpretation of Isaiah as well as to the study of Barth and his theological exegetical approach. Despite increased attention to Barth, his OT exegesis has been largely overlooked. Otto Bächli broke ground in 1987 with *Das Alte Testament in der Kirchlichen Dogmatik von Karl Barth*. Now Mark Gignilliat draws English-speakers into the discussion.

Gignilliat begins with a chapter on "Barth and the Renaissance of Old Testament Theology in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century." After engaging anecdotes from Brevard Childs's student days with Barth in Basel and a brief survey of contemporary scholarship on Barth's exegesis, Gignilliat describes the revival of OT theology in Germany between 1920 and 1950. A review of the correspondence between Barth and Walter Baumgartner between 1940 and 1955 highlights salient points of disagreement between one purely historical-critical exegete and a theological exegete. During an age when the dominant approach was "methodologically atheistic" (Brian Daley's expression) and focused almost exclusively on the religious history of the people of Israel, Barth (along with his friend Wilhelm Vischer) stood against the historicist tide and affirmed the necessity to "read both testaments as a witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" (23).



In the second chapter, “*Die Zeit der Erwartung*,” Gignilliat explores Barth’s view of the OT as a time of expectation. The ghost of Marcion haunted the German church. Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, and even Kittel questioned the validity of the OT for the Christian church. Against the regnant *Religionsgeschichte* approach with its modernistic *Weltanschauung* and epistemological starting point, Barth argues that the object of study determines the approach one takes to the subject. “God’s revelation in Jesus Christ witnessed to in Holy Scripture provides the epistemic possibility for recognition of the unique and revelatory events of the years 1–30 and not vice versa” (34). The dominant approach that made the Judaism of the day the controlling factor for OT exegesis was missing the connection of both testaments to Jesus Christ, and robbing the church of the voice of figuration, typification, and anticipation that it had always heard in the OT.

In the third and fourth chapters Gignilliat turns to Barth’s theological exegesis of Isaiah itself, working through the sections of the *Kirchlichen Dogmatik* that most substantively engage with Isaiah. And in a concluding chapter, Gignilliat examines the “Theological Exegetical Implications of Barth’s Isaianic Exegesis.” He concedes that Barth’s Christian reading of the OT does not provide us so much with a transferable method as an example of sound exegetical instincts and of faithful wrestling with the verbal sense as a theological witness to God’s triune revelation of himself in Jesus Christ.

A strength and limitation of the monograph is the striking way in which it sets up Childs as a conversation partner with Barth, especially regarding the christological witness of the OT. Gignilliat wants to show how “Childs’s formulations provide a helpful heuristic in evaluating what Barth does rather intuitively” (p. x). The conclusion details Childs’s canonical approach as a framework for understanding what Barth does in his multi-leveled reading of Isaiah. But Childs (and his followers such as Seitz) provides the conceptualization and even the terminology for evaluating Barth throughout. I came away wondering what a non-Childean view of Barth’s hermeneutic would look like.

Gignilliat admits Barth’s limitations when it comes to linguistic, historical, and literary analysis. Some of Barth’s readings are admittedly thin, and the treatment of the whole is not programmatically selective. Nevertheless, Gignilliat considers Barth to have pulled off a virtuoso performance. By the end I was not surprised to read in the introduction, “The lion’s share of what I have learned about theological exegesis is indebted to the theological trajectory set by Barth and Childs” (p. x). The book comes as the commendation of a warm-hearted disciple. It does not seriously question Barth’s view of Scripture, for example, nor how this might hinder his exegesis. For a more critical analysis I might recommend the essays in Gibson and Strange’s 2008 collection, *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*.

Gignilliat certainly succeeds in demonstrating that in Barth there is “a reading of Isaiah that understands the relationship between its literal sense and figural witness as organically related and on a sliding scale of mutual reciprocity” (138). With a deft grasp of the state of Isaiah scholarship today (and a solid bibliography), Gignilliat unfolds Barth’s approaches to a long series of passages. Some of these give deeply satisfying insight, but space prohibits me from sharing even the choicest.

I am grateful for the reminder of how brave Barth was in the Germany of his day for his views on the OT and of how concerned he was for the impact of a twisted theological education on the preaching of the churches. I appreciated being let in on the interesting conversations of great minds (not only from Barth but also from many voices in the history of interpretation) inviting us today to reconsider and clarify our own approaches to exegesis. What does a faithful Christian reading of the OT look like? “There is no Christological exegesis of the Old Testament of the *bruta facta* stripe. . . . Theological

exegesis is located in a web of theological confessions that are all mutually informing one another” (p. 22). And, “The recognition of the OT as an expecting voice follows one’s confession of Jesus Christ as God’s revelatory Word and can only be confirmed by the sole authoritative witness to him, Holy Scripture” (p. 40). Indeed, we are seeking what we have already found.

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Richard Viladesau. *The Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 240 pp. \$21.95.

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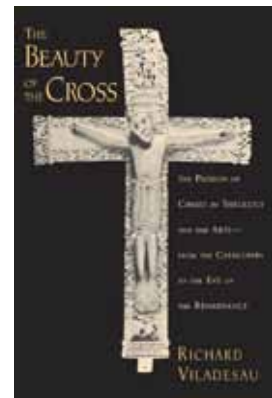
In an age with no shortage of books on the doctrine of the atonement, Richard Viladesau’s *Beauty of the Cross* makes a unique and profitable contribution. Viladesau sets out to demonstrate the beauty of the cross as it developed in both theology and art from the NT to the eve of the Renaissance. This interdisciplinary project includes historical and aesthetic theology, but is primarily systematic and aims to provide necessary background for a proper contemporary theology of the cross.

Viladesau begins by explaining his methodology for correlating theological and artistic mediations of the cross throughout history. Aesthetic theology is employed not only to appeal to the beauty of the cross, but also to demonstrate that throughout history theological conceptions of the cross have always been embodied in artistic mediations. Viladesau, therefore, sketches the theological development of the doctrine of the atonement by using specific works of art to show the contours and nuances of that period’s understanding of the beauty of the cross.

While the NT offers many “images” for Christ’s work on the cross, the early church portrayed the cross primarily as the instrument of God’s triumph. Early artists did not depict “what actually happened” in the crucifixion but rather conveyed the spiritual reality seen through eyes of faith. The passion was seen within the framework of the incarnation and therefore stressed the divinity of Christ as the source of his victory over death and evil. The crucified Christ is not dead or even suffering, but rather alive and triumphant, often with eyes open and a golden crown or halo on his head. As it says in the sixth-century hymn *Vexilla Regis*, “God has reigned from a tree” (p. 38).

Victory would remain the key theme for conceptual and aesthetic mediations of the cross from the early church until the early Middle Ages. Christ’s triumph on the cross, however, would eventually come to be understood within an Augustinian framework and ultimately be transformed by Anselm. Although it was common by the tenth century for Christ to be depicted dead on the cross, Anselm’s emphasis on the satisfaction of God’s honor shifted the focus entirely away from Christ’s divine victory on the cross to his human suffering and death. Furthermore, Abelard’s response to Anselm, which emphasized the subjective aspects of the cross, furthered the shift towards a more human understanding of Christ on the cross, clearly evident in the Romanesque art of the time.

Thirteenth century scholasticism and gothic art made widespread what had been faintly present from the tenth century onward: the suffering humanity of Christ in the crucifixion. Theologians such





as Lombard and Aquinas attempted to uphold both objective and subjective aspects of the cross, but a clear shift away from the juridical metaphor towards a metaphysical notion of enabling grace furthered the previous emphasis on the humanity of Christ on the cross.

The fourteenth century, which marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the age of modernity, brought to fullness the growing emphasis on the natural portrayal of the crucifixion, focusing primarily on the suffering humanity of Jesus. Giotto's crucifixion fresco, for example, depicts the man on the cross as dead, body drooping, head hanging low, and no crown of thorns upon it. The realism extends even to those below the cross, Mary and John, who are overcome with sorrow. While Viladesau recognizes the diversity of atonement theologies throughout the history of the church and does not give in to generalizations, he successfully shows a gradual shift in emphasis from the divine victory of Christ on the cross in the early church to the human suffering of Christ on the cross in the late Middle Ages.

Viladesau's work has several strengths. First, his inter-disciplinary approach offers a fresh perspective to a discussion often marked by redundancy. Viladesau's distinct method helps one accurately understand the history of the doctrine of the atonement as well as provide a fuller meaning of the beauty of Christ's work on the cross. Second, Viladesau not only clearly identifies the major historical landmarks of the development of the doctrine of the atonement, but most saliently articulates the progression of thought from one stage of development to the next.

A weakness of the book comes only in holding Viladesau to his own aim of contributing primarily to systematic theology over historic or aesthetic theology (p. viii). Although an accurate historical understanding is helpful to systematic theology, Viladesau could have been more explicit regarding how these different images of the cross relate to one another, whether they are more or less faithful to Scripture, or how they contribute to a contemporary theology of the cross.

Viladesau achieves his aim of demonstrating the beauty of the cross as it developed in theology and art and therefore makes a valuable contribution to this field of study. This book is a great resource for pastors, theologians, students, and all who desire a deeper appreciation for the beauty of the cross.

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Scot McKnight. *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 240 pp. \$18.99.

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This is a very personal book, full of autobiographical snippets and accounts of Scot McKnight's own journey in his understanding of how to read the Bible. The tone is chatty and anecdotal. Along the way he narrates his move from what he calls a fundamentalist upbringing, through to his work as a biblical scholar, first at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and now (significantly) at the broader North Park University in Chicago.

The book's title, *The Blue Parakeet*, is a metaphor, picked up from an occasion when McKnight was surprised to find a brightly coloured escaped bird in his garden. 'Blue parakeet' passages in Scripture are those which don't fit easily with whatever



theological framework we are working with, leaving us with the choice either to explain them away and preserve our framework, or to alter our theology in the light of them.

McKnight develops this in the book's four parts. In Part 1 ('Story') he proposes that Scripture should be conceived of as 'Story'. This is in contrast to five other approaches to the Bible: 'morsels of law'; 'morsels of blessings and promises'; 'mirrors and inkblots,' i.e. projecting our own ideas onto Scripture; 'puzzling together the pieces to map God's mind,' in order to produce a theological system; and 'maestros,' i.e. focusing on one Bible-writer or character, such as Paul (pp. 44–54). A key example he gives of the benefits of his approach is Jesus' temptations in Matt 4:1–11. Once we see that Matthew is developing the Bible's grand Story, he says, we can then recognise that the point of the story is not to teach us how to resist temptation, but to present Jesus as either the Second Adam or the true Israel (or both), who perfectly resists temptation where previously Adam, Eve, and Israel failed to (pp. 64–65).

Part 2 ('Listening') argues for a 'relational approach' to the Bible that turns Scripture 'from facts-only to facts-that-lead-to-engagement with the God of the Bible' (p. 87). This is in contrast to what he calls 'the authority approach,' which prizes such terms as 'inspiration' and 'inerrancy,' which he alleges 'fosters a relationship with the Bible' rather than with God (p. 84). The key conclusion is that 'those who have a proper relationship to the Bible never need to speak of the Bible as their authority . . . the word "authority" is swallowed up in loving God' (p. 93).

Part 3 ('Discerning') aims to get us to see, says McKnight, that the church has 'always read the Bible in a picking-and-choosing way' (p. 122), for example in not requiring converts to renounce all wealth, despite Matt 19:23–34 (pp. 125–26). We need to acknowledge and develop our 'patterns of discernment,' realising, as we relate the Bible's world to our own, 'that was then but this is now' (which is McKnight's key hermeneutical principle). This he calls reading 'with tradition,' and not (as he says conservatives do) 'through tradition' (p. 144).

In a final long section (Part 4), he seeks to apply all these principles to the case study of women in church ministries, arguing passionately and emotively that every position of ministry and leadership in the church ought to be open to women. He asserts that the key 'anti' texts (1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2) in their historical context aim only to bar (not women as such but only) the uneducated and untaught from leadership.

Such a personal and at times emotional book deserves a response of a similar tone. So here it is: my frustration with *The Blue Parakeet* only grew the more of it I read. There were, along the way, moments of (sometimes qualified) approval. Stressing that we read Scripture only in order to relate in love to the Lord is vital for anyone who's been brought up with a different approach. Acknowledging that in many areas of life the application of Scripture is not a simple affair and that many Christian sub-cultures think that they are 'just reading the Bible' when a far more complex process involving culture, tradition, and hermeneutics is going on remains an important point to make at a popular level. However, McKnight asserts that the positions he is reacting against are often too simplistic and lacking in historical awareness, and in return I want to level the same charge at his response to them. It is of course unfair to expect a popular-level book such as this to engage in detail with every viewpoint, but McKnight too often speaks of the positions he's warning against in terms of 'some people say . . .'; before presenting a straw-man. In his handling of inspiration, he says, 'To make the Bible into God is idolatrous' (p. 89), giving no indication that generations of theologians have strongly confessed inspiration while thinking through rigorously how this is not idolatrous. Similarly he gives the impression that unless we downplay 'authority' and 'inspiration' we'll never reach biblically rich understandings of passages such as Jesus'

temptations, which is of course not true. And in the case study, he gives little indication at all that there is a thorough complementarian response to his position. His suggestion that complementarians use Genesis primarily to perpetuate the fallenness in Gen 3.16 (p. 189) is especially unfair, giving no hint that they seek to find male headship pre-Fall. (As an aside, it wasn't clear to me that his approach to this issue in Scripture actually was a putting into practice of his principles. If, as he argues, Paul intended to bar women from leadership only *because they were uneducated*, then is he actually using any of his 'discerning-the-direction-of-the-biblical-Story'-style hermeneutics in reaching his egalitarian conclusion? Isn't he simply applying today [what he takes to be] the same explicit principle consciously brought to bear by Paul back then?)

Anyone who (like me, unlike McKnight) had no oppressive fundamentalist upbringing and has enjoyed discovering the richness of the doctrine of Scripture and consequent approaches to Scripture found in the likes of John Calvin and Herman Bavinck (to name but two of the greats) is likely to find this book bemusing, and so thin as to be misleading at times. Anyone who has a background more like McKnight's and who has never been helped to encounter the traditional orthodox view of Scripture at its best, in writers such as these, needs to know that McKnight has almost silently thrown large chunks of a very attractive and truthful baby out with the unthinking fundamentalist bath-water. In so doing, I fear that he risks perpetuating for another generation of Christians the ignorance of the best traditions of teaching about the Bible among contemporary evangelicals which he so laments, as do I.

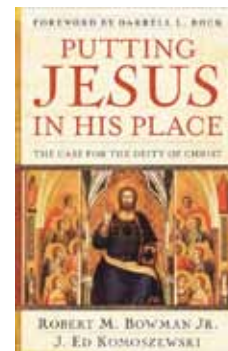
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Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed. Komoszewski. *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007. 392 pp. \$18.99.

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The first item of note about this book is that the authors developed an extensive website and blog to promote and explain it at [www.DeityofChrist.com](http://www.DeityofChrist.com). This website provides information about the authors' seminar ministry that aims to provide attendees with "a thorough understanding of Christ's deity and the ability to convey that understanding comprehensively, concisely, and clearly." The website provides contact information for those who want the authors to provide a seminar at their venue. A free sample chapter is available for those who wish to consider purchasing the book. The target audience of this book is Christians who want to develop a strategy for engaging in apologetics- and evangelism-training that is Christ-centered and specifically able to articulate that Jesus is fully divine.



Because the authors are engaged in public ministry, their writing is academic as well as accessible. The entire content of the book is oriented around the five-point acronym HANDS. This acronym draws from the role that Jesus' hands played in providing Thomas evidence of his resurrection in John 20:24–29. This acronym stands for Jesus having a divine identity based on the following: Honors, Attributes, Names, Deeds, and Seat. It is focused on developing the main point of this book: Jesus is God. The book builds on the presuppositions that beliefs about Jesus will come from the NT, that the NT's statements

are true as well as historically accurate, and that Jesus' divinity is to be understood in a Trinitarian construction (p. 21).

The value of this book is that the authors intentionally move beyond a few key passages that are well known to many Christians in order to prove that a "comprehensive case" can be made from the NT for the deity of Jesus Christ (p. 21). The introduction states the author's intention to avoid proof-texting or citing biblical passages without discussing their interpretation. Those looking for accessible clarity combined with scholarship will be pleased with this volume. The authors cite from several published dissertations and critically engage scholars such as Larry Hurtado (p.58), James D. G. Dunn (p. 81), N. T. Wright (p. 83), Richard Bauckham (p. 269), and Geza Vermes (p.199).

The apologetic approach underlying this book may disappoint some readers who are looking for philosophical sophistication. The method of argumentation is essentially based on an inductive study of the NT that draws from narrative and literary criticism and synthesizes data across the testaments. This approach is also its major strength as the sheer volume of texts that support the deity of Christ gives the reader a sense of how strong the case is. The major thrusts of the apologetic arguments are against Jehovah's Witnesses and their New World Translation. There is some interaction with Islamic ideas about Jesus' divinity as well.

The most important criticism to note is that the size, scope, and depth of the material may be intimidating to many laymen. The authors did not quite achieve their stated goal of providing a book that could serve as a Sunday school text (p. 15). This criticism must be balanced by noting that it will be an excellent resource for developing a sermon series or Bible-institute class. The style is very clear and engaging, but many parishioners have not even been exposed to textual criticism let alone the various criteria used to weigh variants (p. 51). There are helpful charts and illustrations throughout, and the use of endnotes makes the book more approachable. Other difficult issues for laymen will include advanced vocabulary and a few untranslated Greek transliterations. Those most likely to appreciate this volume are pastors and Bible college students.

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— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

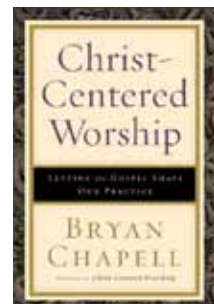
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Bryan Chapell. *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. 307 pp. \$24.99.

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"Structures tell stories." So opens Bryan Chapell's recent volume, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice*. Chapell, noted homiletician, theologian, and author of the popular volume, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker, 1994), is president of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO, the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America.

The underlying assumption of Chapell's work is that the structure of our liturgy carries meaning, and therefore a Christian liturgy should communicate the message of the gospel. "Whether one intends it or not," Chapell argues, "our worship patterns



always communicate something” (p. 18). He seeks to sidestep the prevalent traditional/contemporary worship debate by urging church leaders to allow gospel purposes to shape their worship—not only the content, but also the structure.

Chapell begins in the first six chapters by comparing and contrasting the most influential Christian liturgies in the history of Christianity: pre-Trent Rome (chap. 2), Luther (chap. 3), Calvin (chap. 4), Westminster (chap. 5), and Modern (specifically Robert Rayburn’s; chap. 6). While demonstrating that these various liturgies certainly differ as they reflect the specifics of the theological systems in which they operate, Chapell’s aim is to show that “where the truths of the gospel are maintained there remain commonalities of worship structure that transcend culture” (p. 18). He shows that no matter the differences, each liturgy contains common elements: adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction, charge, and blessing (pp. 98–99). Not only are the elements common, but their progression also remains consistent among the liturgies. Chapell argues that this is the case because each liturgy “reflects the pattern of the progress of the gospel in the heart” (p. 99). A person recognizes the greatness of God (adoration), which leads him to see his need for confession of sin. He then receives assurance of pardon in the gospel through the merits of Christ, and he responds with thanksgiving and petition. God then gives his Word in response to the petition (instruction), leading to a charge to obey its teaching and promise of blessing. This common liturgical structure, telling the story of the gospel, “re-presents” the gospel each time God’s people worship (p. 99).

Chapell continues in chapter seven by demonstrating that such a liturgical structure is present not only in historical liturgies but also in scriptural examples. He surveys Isaiah’s worship (Isa 6), Sinai worship (Deut 5), Solomon’s worship (2 Chr 5–7), Temple worship (Lev 9), NT spiritual worship (Rom 11–15), and eschatological worship (Rev 4–21) to illustrate that in each case these same common liturgical elements appear in progression. Chapell is not arguing that with each case the liturgy was consciously meant to communicate the gospel or that such liturgies are prescriptive but that “there are regular and recognizable features to God’s worship because there is continuity in his nature and the way he deals with his people” (p. 105). Thus, even historical liturgies contain common elements, not because any one authority or tradition has controlled how all churches should worship, but because a “gospel-formed path always puts us in contact with God’s glory, our sin, his provision, our response, and his peace. By walking a worship path in step with the redemptive rhythm we simultaneously discover the pattern of our liturgy and the grace of our Savior” (p. 115).

This then leads Chapell to insist that “Where the gospel is honored, it shapes worship. No church true to the gospel will fail to have echoes of these historic liturgies” (p. 25). He summarizes the flow of his argument thus:

The liturgies of the church through the ages and the consistent message of Scripture combine to reveal a pattern for corporate worship that is both historical and helpful for our time. Christian worship is a “re-presentation” of the gospel. By our worship we extol, embrace, and share the story of the progress of the gospel in our lives. We begin with adoration so that all will recognize the greatness and goodness of God. In the light of his glory, we also recognize our sin and confess our need of his grace. Assurance of his pardon produces thanksgiving. With sincere thanksgiving, we also become aware that all we have is from him and that we depend on his goodness for everything precious in our lives. Thus, we are compelled to seek him in prayer for our needs and his kingdom’s advance. His loving intercession makes us desire to walk with him and further his purposes, so our hearts are open to his instruction and long to commune with him and those he loves. This progress

of the gospel in our lives is the cause of our worship and the natural course of it. We conclude a service of such worship with a Charge and Benediction because the progress of the gospel is God's benediction on our lives (p. 116).

This doesn't necessarily mean that every element will be emphasized equally (p. 111), nor does it imply that there is never room for changing the structure (p. 147). In fact, Chapell provides helpful examples of how "as long as its gospel purpose is fulfilled, each aspect of a Christ-centered liturgy may be expressed through a variety of worship components" (pp. 147–49). Again, the medium is something that is shaped by the message, not a structure artificially imposed upon the message.

Chapters 9–12 are dedicated to exploring how this kind of gospel-informed thinking about worship can help church leaders move beyond simply personal preferences or tradition to make decisions about their worship that will best communicate the gospel, both to believers and unbelievers alike. Chapell addresses controversial issues such as musical style, reverence vs. relevance, and seeker-sensitivity, attempting to show how in each case, an allegiance to Christ-centered worship will help those involved come to a unified consensus (pp. 130–35).

In the second half of the book (chaps. 13–24), Chapell provides helpful resources for the implementation of Christ-Centered Worship including specific examples of the various components (e.g., call to worship, affirmation of faith, confession of sin, etc.), example service orders across a broad spectrum of traditions, and discussion of some of the more controversial practical matters (e.g., frequency of communion, Scripture readings, preaching styles, and musical styles). In each discussion Chapell attempts to allow the gospel to relieve the tensions.

In *Christ-Centered Worship* Bryan Chapell presents an engaging exploration of how the gospel should shape Christian worship. Although one may disagree in some areas of specific application, pastors especially will certainly benefit from an approach to worship that is richly conservative (e.g., an appreciation for and desire to conserve what has come before), biblical, and Christ-centered.

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*BibleWorks 8: Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research*. BibleWorks, LLC. P.O. Box 6158. Norfolk, VA 23508. [www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com). © 2008 BibleWorks, LLC. \$349.00.

*Logos Bible Software 3* with the Libronix Digital Library System. Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1313 Commercial St. Bellingham, WA 98225. [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com). © 2001–2008 Logos Bible Software. *Leader's Library*, \$309.95. *Scholar's Library*, \$629.95. *Scholar's Library: Silver*, \$999.95. *Scholar's Library: Gold*, \$1,379.95.

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[Editor's Note: This review evaluates *Scholar's Library: Gold* for Logos Bible Software 3. *Logos Bible Software 4* was released on November 2, 2009 after this review was written.]

*BibleWorks 8 (BW8)* and *Logos 3 (L3)* are powerful and impressive programs. With their varying strengths, no matter where one is on the



spectrum of beginning student to seasoned scholar, or lay leader to senior pastor, he or she will find in these programs invaluable resources for the study and exposition of Scripture. Since space does not permit an exhaustive discussion of the components and capabilities of each program, much less a thorough comparison of the two, this review is confined to four aims: (1) introducing each program with attention to its user interface and associated strengths; (2) contrasting the capabilities of *BW8* and *L3* through the example of a specific biblical text, Rom 1:18–32, and the issue of digital library resources; (3) highlighting specific weaknesses of each program; and (4) providing concrete recommendations for those trying to decide which program to purchase.

Beginning with *BW8*, the purpose of BibleWorks “is to provide pastors, teachers, students, and missionaries with the tools they need to ‘rightly divide the word of truth’” (2 Tim 2:15). With over 190 Bible translations in nearly 40 languages, 35 original language texts and morphology databases, as well as 29 lexical-grammatical references, particular emphasis is placed on primary texts and the tools necessary to interpret them. The *BW8* user interface is composed of three parallel vertical panels: from left to right, the Search window, Browse window, and Analysis window. The Search window allows one to navigate within or between original language texts and their translations, including biblical and extra-biblical writings (Josephus, Philo, OT Pseudepigrapha, the Apostolic Fathers), as well as to perform simple to moderately complex word or phrase searches in all of these texts. The Browse window displays the texts, either in multiple or single version mode, with the ability to select the number and order of versions displayed. The Analysis window, through its various tabs, provides easy access to morphological, lexical, and grammatical data for the texts and verses displayed, not to mention cross-references, a word-processing program, the ability to append chapter and verse notes, and more. Other important resources, accessible from the menu and button bars above, include the following: a Graphical Search Engine for especially complex searches; a parallel Hebrew-LXX database with analytical notes and proposed retroversions of the Hebrew and Aramaic text underlying the LXX; a sentence-diagramming tool; a window for displaying parallel versions; a synopsis-tool for study of the gospels; a map-module for locating biblical sites; and Hebrew and Greek flashcard-modules with audio files for practicing pronunciation. All of this is included in the base package of *BW8*. Still other primary text resources (e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls) and reference works (e.g., BDAG) may be purchased at additional cost.

The broader purpose of Logos is reflected both in its goal “to equip everyone in the Church with a theological library” and in a more concentrated focus on resources for laity and ministers. This broader purpose is evident firstly in the four-tiered structure of the *L3* software packages. The *Leader’s Library* includes over 230 books with limited, but significant, Hebrew and Greek tools. It is recommended for lay persons. The *Scholar’s Library*, the most popular collection, includes additional Hebrew and Greek tools and over 330 books. *Scholar’s Library: Silver*, recommended for pastors and teachers, consists of over 525 books, including other original language resources as well as the NAC series and Ante-Nicene Fathers. *Scholar’s Library: Gold* is the most complete package. Its over 700 books include further Hebrew and Greek tools, the NIGTC volumes, UBS Handbooks, and the three-volume *Context of Scripture*, with its array of ANE texts.

The focus of this review is the *Scholar’s Library: Gold* version. Its user interface, designed to look like an Internet homepage, consists of a scroll-down window on the left side of the screen composed of four sections: the Bible Study Starter in which one can enter a study passage, word, or topic as well as pursue a Bible reading plan; a Devotions section; a Prayer section, which may be customized to

include regular or even semi-regular prayer lists; and a My Library section featuring resources available in the vast digital library, such as a highlighted “Book of the Day.” The right side of the screen, initially blank, is filled in once one enters a passage, word, or topic in the Bible Study Starter section or opens a book from the digital library. Other important resources include the following: a Weights and Measures feature for calculating contemporary equivalencies; a Bible Puzzles tool for producing word-finder puzzles, especially helpful for those designing Children’s Sunday School curriculum; an inductive Bible study feature for marking up the text with visual symbols; multiple pastoral and sermon aids, such as an encyclopedia of illustrations; and, lastly, the ability to perform both complex original language morphological searches and syntactical searches, the latter not possible with *BW8*.

The integration of resources in *L3* is less transparent and intuitive than *BW8*, but impressive in its own right. Suppose one wants to study Rom 1:18–32. When this text is entered into the Bible Study Starter section, a window on the right opens to display the preferred biblical version, whether the Greek NT, an ESV English-Greek reverse interlinear, or one of several translations. Meanwhile, the left side window simultaneously searches the digital library and changes to display a passage guide consisting of commentaries, cross references, key words, topics, and illustrations, among other things, related to Rom 1:18–32. Thus, for example, one can immediately see what the NAC Romans commentary says about this text. If additional unlocks are purchased, such as the WBC and ICC Romans commentaries, then they may be accessed as well. Clearly the power of *L3* resides in the integration of its vast library of resources.

However, except for the ability to perform syntactical searches, the base-package of *BW8*, in comparison with the base-package of *L3 Scholar’s Library: Gold*, is more effective when it comes to close textual analysis. This is because *BW8* contains crucial primary texts that must be purchased as add-ons in *L3*, specifically the morphologically-tagged Greek texts of the Apostolic Fathers, Josephus, and the OT Pseudepigrapha. The importance of the latter two texts may be illustrated by continuing with the example of Rom 1:18–32. It is customary for critical commentaries to compare Paul’s polemic here with other Second Temple Jewish excoriations of idolatry and immorality, such as Wis 13–15; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.236–54; Philo, *Decal.* 52–81; *Spec.* 1.13–31; *Let. Aris.* 128–171; *Sib. Or.* 3.8–45; *T. Naph.* 3.3–5. Examining these texts allows one to see, for example, that the term *mataios* (“empty, vain”) and its cognates, such as the verb *mataioō*, occur regularly in these contexts (Rom 1:21; Wis 13:1; 15:8; *Let. Aris.* 1.134, 136, 138, 139; *Sib. Or.* 3.29). In such passages the appearance of the term *mataios* and its cognates is not distinctive but customary. This observation calls into question the common claim that Paul’s employment of *mataioō* in Rom 1:21 specifically intends to evoke Jer 2:5, where *mataioō* and *mataios* occur. Significantly, except for Wis 13–15 and Philo, the ability to search these original language Second Temple Jewish texts is possible only with the base-package of *BW8*. Of course, one may search these same texts by purchasing add-ons for *L3* but this comes at an additional cost (e.g., the OT Pseudepigrapha alone is \$99.95).

With the mention of add-ons, or additional library resources, we arrive at another important difference between *BW8* and *L3*, one directly related to their varying purposes. Whereas one of the primary purposes of *L3* is to provide its users with an extensive and easily expandable digital library, that is not one of the purposes of *BW8*. This difference is reflected both in the number of additional resources available from *L3* (over 10,000 volumes and counting), as compared to *BW8* (only 25 reference works and primary texts are listed on the website), and in the integration and quality of these resources. Thus, for example, both *BW8* and *L3* offer digital versions of the Dead Sea Scrolls in morphologically-tagged,



original language texts and translation. In *BW8*, the original language Dead Sea Scrolls, or Qumran Sectarian Texts (QST), and manuscripts of the OT found at Qumran, the Qumran Bible in English (QBE), are well-integrated into the program. One may access them by typing QBE, for instance, into the Search window. However, the English language translation of the QST, provided by Wise-Abegg-Cook (*The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*), is not well-integrated into the program. One must access this translation through the menu bar. The resultant pop-up window that is displayed makes it difficult to compare the English translation of a particular line with the un-pointed Hebrew text underlying it shown in the Browse window. With *L3*, one does not encounter this problem of integration of resources. Moreover, the digital resources in *L3* are of a higher quality than parallel ones in *BW8*. This is evident, for example, when comparing the differing versions of the Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> edition (NA27) of the Greek NT, a text that is part of the base-package of both programs. The *L3* version helpfully retains the paragraph and subparagraph divisions of the NA27 while the *BW8* version only provides the option (via the Tools menu) of displaying paragraph markers. These paragraph markers, however, are the same for paragraph and subparagraph divisions, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. With *L3*, one faces no such difficulty.

Before providing specific recommendations for those considering which program to purchase, a few specific weaknesses of *L3* and *BW8* should be noted. The primary problem with *L3* resides in the program design and the manner in which it is marketed. The simple fact that the right side of the screen is initially blank (no biblical text is displayed) while the Bible Study Starter section in the left side window allows one to look up a passage, topic, or term may exacerbate the already pervasive and lamentable tendency to treat the Bible as a divine source book for matching verses, bereft of context, to felt needs. The software need not function in this way, of course; but the design does little to discourage it. Add to this the marketing assurances that, “You can’t trust your English search results. They’re simply not accurate” and “You do not have to go to seminary to access the original language,” and one begins to worry about people inordinately neglecting the text in a tongue they do understand to focus on tongues that, even with the best of tools, will remain ultimately unintelligible, without proper training. This is not to deny that the wealth of original language biblical tools in *L3*, employed with proper caution, will also have the salutary effect of fostering a more accurate and edifying inquiry into Scripture among those who lack the privilege of a seminary education, or that *BW8* could not be similarly abused. It is rather to suggest that the program design and marketing strategy of *L3* could and should be improved to discourage such abuses.

An almost imperceptible but important weakness with *BW8* concerns the lack of punctuation in the Septuagint text. The LXX version utilized is that of Alfred Rahlfs, the same one employed by *L3*. However, whereas *L3* retains Rahlfs’s punctuation, *BW8* lacks it. Interestingly, the influence of this punctuation is still reflected in the accentuation of the *BW8* text. Thus, for example, the term *theón* (“God”) retains its acute accent in Exod 32:30, although, with the comma following the term removed, the accent should be grave, i.e. *theòn*. Even if the punctuation in Rahlfs is not as extensive as that in the Göttingen LXX volumes, the failure of *BW8* to include it deprives the interpreter, especially the novice one, of an important aid to deciphering the Greek text. This shortcoming should be corrected.

Mention of the Göttingen LXX texts leads to the last weakness, one shared by *BW8* and, for the moment, *L3*. As is well-known, Rahlfs produced a provisional critical edition of the LXX. While this edition has often been treated as the standard Septuagint text, and in that sense it is appropriate for *BW8* and *L3* to utilize it, “for many books of the Bible it has now been superseded” by the Göttingen

LXX volumes (Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000], p. 75). At present, twenty-four have been published. These critical texts supersede Rahlfs's because they are based on a more extensive analysis of the Greek witnesses available and provide a more detailed apparatus of variant readings. The result is Greek texts that differ from Rahlfs's both in versification (e.g., MT and Göttingen Exod 8:1–15 = Rahlfs Exod 7:26–8:11) and readings. Admittedly, the Göttingen readings often differ little, if at all (cf. Exod 24), from those in Rahlfs. Yet, sometimes the variations are more substantial (cf. Deut 32). Even if in the latter case the alteration in overall meaning is often negligible, it is nonetheless true that neither *BW8* nor *L3* currently provide students and scholars with the best LXX critical texts available. (For those tempted to dismiss the significance of this fact since, aside from Eastern Orthodoxy, the Hebrew MT is regarded as canonical by the various branches of Christendom, not the LXX, it is worth recalling that NT authors often cite the Greek version of the OT current in their day, not an independent rendering of the Hebrew text. Indeed, the LXX was, for the Greek-speaking members of the "Way" [cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22], the Bible of the Early Church.) The qualification *currently*, however, is important. A Logos digital edition of the *Göttingen Septuagint* is presently in pre-publication for the bargain price of \$299.95 (the suggested retail price is \$3,102.98). Hopefully, BibleWorks will follow Logos's lead in this regard.

We come now to concrete suggestions for those trying to decide which program to purchase. Students who aspire to first-hand analysis of original language texts, pastors whose primary focus is exegesis, and scholars would be well served to choose *BW8*. Even if the quality of its resources is sometimes inferior to that of *L3* (e.g., the NA27, LXX), the base-package of *BW8* not only offers important original language texts lacking in the base-package of *L3* but does so at a much better price. Yet these same students, pastors, and scholars should also bear in mind that they need not purchase *L3* to benefit from the Libronix Digital Library System. Commentary series, such as the ICC or WBC, dictionaries, such as the AYBD (formerly the ABD), and the *Göttingen Septuagint*, when available, may be purchased separately for a fraction of the cost of their print editions. Moreover, not only may these digital editions be searched but they also accompany you wherever your laptop goes. Ministers, who rarely interact with Hebrew and Greek (e.g., due to time constraints), or those with particular interest in the plethora of pastoral and digital resources *L3* provides, as well as lay persons are better suited to purchase one of the *L3* versions. Commentary series, like the NAC, and features, such as the inductive Bible study symbols and the prayer lists, should prove especially helpful in sermon preparation, lay training, and personal devotions. Once again, then, *BW8* and *L3* have something to offer every Christian, from the person in the pew, to the pastor in the pulpit, to the scholar in the study.

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Kevin DeYoung. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will: or, How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleece, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Chicago: Moody, 2009. 128 pp. \$10.99.

Is this yet another book on how to find the will of God, especially with reference to vocation and marriage? No, Kevin DeYoung, senior pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, does not think God's will is lost, but he does think that many Christians are—not lost in the sense of being unregenerate but in the sense of being indecisive, unstable, unproductive, and misguided. “When it comes to our future,” DeYoung argues, “we should take some responsibility, make a decision, and just do something” (p. 15).

But this is not the first book to make that argument. It is distinctively accessible, clear, and vigorous. It includes enough qualifications to make it responsible but not too many to soften its bite. The argument unfolds over the next eight chapters (chaps. 2–9):



1. We should trust God's “will of decree,” follow his “will of desire,” but not wait for him to reveal to us his “will of direction” (pp. 17–26).

2. Christians desperately want to figure out God's “will of direction” for five reasons: (1) we want to please God; (2) we are timid; (3) we want perfect fulfillment; (4) we have too many choices; and (5) we are cowards (pp. 27–42). “Some Christians need encouragement to think before they act. Others need encouragement to act after they think” (p. 28).

3. The mystical, “magic 8-ball” approach to discovering God's will has five problems: (1) it tends to focus on non-moral decisions; (2) it portrays God as sneaky; (3) it is anxiously preoccupied with the future; (4) it undermines personal responsibility and initiative; (5) it is hopelessly subjective (pp. 43–54). “If we say ‘God told me to do this’ or ‘God's leading me here,’ this puts our decisions out of reach from criticisms or concerns” (p. 49, emphasis in original).

4. There is a better way: Don't worry, but instead focus on God's “will of desire” (pp. 55–62). “In short, God's will is that you and I get happy and holy in Jesus” (p. 61).

5. God guides us in decision-making but does not expect us to discover every aspect of his plan for our lives ahead of time (pp. 63–74). “Apart from the Spirit working through Scripture, God does not promise to use any other means to guide us, nor should we expect him to” (p. 68).

6. Four “tools of the trade” for discerning God's will “can be instruments of foolishness”: open doors, fleeces, random Bible verses, and impressions (pp. 75–86). “If a thought or impulse pops into your head, even if it happens while reading Scripture, don't assume it is a voice from heaven” (p. 84).

7. There are three ways to access wisdom: (1) read the Bible responsibly; (2) seek wise counsel from others; and (3) pray for illumination, wisdom, and what you already know is God's will (p. 87–98).

8. Applying this to getting a job or getting married is pretty straightforward: search the Scriptures, get wise counsel, pray, and make a decision (pp. 99–113).

DeYoung's slim, easy-to-read book is a welcome correction to destructive beliefs that Christians commonly follow. It could be liberating for a twenty-something struggling with vocational and relational decisions, parents trying to help their children decide what college to attend, or retired people considering how to spend their remaining years.

“So the end of the matter is this: Live for God. Obey the Scriptures. Think of others before yourself. Be holy. Love Jesus. And as you do these things, do whatever else you like, with whomever you like, wherever you like, and you’ll be walking in the will of God” (p. 122).

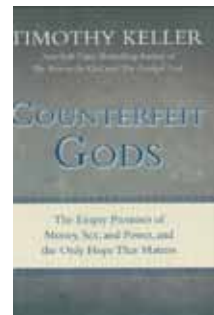
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Timothy Keller. *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*. New York: Dutton, 2009. xxiv + 211 pp. \$19.95.

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This is Tim Keller’s third book published by Dutton. His first two were *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (2008)—a *New York Times* bestseller—and *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (2008). *Counterfeit Gods* is about our idols, namely, what they are, how to discern them, and how to remove and replace them.



Keller defines idols from multiple angles. “The human heart” is an “idol factory” that

takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them. (p. xiv)

An idol is something we cannot live without. (p. xv)

We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. . . . Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the very best things in life. (p. xvii)

[An idol is] anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. . . . If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol. (pp. xvii–xix)

*Idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong.* . . . [Martin Luther argued that] the fundamental reason behind lawbreaking is idolatry. We never break the other commandments without breaking the first one. (pp. 165–66, emphasis in original)

Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something besides God. (p. 171)

Keller gives more than one typology of idolatry. Idols are personal, cultural, and intellectual (pp. xix–xx). Identifying our idols is complicated because they are complexly interwoven: theological, sexual, magic/ritual, political/economic, racial/national, relational, religious, philosophical, cultural, and deep (pp. 203–4n119). “Deep idols” are motivational drives and temperaments—such as power,

approval, comfort, and control—that we make absolutes, and they seek fulfillment through “surface idols” like money, family, or careers (pp. 64–66). *Counterfeit Gods* focuses most on four idols: love, money, success, and power.

Diagnostic questions help us discern our idols (pp. xxi–xxii, 168–70). (1) What do you characteristically daydream about? (2) What do you most fear? What could you lose that would make life not worth living? (3) What fills you with irrational anger, anxiety, despondency, or guilt? (4) What do you effortlessly spend too much money on?

Keller illustrates his analysis of idolatry with stories about Bible characters: Abraham, Jacob, Leah, Zacchaeus, Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar, and Jonah. It occasionally seems like Keller turns to these stories to support his conclusions about idolatry rather than starting with the Bible to reach his conclusions, but perhaps that is a misperception stemming from the way he arranges the material.

Understanding, identifying, and even removing idols is not enough. They must be replaced, and Col 3:1–5 explains how: uproot idols by repentance, and replace them with rejoicing in Christ (pp. 171–73). But “be patient,” Keller warns, because “this process will take our entire lives” (p. 175).

Keller, who first pastored in Virginia and then planted Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan in 1989, writes with a mature pastoral warmth and insight. He offers an unusual blend of pastoral experience, theological acumen, penetrating cultural analysis, disarming explanations of views he rejects, clear prose, and compelling arguments. *Counterfeit Gods* is an incisive, accessible, and convicting exposé of our deeply rooted, widespread idolatry and what we should do about it.

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C. S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters: First Ever Full-cast Dramatization of the Diabolical Classic*. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Radio Theatre, 2009. 4 CDs and 1 DVD. \$39.99. [www.screwtape.com](http://www.screwtape.com)

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Focus on the Family Radio Theatre has produced another first-class dramatization of a classic book. Its most recent production creatively and engagingly enhances C. S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*. It is hosted by C. S. Lewis’s stepson Douglas Gresham, and it stars Andy Serkis, who plays Gollum in Peter Jackson’s blockbuster trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, as the voice of Screwtape.

The dramatic reading of *The Screwtape Letters* is 4.5 hours long (including Lewis’s preface and Gresham’s background commentary). It also includes about thirty minutes of ten original songs and forty minutes of documentaries on a DVD.

I listened to the drama twice, first only listening to the audio and second listening while reading Lewis’s original text. The audio does not abridge the text, but it embellishes it—otherwise it would be a monologue since Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters* consist of thirty-one letters from the senior demon Screwtape to his nephew and apprentice Wormwood. The embellishments include dialogue between Screwtape and his nephew Wormwood, between Screwtape and his servant Toadpipe, and between some of the demons’ human “patients.” Most of the letters end or begin with fabricated scenes set in either hell or London during World War II, and some occasionally skip, rephrase, or otherwise alter small portions. For example, the last paragraph of letter 19 in Lewis’s



original is moved to the end of letter 18 in the dramatization. And letter 16 ends like this in the dramatization:

The real fun is working up hatred over styles and approaches to worship: stand or sit or kneel; lower the head, raise one's arms; traditional or modern music. These issues are an admirable ground for our activities. Without them the church might become a positive hotbed of charity and humility.

That may sound prophetic, but it is somewhat anachronistic. Lewis did not write that, though I suppose it communicates his general spirit.

Lewis masterfully “teaches in reverse” by wryly using demonic points of view to enforce a biblical one. He calls it “diabolical ventriloquism.” Here is a summary of each of Screwtape’s letters that advise Wormwood how to tempt his “patient” (who becomes a Christian between letters one and two):

1. Make him preoccupied with ordinary, “real” life—not arguments or science.
2. Make him disillusioned with the church by highlighting people he self-righteously thinks are strange or hypocritical.
3. Annoy him with “daily pinpricks” from his mother.
4. Keep him from seriously intending to pray at all, and if that fails, subtly misdirect his focus to himself or an object rather than a Person.
5. Don’t hope for too much from a war [in this case, World War II] because the Enemy often lets our patients suffer to fortify them and tantalize us.
6. Capitalize on his uncertainty, divert his attention from the Enemy to himself, and redirect his malice to his everyday neighbors and his benevolence to people he does not know.
7. Keep him ignorant of your existence, and make him either an extreme patriot or an extreme pacifist who regards his cause as the most important part of Christianity.
8. Make good use of your patient’s series of troughs and peaks (i.e., “the law of undulation”), and beware that the Enemy relies on the troughs more than the peaks.
9. Capitalize on trough periods by tempting him with sensual pleasures (especially sex), making him content with his moderated religion, and directly attacking his faith as merely a “phase.”
10. Convince him to blend in with his new worldly acquaintances.
11. Understand the four causes of laughter (joy, fun, the joke proper, and flippancy), and shrewdly use jokes and flippancy.
12. Don’t underestimate the power of “very small sins” because “the safest road to Hell is the gradual one.”
13. Don’t allow him to experience real pleasures because they are a touchstone of reality.
14. Make him proud of his humility. Use both vainglory and false modesty to keep him from humility’s true end.
15. Make him live in the future rather than the present.
16. Encourage church-hopping.
17. Encourage gluttony through delicacy rather than excess.
18. Convince him that the only respectable ground for marriage is “being in love.”
19. Understand that the Enemy does not genuinely love humans. (But we don’t know what his real motive is.)
20. Don’t give up if your direct attacks on his chastity fail. Try to arrange a desirable marriage.

21. Convince him to use the pronoun “my” in the fully possessive sense of ownership (e.g., “my time,” “my boots,” “my wife,” and “my God”).
22. Understand that the Enemy has filled His world full of pleasures and that you must *twist* them before you can use them.
23. Encourage him to embrace a “historical Jesus” and to treat Christianity as merely a means to a political end such as social justice.
24. Confuse him with spiritual pride for being part of an elite set.
25. Replace “mere Christianity” with “Christianity And” by increasing his horror of “the same old thing” and thus increasing his desire for novelty.
26. Sow seeds of “unselfishness” during his courtship.
27. Twist his prayers.
28. Guard his life so that he grows old because real worldliness takes time.
29. Defeat his courage, and make him a coward.
30. Capitalize on his fatigue, and manipulate his emotions with the word “real.”
31. His end is inexplicable, but we *must* win in the end.

Kudos to Focus on the Family Radio Theatre for imaginatively dramatizing Lewis’s brilliant, diabolical classic.

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*The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*. Edited by Robert L. Hubbard (OT) and Gordon D. Fee (NT). 40 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971– . 23,831 pp. (including front matter). 1 CD-ROM. \$1,699.95. <http://www.logos.com/nic>

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Logos Bible Software has probably received more requests for the New International Commentary (NIC) series than any other resource. Many of us have begged Eerdmans and Logos Bible Software to produce a version of the NICOT and NICNT for the [Libronix Digital Library System](#), and Logos has been working with Eerdmans for about a decade to make this happen. I am overjoyed that it is now available. This is good news for two reasons: Libronix is far more efficient than print books, and the NIC is a prestigious evangelical commentary series.



It is not as controversial as it used to be to say that using Libronix is more efficient than using print books. One reason is that more and more people are becoming familiar with Libronix’s searchability and versatility. Not only can users search Libronix books incomparably faster and more thoroughly than print books; they can easily carry around thousands of books on a small hard drive, change the font and size of the text, view a book’s collapsible table of contents on the side or top of the screen, mark the text with highlighters and notes, copy and paste the text, save workspaces and bookmarks, jump directly to other electronic resources (such as Bibles and dictionaries) that are integrated in all Libronix books, and much more. (Cf. my review “PNTC, BECNT, and NIGTC: Three New Testament Commentary Series Available Electronically in Libronix,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 12 [2007]: 81–99.)

The NICOT has had two editors: R. K. Harrison (1968–93) and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (1994– ). The NICNT has had three: Ned B. Stonehouse (1946–62), F. F. Bruce (1962–90), and Gordon D. Fee (1990– ). The NIC is written by outstanding evangelical scholars who generally hold conservative critical views. The commentaries are characteristically preoccupied with the text of Scripture. The text of the commentaries is readable enough for many lay people to follow, and most technical discussion (e.g., original languages) occurs in footnotes.

This Logos product includes the full, current forty-volume NIC: twenty-two OT volumes (on twenty-five of the thirty-nine OT books) and eighteen NT volumes (on twenty-five of the twenty-seven NT books, sans 2 Peter and Jude). The average cost per volume is \$42.50. The contract between Logos and Eerdmans requires Logos to sell the entire NIC as a bundle and not to sell the individual commentaries separately.

When evangelical scholars and pastor-theologians list their most recommended commentaries on each book of the Bible, the NIC volumes nearly always occur within the top five and are often the number one recommendation. See, for example, the rankings for each book of the Bible at [BestCommentaries.com](http://BestCommentaries.com), which compiles reviews and then plugs them into a scoring algorithm. The forty NIC volumes are listed below, and an asterisk occurs before ones that I have found exceptional (even if I am not convinced of some of their views). Moo on Romans, for example, is one of the finest commentaries ever written.

- 1–2. Genesis, 2 vols. (Victor P. Hamilton, 1990–95; xxxvii + 1296 pp.)
- \*3. Leviticus (Gordon J. Wenham, 1979; xii + 362 pp.)
4. Numbers (Timothy R. Ashley, 1993; xvi + 667 pp.)
5. Deuteronomy (Peter C. Craigie, 1976; 424 pp.)
6. Joshua (Marten H. Woudstra, 1981; xix + 396 pp.)
- \*7. Ruth (Robert L. Hubbard Jr., 1988; xiv + 317 pp.)
8. First Samuel (David Toshio Tsumura, 2007; xxii + 698 pp.)
9. Ezra and Nehemiah (F. Charles Fensham, 1982; xv + 288 pp.)
- \*10. Job (John E. Hartley, 1988; xiv + 591 pp.)
- \*11–12. Proverbs, 2 vols. (Bruce K. Waltke, 2004–5; lxviii + 1282 pp.)
13. Ecclesiastes (Tremper Longman III, 1998; xvi + 306 pp.)
14. Song of Songs (Tremper Longman III, 2001; xvi + 238 pp.)
- \*15–16. Isaiah, 2 vols. (John N. Oswalt, 1986–98; xxxi + 1501 pp.)
17. Jeremiah (J. A. Thompson, 1980; xii + 819 pp.)
- \*18–19. Ezekiel, 2 vols. (Daniel I. Block, 1997–98; xliv + 1713 pp.)
20. Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah (Leslie C. Allen, 1976; 427 pp.)
21. Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (O. Palmer Robertson, 1990; x + 357 pp.)
22. Haggai and Malachi (Pieter A. Verhoef, 1987; xxv + 364 pp.)
- \*23. Matthew (R. T. France, 2007; lxiv + 1169 pp.)
24. Mark (William L. Lane, 1974; xvi + 652 pp.)
25. Luke (Joel B. Green, 1997; xcii + 928 pp.)
- \*26. John (Leon Morris, 1995 [rev. ed.]; xxii + 824 pp.)
27. Acts (F. F. Bruce, 1988 [rev. ed.]; xxiii + 541 pp.)
- \*28. Romans (Douglas J. Moo, 1996; xxv + 1012 pp.)
- \*29. First Corinthians (Gordon D. Fee, 1987; xxiv + 880 pp.)
- \*30. Second Corinthians (Paul Barnett, 1997; xxx + 662 pp.)



31. Galatians (Ronald Y. K. Fung, 1988; xxxiii + 342 pp.)  
 \*32. Philippians (Gordon D. Fee, 1995; xlvi + 497 pp.)  
 33. Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians (F. F. Bruce, 1984; xxviii + 442 pp.)  
 \*34. First and Second Thessalonians (Gordon D. Fee, 2009; xxviii + 366 pp.)  
 \*35. First and Second Timothy and Titus (Philip H. Towner, 2006; xlvi + 886 pp.)  
 36. Hebrews (F. F. Bruce, 1990 [rev. ed.]; xxii + 426 pp.)  
 37. James (James B. Adamson, 1976; 227 pp.)  
 38. First Peter (Peter H. Davids, 1990; xxii + 266 pp.)  
 39. The Epistles of John (I. Howard Marshall, 1978; xvii + 274 pp.)  
 \*40. Revelation (Robert H. Mounce, 1997 [rev. ed.]; xxxvi + 439 pp.)

These forty volumes do not include some past ones that have been replaced (like John Murray on Romans, Herman Ridderbos on Galatians, or Leon Morris on 1–2 Thessalonians), but Logos plans to sell forthcoming volumes when they become available. ([BestCommentaries.com](http://BestCommentaries.com) lists forthcoming volumes and authors for the [NICOT](#) and [NICNT](#).)

The esteemed NIC is now integrated in the powerful Libronix Digital Library System. This significantly increases the value of both.

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## Book Notes

Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck. *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion*. Chicago: Moody, 2009. 234 pp. \$14.99.

This is a sequel of sorts to *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008). This time Pastor Kevin DeYoung and sports-writer Ted Kluck explore why people allegedly like Jesus but not his church.

They write with the same format and style. The format alternates chapters authored by DeYoung and Kluck. DeYoung is more theologically substantive, and Kluck tells stories with humor and wit. Their style is breezy and entertaining (for a theology book!), though some readers may find Kluck a bit too cool and clever for their tastes.

The thesis is reflected in the title: Christians should love the church. The body of the book evenhandedly and soundly refutes four reasons that people don't love the church:

1. Missiological. Many people think that the church no longer works because it is losing people and has lost its mission (chaps. 1–2).
2. Personal. Many outsiders think that the church is filled with judgmental hypocrites and bigots, and many insiders think that the church is filled with controlling leaders, hypocrites, and too many programs (chaps. 3–4).
3. Historical. Some people (like Frank Viola and George Barna in *Pagan Christianity*) argue that the institutional, organized church that we know is unbiblical (chaps. 5–6).



4. Theological. Some people equate “church” with “Christians”—as in more than one Christian together in one place (chaps. 7–8).

The authors uncover the unfounded assumptions behind these objections. For example, “the main reason,” DeYoung argues, “that people don’t like the church is because the church has walls. It defines truth, shows us the way to live, and tells us the news we must believe if we are to be saved” (p. 178).

DeYoung is “not worried for the church” but “for church-leavers” (p. 92). “The church we love is as flawed and messed up as we are, but she’s Christ’s bride nonetheless. And I might as well have a basement without a house or a head without a body as despise the wife my Savior loves” (p. 19).

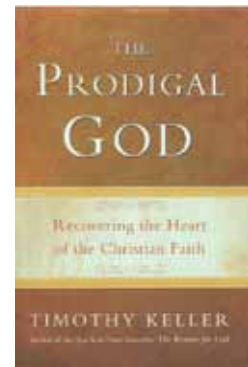
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Timothy Keller. *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. New York: Dutton, 2008. 140 pp. \$19.95.

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Dutton published this book later in the same year that Tim Keller’s *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008) was a *New York Times* bestseller. This little book—about one-third the size of *The Reason for God*—analyzes Jesus’ best-known and most-loved parable. Most people call the story “the parable of the prodigal son,” but Keller argues that a more accurate title is “the parable of the two lost sons.” The book’s provocative title underscores God’s reckless extravagance.



Most people focus on the wayward, disobedient younger brother in the story, but Jesus was emphasizing the self-righteous, obedient older brother. The two brothers “portray the two basic ways people try to find happiness and fulfillment,” “personal significance and worth.” The younger brother represents “self-discovery” and the older brother “moral conformity” (p. 29). Both the younger and elder brothers rebelled, “but one did so by being very bad and the other by being extremely good” (p. 36). Elder-brother types are religious people who attempt to follow very strict moral rules, but their motivation is sinful because “their goal is to get leverage over God, to control him, to put him in a position where they think he owes them” (p. 38). They “obey God to get things. They don’t obey God to get God himself” (pp. 42–43). Four features distinguish elder-brother types: (1) anger, bitterness, and confusion; (2) superiority; (3) joyless, fear-based, slavish compliance; and (4) no assurance of God’s love (pp. 49–63). Keller then insightfully applies the story to elder brothers, younger brothers, and “genuine Christians who are elder brotherish” (pp. 66ff.). It’s all deeply convicting.

Like *The Reason for God*, this book is just as profitable for religious people as non-religious. Zondervan has produced a corresponding [DVD](#) and [discussion guide](#) to help small groups and churches benefit even more from Keller’s winsome presentation, and Keller’s church has made his six-part sermon series on Luke 15:11–32 [available online](#).

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