# themelios

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

**Volume 43 Issue 2 August 2018**

**THE**GOSPEL**COALITION**

# themelios

## DESCRIPTION

*Themelios* is an international, evangelical, peer-reviewed theological journal that expounds and defends the historic Christian faith. Its primary audience is theological students and pastors, though scholars read it as well. Themelios began in 1975 and was operated by RTSF/UCCF in the UK, and it became a digital journal operated by The Gospel Coalition in 2008. The editorial team draws participants from across the globe as editors, essayists, and reviewers. *Themelios* is published three times a year online at The Gospel Coalition website in PDF and HTML, and may be purchased in digital format with Logos Bible Software and in print with Wipf and Stock. *Themelios* is copyrighted by The Gospel Coalition. Readers are free to use it and circulate it in digital form without further permission, but they must acknowledge the source and may not change the content..

## EDITORS

**General Editor:** D. A. Carson
*Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*
*2065 Half Day Road*
*Deerfield, IL 60015, USA*
themelios@thegospelcoalition.org

**Managing Editor:** Brian Tabb
*Bethlehem College & Seminary*
*720 13th Avenue South*
*Minneapolis, MN 55415, USA*
brian.tabb@thegospelcoalition.org

**Contributing Editor:** Daniel Strange
*Oak Hill Theological College*
*Chase Side, Southgate*
*London, N14 4PS, UK*
daniels@oakhill.ac.uk

**Administrator:** Andy Naselli
*Bethlehem College & Seminary*
*720 13th Avenue South*
*Minneapolis, MN 55415, USA*
themelios@thegospelcoalition.org

## BOOK REVIEW EDITORS

**Old Testament**
Peter Lau
*Malaysian Theological Seminary*
*Seremban, Malaysia*
peter.lau@thegospelcoalition.org

**New Testament**
David Starling
*Morling College*
*120 Herring Road*
*Macquarie Park, NSW 2113, Australia*
david.starling@thegospelcoalition.org

**History and Historical Theology**
Geoff Chang
*Hinson Baptist Church*
*1315 Southeast 20th Avenue*
*Portland, OR 97214, USA*
geoff.chang@thegospelcoalition.org

**Systematic Theology and Bioethics**
David Garner
*Westminster Theological Seminary*
*2960 Church Road*
*Glenside, PA 19038, USA*
david.garner@thegospelcoalition.org

**Ethics and Pastoralia**
Rob Smith
*Sydney Missionary and Bible College*
*43 Badminton Road*
*Croydon NSW 2132, Australia*
rob.smith@thegospelcoalition.org

**Mission and Culture**
Jackson Wu
*International Chinese Theological Seminary*
*East Asia*
jackson.wu@thegospelcoalition.org

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Gerald Bray, *Beeson Divinity School*; Hassell Bullock, *Wheaton College*; Lee Gatiss, *Wales Evangelical School of Theology*; Paul Helseth, *University of Northwestern, St. Paul*; Paul House, *Beeson Divinity School*; Hans Madueme, *Covenant College*; Ken Magnuson, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*; Gavin Ortlund, *Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*; Jonathan Pennington, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*; Mark D. Thompson, *Moore Theological College*; Paul Williamson, *Moore Theological College*; Mary Willson, *Second Presbyterian Church*; Stephen Witmer, *Pepperell Christian Fellowship*; Robert Yarbrough, *Covenant Seminary*.

## ARTICLES

*Themelios* typically publishes articles that are 4,000 to 9,000 words (including footnotes). Prospective contributors should submit articles by email to the managing editor in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). Submissions should not include the author's name or institutional affiliation for blind peer-review. Articles should use clear, concise English and should consistently adopt either UK or USA spelling and punctuation conventions. Special characters (such as Greek and Hebrew) require a Unicode font. Abbreviations and bibliographic references should conform to *The SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd ed.), supplemented by *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th ed.). For examples of the the journal's style, consult the most recent Themelios issues and the contributor guidelines.

## 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.

# When Revival Comes

## — D. A. Carson —

*D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical*
*Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and general editor of* Themelios.

Recently I was speaking in a part of the country known for its antagonism to the gospel. Church planting in that area is very hard work. The small number of confessionally strong churches are making headway, but slowly. I admire these pastors, evangelists, and church planters more than I can say; it is a pleasure and a privilege to spend time with them.

In the course of a meal with several of them, one pastor said, "I know full well that I may serve all my years working in the teeth of strenuous opposition that may get worse before it gets better. But suppose that genuine revival breaks out, whether in one church or in a larger region. What should my priorities be?"

Great question—not least because this brother was not awash in pessimism. While working faithfully in a day of small things, he retained confidence that the Lord's arm is not shortened, such that he could not save. By this time, the pastor in question has a pretty good idea of what godly ministry looks like when the opposition is pretty intense, but he wondered how his priorities should change if the Lord in his mercy visited him with the blessings of reformation and revival.

As it happens, I've been on the edge of such visitations a couple of times. In 1970–1971, when the so-called Canadian Revival swept through parts of Western Canada, sparked by ministry led by the Sutera twins, I was serving as pastor of a church in British Columbia. And then, brought up as I was in French Canada, I witnessed the unprecedented (for Québec) multiplication of about thirty-five French-speaking churches to just under five hundred, in eight years (1972–1980). More importantly, I've tried to read some of the histories of revivals in various corners of the world, partly to think through what is genuinely of God and what is not. As a result of my own experience and of my reading, filtered by what I understand Scripture to say, my list of dos and don'ts when revival comes, in no particular order of importance, would look something like this:

(1) Re-read some serious literature about what is real and what is most likely fraudulent in revival. You cannot do better than to begin with *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, and *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, both, of course, by Jonathan Edwards. Edwards is remarkably open to various displays, but the real test is never the display but God-centered righteousness, gospel-fueled integrity. About a century after Edwards, some "revivals" in Kentucky and elsewhere produced a disproportionate number of illegitimate births nine months later. One can guess why: emotional intensity often combines with human intimacy which, if it is not of God, is more likely to produce babies than righteousness. Knowledge of abuses easily breeds a slightly supercilious cynicism, while infatuation with revival easily breeds naïveté. Don't be cynical; don't be gullible; be discerning.

(2) Examine your own heart; fan the flames of personal devotion to Christ. Abundantly use the ordinary means of grace: that is, instead of relying on the intensity of the revival, turn again and again to Bible reading, prayer, self-examination and confession, death to self-interest, a joyful focus on the cross, faithful evangelism, service, and eager anticipation of the glories yet to come. If instead you rely for your sustenance on the sweeping movement of the revival, ignoring the ordinary means of grace, you are likely to burn out in a frenzied pursuit of what is instantly gratifying but not very nourishing.

(3) When revival comes, large numbers of people display boundless energy for the things of God. In your role as a minister of the gospel, direct that overflowing energy toward Bible study and prayer, toward corporate worship that is full of the Word, not toward revival experiences but toward Jesus himself. Times of revival are clarion calls for increased commitment to anointed expository preaching, not an excuse for informal chats studded with pious clichés. One of the great things that happened in connection with the Québec movement was the far-sighted establishment of SEMBEQ (=Séminaire Baptiste Évangélique du Québec), which became a conduit for the theological and pastoral training of that generation and the next. It is easy to think of genuine movements of God that petered out in silliness and warm nostalgia, because the energy released in the movement was never directed toward training.

(4) Keep out the press. Transparently, that's not possible, not even strictly advisable—but work toward that end. More precisely, if in God's mercy you find yourself serving in a time of great blessing, do not announce it, do not "puff" it, do not promote it. By all means work to expand the ministry, but by service and teaching and preaching, not by gimmicks. Eventually, of course, the press will find you. Then you must answer questions with self-deprecation, with lots of emphasis on the matchless grace of God, with a steadfast refusal to promote "stars" and "celebrities." Do everything you can to avoid the "experts" who arrive *en masse*, trying to analyze the revival and "catch" the revival to carry it somewhere else. One of the great advantages enjoyed by those involved in the work in Québec between 1972 and 1980 was the language barrier: most American press voices didn't know enough French to find out what was going on. Today, of course, the quickest forms of distribution of information (and of vicious attacks, too) are not tied to the organs traditionally labeled "the press," but to the social media—and they are much more difficult to avoid. But amongst the leaders where you have influence, foster restraint, a refusal to get caught up in every outraged blog, a quiet perseverance in faithful ministry while remaining highly suspicious of the siren call of renown, especially your own.

(5) Eschew manipulation. During the Canadian revival, I recall the spontaneous testimony of a man who had been minding his own business, a happy secularist who was oblivious to the rising movement, when suddenly he felt compelled to enter the church building in Saskatchewan where the revival began, where he was crushed by the convicting work of the Spirit, heard the gospel, and was dramatically saved and transformed. His testimony was captivating, compelling, powerful—a tool God used to bring others to repentance and faith. Sadly, a pastor (not from that church) caught up with the man and persuaded him to embark on a speaking tour in which he would "share his testimony" at major venues across Canada. I heard it in Vancouver. The words were the same, the story was the same, but the whole thing had become canned. What was a spontaneous and Spirit-anointed testimony became a bit of manipulation in an effort to spread the revival elsewhere. Christian leaders who should have known better were relying on

moving testimonies that were no longer spontaneous and irrepressible outpourings of God's grace, but were substitutes for preaching Christ and the cross. It would be easy to provide many examples where the line between zeal and manipulation was breached.

(6) Never imagine, not for a moment, that this movement from the Spirit of God depends on you. Why is it that during the twentieth century, South Korea witnessed spectacular growth in converts and theological maturity, while Japan struggled with minimal numbers? Are we to conclude that the leaders in South Korea were much more capable or gifted than those in Japan? Why is it that a Josiah presides over national revival, while a Jeremiah devotes his life to tears, discouragement, and judgment? If God gives you the privilege to participate in a time of great renewal, thank him for the opportunity, give yourself to being a faithful conduit of God's blessings, but do not presume that God is rather lucky to have you. Cultivate humility.

- Beware the dangers that attend a movement's popularity. Many pundits have observed that today in many parts of North America, the number of nominal Christians is falling off rather rapidly. This development is fueled by the fact that there are rising social and cultural forces that are marginalizing and opposing Christians and Christianity. Where opposition abounds, numbers of nominal Christians decline. The result is that it is getting easier and easier to discern who is a genuine Christian. Conversely, however, a movement faces a new set of dangers when it becomes popular. Not infrequently, when a reforming and revivifying movement breaks out, it is initially opposed, but once it becomes popular, a lot of people want to clamber on board. And that means leaders need to ask God for discernment.

(7) Restrain yourself from offering purely naturalistic explanations. During a movement of genuine revival, and certainly in its aftermath, many people will ask what the circumstances were that precipitated it. Usually it is easy enough to make a list: a praying circle of brothers and sisters, a time of spiritual declension that made some people really eager for renewal, cultural unrest and upheaval (in Québec, it was "the Quiet Revolution"), and much more of the same. Usually it is entirely reasonable to look at such phenomena and see God's providential hand in them. Nevertheless there is an unhealthy way of reporting these phenomena—a way that gives the impression that these things were sufficient in themselves to bring about revival, a way that implies if you could duplicate these phenomena elsewhere you could bring in revival there, too. A little reflection, however, suggests that all of those accompanying cultural phenomena could take place *without* revival, that no one *predicted* the onset of revival on the basis of such phenomena. God will not be tamed. Detailed analyses may serve no end other than our own self-promotion. The analyses tend to give the impression that we control the movement, though of course we'd never by so crass as to say so. By all means ponder the enormously complex intertwinings of history and culture, by all means discern the providential hand of God in them, but leave plenty of space for simply confessing, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Editor's Note:** Jonathan Arnold has faithfully served as the History and Historical Theology book review editor since 2017 and is now transitioning to focus on other responsibilities. Geoff Chang succeeds Jonathan in this editorial role. Geoff has served as an associate pastor of Hinson Baptist Church in

Portland, Oregon since 2010. He is also a PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and recently contributed the article "Spurgeon's Use of Luther against the Oxford Movement" in the April issue of Themelios. Geoff may be contacted at geoff.chang@thegospelcoalition.org.

We are also pleased to welcome Dr. Mary Willson to the editorial board of Themelios. She received a PhD in Theological Studies (Old Testament) from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Dr. Willson will soon begin serving as director of women in ministry at Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis and previously served as the director of women's initiatives for The Gospel Coalition.

# The Rolling Stones Will Stop

## — Daniel Strange —

*Daniel Strange is college director and tutor in culture, religion and public
theology at Oak Hill College, London.*

Good folk, come, rich or poor, this way,
Come, young and old, to see the play.
And think on this: though every man
Would live forever, no-one can. ('The Preacher', *Totentanz*)

Oh death, how can I understand?
I cannot walk, yet I must dance! ('The Baby', *Totentanz*)

*Totentanz* ('Dance of Death') is Thomas Adès' critically acclaimed composition for mezzo-soprano, baritone and orchestra, premiered at the BBC proms in 2013.[1] At once arresting and macabre, the work sets to music an anonymous German text that appears under a huge 15th century frieze which once covered the inside of St Mary's Church, Lübeck.[2] The frieze depicts a danced drama with the character of Death seizing people from every category of society in descending order of status, from Pope to peasant to baby. Class and privilege count for nothing. Interviewed about the piece, Adès notes that the dance of death is not an optional dance, it's the one we all have to dance. It is both terrifying but also funny and absurd because of the total powerlessness of everyone no matter who they are: Death has to tell the Pope to take off his hat because it won't fit into the coffin. At the end of the interview Adès is asked whether the writing of the piece has changed his view of mortality and death. He responds with a chuckle, 'No, I mean it wouldn't matter if it had, I mean it's not going to change anything is it? That's the point of the piece.'

Before conversion I was prone to some mild bouts of thanatophobia. Periodically in my Christian life it has returned, producing a flare-up of what Richard Lovelace calls my 'characteristic flesh'. Yes, I admit it: I was the one who threw a 'last-day-of-being-thirty-nine' party, an unspecified number of years ago. Therefore, while this editorial might have reflected upon the Irish referendum to repeal *that* amendment, or the Royal Wedding and *that* sermon, I want to focus on *that* event which necessitates what my Anglican friends call an 'occasional office'.

---

[1] This Proms world premiere including the interview with Adès can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2G8ySgSayK8. Both the full text and score can be viewed on the Faber score library at http://scorelibrary.fabermusic.com/Totentanz-20627.aspx.

[2] For a website devoted to the frieze, go to http://www.dodedans.com/Emaria.htm. Given its theme, it is tragically ironic that the painting was destroyed in a British bombing raid on Palm Sunday 1942.

Recently, death has been on my mind. First, taking the funeral of a church member aged one hundred and three; second, still feeling the aftershock following the sudden death of Oak Hill's principal Mike Ovey eighteen months ago; third, being alongside and witnessing the slow but inexorable deterioration of a dear dear friend and colleague in church ministry who, over a decade after being diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour in his early forties, is now approaching the end of his race, and as you read this, will probably be with the Lord. These experiences have been personally painful but accompanying that pain has been a faltering but growing sense of privilege, of the Lord's perfect pedagogy in a sanctifying exercise to de-mortify my mortality. As Gibson notes 'Death creates as well as kills. It can shape and mold as well as tear and shatter.… Death is a Teacher.'[3]

Mrs Mary Loomes was born on Christmas Day 1914, the day of the football matches played in no-man's land along the Western Front. One could argue she classified as an Edwardian. In that year Chaplin made his film debut in *Making a Living*, George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* opened to positive reviews, and *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs was published. Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* was slashed by suffragette Mary Richardson in the National Gallery. Different times, a different world even, and to think of a single human being spanning it all. We made a lot of Mary's age, particularly as she passed one hundred: a special birthday party, a local newspaper article showing her skipping well into her nineties, the card from the Queen (though no longer personally signed). No doubt, she was an extraordinary Christian women who gave a lifetime of service to the Lord as a wife, mother and London City Missioner. For that, we rightfully gave thanks to the One who had upheld her since her birth and who had carried, sustained and rescued her even to her old age and grey hairs (Isa 46:3).

And yet what I have reflected on most in this unusual instance of human longevity, is a stark full in the face stare at human finitude and mortality, of the inevitability of death, of the ephemerality of life, and of our mutability. I didn't recognise Mary's sweet soprano voice cutting through the crackle of the reel-to-reel recording played at the thanksgiving service. I only heard the grumbling and growling bass baritone sitting behind me on a Sunday. And in any other context, I would have had no idea of the identity of the smiling young women on her wedding day, shown to me over refreshments. I only knew a very wrinkled, wizened old lady. At this point I have never seen with such clarity the Creator-creature distinction: the unchanging 'I am He', contrasted with our ever changing creatureliness.

There are many modules to take in death's curriculum. Death and mortality is God's wrath revealed, an unnatural curse to be endured and feared, a fitting judgement for our puny pretensions to be as God (as Psalm 90 makes clear). For those in Christ of course, death is 'ours' (1 Cor 3:23), no longer a penalty for sin but a stingless servant and gateway to life.

However, as Ephraim Radner points out in his extraordinarily rich study, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality and the Shape of a Human Life,* we are reminded also that 'the ordering of the traversal of the world, clothed in skins, is itself a divine gift.'[4]

> While the 'hope of heaven' is a central Christian commitment, it should not be one that is based on the theological rejection of the grace that marks our being alive at all, given within the form of mortality. To say that mortality limits our being in a definitive fashion, theologically, is not to deprive our self-understanding of transcendent elements.

---

[3] David Gibson, 'On Death' in *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 132.

[4] Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 34.

> That could happen only if our mortal existences were not *created* – that is, if they were not utterly dependent upon God. Indeed, the loss of a sense of *creaturehood* is what has determined the desiccated character of modern 'immanence' noted by critics like Charles Taylor in his studies of secularism.[5]

Such creatureliness means that *amortality*, 'the mass condition where people don't act their age and don't acknowledge death,'[6] is a denial of our created givenness. It's futile, foolish and fantastical. One day, even the Rolling Stones will come to a stop.

A meditation on our creatureliness comes from the Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter (1915–1997), a musician that I have become slightly obsessed with over the years. Richter is universally considered to have been a pianistic 'god' based on his prodigious technique, profundity of interpretation, longevity of career and incredible breadth of repertoire.[7]

Right at the end of his career and in his late seventies, one can hear in his recitals the stiffenness of joints and ardour of delivery in certain pieces that he would have tossed off with pyrotechnic abandon in previous years. The audiences are still ecstatic but it can't mask the finger slips, slowing of speed and that Richter read from a score because of a memory lapse that had occurred at a concert caused by his perfect pitch having become a little less perfect. Richter's 'fight' here is laudable but sometimes painful to listen to. But then in last year of his public recitals, something quite beautiful happens. An ailing Richter starts to play a selection of Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, miniatures he has never programmed publically before. Grieg had composed these little pieces throughout his life. A good amateur pianist could play them well but here is Maestro playing them. The first 'Arietta' was composed in 1867 by a twenty-five year old Grieg, the last 'Remembrances ('Efterklang') in 1901 when Grieg is reaching the end of his own life. 'Remembrances' takes the theme of the Arietta composed all those years before, and in changing it to a waltz gives it an aged nostalgic feel. Listening to Richter play these pieces is a truly authentic and 'real' experience. Pieces, composed by an old man looking back at a life lived, played by an old man looking back at a life lived. The fragility of mortality here is profoundly beautiful and yes, transcendently human.[8]

Our mortality and death are meaningful in that they reveal things about ourselves and about our Creator. Sinful and supressing cultural discourse attempts to vandalise this meaning by attempting to obscure with its own graffiti. Our culture continues to redefine our mortality in a myriad of ways, domesticating it, being terrified by it, denying it. However, the intractability of death remains. We can argue that our contemporary cultural context is one where gospel 'points of contact' are being pushed down further and further underground. They are there (and are *always* there), but require us both to excavate with the power of a bulldozer, and operate with the deftness of a surgeon. Apologetically and evangelistically death is not an easy target, but perhaps remains an *easier* target: death is stubborn and just won't die quietly.

---

[5] Ibid., 33.

[6] Peter York, "A User's Guide to Age: We Can't Become Truly 'Amortal,'" *The Independent*, 13 May 2011, https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/healthy-living/a-users-guide-to-age-we-cant-truly-become-amortal-2283276.html. The term 'amortal' was coined by Catherine Mayer in *Amortality: The Pleasures and Perils of Living Agelessly* (London: Vermilion, 2011).

[7] See Bruno Monsaingeon, *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).

[8] There are several recordings of Richter playing these *Lyric Pieces*. To listen to a 1993 performance in Athens, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9vhrt0MAFE. 'Remembrances' can be found at 1:09:59.

In previous ages of low life expectancy and high infant mortality rates, days of plague, pestilence, famine and war, death was everywhere all of the time, hence the tradition of the *totentanz* and the *danse macabre*. Could it be that we need to re-appropriate such traditions? As Radner states:

> [P]art of our Christian vocation is to proclaim the reality of death itself. Nothing could be more revelatory of contemporary forgetfulness – or faithfulness – than the disappearance of this proclamation from Christian teachers and preachers as a central part of the gospel they announce. The tradition of *memento mori* - "remember that you must die" – was not merely a medieval invention. Is stands as a central scriptural focus (e.g. Ps. 39:6; Luke 12:20). For to proclaim death, at least in its central aspect of our existence, is to return always to that form of our being as creatures. To announce our creaturehood is to proclaim God.[9]

Importantly, even when our culture does admit death's existence we distract ourselves from its harsh reality, reinforcing our bravado in the face of it, to put whitewash over the kind of universal fear that would actually haunt us if we only stopped to think about it. In 'How Death Got Cool',[10] Marisa Meltzer evidences how dying well and 'death positivity' is becoming a defining obsession of our time in some sub-cultures. One of Meltzer's interviewees is mortician Caitlin Doughty, founder of The Order of the Good Death, 'a group of funeral industry professionals, academics, and artists exploring ways to prepare a death phobic culture for their inevitable mortality.'[11] Members of the order (most of whom appear to be in their twenties and thirties) include a 'grave garment designer', a 'mushroom decomposer', a 'smell of death researcher', a 'post-mortem jewelry designer' and a 'morbid cake maker'.

Groups like these *do* want to have a public conversation about death which is an obvious point of contact for us. What we must lovingly but firmly point out is that ultimately 'death positivity' does have the resources to deal with the hard reality and 'negativity' of the awfulness of death. As the journalist commentator Owen Jones (whose views are often antithetical to orthodox Christianity) confessed recently following the death of his father, 'I have no idea if, or how, our culture will ever come to terms with death.'[12] Into this vacuum we hold out that one can only 'die well' within the subversively fulfilling narrative of the gospel of Christ.

For Christian believers, remembering our death enables us to prepare for our death. One creative suggestion comes from Professor John Wyatt (emeritus professor of neonatal paediatrics at University College London) in his new book *Dying Well*. Coming from within the *memento mori* tradition he reminds us of the late medieval *Ars moriendi* (the art of dying). These were 'self-help manuals for the person who was dying' (because a priest might not be available) and that 'could be read while you were still healthy but the manual was also to be kept for use during the final days and hours.'[13] A standard format emerged consisting of a commendation of death; warnings on temptations that beset the dying

---

[9] Radner, *A Time to Keep*, 152.

[10] Marisa Meltzer, "How Death Got Cool," *The Guardian*, 12 January 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/12/how-death-got-cool-swedish-death-cleaning. With thanks to Robbie Strachan for alerting me to this.

[11] http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/about.

[12] Owen Jones, "Grief will let go eventually. And then I'll remember my dad as he was," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/12/grief-dad-father-death-loss.

[13] John Wyatt, *Dying Well* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 14.

person and how they could be overcome; a catechism on repentance with the assurance of forgiveness; Christ's seven prayers on the cross as a model for the dying believer's prayers; and finally an exhortation on the importance of this preparation with suggested prayers for those caring for the one facing death. Wyatt's notes at the beginning:

> Scholarly works on the *Ars Moriendi* are starting to appear and the question of what it means for Christian people to die faithfully is being discussed with renewed energy. What would happen if we tried to translate the medieval art of dying into our world, the world of technological medicine and care pathways for dying people?[14]

This is what the rest of the book attempts to do as each chapter is structured around the various stages of the *Ars Moriendi*.

Finally, as we remember and prepare for our death, we will learn the art of living. As Radner states 'whatever the church's full vocation may be at this time of unprecedented global transformation, it must include as a central element the ministry of day numbering.'[15] This is also a major theme in Gibson's excellent study of death in Ecclesiastes: 'Dying people, who truly know they are dying, are among all people the most alive. They are not here to live forever. They are here to live for now, for today – and most of all they are here to live for others.'[16] It's been my privilege for over a decade to have witnessed this truth first hand as I have ministered to, ministered alongside, but most of all *been* ministered to, by my brother in Christ, Simon. His tumour has been a *memento mori* literally inside his head guiding his steps and shaping his decisions. Of course, there has been much pain and many tears of sorrow and frustration, but there has been so much laughter and tears of joy as he has lived and loved his family and his congregation. Mortality has gifted him a depth, intensity and quality of relationship with God and with others that has been beautiful to behold and has produced so much fruit. He has been a good pupil of Death the Teacher, numbering his days aright and so has become a wise man for he has experienced, and as we need to know, that we are *all* on borrowed time.[17] He has lived for Christ and soon will be with him:

> Q: Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?
>
> A: Our death is not a satisfaction for our sin, but only a dying to sin and an entering into eternal life. (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 42)

---

[14] Ibid., 15

[15] Radner, *A Time to Keep*, 241.

[16] David Gibson, *Living Life Backwards: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 133.

[17] See Radner, *A Time to Keep*, 233.

# *Paul and Gender*: A Review Article

## — **Thomas R. Schreiner** —

*Tom Schreiner is the James Buchanan Harrison professor of New Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.*

\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** Cynthia Westfall has written a wide-ranging book on Paul and gender, examining key texts in their literary, cultural, and theological context. Her discussion is fresh and stimulating, and many of her insights are to be warmly welcomed. She recognizes that Paul's view of gender must be distinguished from common conceptions in the Greco-Roman world. Nevertheless, the perspective advocated as a whole fails to convince, especially in the exegesis of key texts like 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 1 Timothy 2:8–15.

\*\*\*\*\*\*

## *1. Introduction*

Cynthia Long Westfall, a well-known NT scholar, especially for her work in linguistics, has written a fascinating book on Paul and gender, focusing on both males and females.[1] Westfall places Paul within the context and culture of his day as she constructs what she calls a coherent and consistent interpretation of Paul. Westfall doesn't simply interpret individual texts, but she looks at the matter broadly, considering culture, gender stereotypes, creation, fall, the body, calling, and authority, and closes by providing an interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8–15. The distinctiveness of her approach and the wide lens by which she approaches the matter makes her book a significant achievement. She surveys the whole matter of gender from a fresh perspective.

Westfall claims in the introduction that the traditional view on gender embraced philosophical Greek notions instead of adhering to the biblical witness. Where Paul appears to be traditional, such a stance can be attributed to his missional concerns. If we truly understood the literary, cultural, and theological context in which Paul wrote, we would realize how he both challenges and accepts particular views of gender. Traditional readings aren't coherent and actually they represent a power move on the part of men. It makes little sense, she avers, for scholars to say they uphold the traditional view since the latter propounded the ontological inferiority of women. A brief survey of each chapter will help us set the landscape for Westfall's view, and the summary of some chapters will be longer than others if the

---

[1] Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

argument is particularly important. A summary of Westfall's reading is sketched in so that readers can hear her view before I offer an evaluation.

## 2. A Brief Chapter-by-Chapter Summary of Paul and Gender

In chapter one Westfall considers the culture in which the letters were birthed. Paul doesn't uncritically accept either Greco-Roman or Jewish culture but critiques them through the lens of the gospel. We recognize that on occasion certain practices are prohibited for women for missional reasons so that believers can relate to the culture of the day. The honor-shame and patron-client dynamics of the ancient world are discussed, and Paul stands out for honoring women in a culture where they were often ignored. Paul overturns the culture, for instance, in Ephesians 5:25–33 by admonishing husbands to nurture their wives with terms that were typical for women's work: they are instructed to nurture, launder, and bathe their wives.

One of the fascinating contributions in Westfall's reading is her understanding of veils. The veiling of women has often been interpreted to signify that women are to submit to men. Actually, however, when read in light of the culture of the day, the veiling of women signified that they were honorable and dignified. The hair of women is beautiful and uncovered hair signals the sexual availability of women. Thus, the veiling of women actually protected them, showing that they were off-limits for men. Westfall thinks the pressure for some women to be unveiled, perhaps prostitutes or lower–class women, came from men in Corinth. Paul strikes back by saying that all the women should be protected, all women should be honored, and no women should be sexually available. They should all be veiled. Hence, the veil did not connote submission, and this judgment is defended with the argument that the word "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3 means "source" not "authority over."

Chapter two considers gender stereotypes, while reminding readers that Paul resisted conformity to the world (Rom 12:2). For instance, male metaphors are applied to all believers. All believers are spiritual warriors, athletes, and are summoned to be brave. The command "to act like a man" (ἀνδρίζεσθε) is addressed to both men and women! (1 Cor 16:13). Conversely feminine metaphors are also applied to all believers. The life of believers is described with maternal imagery and men take the role of women in some instances (2 Cor 11:1–3). In Ephesians 5 men are depicted as Christ's bride, and the role of husbands isn't to provide and to protect their wives. Instead, as noted already, the language of women is used for husbands: they are to bathe, clothe, launder, feed, and nurture their wives.

The third chapter addresses the subject of creation. Here Westfall takes on the notion that an appeal to creation signifies a transcendent norm. A reference to creation may support a temporary injunction, she claims, or address a specific situation. Evangelicals don't restrict themselves to creation to ground applications but attempt to find fresh reasons for norms in every sermon. When we read 1 Corinthians we learn that women are made in God's image *and* that they are the glory of men. Their identity isn't singular but comprises *both* truths. Women being the glory of man doesn't indicate subordination; glory here refers to the beauty of the woman which powerfully attracts men. And the veil, as we have seen, protects women from men. Men being created first doesn't indicate role differentiation since men and women are interdependent (1 Cor 11:11–12).

The women in Ephesus were likely reversing the order of creation (1 Tim 2:11–12) and may have been influenced by the Artemis cult. Westfall posits that such false teaching and erroneous myths about creation may explain what is going on in 1 Timothy 2. The lack of knowledge of the women in Ephesus

should be remedied. The verb αὐθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12 suggests that women were attempting to master or domineer men, but we should not make the mistake of thinking that men should turn around and dominate women! The women were attempting to dominate men based on a flawed account of creation. What we have in 1 Timothy 2:13–14 is not a transcendent norm but represents Paul's rehearsal of Genesis 2:5–22. The Ephesian women were banned from teaching until they came to the place where they were educated appropriately. We can't appeal to men being created first since primogeniture is regularly subverted and overturned in scripture, and thus we shouldn't say first designates authority and that last signifies subordination. Jesus is the "last" Adam and yet he exercises authority.

When the word "head" is used of male-female relations, it never has the meaning "authority" but regularly refers to one's "source." She says that authority and source are often closely linked as in Colossians 2:9–10, though she lands on saying that Jesus is the creator of all spiritual powers, that is, their source. Just as parents grant life to their children, so Christ grants life and identity to his people. In the same way Adam is the biological source for the human race. Authority doesn't make sense as a rendering for "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3 for several reasons: many men don't submit to Christ in the present age; it doesn't make sense to say that Christ isn't the authority over women; the analogy fails since men don't submit to Christ in the same way women submit to men; men aren't ontologically equal to Jesus, but women and men are ontologically equal; nothing is said about how men relate to other men; it isn't clear that Jesus is subordinate to the Father now, for such submission is in the future (1 Cor 15:28). What happens in traditional readings is that the authority males have over women exceeds Christ's authority during the incarnation or his authority over men now, and thus such teaching is guilty of over-realized eschatology. But we have a rich and satisfying teaching if the text teaches that Christ is the source of life for men. The headship of husbands doesn't signify authority but the husband as source serves and nurtures his wife.

In Ephesians 5 the submission of the wife is an example of mutual submission. It was typical for household codes to delineate the responsibilities of the subordinate members in relationships, but Paul turns such a paradigm on its head by emphasizing the responsibilities of those who culturally and socially enjoyed authority, so that husbands, parents, and masters are admonished as well. When we understand the responsibility of the husband, we see that he is to be the source of the wife's life by nurturing and cherishing and doing the domestic chores typical of a woman (laundering and bathing), so that the woman has become the male in the illustration. The husband is the patron and the wife the client, just as Christ is the patron and the church is the client and beneficiary. The wife's submission fits with the culture of the day, but when the text is fully unpacked we see that the theme is mutual service between the husband and wife. Nor should 1 Corinthians 11:8–9 be interpreted to undermine such mutuality since women being created for man's sake is just another way of speaking of the reciprocal service between men and women since men also receive benefits from women.

Westfall says that the historic view, depending largely on 1 Timothy 2:14, is that women are less qualified to teach because they are more easily deceived than men. She shows, however, from many places in the scriptures that men are also prone to deceit, and thus it isn't convincing to say that women are more liable to deceit. We can't say, therefore, that Satan approached Eve as if the relative strengths of men and women differ so that women are more vulnerable to deception. When we examine 1 Timothy we see that the women were led astray by false teaching which was Satanically inspired and had to do with myths and marriages. Eve sinned in Genesis 3 because she wasn't informed and educated about the command, and she was confused about the command since it wasn't given directly to her.

Adam is held responsible since Eve wasn't given the command directly, and thus didn't sin in the same way as Adam, for her sin wasn't a direct act of rebellion like Adam's. Paul would have used the word sin (ἁμαρτία) if it were a direct act of rebellion. The point of 1 Timothy 2:14 isn't that the headship of Adam was being subverted. We see an illustration of what happens when women are led astray by false teaching. We must not say that what Eve did in the fall still applies today, for then we would be denying the redemptive work of Christ.

Westfall also supports the idea that saved through childbirth refers to women being preserved physically when they give birth to children (1 Tim 2:15). She claims that spiritual salvation doesn't relate to the concerns of women in 1–2 Timothy, but childbirth was a major and ongoing concern of women. Furthermore, it fits with the background in Genesis 2–3. The notion that σῴζω refers to spiritual salvation in Paul is rejected since the sample is too small, and since such a view misreads Paul's theology of salvation and also skews the evidence. The fact that women still die in childbirth doesn't invalidate the interpretation since childbirth becomes a metaphor for all the dangers of living in a fallen world. People often claim texts that promise protection in war but still die in battle, or we pray for healing and still die. First Timothy 2:15 is no more of a promise of physical preservation than James 5:16 guarantees we will be healed when we pray. Furthermore, the Artemis cult promised safety to adherents, and thus women would be tempted to find security and safety there.

In chapter five the role of eschatology in Paul's thought is considered, for in God's end-time work we see that he is reversing the impact of the fall. A transcendent creational norm must fit with Paul's eschatological vision. We see Paul's eschatological vision for women in Galatians 3:28, and the loss of authority for women is a consequence of the fall (Gen 3:16). In the resurrection men and women share the same destiny. The doctrine of creation must not be used to cancel out what is true about us eschatologically, and thus the claim that women teaching men represents over-realized eschatology is mistaken. What Paul says about salvation in Galatians 3:28 necessarily involves social changes as well and can't be limited to equal access to salvation. The social consequences which flow from Galatians 3:28 is evident since Jews and Gentiles now eat with one another. Still, it doesn't follow that the differences between men and women are erased, just as the differences between Jews and Gentiles persist. Men who limit women from ministry because of a desire for power will be held responsible.

We also see Paul's eschatology in the household codes. He conformed to society in some respects for missional purposes, but he also subverted the codes in terms of their basis, motivation, and purpose. After all, Jesus himself taught that those who were in authority should serve others and not domineer over them. We see in Ephesians 5:21 mutual submission, and Paul conceives of the husband as the source of the wife, and he acts like a woman or a slave in the marital relationship.

The body should not be equated with the flesh, which is the sin principle in human beings. The OT requirement for circumcision was no longer imposed on Gentile males coming to Christ, signaling that new social realities were dawning. Both males and females had new possibilities in the new era. She discusses the problem of male anger, and the focus on video games, pornography, and violence. Paul doesn't criticize the female desire to be attractive or safe, but he does criticize overemphasis on expensive adornment and any attempt to manipulate or seduce men. Paul has a positive view of the sexual drive, instructing married couples to regularly engage in intercourse to fend off sexual immorality. Both men and women are called to be faithful sexually, and such commands aren't restricted to women.

Teaching on calling has been applied inconsistently when it comes to women. Too many have used 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 as a hermeneutical grid for what Paul says about spiritual gifts.

In effect, the notion that women have many of the spiritual gifts ends up being denied as texts are read through the lens of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11. All believers are priests and thus have the potential to exercise every gift. We must not let cultural factors restrict what women do (cf. Rom 12:1–2). Evangelicals are often inconsistent because one's calling to ministry is based both on experience and gifts. Some say to women that they are just relying on experience, but men think they are called to ministry based on experience as well. We have to beware of a double standard in assessing men and women.

It is important to realize, says Westfall, that 1 Timothy 2 is a private letter addressed to a specific situation. Doctrines shouldn't be based on a single verse, or on a text with interpretive problems, and clear teaching should take precedence. Texts that seem to limit women in ministry are used to rule out what is said about women enjoying gifts in clear texts of scripture.

We can't say women are called to the domestic sphere on the basis of creation since then we should say that all men should be farmers! Those who read 1 Timothy 2:15 this way can't explain what bearing children has to do with preaching and teaching. Such a view suggests that women should be giving birth during worship services! Furthermore, it doesn't square with the recommendation to be single in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul commends, actually, many women in ministry according to Romans 16, and some of what is found there indicates women had church offices, and such a reading is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 16 where believers are called upon to submit to church leaders which includes women. The traditional interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 fails, then, because it leads to the conclusion that Paul contradicts what he wrote elsewhere.

We see the crucial role of women in the many instances where women served as patrons for the church, which includes Chloe, Nympha, Lydia, and Phoebe. When we come to 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 women are to be quiet and self-controlled, which is the rule or order or law, and she argues that the most common meaning for the Greek word νόμος is norm, rule, or principle. Women are addressed here because they tended to gather together in groups and talk in a noisy fashion, and we should consider that women as a rule had less education and were at the lower order of the social scale.

In the Greco-Roman world rank and status played a significant role, and we see this particularly in the patronage system. Such a worldview affected gender roles, but both Paul and Jesus rejected the social constructs of their day. Paul embraced reciprocity, seeing God as the paterfamilias or patron. The household in the cultural scene of the first century was understood along patron-client lines with the husband as the patron and wives, children, and slaves were considered to be clients. Philosophers like Plato thought men were qualified to rule and women were meant to be ruled. Westfall emphasizes that in the complex world of the first century that most men were patrons in some relationships and clients in others. Paul didn't embrace the patron-client view of his day but taught mutual submission so that the model of authority in the ancient world wasn't accepted by Paul.

The view that men should exercise all the power in the church is contrary to the view of leadership taught by Jesus and Paul. Power, after all, comes from the Holy Spirit and not from the individual. In the Greco-Roman world women were deemed to be ontologically weaker and not capable of wielding authority well. Such Greek views of women have dominated scholarship until the second half of the twentieth century. When we actually look at the evidence from the NT we see that women did exercise authority. Women had authority as mothers, over slaves, and as masters of the household (such as Chloe and Lydia). We see, therefore, that there are contexts in which women did rule over men. The

use of masculine words doesn't indicate that women didn't serve as leaders since the default gender was masculine. It is evident that women served as apostles (Rom 16:7), deacons, prophets, and coworkers.

The last chapter before the conclusion contains Westfall's interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15. Westfall sees the text as authoritative and Pauline but argues that it is a personal letter and not a public letter. A personal letter is not the same thing as a private letter. If it were read as a public letter, then it would actually be fictitious since the letter claims to be personal. Since it is a personal letter, we as readers need to fill in the gaps more than we need to do so in a public letter. Since the letter isn't public, it doesn't necessarily reflect Paul's fixed theology or a code book for the behavior of the church worldwide. The more limited scope of the letter fits with being addressed to a situation in Ephesus.

Many scholars think the text addresses the church at worship, but Westfall dissents. When Paul speaks of "every place" in 1 Timothy 2:8, he doesn't mean in every church. And it makes little sense to think that the concern for women's adornment in 1 Timothy 2:9–10 is restricted to worship meetings. The shifts between singular and plurals in the text also indicates that public worship isn't in view. Instead, the singulars denote private interactions between a husband and wife. In the same way, the reference to childbirth doesn't fit with meetings where members are worshiping.

The verb αὐθεντεῖν (1 Tim 2:12) has a negative meaning so that it refers to domineering over another. The reference to creation in 1 Timothy 2:13 doesn't represent a transcendent norm, for Paul doesn't use such norms elsewhere and we look for timely application of scripture to address situations. Paul instead could be addressing false teaching and the specific situation in Ephesus, and we don't expect a transcendent norm in a personal letter. He could appeal to creation in addressing a specific problem in the church.

Since the letter is personal, Paul doesn't describe the false teaching in detail, but we have many indications that false teaching was the problem in the letter. Wrong teaching on celibacy may have contributed to women wanting to be emancipated and freed from adorning themselves in appropriate ways. The women in gossiping probably spread the false teaching about myths and genealogies (1 Tim 5:13), and perhaps these myths disseminated mistaken views about creation and the fall. Paul wants husbands to take responsibility for their wives so that they aren't promulgating myths and genealogies contrary to apostolic teaching. A wife isn't to dominate or control her husband but learn and submit to proper teaching. Men must not dominate wives either, but the central concern here is women being deceived by false teachers. The verse on childbirth (2:15) relates to the fall, and here women may have turned to Artemis for safety instead of to the one true God. Both husbands and wives together play a role in protecting wives from the consequences of the fall in childbirth.

Westfall concludes that traditionalists don't read the texts on gender in accord with their historical background or in harmony with the literary features of the epistles. Our cultural context provides an opening for us to reread the text in our day. We need to use a consistent hermeneutic and recognize what a text is. The traditional readings should not be granted a privileged place, and they should be reexamined. Gender texts should be read in the context of Paul's theology of grace and his notion of power. Many women have been marginalized and mistreated, as men have used these texts to undermine women, especially in a day where sexual harassment is rife and women are oppressed. Often men resort to propaganda and power plays to maintain their dominance. Westfall proposes alternative readings and new perspectives, which she hopes will advance the discussion and God's kingdom.

## *3. Evaluation*

### 3.1. Points of Common Consent

Westfall presents a scholarly and well-researched defense of what I will call an egalitarian reading of the gender texts. All those of good will wish there were not disagreements on these issues, for how much better it is to be united and harmonious. We look forward to the new creation when disagreements with brothers and sisters will end forever! Still, in churches decisions have to made on these matters. We can't just agree to disagree, but we have to decide in local churches whether Paul thinks gender determines role differences in the church and the home.

There is much in the book that complementarians can agree with and rejoice in. Too often men have exercised leadership in tyrannical and dominating way and have not led like Jesus Christ. We remember Diotrophes in 3 John who was a tyrannical and selfish leader, insisting on his own way in his relationships with other believers. Paul doesn't simply baptize the Greco-Roman culture of his day, and the relationship between the sexes in the church should be different from relationships between sexes in the world. Husbands are to serve, nurture, and cherish their wives (Eph 5:25–29). Westfall rightly sees that Paul subverts typical views of leadership. She reminds us as well that men often struggle with anger and abuse, and certainly this is reflected in our world today where sexual harassment and sexual abuse of women is all too common. At the same time, Westfall rightly says that women are instructed to not dress seductively.

Westfall's explanation of why women wore veils is one of the most interesting parts of the book, and I will discuss it further below. Perhaps she is correct in saying that shedding the veil signaled that a woman was sexually available, and in that sense the veil provided protection. Westfall also rightly notes that typical male activities in the ancient world (like spiritual warfare) are applied to both men and women, and that typical female activities are also applied to both men and women. As complementarians, we may concentrate unduly on the *differences* between men and women, and Westfall helps us see many points of commonality.

We can also agree that the Pauline view of the body must be understood. The body isn't sinful per se, and Paul has a healthy and mutual view of sexual relations (1 Cor 7:1–5). The relationship between men and women is complex and multifaceted. There were women who were in charge of slaves and households and exercised authority in various spheres. The relationship between men and women wasn't monochromatic, and again the danger for complementarians is failing to see the fullness of what the NT teaches. Women did prophesy in the assembly (1 Cor 11:2–6), and Paul says that both men and women exercise authority over one another's bodies (1 Cor 7:3–5). We also see in a number of texts that women exercised significant ministries in the church of Jesus Christ (e.g., Rom 16:3–16; Phil 4:2–3).[2] Certainly complementarians need to beware of a reductionistic and simplistic view of the relations between men and women in the church, and sometimes in the midst of the debate that has been going on for some years those of us on the complementarian side may make extreme statements. I hope we continue to be open to discussion and refinement of our views, and Westfall helps us with her respectful tone and scholarly work to think through issues again. The fundamental difference between egalitarians

---

[2] See also Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership among God's People" in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Westchester, IL; Crossway, 1991), 209–24, 503–6.

and complementarians is whether women can serve in the pastoral office, but there is still much that Westfall says that we as complementarians should embrace. Though I have listed some of the places I agree with Westfall here, other agreements will be noted in the course of the discussion.

### 3.2. Hermeneutical Approach and 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

I hope it is evident that I have the highest respect and regard for Westfall and consider her approach constructive and correct, in many respects. Placing the discussion in its larger historical, cultural, literary, and theological context is illuminating and insightful. Her reading of veiling in 1 Corinthians 11 is fascinating and quite creative. I also found her interpretation of the role of the husband in Ephesians 5 to be fresh and stimulating. I have taken time to sketch in her book because it represents in many ways a fresh reading, and complementarians must not ignore what she says.

As I noted before one of the most interesting moves Westfall makes has to do with her reading of veiling in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. The issue of mirror reading arises here, and we all, of course, engage in mirror reading, but proposed mirror readings must be warranted or defended, and I think at some crucial points her reconstructions are unconvincing. Anyone who has read deeply in NT studies knows that proposed backgrounds are legion. I remember reading one study on Colossians which said that there were forty-four different views regarding the opponents in the letter! Such a view is exaggerated, but it reminds us that we need textual warrant for reconstructions. Now I am not saying that Westfall doesn't provide evidence for her reading. It may be the case that the removal of veils by women signaled their sexual availability. Such a reconstruction makes sense, for there is ancient evidence that the hair of women attracted men sexually. For instance, Lucius says in the work by Apuleius about the hair of women, "my exclusive concern has always been with a person's head and hair, to examine it intently first in public and enjoy it later at home," and the context makes it clear that there are sexual connotations here (*Metam.* 2:8–9). But such a reading should be held somewhat loosely since there are no warnings about sexual sin in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, which stands in contrast to 1 Corinthians 5:1–13 and 6:12–20. But let's assume Westfall is right in saying that the uncovered hair of women signaled sexual availability. She then posits that some women didn't wear the veil because of the influence of men. This claim isn't persuasive, for we would expect Paul to criticize men directly if they suggested that women abandon veiling, but we find nary a word addressed to the men on this score. In fact, for Paul to emphasize man as head (whether it means "authority" or "source") seems quite strange if they were wrongly directing at least some women to cease wearing veils. It actually makes better sense of the text to say that some women didn't wear veils to signify their sexual liberation or to signal that they weren't under male authority any longer. Other scholars, even feminist scholars, have argued this very thesis. My point is that one can accept nearly everything Westfall says about veiling in the text, but when one removes her idea that men incited some women to give up veils, then the text can be read to support role differences between men and women. And I think the latter view is more likely because of the meaning of the word "head" and Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11:7–10, to which I now turn.

### 3.3. The Meaning of "Head" and Its Implications

Defining the word "head," of course, brings us into the realm of exegesis. Westfall argues that the term means "source," and she presents some new arguments for her understanding. On the other hand, she doesn't study the meaning of the word "head" in detail, and thus her exegesis on this matter is rather abbreviated. Obviously, space is lacking here to do a full-scale study. When Ephesians 1:20–22 identifies

Christ as "head over all things" and also emphasizes that all things are subjected under his feet, it seems clear that the meaning is authority, especially since Christ's headship is tied to his exaltation above all heavenly powers. Scholars recognize that Colossians and Ephesians are closely related, and we know that the Colossians were attracted to angels—"worship of angels" (Col 2:18). Since Paul emphasizes the subjection of demonic powers to Christ (2:15), and since Colossians is closely related to Ephesians, Christ's headship over such powers (2:10)—contrary to Westfall—probably designates his authority. In the same way, the Colossian hymn features Christ's supremacy, and thus Christ's headship over the church (1:18) also refers to his authority.

When husbands are said to be the head of their wives (Eph 5:23), the most likely reading is that husbands are designated as the authority. The reason for this is contextual. Wives are called upon to *submit* to their husbands (5:24), and the collocation between "head" and "submit" points to husbands being the authority. Yes, Westfall is right in saying that Paul subverts such headship to some extent. The husband is to serve his wife, nurturing and cherishing her, as Christ does the church. Headship isn't a privilege but a responsibility, and it should not be viewed as an opportunity to exercise authority. There is subversion going on here in terms of cultural expectations, but Westfall goes too far in reducing the text to mutual submission. Husbands are never instructed to submit to their wives. Yes, Christ serves the church, but he is still its Lord. Of course, husbands aren't the Lord of their wives in the same way as Christ is the Lord of the church. The argument is analogous; husbands are leaders, but in their leadership they should serve and cherish their wives.

Westfall strays from reading Ephesians 5:22–24 in its nearest context in assigning the word "head" the meaning "source." She defends her reading by saying that husbands are the source in that they are to bathe, launder, and nurture their wives. Such language, however, is in the next paragraph (5:25–29) and the word should be defined by the nearest term it is collated with (namely the word submit). Perhaps Westfall is correct in saying that husbands bathe and launder wives in nurturing them. Certainly, she is right in saying that secular views of authority are subverted. I wondered if she over-reads the pictures of bathing and laundering here, for it is quite possible that some dimensions of the metaphor have died. I also have questions about whether Paul is thinking of husbands at all in Ephesians 5:26–27. The mystery unfolded here is Christ's relationship to the church (5:32), and it Christ who makes the whole church (men and women!) holy. *He* cleanses the church and presents it without spot and wrinkle (5:26–27). It is difficult to see how husbands do this for wives; such cleansing and sanctifying is Christ's work alone. In the same way, Christ is the Savior of both men and women (5:23). Husbands serve their wives by cherishing and nurturing them, but I have doubts about whether Paul conceives of husbands playing any role in a wife's cleansing or being presented without spot or wrinkle, just as husbands don't save their wives! Perhaps husbands function as Christ does in a lesser and analogous way, but then it also seems that the husband's role as leader (just as Christ is Lord) is preserved as well. To put it another way, Westfall rightly sees subversion of typical view of what it means to be a husband, but such subversion doesn't cancel out altogether the different roles for husbands and wives. Jesus is a servant leader, but he is still the Lord.

The previous discussion brings us back to the word "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Since Paul uses the term to signify authority when talking about husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22–24, he probably has the same idea in mind in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Yes, the word "head" probably means "source" in some texts (Eph 4:15; Col 2:19), though I still think the meaning "authority" is more common in Paul's letters. Even if we grant Westfall's reading and the word means "source" in 1 Corinthians 11:3, the notion of authority

still isn't absent since women are to adorn themselves a certain way *because* of their relationship to men. Women are required to wear a covering because if they don't veil themselves they dishonor their *head* (here Paul probably has husbands particularly in mind, 11:5). The woman should adorn herself since she "is the glory of the man" (11:7). Here Paul spies significance in man being created first (11:8), just as he does in 1 Timothy 2:13. Along the same lines, he argues that woman was created for man's sake (1 Cor 11:9), which probably refers to woman being created to be man's helper (Gen 2:18, 20). It seems clear that women are to adorn themselves in a certain way because of their relationship to men as head, and that is how Paul sets up the passage from the outset (1 Cor 11:3). When we actually read the text closely, women are to be veiled because of their relationship to men, and Paul doesn't indicate that men are the source of the problem here, as if the men are saying that some women should be unveiled.

Of course, every point made here is contested, and further discussion is needed but space precludes such here.[3] A good case can be made for reading the authority on the head (1 Cor 11:10) as *symbolizing* the authority of man over woman. Such an interpretation fits the context and especially the qualification in 1 Corinthians 11:11–12. If Paul has just asserted the women's authority in verse 10, there is no need for qualifying statements to be made in verses 11–12. The discourse *changes* direction with the "Nevertheless" (πλήν) in verse 11. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, then, Paul draws an analogy between the headship of men over women and the headship of Christ over men. Westfall raises many objections to such a reading which I noted earlier in this review. In response, the argument is analogous and not one to one, and thus the argument isn't negated by pointing out the ontological difference between Jesus and males, or by pointing out other lacunae in the text. An analogy doesn't have to stand at every point to apply. Believers are to be humble as Christ was humble (Phil 2:5–8), but Paul isn't suggesting in Philippians, therefore, that Christ and believers are ontologically equal. Nor does 1 Corinthians 15:28 cancel out what is said here, for Paul probably speaks of Jesus's submission to the Father as a human being in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Just as God was Christ's head during Christ's earthly ministry (as the Gospel of John says often, the Father sends and the Son goes), so men are the head of women (in terms of offices in the church) in this present age.

### 3.4. Eschatology and Calling

Westfall argues that eschatology and calling also support the inclusion of women in all ministries. She insists that eschatology (fulfillment in Christ) and creation can't be opposed to one another. Since different roles for men and women won't exist eschatologically in the new creation, they shouldn't exist now. I agree with Westfall that role differences don't exist in the eschaton, though men will still be men and women will still be women. Still, the eschaton isn't here yet, and there are dimensions of the new creation that don't apply now. For instance, marriage exists in the present age but in the eschaton marriage as an institution will be dissolved (Matt 22:30). Some of the orders and structures of the present age won't exist when the age to come is consummated. Certainly, when the end comes, there will be no need for elders, pastors, and overseers. Life in the new creation, life in the world to come, isn't necessarily continuous with the structures and practices of the present time. Appealing to eschatology doesn't resolve the matter definitively.

---

[3] For further study on 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, see Thomas R. Schreiner, "1 Corinthians 11:2–16: Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Westchester, IL; Crossway, 1991), 124–39, 485–87; Schreiner, "Much Ado about Headship: Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11:3," in *Scripture and the People of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed), forthcoming.

Finally, Westfall rightly says that all believers—including women!—are given spiritual gifts, and women are definitely called to ministry, and yet they aren't in my judgment called to be pastors, overseers, and elders (1 Tim 2:11–15). It hardly follows that women don't have spiritual gifts if they can't serve in the pastoral office; the question is where such gifts are to be exercised. What Paul wrote about spiritual gifts coheres with what he wrote in 1 Timothy 2. Women do enjoy spiritual gifts, but there are also some limitations in terms of the exercise of such gifts. Since Pauline writings are occasional documents, we need to read all that he wrote to come up with a full-orbed theology. For instance, when it comes to marriage and celibacy, we need to include 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5, and 1 Timothy 5. If we only read 1 Corinthians 7, we would have a partial perspective on Paul's view of marriage. The same applies to spiritual gifts and the restrictions found in other Pauline texts. I conclude that a woman with a spiritual gift of teaching is called to exercise it with other women. It is difficult in western culture for us to hear about any restrictions placed on anyone, but I would suggest that our western view of equality is actually imposed onto the scriptural canvas in some instances.

### 3.5. 1 Timothy 2:11–15

Westfall's case finally stands and falls with her interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15.[4] She maintains that an argument from creation isn't a transcendent norm, that various arguments are used to support admonitions, and thus an argument from creation isn't necessarily transcendent. Her argument here doesn't carry the day. Where is the evidence from the NT that an appeal to creation in the NT doesn't represent a transcendent norm? Jesus appeals to creation to support the notion that marriage is between one man and one woman for life (Matt 19:3–12). Paul grounds his argument against same-sex relations in creation (Rom 1:26–27), and he says that marriage and eating all foods are good because of creation (1 Cor 10:25–26; 1 Tim 4:1–5). Westfall doesn't give us any textual example in the NT where creation is applied to an admonition, and the admonition doesn't apply today. It doesn't work to say that if we appeal to creation then men would have to be farmers per Genesis 1–3, for there is no NT admonition based on creation where men are commanded to be farmers, but there is an admonition that women should not teach or exercise authority over men on account of creation.

### 3.5.1. A Personal or Public Letter?

She also claims that 1 Timothy is a personal letter instead of a public letter. If she is correct, her judgment might affect how we read the letter. But she herself points out the plural second person pronoun in 1 Timothy 6:21. Restricting 1 Timothy to a personal letter fails to convince, for Timothy is given instructions as to how the church and believers are to conduct themselves (cf. 3:14–15). Much more discussion of the content of the letter would be needed to defend the notion that the letter is merely personal. It is more convincing to say it is personal *and* public, and a false dichotomy is erected in saying it is personal and not public. After all, Timothy is given instructions about elders and deacons (3:1–13; 5:17–25), about how believers should conduct themselves in church (3:14–16), about the place of widows in the church (5:3–16), about false teaching in the churches (1:3–11, 18–20; 4:1–17; 6:3–10), etc. Restricting the letter to the personal category is quite inadequate and doesn't account for Timothy's role as an apostolic delegate nor does it explain the nature of the instructions contained in the letter.

---

[4] For a more detailed analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, see Thomas R. Schreiner, "1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 163–225.

Nor is Westfall persuasive in saying that 1 Timothy 2:8–15 doesn't relate to a worship context. The reference to prayers (2:8) and teaching (2:12) points in the other direction. Indeed, the next text refers to elders and deacons, who functioned as leaders and servants in the churches (3:1–13). Paul says that he writes so that believers know how to conduct themselves in the church (3:15), and the emphasis on countering false teaching in the letter also supports a public context. References to childbirth (2:15) and appropriate clothing (2:9–10) don't prove the contrary. In verse 15, Paul reflects on what it means to live one's life as a woman and considers the sphere of a woman's life as a whole (see below). The dress of woman during times of worship was particularly noticeable, though it doesn't logically lead to the conclusion that Paul didn't care about what women wore at other times. The seductive or ostentatious dress of a woman becomes particularly noticeable when the church is gathered together.

Westfall also argues that the text refers to husbands and wives instead of men and women. Her argument here is abbreviated, but a longer and more substantive case needs to be made for such a judgment. In passages where husbands and wives are in view, the text makes this quite clear (cf. 1 Cor 7:2–4, 10–16, 39; 9:5; Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; 5:9; Tit 1:6; 1 Pet 3:1–7). No such clues are found in this text. The switch from the plural to the singular for women and men is not compelling, for the singulars are generic. We see the same use of the generic singular in 1 Timothy 3:2 when Paul refers to an *overseer* (τὸν ἐπίσκοπον), and we see the generic singular also when he refers to a *worker* (ὁ ἐργάτης) who is worthy of his pay (5:18). And we also see how Paul begins a text speaking of elders in the plural (5:17) but shifts over to the singular as the passage continues (5:19).

### 3.5.2. Authority or Domineering?

When it comes to αὐθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12, Westfall argues that the verb means something like "domineer." But she doesn't engage in the kind of careful study that we find in Al Wolters,[5] and she doesn't interact in any detail with the careful argument of Andreas Köstenberger, who argues that both activities are positive.[6] Obviously, Wolters and Köstenberger could be mistaken, but what we don't find in Westfall is the detailed exegetical work which is necessary to overturn the work of Wolters and Köstenberger.

Westfall rightly says that deceit isn't just limited to women (1 Tim 2:14), but she resorts to saying that the spreading of the false teaching by women explains the reason for the prohibition. But Paul says nothing about the false teaching in 1 Timothy 2:13–14, and it would not be difficult to say that women are prohibited from teaching because they were disseminating the false teaching. Actually, the only false teachers mentioned in the letter are men (1:20). If both women and men were propagating the false teaching, why does Paul prohibit *only* the women from teaching? We are faced with the conclusion that only some of the men were duped by the false teaching, but *all* the women were misled. But it is difficult to believe that all the women were deceived. Indeed, if that were the case, it would seem to support the notion that women are by nature more easily deceived.

Were women even spreading the false teaching? Perhaps. Many appeal to 1 Timothy 5:13, but in the context actually says nothing about false teaching. Women are indicted for gossip and slander, not for

---

[5] Al Wolters, "The Meaning of αὐθεντέω," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 65–115.

[6] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 117–61.

spreading wrong doctrines. Paul brings up false teaching repeatedly in the letter, but in a long section on widows (5:3–16), he doesn't discuss false teaching. Perhaps women were spreading the false teaching, but we are still faced with the fact that he doesn't say they were doing so in 1 Timothy 2:13–14. And we return to the issue mentioned earlier. If the women were purveying the false teaching, was every single woman deceived? Such a scenario seems quite improbable. In any case, we need to be careful of reading into letters situations or backgrounds that aren't clear in the text. NT scholarship is littered with grave stones of alleged backgrounds for particular letters and texts.

Westfall lands on the verse about the women being deceived (1 Tim 2:14), but deceit isn't the same thing as being uneducated or uninformed. She posits that Eve was misinformed because she didn't get directly from God the command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Such a reading, though, is hard to believe because the command was amazingly simple. Either Adam was a dunce in that he couldn't explain to Eve what the command was, or Eve was a dunce in that she couldn't understand it! Of course, neither of these two options is true. Eve wasn't misinformed, but she rebelled against God as well.

Westfall argues that Eve's sin wasn't as serious since it is labeled as transgression (παράβασις) instead of sin (ἁμαρτία). Actually, however, the reverse is the case in Paul, for transgression occurs when people violate a commandment that is specifically revealed. Thus, those who violate the Mosaic law, which specifically stipulates what is required, transgress (Rom 4:15; cf. Gal 3:19), and Adam also transgressed a specific commandment (Rom 5:14). Paul doesn't always use the terms technically, but there is no basis for saying that the word transgression indicates less responsibility. If anything, it is precisely the opposite. Paul gives every indication that Eve sinned rebelliously. She knew what she did was wrong but was deceived in thinking that it would make her like God (Gen 3:1–6). And Adam was, in Paul's theology, still held responsible for the transgression more than Eve (Rom 5:12–19), testifying to male headship. The appeal to false teaching or to lack of education for the prohibition strays from the text and substitutes an unstated background.

### 3.5.3. Saved by Childbirth

The traditional view doesn't depend upon my reading of 1 Timothy 2:15. George Knight, for instance, thinks it refers to the birth of Christ,[7] and Andreas Köstenberger to being saved from Satanic deception.[8] I argue that it refers to childbirth. Westfall thinks it refers to being physically preserved in childbirth, and such a view could fit with a traditional reading, and perhaps she is even right. What I am about to say, then, isn't crucial for one's reading of Paul and gender. I am happy to say I could be mistaken here, but I am still unconvinced, for Westfall doesn't account well for how the words "save" and "Savior" are used in the Pastoral Epistles, where every usage of the terms relates to spiritual salvation (see 1 Tim 1:1, 5; 15; 2:3, 4; 4:10, 16; 2 Tim 1:9, 10; 2:10; 3:15; 4:18; Titus 1:3, 4; 2:10, 11, 13; 3:4, 5, 6). She doesn't consider in any detail the use of the term in the Pastorals. Of course, the word does refer to physical deliverance in some instances in the NT, but the question is what the term "save" means in the Pastorals, which is the nearest context. The principle of word study is the nearest context and the usage of the author counts the most in assigning a meaning to a word. She does appeal to Philippians 1:19, but I think the word refers to spiritual salvation as well, and Moises Silva makes this case well in

---

[7] George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 146–47.

[8] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15," *BBR* 7 (1997): 107–44.

his Philippians commentary. Nor do the words "save" and "rescue" in 2 Timothy 4:17–18 refer to Paul's physical deliverance. He knew that he was going to die. The point is that the Lord saved him, in that he didn't deny the faith before Nero Caesar. He wasn't ashamed of the gospel but confessed the good confession, just as Jesus did before Pilate.

Nor is it convincing to say that the text refers to physical preservation when many Christian mothers die in childbirth. It is hard to understand what the promise means if Christians continue to die in childbirth. Appealing to another disputed text (James 5) to solve the problem isn't persuasive. We should not use one difficult passage to arbitrate the meaning of another. Nor are the prayers for deliverance in the Psalms genuine parallels. The main reason Westfall's interpretation fails is the meaning of the word "save," but a reference to physical preservation seems unlikely. I also continue to insist that spiritual salvation fits in context and is an example of synecdoche. Of course, Paul isn't saying all women should have children since he also wrote 1 Corinthians 7. But the emblem of the difference between men and women is the bearing of children. The bearing of children isn't a superficial remark but reminds astute readers of the profound and mysterious differences between the sexes. In this present age only women have children. What it means to live out one's life as a woman is to be open to having children. We are not surprised to discover today that radical feminism often opposes children and ardently supports abortion on demand.

### 3.6. 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36

I agree with Westfall that 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 has to do with a particular situation. Still, I part ways in seeing a principle of submission in the text, which fits with 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Timothy 2, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3, Titus 2, and Genesis 2. We don't have an isolated teaching here but one that pervades the NT. Westfall argues that the word νόμος doesn't refer to the Mosaic law (1 Cor 14:34), but most scholars agree that the term, except in few cases, refers to the Mosaic law in Paul. Her argument to the contrary is exceedingly brief. Paul's injunction for wives to submit fits with the broader parameters of his teaching. Still, we should immediately acknowledge the many women who served in ministry are commended by Paul. Westfall reminds us that there were many contexts in which women ministered and that the ministry of women was celebrated.

## 4. Conclusion

In closing, Westfall's book warrants discussion, and she has given us fascinating readings of veiling in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and the job description of husbands in Ephesians 5:25–29. At the same time, she conducts her discussion on a broader landscape than previous treatments, and thus she addresses both men and women. She reminds readers rightly of faults that are particularly characteristic of men: authoritarianism, sexual abuse, anger, etc. Naturally, she raises other issues that deserve further discussion than I can provide here. As noted earlier, she rightly recognizes that Paul doesn't endorse the worldview of the Greco-Roman world. For instance, in household codes he admonishes those who enjoy power in relationships: husbands, parents, and slaves. She reminds us that men have abused women, and that authority is dangerous since it often becomes an excuse for selfishness and mistreatment of others. At the same time, her own interpretation of key texts fails to persuade. Sometimes her reconstruction of the text overrides the flow of argument in the text and departs from the text to make her case. Traditional readings have sometimes been used as a power play, but she wrongly concludes that this is

the only motivation. Even if complementarians are wrong, many of them (probably most of them) want to faithfully obey what they understand scripture to teach. And they are persuaded that there are role differences in the church and in the home between men and women, and that such role differences do not deny that women are equally created in God's image (Gen 1:26–27), that they have equal worth, value, and dignity, that they have equal access to salvation (Gal 3:28), and that they are equally coheirs of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7).

# Songs of the Seer:
# The Purpose of Revelation's Hymns

— **Robert S. Smith** —

*Rob Smith is lecturer in theology, ethics & music ministry at Sydney Missionary Bible College in Sydney, Australia, and serves as Ethics and Pastoralia book reviews editor for* Themelios*.*

*******

**Abstract:** What are the purposes of the songs of the Apocalypse? What effect are they intended to produce? After a brief discussion of the question of sources, the function played by Revelation's hymns is explored with particular attention being paid to their connection to the cosmic conflict theme, the way they model celebration in the face of tribulation, the comfort they offer believers and the warning they present to unbelievers. The article then turns to some of the key theological emphases the songs – in particular Christological and salvific themes. While Revelation's hymns are transparently doxological, they are also richly pedagogical and pointedly pastoral. For this reason, they pose a much-needed challenge to many contemporary praise practices.

*******

The Book of Revelation is, quite literally, hymn-laden. Fifteen hymns or hymn fragments are commonly recognised (4:8; 4:9–11; 5:9–10; 5:12; 5:13; 7:10; 7:11–12; 11:15; 11:16–18; 12:10–12; 15:2–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–4; 19:5; 19:6–8), and some scholars have identified even more.[1] Although it is the term "song" (Gk. ᾠδή) that is used throughout John's prophecy (5:9; 14:3; 15:3), the designation "hymn" is fitting, for these words of acclamation "praise God and the Christ who shares God's throne by extolling their traits and actions."[2] While each of the hymns evinces a number of poetic features,[3] there is some ambiguity regarding how many of them are depicted as being sung.[4] Nevertheless, there is a good

---

[1] For example, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*The Book of Revelation* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985], 164) adds 1:6, 13:4 and 18:1–24. A further reference to singing "a new song" is found in 14:3, but nothing of the song's content is given.

[2] Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 127. For this reason, I will be using the terms "hymn" and "song" interchangeably.

[3] For example, parallelism (especially 15:3) and a three-part pattern found in many psalms: (i) call to praise; (ii) statement of praise; and (iii) reasons for praise (18:20; 19:1–4, 5–8).

[4] For instance, some are described as simply being "said" (e.g., 4:8, 11; 7:11–12; 11:16–17; 16:5–7) and others as exclaimed with a "loud voice" (e.g., 5:12–13; 7:10; 11:15; 12:10; 14:7; 19:1)

case to be made that most of them were "said by singing."[5] But whatever the precise number of songs, Craig Koester's verdict is difficult to gainsay: "Music plays a larger role in the book of Revelation than in any other book of the New Testament, and few books in all of Scripture have spawned more hymns sung in Christian worship today."[6]

But what purpose or purposes do these songs perform? What role do they play in the Apocalypse as a whole? What is their intended effect? That is, what does John desire the hymns to achieve in readers and hearers of his prophecy? It is these questions that I wish to explore briefly in this article.

## 1. The Sources of the Songs

Over the last half century, much attention has been given to the question of the sources or origins of the songs of Revelation. Where exactly did all of these hymns come from? What accounts for their form and content? At first glance, the answer to these questions appears to be straightforward: John is relaying what he saw and heard (1:1). However, there are good reasons to believe that, rather than providing us with "mere transcriptions,"[7] John "depicts what he has seen with interpretive glosses from his learned biblical tradition."[8] Some scholars go even further, treating the songs not so much as interpretations of heavenly realities, but as reflections of earthly practices. Larry Hurtado, for example, suggests that the "scenes of heavenly worship of Christ correspond to, and give justification for, the praise given to him on earth as in the doxology in Rev. 1:5–6."[9] In a similar vein, Ralph Martin claims that John "set forth his depictions of the heavenly scene and the celestial worship by projecting on to his canvas the forms and patterns which belonged to his knowledge of the worship of the Church on earth."[10] Edgar Krentz argues that different elements of the hymns are drawn from difference sources: "Amen" and "alleluia" reflect the Jewish synagogue, "maranatha" reflects the Aramaic-speaking Christian communities, and the "worthy" passages reflect pagan worship practices.[11]

---

[5] While only two of the songs of Revelation are explicitly described as being sung (5:9–10 and 15:2–4), several observations suggest that they are far from alone. First, Revelation 5:9 reveals that what the living creatures and the twenty-four elders *say*, they say by *singing*. Second, the description of the song of 5:9 as a "new song," suggests an earlier song. The obvious candidate is the parallel "song" is 4:9–11 – with its identical opening ("Worthy are you …") and, more than likely, the "song" of 4:8 also. Third, both of these observations open up the real possibility that other (perhaps all?) of the book's "songs" were, similarly, *said by singing*. To these points, it should also be added that (i) in many cultures, the line between singing and speaking is a fine one, (ii) singing is simply a more "athletic" or extended form of speaking, and (iii) ancient singing was more like chanting than what we today call singing. These points highlight the fact the line between singing and speaking can be a fine one.

[6] Craig R. Koester, "The Distant Triumph Song: Music and the Book of Revelation," *WW* 12 (1992): 243.

[7] Steven Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict*, LNTS 511 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 6.

[8] Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 368.

[9] Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 103.

[10] Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 45.

[11] Edgar Krentz, "The Early Dark Ages of the Church," *CTM* 41 (1970): 67–85.

There is much to commend many of these suggestions, particularly those that seek to discern the influence of the Old Testament on the book's songs.[12] In fact, it is generally recognised that Revelation contains more Old Testament references and allusions than any other New Testament book.[13] The hymns are no exception to this phenomenon,[14] even if it is not always clear if the author was conscious of the references, or whether they are simply the result of a mind so steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures that they inevitably coloured his portrayals.[15] Nevertheless, without denying such influences, Martin Hengel believes it would be a mistake to assume that the hymns have simply been taken over from the liturgy of the early churches, and much more likely that they have "deliberately been composed by the seer with an eye to his own work."[16] David Peterson puts the point even more strongly: Rather than reflecting earthly patterns in his portrayal of heaven, "John wrote to encourage his readers to *reflect the pattern of the heavenly assembly in their life on earth*."[17]

Of course, the resolution of this question may not entail a complete either-or. Seeking to identify what might have influenced John's portrayal of the heavenly songs does not itself entail a denial either of the originality of his compositions or of the objectivity of the revelation given to him. Otherwise put, John's visionary experience "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (1:10),[18] the liturgical sources that possibly shaped his portrayals, and his purpose in writing are all distinct questions. Even so, Peterson's main point is surely correct: Whatever patterns of praise were already taking place on earth, John is not only

---

[12] For example, the parallels between the hymnic language of Revelation and Hebrew expressions of praise are well documented. See Koester, *Revelation*, 127.

[13] For a list of attempts to tally the total number of Old Testament references, as well as an explanation of why the number can vary dramatically from commentator to commentator, see G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, "Revelation," in *Commentary on the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1082.

[14] See, for example, the discussion of Revelation 15:2–4 and its relation to the song of Moses in Exodus 15 in Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 296–307.

[15] Beale and McDonough, "Revelation," 1083.

[16] Martin Hengel, "Hymns and Christology," in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1983), 81–82. See also the arguments in favour of the author having composed all of the book's hymns (with the possible exception of 1:5b-6) in David R. Carnegie, "Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation," in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 243–47.

[17] David G. Peterson, "Worship in the New Testament," in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 89–90 (emphasis his).

[18] All Bible quotations taken from the ESV.

conveying what the heavenly hosts are doing, but encouraging his readers to do likewise.[19] Koester agrees: "The praises offered in heaven establish the focus for worship on earth."[20]

## *2. The Function of the Songs*

This brings us to probe more deeply into the function of the songs. Given the sheer number of them, this is a potentially large and complex task, as each one has its own discrete purpose as well as making its own unique contribution to the larger message of the prophecy.[21] Nevertheless, some general observations can be made.

Seeking to understand the book in its historical context, a range of scholars have argued that the hymns of Revelation owe their presence and position largely to the threat posed to John's first readers by Rome and its idolatrous emperor cult.[22] Given that the proper worship of God is, arguably, the ultimate issue and aim of the book (19:10; 22:9),[23] and that "an aggressive programme of Caesar-worship" was being "forced upon the population of the Roman Empire in the latter part of the first century,"[24] this makes considerable sense. Along these lines, and echoing Krentz's view regarding the Roman antecedents to the "worthy" songs, David Aune has suggested that "John's depiction of the ceremonial in the heavenly throne room has been significantly influenced in its conceptualization by popular images of Roman imperial court ceremonial."[25] But rather than simply echoing the individual constituents of that ceremonial, John has heightened and expanded their cosmic significance.[26]

> The result is that the sovereignty of God and the Lamb have been elevated so far above
> all pretensions and claims of earthly rulers that the latter, upon comparison, become

---

[19] While most of Revelation's hymns are sung by heavenly beings (either the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the angels, or some combination of the three), at various points we see a progression toward the entire universe, most especially the redeemed, being drawn into the praise (e.g., 5:13; 7:9–10). This comes to a climax in the songs of the "great multitude" in chapter 19 – a multitude which, as 19:5 makes clear, includes all the servants of God, "both great and small" (See Carnegie, "Worthy is the Lamb," 252–54). Given the significance of the hymns for the worship taking place in the heavenly realms and the importance of the call to worship God for John's readers and hearers (22:8–9), this eschatological trajectory clearly has present implications for God's people on earth. See further Gottfried Schimanowski, "'Connecting Heaven and Earth': The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4–5," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 81–84.

[20] Koester, *Revelation*, 129.

[21] For a detailed and insightful treatment of the book's main songs, particularly in light of their relationship to the cosmic conflict theme, the leitmotif of John's prophecy, see Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, chapters 5–7.

[22] See, for example, J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010).

[23] David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment," *Int* 40 (1986): 255.

[24] Peterson, "Worship in the New Testament," 85. For a brief but useful discussion of the dating of the book, and a persuasive argument in favour of a Domitianic date (e.g., AD 95–96), see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 707–12.

[25] David E. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John," *BR* 18 (1983): 22.

[26] Ibid.

only pale, even diabolical imitations of the transcendent majesty of the King of kings and Lord of lords.[27]

So what does all this mean for Revelation's songs and what might it tell us about their importance? It is noteworthy that the heavenly worship scenes, and the hymns that are so central to them, "always occur at critical junctures in the book and provide commentary on the significance of the action."[28] They thus perform the function of interpreting the events that unfold in the narrative sections of the prophecy. Consequently, "all the major events of the book are accompanied by heavenly hymns."[29] The five hymns found in chapters 4–5, in particular, not only "stand at the beginning of the vision section, functioning as an impressive portal into the rest of the apocalypse, but they set the tone for the following chapters (6–21)."[30] The hymns, more broadly, have also been shown to connect both to each other and to the larger narrative theme of cosmic conflict.[31]

But the songs do more than simply create connections, set tone and convey understanding. They also model celebration and, by so doing, teach a pattern of responding to tribulation that feeds "the patient endurance" (1:9; 2:2, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12) required of all those who will conquer. Otherwise put, by confirming ultimate reality and the certainty of divine victory, the songs inspire confidence, engender hope and impart strength. In fact, as Steven Grabiner has ably demonstrated, "the hymns are sung with the accusing voice of Satan in the background," and thereby play a key role in both the refutation of those accusations and the vindication of God and his people.[32] Therefore, if John's aim was to assist beleaguered believers "to maintain their faith in Christ and resist every temptation to idolatry and apostasy, the hymnic material, with its focus on the sovereignty of God and the victory of the Lamb, must have provided the original recipients with every encouragement to do just that."[33]

Furthermore, the very image of the Lamb, standing "as though it had been slain" (5:6), and the repeated mentions of his blood (1:5; 7:14; 12:11), speak powerfully "to the 'walking wounded' who suffer under Roman oppression."[34] Indeed, in chapter 17, the great harlot (an image of Rome) is depicted as being "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6). In light of this, the honour and praise that is given to the once slain Lamb, precisely because of his sacrifice, links up with the encouragement given to believers to love not their lives even unto death, but instead to overcome by "the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (12:11).

Along with these powerful encouragements, the songs contain both implicit and explicit warnings. For example, the songs of exclusive devotion to the holy one who sits on the throne (e.g., ch. 4) remind

---

[27] Ibid.

[28] Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 47.

[29] Josephine M. Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John," *AUSS* 36 (1998): 211.

[30] Schimanowski, "Connecting Heaven and Earth," 67.

[31] Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 218–19, 223–24.

[32] Ibid., 225.

[33] David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 277.

[34] Luke A. Powery, "Painful Praise: Exploring the Public Proclamation of the Hymns of Revelation," *Theology Today* 70 (2013): 72.

believers "not to assimilate comfortably into the idolatry of the surrounding culture."[35] Likewise, by hearing that all wisdom, wealth, glory and power belong to the Lamb (e.g., ch. 5), believers are tacitly warned "not to let the prosperous times lull them into a state of spiritual torpor."[36] The message is clear, and has already been sounded in the letters to the seven churches: only those who confess Jesus's name before others will have their names confessed by Jesus before his Father and before his angels (3:5).

It is also important to note that the warnings contained in the heavenly hymns are not only given to believers (the prophecy's *primary audience*), but also to unbelievers (its *secondary audience*). We see this, for example, in the "eternal gospel" which is proclaimed "to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people" (14:6). The proclamation is uncompromising: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (14:7). In short, the call to worship and the threat of judgment go hand in hand.

Of particular interest is the way in which the theme of judgment is expounded in a number of the songs. Three examples will suffice. The first, from 11:18, is sung by "the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God" (11:16),[37] and celebrates the advent of divine wrath on those who oppress God's people:

> The nations raged,
>     but your wrath came,
> and time for the dead to be judged,
> and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints
> and those who fear your name,
>     both small and great —
> and for destroying the destroyers of the earth. (11:18)

The second, from 16:5–6, is sung by "the angel in charge of the waters" (16:5) – so-called because he poured out his bowl of wrath "into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood" (16:4) – and again proclaims the justice of divine retribution:

> "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
> for you brought these judgments.
> For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
> and you have given them blood to drink.
> It is what they deserve!" (15:5–6)

---

[35] Koester, "The Distant Triumph Song," 245. For further discussion of the importance of the throne motif to the book's hymns, the pastoral implications that flow from the connection, and the praise offered to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, see Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 487 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 111–13, 153–58, 230–32, 333–34.

[36] Powery, "Painful Praise," 72.

[37] I agree with Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, 322) that the elders are most likely "angels who are identified with the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, thus representing the entire community of the redeemed of both testaments." See also Osborne, *Revelation*, 228–29.

The third, from 19:1–2, is sung by "a great multitude in heaven" (19:1) and yet again celebrates the righteousness of divine vengeance:[38]

> "Hallelujah!
> Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
>    for his judgments are true and just;
>    for he has judged the great prostitute
>       who corrupted the earth with her immorality.
>    and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." (19:1–2)

The songs of Revelation, then, not only contain promises of salvation for God's servants but threats of destruction for his (and his people's) enemies. In its original, historical context, "John's musical vision sings against the imperial cult and the injustices of life while singing for God and rhetorically persuading others to do the same."[39] In other contexts, it is no less confronting and no less comforting, for the song remains the same! The glory and majesty of God are its major themes and the truth and righteousness of his judgments are consistently affirmed. This is why the songs unashamedly celebrate the doom of all who worship the beast and its image, and rejoice in the justice of Babylon's demise. This response is summed up in the shout of the heavenly multitude: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever" (19:3).

The pastoral purpose of these musical foreshadowings of the future is to fortify believers against compromise and embolden them in their worship and witness. Inasmuch as they simultaneously warn a rebellious world that Jesus Christ is nothing less than "ruler of the kings of earth" (1:5) and the one who will "repay each one for what he has done" (22:12), they may also be described as having not only an evangelistic purpose, but a political purpose. For all true praise, as Walter Brueggemann has pointed out, is both polemical and political; it "insists not only that this is the true world, but that other worlds are false. The church sings praises not only toward God but against the gods."[40] Furthermore, to the extent that their message is heard by unbelieving authorities, the hymns of Revelation "speak truth to power," functioning not only as words of encouragement to the faithful, but as "coded musical weapons that struggle against and seek to undermine the ruling empire of its day."[41] My near namesake, Robert H. Smith, puts it well:

> The Seer is possessed by a burning desire to show Christians that hymns and doxologies
> and obeisance are to be made only to God and the Lamb and never to the emperor or
> his agents. So the hymns of Revelation have not simply evolved gradually and peacefully
> out of temple and synagogue patterns. They are weapons in John's warfare against Rome
> and its claims.[42]

---

[38] The identity of the "great multitude" has been much discussed (see Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 197, n. 117). In light of the context, the previous appearance of the term in 7:9–10, Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, 926) is most likely correct that it is "the entire assembly of saints as they praise God at the consummation of history, though angels could also be included."

[39] Powery, "Painful Praise," 72.

[40] Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 27.

[41] Ibid., 71.

[42] Robert H. Smith, "'Worthy is the Lamb' and Other Songs of Revelation," *CurTM* 25 (1998): 504.

## *3. The Theology of the Songs*

As we have seen, "the hymns carry the 'story line' of the Apocalypse, and through them the work gradually moves into a crescendo and reaches a climax which becomes the proclamation of the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the enthronement of the Lamb."[43] But what more can be said about the theological content of the songs themselves? What are some of their more notable themes? As this is, again, a potentially large subject, four brief observations will have to suffice.

The *first* may initially appear formal, but it is actually deeply theological. It concerns what Paul Barnett has described as the "two-beat rhythm" of many of the book's songs. In chapter 4, for example, the first beat of this rhythm is "the evangelical proclamation of the four creatures that *holy, holy, holy* is the Lord God Almighty…. The second beat is the worshipful response of the twenty-four elders representing the redeemed people of God."[44] Consequently, whenever the elders hear the declaration of the four creatures "they *fall down* and *worship*, not the Roman emperor, but *him who sits on the throne, who lives for ever and ever.*" The reason is simple: "It is not Domitian but *our Lord and God … who is worthy to receive glory, honour and power.*"[45] Moreover, this two-beat pattern is not only a feature of the elders' *actions*, but applies equally to their *words*. As Barnett writes,

> They begin by declaring God to be worthy to receive glory, honour and power. Then, in reverse order, they state the evangelical truth that is the basis for their worship of God. It is because (Greek: *hoti* = for) by his will God *created all things* that they declare God to be *worthy of glory, honour and power*.[46]

This first observation leads naturally to a *second*. This relationship between the two "beats" highlights the theological order of things: revelation comes first, response comes second. Otherwise put, divine reality and activity generate creaturely praise and adoration. As we have just seen, God is praised *because* he is holy, *because* he is eternal, *because* he is creator (4:8, 11). Similarly, the Lamb is deemed "worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals" *because* he was slain, *because* his blood has purchased persons for God, *because* he has now "made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (5:9–10). Furthermore, what is true of praise specifically is true of worship generally. Consequently,

> Worship is not to be thought of primarily, in either aesthetic or emotional terms, though aesthetics and the emotions may be involved. *Worship is the expression of agreement by the people of God about the truth of God*. Worship is based on the evangelical declaration about who God is, and what God does.[47]

---

[43] Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns," 208.

[44] Paul W. Barnett, *Apocalypse Then and Now: Reading Revelation Today* (South Sydney: Aquila Press, 2004), 70 (emphasis his).

[45] Ibid. (emphasis his). Barnett's mention of the emperor, Domitian (who reigned AD 81–96), reflects his agreement with the traditional view that John's prophecy most likely dates from the latter part of his reign, when a great temple had been built for him in Ephesus, an eight-meter-high statue erected next to it and an imperial decree issued that he should be called "Lord and God" (30).

[46] Ibid., 70–71 (emphasis his).

[47] Ibid., 70 (emphasis his).

This second observation leads naturally to a *third*. The songs not only teach us that we should respond to God's being and doing, they expound his nature, character and works. So, for example, in chapter 4, the Lord God Almighty is described as thrice-holy (echoing the vision of Isaiah 6) and as the one who transcends time and history. The songs generated by this revelation thus highlight "the two most primary forms of awareness of God: the awed perception of his luminous holiness (4:8; cf. Isa. 6:3), and the consciousness of utter dependence on God for existence itself that is the nature of all created things (4:11)."[48] Furthermore, this is theology with a clear pastoral purpose. As Greg Beale notes,

> The titles show that the intention of this crucial vision is to give the supra-historical perspective of "the one who is, was, and is coming," which is to enable the suffering readers to perceive his eternal purpose and so motivate them to persevere faithfully through tribulation.[49]

This, then, is an important vision for suffering Christians to see, particularly in light of (what Leon Morris calls) "the troubled state of the little church."[50] The songs, likewise, are equally important for fearful believers to hear, if not to sing themselves. For they remind the church that "God has not abandoned the world, and it is indeed His world. He made all things and made them for His own purpose." Evil may be a reality, but it is not ultimate and not in control: "the divine purpose still stands."[51]

This third observation naturally extends to a *fourth*. For more remarkable still is the fact that the divine attributes and glorious ascriptions applied to God in chapter 4 are then extended to Jesus in chapter 5. This is underscored by the fact that just as the one who sits on the throne is "worthy" (4:11), so the one to whom he gives the scroll is also "worthy" (5:9).[52] Indeed, "the parallels between 4:9–11 and 5:8–12 make it clear that Christ is being adored on absolutely equal terms with God the Creator! Christ is not an alternative object of worship but shares in the glory due to God."[53] Little wonder that the final song of chapter 5 is not only sung by "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them" (5:13a), but ends by combining the two songs into one:

> To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
> be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever! (5:13b)[54]

---

[48] Richard J. Bauckham, *The Theology of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 32–33.

[49] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 333.

[50] Leon L. Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 20 (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 92.

[51] Ibid.

[52] For an older but valuable discussion of the significance of this term, see Robert H. Mounce, "Worthy Is the Lamb," in *Scripture, Tradition and Interpretation: Essays Presented to Everett F. Harrison*, ed. W. W. Gasque and W. S. Lasor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 60–69, who concludes that, in light of this ascription, no Christology could be greater. For more recent discussions, see Osborne, *Revelation*, 239–42; Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns*, 83; Schimanowski, "Connecting Heaven and Earth," 73.

[53] Peterson, "Worship in the New Testament," 88.

[54] The book of Revelation further confirms the coequality and coeternity of God and Christ by describing them both as "the Alpha and the Omega" and "the beginning and the end" (21:6; 22:13). Jesus also receives a third parallel title, "the first and the last" (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). All three titles underscore the rightness of Charles Talbot's conclusion that by "speaking of Jesus Christ as eternal (the first and last) and by depicting him as a legitimate object of worship, the author of the Apocalypse clearly locates him on the side of Deity rather than on the side of the creatures." See Charles H. Talbot, *The Development of Christology During the First Hundred Years: And Other*

The Christological title, "the Lamb," also deserves further comment, as it is without doubt "the central feature of the christology" of the book, occurring some 29 times (six times in the songs).[55] Of particular note is the two-fold fact that it is "only the Lamb who is capable of opening the book of visions (5:9), which shows a christology containing a revelatory element, and only he can open the seals of the scroll of destiny, which points to a christology full of sovereignty."[56] Jesus is, therefore, not only "the slain Lamb" but also "the eschatological Ram" – the one who is "Lord of lords and King of kings" (17:14).[57] Consequently, "the wrath of the Lamb" (6:16) is no less fearful than "the wrath of God" (14:19; 15:1, 7; 16:1; 19:15).

Alongside these clear affirmations of the divinity of Jesus's person is the grateful and joyful acknowledgement of his saving work – a work that could not have been accomplished apart from his full humanity.[58] In this sense, the Apocalypse can be said to locate Jesus *both* on the side of Deity *and* on the side of the creatures. But the reason for his incarnation is equally clear: substitutionary-sacrifice. For it is not his life that atones but his death – the shedding of his blood. Thus, right from the opening chapter, he is presented as the one "who has freed us from our sins *by his blood*" (1:5). Believers are therefore defined as those who have "washed their robes and made them white in *the blood of the Lamb*" (7:14; cf. 12:11). So while the Apocalypse contains only a vague reference to the historical particulars of the event of the cross (11:8), Donald Guthrie is right to remark that "its shadow is everywhere present."[59]

Given that the cross is the key to the Lamb's victory, it is not surprising that the theme of redemption is particularly prominent in the songs (e.g., 5:9–10, 12; 7:10; 12:10–11; 19:1). Nor is it surprising that the first song sung in praise of the Lamb is described as a "new song" (5:9). As Morris writes: "The Lamb's saving work has created a new situation and this elicits a new outburst of praise. No song meant for another situation quite fits this."[60] But there is more to it than this. The word "new" (καινός) occurs a total of nine times in the Apocalypse (2:17; 3:12[x2]; 5:9; 14:3; 21:1[x2], 2, 5). In each other instance it relates to some aspect of the world to come. This is in line with the way in which various Jewish writings applied the "new song" references in the Old Testament (cf. Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10) to the messianic age.[61] The "new song" thus celebrates the fulfilment of the new covenant and "the

---

*Essays on Early Christian Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 159. This is not a denial of Jesus's full humanity, but simply an affirmation of the fact that He is eternally pre-existent in his divine nature only, his human nature commencing at the point of his incarnation.

[55] Donald Guthrie, "The Christology of Revelation," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 400.

[56] Ibid., 401.

[57] Of course, he can only be the latter because he was the former; he is victorious through sacrifice, he conquers because he suffered. See further Osborne, *Revelation*, 35.

[58] Curiously, the Apocalypse has been accused of providing "little evidence … for an incarnational Christology" (so Guthrie, "The Christology of Revelation," 403). In point of fact, Jesus's humanity is everywhere presupposed, if not explicitly affirmed. For example, his birth is affirmed in 12:1–5, as is his descent from David in 5:5 and 22:16, and his identity with "the Son of Man" in 1:13 and 14:14. Furthermore, his choosing of 12 apostles is affirmed in 21:14 and references to words spoken during his "state of humiliation" are recorded in 3:3 and 16:15. Most importantly, the reality of his death is a major theme of the book (1:5, 18; 2:8; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). See further M. Eugene Boring, "Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 702–23.

[59] Guthrie, "The Christology of Revelation," 402.

[60] Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 98–99.

[61] See the references in Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 358, 736.

foundation for the eschatological renewal of creation by the Messiah who has been appointed by God."[62] Robert Mounce puts it this way: "The song of the Lamb is a new song because the covenant established through his death is a new covenant. It is not simply new in point of time, but more important, it is new and distinctive in quality."[63] This, then, is a song that will go on forever, for the redemption it proclaims is eternal! It is for this reason that "Revelation may be claimed to be the capstone of NT Christology."[64]

## *4. Conclusion*

The revelation of Jesus Christ was given to John "to show his servants what must soon take place" (1:1). Its purpose is to encourage true worship of the living God in the interadvent period – a period marked by tension, temptation, suffering, persecution and martyrdom. John does not write as a dispassionate bystander, but as one who shares with his readers "the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus" (1:9). His prophecy, therefore, is delivered into a context of intense conflict, a conflict he knows first-hand. The songs, which form such a significant part of the book, likewise speak into this conflict and minister to those caught up in it. This explains why they have not only been such a rich source of inspiration for Church liturgy and Christian hymnody, but a profound encouragement to believers, especially those experiencing opposition. It also highlights their importance for us in the west today, where religious freedom is daily being sacrificed in the name of erotic freedom, and where those who follow the Lamb are coming under increasing pressure to bow at the altar of the moral and sexual revolution. We need to heed the call of these songs!

This effect is entirely in line with the purpose of the prophecy. For while the book's hymns are transparently doxological, they are also richly pedagogical and pointedly pastoral. Otherwise put, they are designed not only to glorify God but to instruct and strengthen his people. Moreover, as the hymns define and declare the character of God, they not only "shape the identities of those who worship him," but "shape the way worshipers see their place in a world where they live with competing claims upon their loyalties, while fostering their hope in God's kingdom."[65] Therefore, the more we listen to them and make them our own, the more they summon and assist us "to enter into healthier relations to Creator and creation, to Redeemer and all the redeemed. And in the singing, we also begin to move at least tentatively toward exiting from our multiple idolatries and abuses of the things of creation."[66]

In addition to this, the songs have much to teach us about the nature, content and purpose of praise, as well as "the importance of singing God's praise in a way that is truly honouring to him and helpful to his people."[67] As we've seen, the thematic range of John's songs is rich and broad: "Praise, pain

---

[62] Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 83

[63] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 147.

[64] Guthrie, "The Christology of Revelation," 409. While the same cannot be said for New Testament Pneumatology, there is no reason to regard the Apocalypse as anti-trinitarian. See Jan A. du Rand, "'… Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says …': The Functional Role and Theological Meaning of The Spirit in The Book of Revelation," *ExAud* 12 (1996): 43–58; Louis A. Brighton, "Christological Trinitarian Theology in the Book of Revelation," *Concordia Journal* 34 (2008): 292–97; Hee Youl Lee, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation: A Theological Reflection of the Functional Role of the Holy Spirit in the Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 68–129.

[65] Koester, *Revelation*, 130.

[66] Smith, "Worthy is the Lamb," 506.

[67] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 278.

and politics are all necessary parts of his proclaiming hymnody."[68] Indeed, in light of the deadness and/or shallowness of much contemporary praise, they raise a series of questions (some quite troubling) about our own habits and practices:

- Do our hymns and songs concentrate on praising God for his character and his mighty acts in history on our behalf?
- Do they focus sufficiently on the objective truths of the gospel, or are they more concerned with our subjective response?
- Is the language we use as powerful and as simple as the language used in the material given to us by John?
- Do our hymns and acclamations help us to rejoice in God's gracious and powerful rule, acknowledging his blessings and looking forward to the new creation?
- Do they challenge us to take a firm stand against every manifestation of Satan's power and to bear faithful witness to the truth of the gospel?[69]

While this present age persists, and the Dragon continues to make war on "those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17), we need the songs of the book of Revelation – to hear and sing them, be taught and fortified by them, and to echo their themes and concerns in our own musical compositions. What is more, their purpose is not for this life only. They are a foretaste of our eternal future, as Jonathan Edwards rightly saw:

> So far therefore as we sing this song on earth, so much shall we have the prelibations of heaven … And this will make our public assemblies some image of heaven, and will make our sabbath days and thanksgiving days some resemblance of that eternal sabbath and thanksgiving that is solemnized by that innumerable company of angels and spirits of just men made perfect.[70]

---

[68] Powery, "Painful Praise," 71.

[69] These questions have been adapted from Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 278.

[70] Jonathan Edwards, "They Sang a New Song (Rev 14:3a)," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout, WJE Online 22 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 241.

# Have Theologians No Sense of Shame? How the Bible Reconciles Objective and Subjective Shame

## — Jackson Wu —

*Jackson Wu teaches in a Chinese seminary in East Asia, serves as Mission and Culture book reviews editor for* Themelios, *and regularly blogs at* jacksonwu.org.

******

**Abstract:** Everyone agrees shame is a pervasive problem; yet, in book and articles, we find writers often talk past one another. Missionaries and anthropologists speak of "honor-shame" cultures. Psychologists describe shame as an individual, emotional experience. Strangely, theologians typically say little about the topic. Christian scholars tend to treat guilt as "objective" and shame merely a "subjective." This misunderstanding undermines our ability to develop a practical theology of honor and shame. Therefore, this article demonstrates how the Bible helps us have an integrated understanding of shame in its theological, psychological, and social dimensions.

******

## 1. A Unified View of Shame

Everyone agrees that shame is a pervasive human problem that causes havoc throughout society. Yet, in books about shame, writers often talk past one another. On the one hand, missionaries and anthropologists sometimes speak of "honor-shame" cultures. On the other hand, psychologists describe shame as an individual, emotional experience. Strangely, Christian theologians typically say very little about a destructive human experience. We have to ask, "Have theologians no sense of shame?"

Why do Christian scholars seemingly overlook such an important biblical and life theme? Within Western theology, why do people have a shameless preference for legal-metaphors? No doubt, there are many reasons for this.[1]

People have several hidden assumptions about "shame" that are based on partial truths. For instance, many in the church have the impression that shame is a "subjective" problem. It is concerned with

---

[1] Cf. Jackson Wu, "Why Has the Church Lost 'Face'?," *Mission Frontiers* (January–February 2015), www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/why-has-the-church-lost-face.

psychology and culture, not theology, which is primarily about "objective" truth. As a result, honor-shame language seems ill-suited to describe ultimate realities, like God and salvation from sin.

In this essay, I will first correct this misunderstanding by clarifying the meaning of "shame." I present a unified view of shame, one that includes a subjective *and* an objective dimension. The following definition of "shame" brings together the primary ways that people use the concept of shame. *Shame is the fear, pain, or state of being regarded unworthy of acceptance in social relationships.*

Shame is multi-faceted. It is a theological, psychological, and social concept. The Bible helps us reconcile the various understandings people have about this topic. In fact, the Bible uses honor and shame language both to describe the world's most serious problem and its solution. Evangelicals want to have biblically faithful theologies and culturally meaningful ministries. To attain this goal, one needs a more robust view of shame.

## 2. What Is Shame?

### 2.1. Distinguishing Guilt and Shame

What is a basic difference between guilt and shame? Guilt focuses on a person's actions or behavior. Thus, guilt is a person's negative response to wrong actions. Compared to shame, guilt has a narrower focus.

Shame is more general and holistic. It focuses on a person's worth. Whereas guilt says, "my actions were bad," shame instead says, "I am bad." When people do something that is regarded as wrong or bad, they can incur guilt, shame, or even both.

### 2.2. Guilt and Shame are Subjective and Objective

What often goes unnoticed is the fact that both shame and guilt each have an objective and subjective dimension. For instance, one can have objective guilt because (s)he commits an offense. Subjectively, a person might have guilt feelings.

Likewise, people can subjectively feel ashamed or a sense of worthlessness. Yet, it is possible to describe someone has *being* shameful or lacking honor. This sort of judgment is ascribed to individuals by other people or groups. This kind of shame is "objective" in the sense that it comes from some source *outside* the judged individual.

Accordingly, when ancient Romans crucified a person, they effectively shamed those whom they regarded as "criminals" or lacking social worth. Objective shame is inherently public by nature. It typically manifests in many ways, such as criticism, censure, mockery, exclusion, discrimination, torture, and execution.

### 2.3. Three Types of Shame

We can further classify shame into three specific subcategories. Shame is psychological, social, and sacred. Subjectively, shame is psychological or individualistic. Objectively, we can describe shame in two ways. First, it is cultural or social. Second, there is theological or "sacred" shame.

What is the major difference between psychological, social, and sacred shame? Each uses a different standard to assess whether someone is considered shameful (or conversely, worthy of honor). With psychological shame, an individual perceives himself or herself to lack value or significance. Social or

cultural shame measures one's worth in relation to social expectations. Finally, sacred (or theological) shame is ascribed to those who lack honor before God.

The following section will elaborate how these three types of shame differ and interconnect. I will use the Bible to illustrate how biblical authors use the concept of shame.

## 2.4. Individual or Psychological Shame

### 2.4.1. Overview

Psychological shame is closely linked to a range of negative emotions and behaviors, including fear, anxiety, anger, defensiveness, depression, and suicide. June Price Tangney further explains that shame is primarily concerned with "others' evaluation" of oneself whereas guilt is more concerned with "one's effect on others."[2] Brené Brown rightly highlights a common aspect of subjective shame: "Shame is the fear of disconnection––the fear that we're unlovable and don't belong."[3] Consequently, shame makes people want to hide and causes them to feel isolated or invisible.

### 2.4.2. Shame Due to Personal Sin

Since psychological shame is a universal human phenomenon, we are not surprised to find examples of it throughout the Bible. Although Adam and Eve originally were naked yet without shame (Gen 2:25), their sin made them want to "hid[e] themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8). Jeremiah laments for Jerusalem, "How we are ruined! We are utterly shamed, because we have left the land, because they have cast down our dwellings" (Jer 9:16; cf. 3:25).

### 2.4.3. Shame Due to Others' Sin

Elsewhere, people suffer psychological or individualized shame but not necessarily due to their own sin. For example, consider when King David sent his servants to console the Ammonite king, who mistakenly regarded them as spies.

> So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away. When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were *greatly ashamed*. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return." (2 Sam 10:4–5)

Later, Ezra's shame results from imagining the king's reaction were Ezra to ask for the king's assistance in returning to Jerusalem.

> Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was *ashamed* to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." (Ezra 8:21–22)

---

[2] June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt* (New York: Guilford, 2002), 25.

[3] Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York: Random House, 2015), 109.

In each instance, the men feel a sense of shame that causes them either to hide or not to disclose their true desires and thoughts.

Multiple NT writers similarly use the concept of shame. Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:2 contrasts two ways of doing ministry––one that is "open" (φανερώσει), whereas the other is "hidden" (κρυπτά). He renounces the latter as shameful [αἰσχύνης]. He too connects shame with being "hidden" or "veiled" (4:3). Shame influence a character in Jesus's parable. Luke 16:3 says, "the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and *I am ashamed to beg*.'"

### 2.4.4. Shame's Influence on Discipleship

The NT writers are ever mindful that shame influences their readers. Paul explains that he does not want to make his readers feel ashamed:

> To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. *I do not write these things to make you ashamed*, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (1 Cor 4:11–15)

Given that Paul later writes, "I say this to your shame" (6:5; 15:34), he is aware that his use of shame can have contrasting effects on the Corinthians.[4]

Furthermore, both Peter and John want readers to be free from a subjective kind of shame. Despite the (objective) social shame that comes with suffering, Peter writes, "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, *let him not be ashamed*, but let him glorify God in that name" (1 Pet 4:16; cf. Rom 1:16). Similarly, John urges his flock to persevere in love by saying, "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and *not shrink from him in shame* at his coming" (1 John 2:28).

## 2.5. Cultural or Social Shame

### 2.5.1. Explanation

The second type of shame is social or cultural shame. For instance, anthropologists and missiologists often write about so-called "honor-shame cultures,"[5] like those in East Asia and the Middle East. In fact, honor-shame cultures (and subcultures) exist throughout history and the world, including Western

---

[4] Cf. Te-Li Lau, "I write these things not to shame you." *JETS* 60 (2017): 105–24. Lau suggests that Paul in 1 Cor 4:14 employs "a rhetoric of shame that a loving father might employ to instruct his children" (p. 107). An alternative explanation is possible. Paul might not use shame in 4:14 because he wants to motivate a certain positive response whereas 6:5; 15:34 rebuke negative behavior that stands in contrast to their identity as Christ followers.

[5] For example, Roland Müller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2001); Jayson Georges and Mark Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

cultures.[6] Recently, major publications have given significant attention to the destructive use of shame, especially within social media.[7]

What do we learn from research on "honor-shame" cultures? Within any culture (or subculture), certain behaviors and characteristics are regarded as either shameful or honorable. That is, certain things are deemed worthy of either censure or praise. Many of these collective norms are rarely stated explicitly. These community standards form the moral basis for deciding right and wrong within a social group.

This type of "shame" is considered "objective" in the sense that it is more public than personal (i.e., psychological). Such "shame" reflects the assessment of someone other than the person being judged. In other words, an individual's sense of self-worth is not the reason society views the person as being deficient or lacking worth. An individual has shame according to the measure of the surrounding group or culture.

### 2.5.2. Biblical Examples

The Bible has many examples of this objective, social shame. Nehemiah describes the condition of the exiles, "And they said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in *great trouble and shame.* The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire'" (Neh 1:3). Biblical writers can use shame-language to describe circumstances, as in Jeremiah 46:12, "The nations have heard of your *shame*, and the earth is full of your cry; for warrior has stumbled against warrior; they have both fallen together" (cf. Lam 5:1–16

Proverbs warns of the public shame that comes upon parents of an unruly child. For example, Proverbs 19:26 warns, "He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings *shame and reproach*" (cf. 10:5; 29:15). Also, Proverbs 25:10 warns against revealing another's secret "lest he who hears you *bring shame upon you*, and your *ill repute* have no end." These passages depict a type of shame that exists without respect to an individual's psychological state.

The New Testament also speaks of shame that is imputed to a person by their community. When Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant with Jesus, he is concerned with the social shame that would be heaped on Mary. Matthew 1:19 states, "And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to *shame*, resolved to divorce her *quietly.*" He does not want to subject Mary to the merciless court of public opinion.

A most obvious example is found in Hebrews. The author claims that an inanimate object has "honor" or has a "dishonorable" use. Hebrews 3:3 states, "For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses––as much more glory as the builder of *a house has more honor than the house itself.*"

Similarly, Paul explains, "Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, *some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself*

---

[6] Tamler Sommers, *Why Honor Matters.* (New York: Basic Books, 2018); Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: Norton, 2010); James Bowman, *Honor: A History* (New York: Encounter, 2006); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture Of Honor: The Psychology Of Violence In The South* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Lyman L. Johnson, eds., *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

[7] Cf. Jon Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* (New York: Riverhead, 2015); Andy Crouch, "The Return of Shame," *Christianity Today* 59.2 (March 2015): 32–40.

from what is *dishonorable*, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work" (2 Tim 2:20–21). The objects themselves neither claim honor nor feel dishonored. Instead, people give these ascriptions.

Honor-shame language routinely describes certain behaviors and actions (which of course do not have emotions). Thus, Paul can talk about "shameful gain" (Tit 1:11) and shameful speaking (cf. 1 Cor 14:35; Eph 5:12). In 2 Corinthians 6:8–9, Paul describes his suffering in a way that makes clear the nature of shame and honor, for he labors "through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known." His social (dis)honor is made manifest in the way he is publicly treated (cf. Jesus's treatment in Matt 22:5–6; Mark 12:4; Luke 18:32; 20:11). Thus, we understand why Jesus warns those who are "ashamed of me and my words" (Luke 9:26). Their problem is that they do not publicly ascribe worth to Jesus. In contrast, Moses "considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward" (Heb 11:26). Notice that "reproach" here describes Moses' mistreatment in Egypt and is even objectified as wealth or reward.

## 2.6. Sacred or Theological Shame

### 2.6.1. Explanation

The Bible is foremost concerned with the third type of shame, which I call "sacred" or theological shame. Like social shame, this is an objective shame. That is, a person or thing is determined to be shameful according to some outside measure; in this case, God's character. Ultimately, God is the measure of true honor/glory (and conversely, whatever is dishonorable or shameful). Having shame before God may or may not be linked directly with psychological or social shame.

### 2.6.2. Old Testament Examples

A few examples from prophets illustrate the meaning of sacred/theological shame. These passages concern Israel's sin and consequent exile. Hosea laments,

> The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame…. When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring; their rulers dearly love shame. A wind has wrapped them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices. (Hos 4:7, 18–19)

God's judges his enemies by shaming them. Hence, Habakkuk vividly describes God's wrath,

> You will have your *fill of shame instead of glory*. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and *utter shame will come upon your glory*! The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. (Hab 2:16–17)

Jeremiah speaks against his persecutors, "But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore, my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be *greatly shamed*, for they will not succeed. Their *eternal dishonor* will never be forgotten" (Jer 20:11).

Daniel does not talk about psychology when he contrasts God's righteousness with Israel's shame in Daniel 9:7–8. Daniel adds, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some

to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2). This eternal shame clearly transcends any particular cultural or social perspective of dishonor. Likewise, Ezekiel says those who rebel against the Lord will bear their "shame" (32:24, 25, 30; 44:13) and "disgrace" (16:52–54; cf. 36:15).

In salvation, God brings honor to his people and guards them against shame. In Zephaniah 3:18–20, the change from shame to honor is public and pervasive:

> "I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will *no longer suffer reproach*. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save *the lame and gather the outcast*, and I will *change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth*. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for *I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth*, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the Lord.

We would be remiss to overlook the repetition and thus emphasis in Joel 2:26–27:

> You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And *my people shall never again be put to shame*. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else. And *my people shall never again be put to shame*.

Other passages likewise speak of an objective state of honor and shame, which is determined by God (cf. Ps 25:2–3; 31:17; Jer 13:26–27; Ezek 7:18).

### 2.6.3. New Testament Examples

The New Testament paints a similar picture. Paul says that "enemies of the cross of Christ … glory in their shame, which minds set on earthly things" (Phil 3:18–19). In Romans, Paul uses the concept of shame to describe justification, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame'" (Rom 10:10–11; cf. 9:33). In this passage, the shame that is avoided is *as objective as the justification that is gained*. God gives "glory and honor" as a reward (Rom 2:7, 10; cf. Rom 8:30). As Jesus himself promises, "If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).

It would be a shame if we overlook sacred (dis)honor and think only in terms of sociology or psychology. Biblically speaking, "shame" cannot be reduced to a cultural or individual phenomenon.

### 2.6.4. Integrating Objective and Subjective Shame

Within a single passage, biblical writers sometimes use shame (and honor) language yet the meaning of their words might slightly differ. For example, Ezra first confesses his subjective shame and then speaks of Israel's objective shame.

> O my God, *I am ashamed* [בֹּשְׁתִּי] and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and *to utter shame* [בֹשֶׁת], as it is today. (Ezra 9:6–7)

A subjective sense of shame is the appropriate response to objective shame. For example, the prophet in Ezekiel 16:62–63 writes that the Lord will remember his covenant *so that* Israel would feel the *subjective* shame they ought to feel. As a result, he then says to Israel, "[you will] never open your mouth again because of your shame." This shame is the objective shame they suffer as a result of their sin (cf. Ps 4:3; Ezek 39:26).

Shame is not an entirely bad phenomenon. In fact, morality requires one to have a sense of shame. The godless person is shameless.

### 3. Reconciling Shame

In this section, we see the theological significance of distinguishing subjective and objective shame. With a more holistic perspective of shame, we can explain the meaning of sin and its consequences. In addition, we will find a corresponding perspective of salvation. The Bible demonstrates how Jesus overcomes human shame and displays divine honor.

### 3.1. When Shame is the Problem

Biblical writers use "honor and shame" to describe the human problem. Shame is the cause and consequence of sin. Simultaneously, shame is both sin's root and its fruit. On this point, the distinction between objective and subjective shame is useful. When discussing the human problem, we should clarify the relationship between these two dimensions of shame.

In the Bible, people have at least 6 problems that concern honor-shame. Because of space limitations, I will only mention a few passages that illustrate these points from the Bible.

| PROBLEM | SHAME |
|---|---|
| 1. People have shamed (dishonored) God. | Objective |
| 2. People are shameful. | Objective |
| 3. People feel shame. | Subjective |
| 4. People shame others. | Objective |
| 5. People suffer shame from others. | Objective & Subjective |
| 6. God will put people to shame. | Objective |

#### 3.1.1. People Have Shamed God (Objectively)

First, humanity dishonors God; that is, we bring shame upon God's name. Those who are supposed to reflect his glory and worth have instead regarded the Creator God as though he has little value.

In Romans 1:18–21, "unrighteousness" is described as "dishonoring" God. Verse 23 says people "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (cf. Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11). When people "did not honor him as God" (Rom 1:21), they effectively exchanged the basis of their *own* glory.

Chapter 2 explicitly describes sin in terms of "dishonor." Romans 2:23–24 says, "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law." The main verb in the sentence is "dishonor" (ἀτιμάζεις), whereas the phrase "by breaking the law" is simply a prepositional phrase (διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου). Grammatically speaking, Paul indicates the main problem is *dishonor*; law-breaking is but one particular way that a person might dishonor God. Verse 24 supports v. 23 and confirms this emphasis: "For, as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"

The following two passages illustrate the human problem using different perspectives. Malachi 1:6 poignantly identifies Israel's fault when the Lord says, "A son *honors* his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is *my honor*? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we *despised your name*?'" Second, 1 Corinthians 10:31 lays down a principle that should mark everything we do: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Thus, the human problem of sin could be summed up as *not* doing something to the glory of God.

### 3.1.2. People are Shameful (Objectively)

When people dishonor God, they incur objective shame. They are worthy to be reckoned shameful and disgraced. In other words, a person lacks the honor he or she should have before God (cf. Ps 8:5; Rom 3:23). Malachi 2:2–3 graphically depicts the consequence of not honoring the Lord:

> If you will not listen, *if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name*, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, *I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.*

Hosea 4:7 adds, "The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame." In other words, sinners are marked with shame objectively, not simply subjectively (i.e., within their own psychology).

### 3.1.3. People Feel Shamed (Subjectively)

Since humanity (objectively) dishonors God and so brings shame upon themselves, people feel varying degrees of shame (subjectively). This is a consequence of human sin. A world without sin is a world without shame.

Sin brings humiliation. Ezra represents the proper response of anyone who recognizes the horror of sin: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens." Jeremiah foretells that Israel "shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the Lord," which is inflicted due to sin (Jer 12:13).

### 3.1.4.    People Both Shame Others (Objectively) and Suffer Shame from Others (Subjectively)

We will address the fourth and fifth problems together. They concern the same phenomenon within human relationships. However, they use two different perspectives––those who afflict and those who are afflicted. After all, the human problem is both passive and active. That is, people are sinners who bring harm to others. In addition, people suffer as a result of sin. God cares to solve both aspects of the human shame problem.

The most heinous sin in Scripture is the murder of Jesus. He describes in advance the suffering that awaited him saying, "he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him" (Luke 18:32–33).[8] Naturally, those who follow Christ share in his suffering because of the sin of their persecutors. Before arriving in Thessalonica, Paul

---

[8] Cf. Matt 22:6; 27:26–31; Mark 12:4; Luke 20:11; 23:11; Heb 12:2.

remarks, "we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi" (1 Thess 2:2). The writer of Hebrews depicts the experience of many early believers as "sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated" (Heb 10:33).

### 3.1.5.  *God Will Put People to Shame (Objectively)*

Ultimately, God will put to shame those who are unwilling to honor him. Daniel 12:2 vividly describes their fate: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and *some to shame and everlasting contempt*" (cf. Jer 20:11). The psalms consistently praise God for the shame that will come upon God's enemies.

Accordingly, the psalmist prays,

> Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O Lord. Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace, that they may know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth (Ps 83:16–18).

Finally, the writer of Psalm 109:28–29 adds, "Let them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad! May my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak!"

## 3.2. Solving the Problem of Shame

For each aspect of humanity's shame problem, the Bible offers a solution.[9] Objectively, God takes away our shame. By granting us honor, he eliminates the root of subjective shame. Next, I will succinctly state 6 aspects of salvation, understood from the perspective of honor and shame. I then will explain each facet by drawing from specific biblical texts.

| PROBLEM | SHAME |
|---|---|
| 1. God glorifies himself. | Objective |
| 2. God gives us a heart to honor him. | Objective |
| 3. God in Christ removes shame and restores honor. | Objective |
| 4. We get a new identity and so belong to the Church. | Objective |
| 5. Because of a new identity, we no longer feel ashamed. | Subjective |
| 6. We are able to honor God and others. | Objective |

### 3.2.1. God Glorifies Himself (Objectively)

What makes sin so deplorable is the fact that it is the dishonoring of God. Therefore, this is the fundamental problem that must be rectified in salvation. Throughout the Bible, God works to defend and restore his honor.[10]

---

[9] One recent proposal that explore salvation from an honor-shame perspective includes Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2013).

[10] Others make similar arguments, like Glatt-Gilad, "Yahweh's Honor at Stake," 63–74; Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World.* James Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); James Hamilton Jr., "The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment:

The Old Testament saints grasped this point well. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God reemphasizes the reason he will bring about salvation for his people. In a significant passage, which echoes the new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31–34), God begins by clarifying his purpose:

> Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. (Ezek 36:22–23; cf. 36:32; 20:44)

Furthermore, God says something similar concerning Israel's exodus from Egypt to Canaan. Despite Israel's sin, God declares, "I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations" (Ezek 20:14; cf. 20:9, 22).

Because God seeks to exalt his own glory, he faithfully saves his people, according to his promises. The petition in Jeremiah 14:21 is succinct: "Do not spurn us, for your name's sake; do not dishonor your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us" (cf. 14:7). The NT further confirms the point. Paul summarizes the reason why Christ came into the world, "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (Rom 15:8–9a).

### 3.2.2. God Gives Us a Heart to Honor Him (Objectively)

For what reason do God's people cast shame aside? The prophet Isaiah highlights the change in their hearts:

> Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, *they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel*." (Isa 29:22; cf. 8:13)

Peter thus exhorts, "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy" (1 Pet 3:15).[11]

In John 5:44, Jesus distinguishes true and false faith via glory, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" The one who has faith in Christ has a new perspective of honor and shame. Peter and John share this perspective in Acts 5:41, "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."

---

The Centre of Biblical Theology?," *TynBul* 57 (2006): 57–84. Finally, nearly anything by John Piper highlights the point.

[11] In Greek, "*sanctify* the Lord Christ in your hearts" (κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἁγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν). To sanctify the Lord is to honor him as uniquely worthy of glory. Cf. Lev 10:3; other passages that similarly link holiness and honor, see Exod 29:43; Deut 26:19; Isa 4:2; 58:13; Ezek 28:22; John 17:7–18, 22–24; 1 Thess 4:4; 2 Tim 2:21; Heb 2:9–11.

When Christ inaugurates the New Covenant, God's people are given new hearts (cf. Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26; Heb 8:8; 10:16). From another angle, one might speak of God's granting people faith.[12] As a result, Paul says the believer seeks a different sort of glory, "His praise is not from man but from God" (Rom 2:29).[13] Because of Christ, they "boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:29, 31).

### 3.2.3. God in Christ Removes Shame and Restores Honor (Objectively)

Christ takes away objective shame and, in exchange, gives us honor. In terms of salvation, what do we mean by "objective" honor and shame? God's people are given glory and so gain a new identity. They no more suffer the shame of sin and death.

Those who follow Christ share in his glory. Jesus's prayer in John 17:22 is unambiguous, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one." Hebrews 2:9–11 provides an excellent account of salvation via honor and shame:

> But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, *crowned with glory and honor* because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in *bringing many sons to glory*, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who *sanctifies* and those who are *sanctified* all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.

In the big picture of salvation, we ultimately seek glory (Rom 2:7, 10); yet, it is the sort that derives being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29–30). Thus, we can understand Jesus's direct and succinct appeal to honor: "If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).

### 3.2.4. We Get a New Identity and So Belong to the Church (Objectively)

As we have seen, honor and shame are inherently communal concepts. One's social identity is influenced by a number of factors, including a group's many ways of assessing and ascribing honor and shame.

God's people also enjoy a unique type of honor not shared with outsiders. Those who follow Christ are reckoned to be God's children. Before God, Christians have a new identity. They now belong to a new community called the "church." Naturally, having this new collective identity has implications with respect to honor and shame.

Being a member of Christ's church entails a shift in worldview, loyalty, authority, and priorities. In many ways, what is honored within the church will be regarded as shameful to the world. Likewise, the world honors much of what God's people consider shameful. As a result, what happens when God changes our identity? Christ's followers are less concerned with the court of popular opinion; instead, they seek to do what is honorable in the eyes of God's people. Within in this holy community, they ought not to be ashamed to "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17).

How do biblical writers depict Christian identity? They use a variety of images to indicate the church's privileges status. For example, Peter compounds honorific epithets:

---

[12] Cf. Rom 12:3; Eph 1:15; Phil 1:29; some appeal to Eph 2:8.

[13] Observe the echoes to the new covenant in Rom 2:27, 29 and, I suggest, in vv. 14–15.

> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ…. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:4–5, 9–10)

As others also note, Peter's prolific use of OT language aims to convey the honor that God bestows on the church.[14]

By contrast, Christ's followers lose worldly honor. Though citizens of God's kingdom, they are regarded as "sojourners and exiles" in the world (1 Pet 2:14–15). Many will be shamefully treated, even hated for Jesus's sake.[15]

### 3.2.5. Having a New Identity, We No Longer Feel Ashamed (Subjectively)

The gospel does not merely change one's legal status; it transforms our social identity as well. Naturally, this has implications with respect to one's personal sense of shame. A person may endure varying types of "objective" shame yet not personally feel "subjective" shame. After all, why should Christ's people feel ashamed before those who dishonor the King of Glory? Peter's comments nicely illustrate the point:

> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. (1 Pet 4:12–16)

When believers understand their identity in Christ, they will not be ashamed of the gospel because they know it is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16).

Why can Paul persevere in ministry? He did not suffer from the subjective shame that comes from public ridicule and hardship; instead, he says, "it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil 1:20).

### 3.2.6. We Are Able to Honor God and Others (Objectively)

In addition to the theological and psychological changes mentioned above, we can highlight a few practical ways God in Christ fills a person's life with objective honor. The Holy Spirit does more

---

[14] John H. Elliott, "Disgraced yet Graced: The Gospel According to 1 Peter in the Key of Honor and Shame," *BTB* 24 (1994): 166–78; Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); David deSilva, "Turning Shame into Honor: The Pastoral Strategy of 1 Peter," in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society*, ed. Robert Jewett (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

[15] Matt 10:25; John 15:18–20; 17:14; Heb 10:33; 1 John 3:13.

than provide comfort for the soul. He enables us to honor God and others publicly, not privately or psychologically.

Shame has many destructive consequences. Renowned psychologist Elaine Aron rightly states, "Much of what we do everyday is to compare ourselves with others and to strive for respect, influence, and power. That is, we rank ourselves among others."[16] As a result, she says, this sort of ranking results in unhealthy relationships and defense mechanisms, like minimizing, blaming, overachieving, inflating, and projecting.[17] What happens when God works to remove chronic shame and its vices? Put simply, people find more freedom to love others better.

A few examples from the Bible will illustrate the corrupting influence of shame (e.g., Cain killing Abel; those at Babel). Consider Simeon and Levi's actions in Genesis 34. They "killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister" (vv. 26–27). What's more, the brothers' actions pose a new threat to the family (v. 30).

How does Paul equip the church to be a light within a dark, social fragmented world? When he emphasizes and exhorts churches concerning church unity, he repeatedly returns to the theme of honor.

Positively, he seeks church unity by highlighting honor in relation to the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, he confronts competition and jealously by undermining the idea that honor within the church is essentially individualistic. He argues that individuals are ascribed honor *as members of the group*.

> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12:22–27)

In other words, honor is ascribed to one part in as much as it belongs to and contributes to the whole. Distinction serves the purpose of unity.

Negatively, James 2:5–8 warns believers to avoid partiality due to social status. What does it look like when the church honors everyone in a way that glorifies God? Many ideas could be suggested. We will highlight one that is mentioned by multiple biblical writers. Like Jesus, his followers should be known for honoring those whom society routinely dishonors (cf. Luke 14:12–14). The distinction in honor-class often divides along economic lines. Thus, James warns,

> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. (Jas 2:5–8)

---

[16] Elaine Aron, *The Undervalued Self* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2010), 9.

[17] Ibid., 40–70.

The inequality and partiality of the world might seep into the church through the subtlest of means. Even in the midst of doing ministry or in worship, churches sometimes reinforce a social hierarchy via their methods, traditions, choice of attire as well as how leaders schedule and run meetings.

## *4. Summary*

This article addresses a frequently overlooked problem that impedes the church's theology and practice. Because shame is a universally experienced phenomenon, people across multiple academic disciplines have explored this topic. However, scholarly silos have long encumbered communication and thus our understanding of shame. While many people assume they understand the meaning of "shame," their assumptions diverge in significant ways.

We began by considering the nature of shame. Contrary to common opinion, shame has subjective and objective dimensions. Subjectively, shame is psychological or individual. Shame is objective in two different ways. First, shame is social or cultural. A particular community judges a person's value according to the norms of a social group. Second, sacred shame refers to a person's shame before God, who is the measure of honor throughout the entire world.

The Bible describes all three types of shame. They are both distinct and interconnected. Shame is both the fruit and the root of sin. Because shame is a basic human problem, we are not surprised that biblical writers also use honor-shame language to describe salvation. Accordingly, the second half of the essay identifies six ways the Bible uses honor and shame to depict humanity's problem and its solution.

The Bible provides an integrated framework for understanding shame (and honor). One hopes the above observations contribute to greater discussion and collaboration among theologians and practitioners across social spheres. This initial proposal should spur many people to rethink their assumptions about the meaning and significance of shame and honor. Our theological understanding is anemic without grasping the psychological and social import of honor-shame. Moreover, our reflections suggest potential ways the Bible can shape various ministries, such as counseling and mission. In short, honor and shame provide a framework for a theology and practice that is both biblically faithful and culturally meaningful.

# Apocalypse Now:
# The Neo-Bultmannian Universalism of David Congdon's *The God Who Saves*

— **Michael McClymond** —

*Michael McClymond is professor of modern Christianity at Saint Louis University and is author of* The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism.

\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** In *The God Who Saves* (2016), David Congdon seeks an elusive synthesis of Karl Barth's dogmatics and Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutics: he integrates Bultmann's insistence on the concrete historicity of individual human experience with Barth's stress on the universal salvific significance of Christ. Despite his "demetaphysicizing" rejection of a substantive God and a Chalcedonian Christ, Congdon propounds universal salvation based on a universal "cocrucifixion" with Christ that may occur in nonreligious experience (e.g., in viewing artwork, watching a baby's birth, etc.). His intricate argument shows little theological coherence and a lack of grounding in scriptural exegesis or empirical observation.

\*\*\*\*\*\*

Universalism has been a hot topic among Christian writers and readers since the start of the new millennium.[1] The most famous of the recent books may be Rob Bell's *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (2011).[2] Bell's book became a *New York Times* bestseller and provoked a *Time* magazine cover story during Holy Week that was emblazoned with the question: "What If There's No Hell?"[3] Yet Bell's book was not alone. Over the last twenty years a large number of popular books have addressed the question of universal salvation. Tak-

---

[1] This article is adapted from Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 841–57, 938–40. Used by permission.

[2] Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

[3] The *Time* magazine cover (April 25, 2011) read, "What If There's No Hell?—A Popular Pastor's Best-Selling Book Has Stirred Fierce Debate about Sin, Salvation and Judgment," while Jon Meacham's article (pp. 38–43) bore the title and heading "Is Hell Dead? Rogue pastor Rob Bell's argument about salvation and judgment has Evangelicals in a fury—and a young generation rethinking Jesus." For an overview of the debates in the wake of Bell's book, see John Sanders, "Raising Hell about Razing Hell," *PRSt* 40 (2013) 267–81.

ing a favorable—or mostly favorable view—of universalism have been Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (1999), Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (2006; 2nd ed., 2012), Carlton Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion* (2006), Doug Frank, *A Gentler God* (2010), Sharon Baker, *Razing Hell* (2010), Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin, *Compassionate Eschatology* (2011), and a couple dozen more works.[4]

This flood of recent titles suggests a surge of interest among scholars and laypersons alike. The pace at which new titles are appearing seems to be increasing.[5] In response to the literature just cited, a number of authors have suggested that the current support for universalism, in Christian terms, is biblically and theologically mistaken. Appearing about fifteen years ago was Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson's edited volume *Hell under Fire* (2004). Works responding to Rob Bell and questioning his seeming support for universalism include Mark Galli, *God Wins* (2011), Brian Jones, *Hell Is Real (But I Hate to Admit It)* (2011), Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell* (2011), Michael Wittmer, *Christ Alone* (2011), and Larry Dixon, *"Farewell, Rob Bell"* (2011). Laurence Malcolm Blanchard's *Will All Be Saved? An Assessment of Universalism in Western Theology* (2015) is one of the few theological surveys that takes a critical stance toward universalism.

There are many schools of fish swimming in the universalist pond. A shared belief in universal salvation does not imply any wider agreement on doctrine. In fact, the universalists themselves are in sharp disagreement on God, the Trinity, Christ, human nature, the nature of salvation, and eschatology. The self-described "evangelical universalist," Robin Parry—who published the book, *The Evangelical Universalist* under the pseudonym "Gregory MacDonald"—affirms his own Christian orthodoxy, highlights his points of agreement with evangelical Protestantism, and seeks to show that the entire Bible can be interpreted in a universalist way.[6] Yet Parry is an outlier, and most contemporary universalists engage with the Bible in a more limited way than he does.

One of the most recent—and most unusual—works of Christian universalist theology is David Congdon's *The God Who Saves* (2016), which develops the universalist implications of arguments in Congdon's *The Mission of Demythologizing* (2015)—a major monograph on Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976).[7] During the early 1920s, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann were generally regarded as theological comrades-in-arms, embracing a common "dialectical" approach to theology, and sharing a common aversion to the German liberalism epitomized in the writings of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930). Yet during the 1920s and 1930s a chasm opened between them, as Barth increasingly aligned himself with the theological orthodoxy of the early church and later Reformed scholasticism, and Bultmann developed a way of thinking—inspired in part by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)— which sought to reinterpret the Christian message as a call to authentic human existence that did not depend for its validity on the historical facticity or actuality of Jesus of Nazareth.

---

[4] For a listing of Christian universalist titles since 1999, and discussion of their themes and arguments, see McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, 937–97.

[5] Also noteworthy is an edited volume that explores the historical lineage of universalist thinking from the early church period to the present time, Gregory MacDonald [pseud. for Robin Parry], ed. *"All Shall Be Well": Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

[6] Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

[7] David W. Congdon, *The God Who Saves: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016); and Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Dialectical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

Describing the intellectual distance between them, and their inability to communicate, Barth in a 1952 letter compared Bultmann and himself to an elephant and whale (without specifying who was which animal): "It is clear to you how things are between us—you and me? It seems to me that we are like a whale … and an elephant, who have met in boundless astonishment on some oceanic shore…. They lack a common key to what each would obviously so much like to say to the other according to its own element and in its language."[8] In *The God Who Saves*, Congdon seeks to bridge this gap, and to achieve an elusive synthesis of these two, by integrating Bultmann's adamant insistence on the concreteness and historicity of individual human experience with Barth's equally adamant stress on the universal salvific significance of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whether or not Congdon has taught the elephant to swim or the whale to walk is an open question, though the effort is instructive.

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth distinguishes his own mature theology from that of Bultmann by contrasting his objective approach to salvation—centering on the event of Christ's life—with what Barth saw as Bultmann's subjective standpoint:

> There have been many attempts to make the history of Jesus Christ coincide with that of the believer, and *vice versa*…. But we can approve and make common cause with it neither in its earlier forms nor in that authoritatively represented today by R.[udolf] Bultmann…. Christian faith takes note of [the history of Jesus Christ], and clings to it and responds to it, without itself being the thing which accomplishes it, without any identity between the redemptive act of God and faith as the free act of man…. What takes place in the recognition of the *pro me* of Christian faith is not the redemptive act of God itself, not the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not the presentation and repetition of His obedience and sacrifice and victory…. It [is] impossible to make what took place *eph' hapax* [Greek, once for all] in Jesus Christ coincident with what takes place in faith.[9]

Congdon's *The God Who Saves* is based on a premise antithetical to that of Barth in this passage. Rejecting the distinction between objective and subjective aspects of salvation, Congdon wants to create—in Barth's terms—an "identity between the redemptive act of God and faith as the free act of man," to make what happened in Christ "coincide" with what happens in faith, and to interpret faith as a "repetition" of Christ's sacrifice.

Congdon states that his "starting point had to be the saving event itself rather than God, and this saving event had to be simultaneously objective and subjective, or rather it had to dispense with the distinction between objective and subjective altogether."[10] For Congdon, "the being of God as an isolated metaphysical entity in itself … does not exist." What exists as a topic for theology is "the concrete being of God *for us*…which is deity as such."[11] Throughout *The God Who Saves*, a blurring of distinctions

---

[8] Karl Barth, to Rudolf Bultmann, December 24 1952, in Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, *Briefwechsel, 1911–1966,* 2nd ed., Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe 5, ed. Bernd Jaspert (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1994), 192; cited in Congdon, *Mission of Demythologizing*, 3 (trans. Congdon).

[9] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 14 vols., edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1942–68), IV/1, 767. Abbreviated hereafter as "CD" with part-volume and page number.

[10] Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, xv. He writes that "the problem is Barth's sharp distinction between the objective and the subjective, which…perpetuates the metaphysical notion that reconciliation applies to us even though it does not concern us existentially" (ibid., xv, n4).

[11] Ibid., 24, emphasis original.

between objective reality and subjective experience generally works in favor of the latter. "Talk of God is always also talk of the human subject and her historical situation," writes Congdon.[12] He rejects any notion of an "essence" or "nature" (Greek *phusis*), whether the term is applied to God or to humanity. "With the exclusion of all worldviews goes the exclusion of all talk of permanent natures or essences in theology. 'So-called "deity" can no more be interpreted as a *phusis* than humanity.'"[13] He adds: "Theology is therefore necessarily and thoroughly actualistic … because the truth of the Christ-myth, which is the norm for both form and content, is itself an active occurrence and relation."[14]

In describing his own intellectual development, Congdon speaks of his conservative Protestant background, and "my complicated, often antagonistic, relationship with my evangelical heritage." In adopting universalism, he acknowledges the influence of Robin Parry, though he says that "I never shared MacDonald's particular view" of universalism. On Barth's influence, he comments that "Barth taught me to see Christ's save work as the *actuality* of salvation and not merely its *possibility*."[15] It was "initially quite a shock" for Congdon to encounter Bultmann's 1959 essay—"Adam and Christ"—which repudiated Barth's claim in *Christ and Adam* of a universal participation of all human beings in the humanity of Christ. Congdon explains: "The problem with universalism—as well as any notion of pretemporal election—is that it makes a judgment about the individual without regard for her particular historicity and is only, at best, indirectly related to personal existence. Reading Bultmann thus validated an instinct I had inherited from my evangelical upbringing."[16] He adds that "I would gradually internalize Bultmann's insights into the historical nature of both God and appropriate talk of God…. The result was a deep internal tension—a tension between a Bultmannian methodological starting point and a Barthian soteriological conclusion."[17] Congdon is thus self-aware concerning the tensions within his own theology.[18]

---

[12] Ibid., 48.

[13] Congdon, *Mission of Demythologizing*, 833, citing Rudolf Bultmann, "Das christologische Bekenntnis des Ökumenischen Rates," in *Glauben under Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933–1965), 2:258–59.

[14] Congdon, *Mission of Demythologizing*, 833.

[15] Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, ix, emphasis original. While Congdon is large uncritical of Bultmann, he is more critical than appreciative of Barth. He writes that "Barth tends to make election a one-time decision in pretemporal eternity, which abstracts election both rom the lived historicity of Jesus Christ and the lived historicities of human persons here and now" (ibid., xiv). Just as Congdon reinterprets objective reality in terms of human subjectivity, and so too his mediation between Barth and Bultmann reinterprets Barthian universalism in the direction of Bultmanninian existentialism, rather than vice versa.

[16] Ibid., x.

[17] Ibid., xi. "Christianity is rooted in a concrete historical event….This is the beating heart of Christianity's rejection of docetism" (ibid., 35). This statement exists in tension with the Congdon's statement that "reconciliation … is always a contingent event within each person's concrete history" (ibid., xvi; Congdon quoting himself from *Mission of Demythologizing*, 833–34).

[18] Congdon's theology has varied affinities. Its theological sources lie for the most part in German-language authors who wrote between 1917 and 1968, apart from the references to Eberhard Jüngel (b. 1934) and to Bruce McCormack—a Barth scholar currently at Princeton Theological Seminary and one influenced by Jüngel. Congdon comments that his is a "*dialectical* systematic theology … in the consistently actualistic sense represented by a synthetic reading of *inter alia* Barth, Bultmann, Ebeling, Gollwitzer, and Jüngel" (*The God Who Saves*, xviii). We see Congdon's dialectical approach in statements like the following (italicized in the original): "The God who is not an object of science becomes an object of science without ceasing to be the God who is not an object of sci-

Congdon's argument in *The God Who Saves* is many-sided, with various lines of reasoning juxtaposed rather than connected in sequence, and so it may be helpful to begin by unpacking with a few of his summary statements. In the epilogue to his work, he says that he presents a "soteriocentric theology … arguing … that God acts savingly and definitively in the historical event of Christ's crucifixion … [and] that the Spirit of God repeats this event in each new elemental interruption of existence." For Congdon, "each person participates in this event through an unconscious act of cocrucifixion that places us outside ourselves in solidarity with others in the apostolate. Salvation is thus a reality rather than a possibility." He adds: "The result is a version of Christian universalism that has been hermeneutically reconstructed in a dialectical and postmetaphysical way so as to avoid general categories that render salvation abstract and ahistorical." In this way, Congdon "locates salvation in the act of human faith without making it contingent upon a conscious decision of faith—a universalism without universals."[19]

Congdon is highly critical of mainstream theologians who have "wandered off into abstract speculation" on such matters as "the notion of an immanent trinity part from the economy [of salvation]," and "pointless conundrums regarding problems like predestination and free will, apologetic exercises, and the like."[20] He writes that "the single divine act that elects, justifies, reconciles, redeems, and reveals makes possible by bringing human beings into an encounter with God."[21] Congdon's "single divine act" of salvation in effect collapses the history of redemption in the world, and God's work in the lives of individuals (traditionally described in the *ordo salutis*), into a single *divine now* that then becomes identified with the *human now* that occurs within *each individual moment of experience*. "If a person's nature is historical," writes Congdon, "that is, if there is no human essence beyond one's concrete actions and decisions—then *the question of salvation cannot be decided apart from the particular moment in which a person realizes her historical existence.*"[22] Congdon's theology is thus not centered on *history*, but rather on *historicity*. There is for him no history of redemption as such, but rather a God-event impinging on human experience. Congdon seemingly does not make room for any development of salvation in the lives of individuals. Everything is collapsed into a divine now that is also a human now.

---

ence" (ibid., 27). Another dialectical statement is the following: "The nonoccurrence of the parousia [i.e., return of Christ] is the fulfillment of the parousia itself, because the purpose of eschatological expectation is the *unsettling* of the believer" (ibid., 127n85, emphasis original). Just as Bultmann prevails over Barth in Congdon's work, so too the Lutheran element (Bultmann, Jüngel, Gerhard Ebeling, Helmut Gollwitzer) triumphs over Barth's more Calvinistic influence. He writes of how at Princeton Seminary he learned for the first time of "the Lutheran 'theology of the cross,'" which he says "remains normative for my thought now" (ibid., xx). Yet Congdon does draw from Barth as well as from the German Lutherans. He takes from Barth the key idea that "faith is not the condition for one's reconciled status before God" (ibid., 10), which differs from the position of Bultmann, for whom the human response to God's call is determinative of one's relation to God. In another side of his thought, Congdon's emphasis on "preflective, unconscious experience" (ibid., 189) reminds one of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Rahner. Congdon's idea of "unconscious cocrucifixion" with Christ (see below) allows him to affirm the unconscious affinity of non-Christians with Christ, making them something like "anonymous Christians" in a Rahnerian sense.

[19] Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, 260.

[20] Ibid., 50–51.

[21] Ibid., 50.

[22] Ibid., 18, emphasis original. "Reconciliation is not first a transaction of change that occurs 'above us,' so to speak, in relation to some general human substance (a universal *humanum*) in which we all participate; it is always only a contingent event within each person's concrete history" (ibid., xvi).

Congdon explains that his intent in writing *The God Who Saves* was "to develop a nonmetaphysical conception of the atoning work of Christ, which means that the ancient substance ontology is done away with entirely," resulting in a "universalism without metaphysics."[23] The definition of metaphysics that Congdon uses is highly pejorative—"a mode of thinking that constrains rational inquiry from the outset with abstract, ahistorical presuppositions."[24] On this basis, Congdon sees it as useless, and indeed as mistaken or even harmful, to speak of God as "being" or "substance," or to accept the ancient Christology that defined Jesus as "two natures" in "one person." He comments on "the internal coherence of Chalcedonian christology."[25] Condgon's theology seeks to make a clean sweep of metaphysics, while at the same time intending "to develop an account of participation" that "does not require recourse to a substantial 'logic of assumption.'"[26] Congdon rejects the idea of "human nature," and for this reason his presuppositions will not allow for Christ to "assume" human nature or then to act in behalf of other human beings, in the way that was assumed by classical Christian thinkers.[27] In cleansing the gospel from all vestiges of metaphysics, Congdon advocates a theological liberationism that he refers to as a "demetaphysicizing," "detheorizing," "deconstantinizing," "deideologizing," "desacramentalizing," deinstitutionizing," and "delegalizing" of Christianity.[28]

More a radical than a liberal theologian, Congdon shows little interest in hedging or compromising with earlier traditions. His project is a "demythologizing theology…[that] attempts to think with and beyond Bultmann."[29] His "demythologizing" includes as a matter of course a repudiation of biblical authority. The Bible cannot serve as the norm of theology, but must itself be criticized.[30] Congdon is also a thoroughgoing critic of incarnational Christology. He speaks of himself as among "those of us today seeking a postmetaphysical christology beyond 'the myth of the incarnate Son of God.'"[31] He brushes

---

[23] Ibid., xiv, 10.

[24] Ibid., 20. "To accept the problem of historicity is to reject the Platonic ontology…Each person is a historical being whose being is thus only ever in becoming" (ibid., 18).

[25] Ibid., 105. He writes, "I do not accept the assumption that the ecumenical councils determine what counts as authentically 'Christian,'" adding that these councils "are only authoritative insofar as they embody and bear witness to the norm of the gospel that stands always beyond them" (ibid., 3n5).

[26] Ibid., xiv.

[27] Ibid., 207.

[28] Congdon, *Mission of Demythologizing*, 831.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Congdon reads scripture as a historical text and not as authoritative: "We must…face the fact that the scriptures are thoroughly historical documents of their time. There is nothing directly divine or inspired about the suzerainty treaty. It was simply what the Hebrew tribes knew" (*The God Who Saves*, 16n22). Congdon says he is "refusing to participate altogether in the ongoing attempt to 'normalize' the faith by identifying a particular creaturely artifact (e.g., scriptural text or creedal formula) with God's revelation" (ibid., 24). "The gospel…resists all attempts to turn it into propaganda," and this means that "orthoheterodox multivocality is not opposed to the gospel" (ibid., 24). Congdon rejects Paul's "heteropatriarchal culture" (ibid., 230). He uses the German technical term *Sachkritik* (critique of content) to defend Bultmann and to explain his own methodology: "Bultmann *interprets all texts* in light of the norm that stands *beyond* every text" (ibid., 39n39, emphasis original; cf. 40–41n41, 232).

[31] Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, 124; citing Ernst Fuchs, "Jesus Christus in Person: Zum Problem der Geschichtlichkeit der Offenbarung," in *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), 39. Congdon adds: "If we dispense with the mythology of a Son in pretemporal eternity who then takes on human flesh in the incarnation, we can interpret Jesus' statements about coming from the Creator as also eschatological in character:

aside as irrelevant the classical Christological debates: "Trying to puzzle out how deity and humanity can coincide in a single person is a false metaphysical dilemma…. Deity simply *is* his humanity in its eschatologically interruptive mode of existence."[32] As Congdon states in his study of Bultmann, the task of demythologizing not only requires the theologian to rethink certain extraneous or peripheral aspects of the Christian message, but also the very concept of God.[33] In the perspective known as "soteriocentrism," Congdon explains that "the starting point had to be the saving event rather than God."[34]

One of the unusual elements in Congdon's argumentation lies in his doctrine of "unnature." So strong is he in rejecting substantialist metaphysics and ideas of "being," "substance," and "nature," that Congdon embraces an antithetical notion of "unnature." God did not create a natural world or natural order, but creation itself is "the apocalyptic event of *unnature*."[35] He develops what he calls "a soteriocentric theology of the creature as eccentric, unconscious, and unnatural," declares that "the apocalyptic event of cocrucfixion puts an end to nature," and that "a faith constituted by the apocalypse is *acosmic*."[36] Such statements often reappear. After a positive reference to Judith Butler's gender theory, Congdon states that "the apocalypse queers the creature," and near the conclusion of *The God Who Saves* states that "the infinite God is the queer God who unsettles all norms and traditions."[37] Congdon's emphatic affirmation of "unnature" gives a gnostic flavor to his theology. It is as though the universal cocrucifixion with Christ were a hidden reality not known or knowable through the natural world. But somehow Congdon himself knows it, and is able to write about it. In a world of "unnature," without "nature," "being," or "substance," where all that exists is a flux of experience, one wonders what basis there might be for an affirmation of universal cocrucifixion with Christ.

In his effort "to think with and beyond Bultmann," Congdon's theology is reminiscent of that of Fritz Buri (1907–1995)—who agreed with Bultmann's initiative, but felt that Bultmann himself had not gone far enough. In place of "demythologizing" the gospel (German *Entmythologisierung*), Buri called also for "de-kerygmatizing" (German *Entkerygmatisierung*), implying that the core or substance of the Christian proclamation (Greek *kerygma*) needed itself to be reinterpreted, and not merely the terms, concepts, or symbols in which the proclamation is made.[38] In the same vein as Buri's work is Charley

---

Jesus comes *from* the Creator in the sense that his existence is divinely authorized and so eschatologically paves the way *to* the Creator" (*The God Who Saves*, 252). This statement might mean that Jesus leads us to God, but Jesus is not God. Consider also the statement: "The God who saves has no given likeness….This God is utterly hidden from sight, present to us only in absence" (ibid., 235). Such an unqualified statement of God's absence seems to exclude a doctrine of incarnation. Congdon speaks of Jesus as prophetic rather than messianic: "While the Gospels … focus on the person of Jesus, this transition suggests that the Jesus of history was himself focused on the coming reign of God. He was primarily a prophetic rather than messianic figure" (ibid., 116n41).

[32] Ibid., 129.

[33] Congdon, *Mission of Demythologizing*, 835.

[34] Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, xv. On "soteriocentrism" generally, see ibid., 21–58. Congdon goes so far as to say that our human experiences are "constitutive" for Christ's identity: "Our concrete experience of abandonment is constitutive of Christ's being as the Abandoned One" (ibid., 157–58).

[35] Ibid., 201.

[36] Ibid., 207, 227, 228; cf. 233. "God is a denaturalizing event and the world is the unnatural place of this event" (ibid., 237). "The apocalypse is the inbreaking of unnature" (ibid., 248 n. 17).

[37] Ibid., 229–30, 258.

[38] Fritz Buri's works include the following: "Entmythologisierung oder Entkerygmatisierung der Theologie," in *Kerygma und Mythos*, ed. H.-W. Bartsch (Hamburg: Herbert Reich, 1952), 2:85–101; *Theologie der Existenz* (Bern:

Hardwick's *Events of Grace* (1996), which argues that "God"-language may be wholly reinterpreted in terms of human experiences of transcendence or transformation.[39] Congdon might resist such a reductive account of his own argument, and yet his rejection of a metaphysically substantive "God" raises the question of whether his "God"-language simply denotes elements or aspects of human awareness.[40] The radical theology of *The God Who Saves* might be read as a form of religious naturalism.

The reader may be forgiven at this point for wondering: What does all this have to do with universal salvation? Congdon's answer in short is that all human beings attain salvation because all human beings without exception participate—by an "unconscious cocrucifixion"—in Christ's crucifixion which is itself an experience of abandonment by God.[41] Congdon's renews the paradox of the Lutheran theology of the cross, in which Father's embrace of the suffering Christ is tantamount to abandonment, and the Father's abandonment a form of embrace. "This death [of Jesus] … is saving *because it is a death in God abandonment*."[42] In context, the "saving" death Congdon refers to is that of Christ, but in his exposition the distinction between Jesus's death and our own "death"—i.e., a comparable experience of abandonment by God—often becomes blurry.

This line of argument evokes the question of whether human beings are saved by Jesus's death, or by their own death-like experiences. Congdon anticipates this objection, and insists that "cocrucifixion is not coredemption. Cocrucifixion occurs where and when our existence corresponds to the cruciform existence of Jesus."[43] One of the ironies in Congdon's argument is that he rejects "magical-mythological belief" in "the efficacy of animal sacrifice" as well as "evangelical crucicentrism," even as he insists on the centrality of Jesus's death as a model of kenotic self-giving.[44] While the argument of *The God Who Saves* is cross-centered, it affirms salvation by *our imitation* rather than salvation by *Christ's representation*.

Much like Jürgen Moltmann, Congdon views Jesus's death as a signification of something eternal in God. Jesus's resurrection therefore does not reverse or counteract suffering, but rather extends and intensifies the alienation of the cross: "The resurrection takes death up into the very life of God. Rather than giving assurance of some escape from or end to the offense of the cross, the resurrection instead intensifies the offence by eternalizing it … [and] we will always encounter the event of God's own self-

---

Paul Haupt, 1954); *Dogmatik als Selbstverständnis des christlichen Glaubens*, 3 vols. (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1956–78).

[39] See Michael J. McClymond, Review of *Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology*, by Charley D. Hardwick, *TS* 58 (1997) 14–16.

[40] Congdon's professed affinity for atheists might suggest that he sees some affinity to his own position. He comments that "genuine Christian theologians may find that outspoken atheists are actually their strongest and closest allies in the pursuit of truth" (*The God Who Saves*, 35n26).

[41] The only potential "canon within the canon," for Congdon, that would apply "to all Christian soteriology is Galatians 2:19–20" (ibid., 81).

[42] Ibid., 85.

[43] Ibid., 88.

[44] Ibid., 52. He writes: "Crucicentrism cannot mean that the crucifixion in itself 'does' something—whether to God or to ourselves. It is not some divine instrument for redeeming the world from sin, any more than slaughtering a goat is really capable of cleansing people from impurity" (ibid., 53). He rejects the "zero-sum logic that requires the death of one creature in order to gain life for another" and the idea that "blood-shedding has the capacity to propitiate a deity" (ibid., 64). He speaks of the need to get beyond "a sacrificial mode of thinking" (ibid., 123–24).

distancing in death, which distances us from ourselves and so crucifies us with Christ."[45] Here Congdon's theology approaches the gnostic conception of an inherently suffering God, with its "eternalizing" of "God's own self-distancing in death."[46]

But how is it that everyone is "cocrucified" and shares in Jesus's death in God-abandonment? Congdon's argument "entails locating the saving event of divine action in a prereflective present tense moment—namely, in the *unconscious*."[47] It should be noted that Congdon's idea of the "unconscious" remains rather ambiguous and in need of further clarification. He states for example that "Christianity loses sight of the eschatological horizon of the gospel…whenever it fails to remain conscious of Christ's interruptive incursion into our unconscious existence."[48] But how is someone supposed to one remain *conscious* of that which is said to be *unconscious*?[49] When one reads Congdon's various statements in context, it becomes clear that "unconscious cocrucifixion" with Christ is not divorced from human experience as such, and so cannot be unconscious in all respects. Otherwise, Congdon's argument would be much like Barth's doctrine of universal election, and it would be tantamount to the claim that all human lives are determined by something that lies beyond all human experience (i.e., a divine decision or determination). What Congdon seems to mean is that there is a general human experience of "death in God abandonment," and though it is a conscious experience for all who undergo it, it is generally not understood by most persons as related to Christ, to God, or to religion.[50]

At this point, the argument takes a strange twist, in which an *unconscious connection* to Christ is said to be superior to a *conscious connection*. Congdon comments that "a soteriocentric theology of the creature will prioritize unconsciousness over consciousness as the defining locus of personal identity."[51] Using the terminology of Karl Rahner's theology, it is as though the anonymous Christian were the true Christian, and the conscious Christian were barely a Christian at all. Congdon follows up his valorization of unconscious Christianity with an attack on conscious, deliberate, professed faith in Christ: "Conscious Christianity is a turning in upon oneself to care for one's own spiritual health and relationship with God. Conscious faith, in other words, is not genuine faith, but rather the objectifying gaze of religion, which turns divine action…into an idol."[52] Congdon cites the atheistic novelist Philip

---

[45] Ibid., 128.

[46] The linkage between ancient gnosis and contemporary ideas of an inherently suffering God are a focus in Peter Koslowski and Friedrich Hermanni, eds., *Der leidende Gott: eine philosophische und theologische Kritik* (München: Fink, 2001).

[47] Ibid., 90, emphasis original. Congdon appeals to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's notion of "unconscious Christianity" (ibid., 93).

[48] Ibid., 176–77.

[49] In another passage, Congdon writes of "the notion of unconscious Christianity, in which faith is primarily and normatively an unconscious act of existence" (ibid., 261). This phrase "unconscious act of existence" is not adequately explained.

[50] "If faith is an act of participating in the crucified Christ, and if this participation occurs in those who are placed outside themselves, then this…can be understood in a universalistic way" (ibid., 96 n. 120). "The truth of the gospel is that the apocalypse occurs in the unconscious *actus directus* of being placed outside ourselves … [in] kenotic death in God-abandonment" (ibid., 97).

[51] Ibid., 215.

[52] Ibid., 96. Later Congdon softens his position: "Conscious Christianity may be, by nature, an exercise in idolatrous unbelief, but it is at least conscious of its idolatry" (ibid., 99). Another passage, in need of clarification, states: "Conscious faith is not in itself saving; it is a contextual interpretation of unconscious faith" (ibid., 261).

Pullman's inverted interpretation of Matthew 25:1–13, in which the wise virgins who go into the feast are actually the outsiders to God's kingdom, while the foolish virgins, who are outside the feast, are insiders to God's kingdom. Congdon writes: "The 'real gospel'... is *not* that God's saving apocalypse is available to those who consciously believe, to those who enter the wedding banquet, but rather that the inbreaking of Christ's reign is a reality for those excluded from every banquet and feast."[53] Salvation is for those who—like the foolish virgins—consciously reject Christ. Here Congdon is on the verge of abandoning his own universalism, by turning his sheep into goats and his goats into sheep—reversing their roles rather than embracing both groups.

Unsurprisingly, Congdon is no fan of the institutional church, though he develops a notion of the "apostolate," which includes those who in some sense bear witness to the reality of death-abandonment by going outside of themselves to identify with, and to serve, the poor and the marginalized. This "apostolate" is not as a self-conscious or self-bounded community, since identification with Christ for many or most in this group remains unknown. The "apostolate" must include those would never imagine themselves as such. Congdon's community serves an ethical aim, by giving individuals the opportunity to serve: "Communal Christian existence, when and where it truly occurs, provides space for people to be placed outside themselves—that is to say, space for ongoing cocrucifixion with Christ."[54] Another line of argument in Congdon pertains to the Holy Spirit, who is said to be the agent who makes effective everyone's participation in Christ.[55] Congdon believes that it is not possible to distinguish Christ from Spirit, and so he collapses these two together into what he calls the "Christ-Spirit."[56]

In one remarkable passage, Congdon specifies more fully how he understands the range of human experience that might be understood in terms of "cocrucifixion" with Christ:

> The eschatological event of salvation thus belongs to those who are placed outside themselves by the powers and principalities of the world—that is, to the poor, the imprisoned, the social invisible, the culturally foreign, those who are vulnerable and disposable. Salvation belongs to them irrespective of their acknowledgement of Christ or their participation in conscious Christian faith. And while the unconscious participation in the apocalypse belongs to them first, we can be confident, based on the logic of the kerygma, that every person has been or will be an unconscious Christian. For some, unconscious faith might only occur in a moment or literal unconsciousness—at birth or at death, where we are placed wholly outsider ourselves. Others will encounter eschatological existence in a moment of pure being-for-others, such as at the birth of a child, in the ecstasy...of love, or in the ethical encounter with a neighbor in need.

---

[53] Ibid., 102, citing Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010), 142.

[54] Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, 99.

[55] For Congdon, "the Spirit is what makes crucifixion into *co*crucifixion" (ibid., 142), and this Spirit acts universally, "the eschatological Spirit of this liberation empowers acts of faith and witness that cannot be circumscribed by the tradition, culture, state, policy, or doctrine" (ibid., 171). The act of the Spirit is the "*nonidentical repetition of interruption*" (ibid., 249, emphasis original).

[56] Congdon writes: "The reconciling work of the Christ-Spirit is already final for each person" (ibid., 263). "The apocalyptic approach to salvation that I am developing here is one that necessarily unites Christ and Spirit in a single event" (ibid., 66–67n26). On "Christ-Spirit," see also pp. 189, 254. The obvious question here is whether Congdon has rejected Trinitarian theology in favor of some form of modalism.

Still others will be placed outside themselves through the aesthetic experience of the beautiful…. However it occurs, each person will at some moment, participate in the authentic existence promised by and actualized in the eschatological kerygma. Insofar as they are placed outside themselves, faith recognizes that it is *Christ himself* in whom they are placed.[57]

A number of things come into focus in this passage. The poor and the marginalized, for Congdon, are closely—though often unconsciously—related to God. The wealthy and the privileged must align themselves with the poor, in order to share in the poor's spiritually advantaged though material diminished state. Congdon's opens the door to experiences of "unconscious faith" occurring at one's birth as well as at one's death. Aesthetic as well as moral experiences count as participation in Christ. Finally, in truly sweeping terms, Congdon states that "we can be confident, based on the logic of the kerygma, that every person has been or will be an unconscious Christian."

Participation in Christ happens by means what Congdon calls "the nonidentical repetition of Christ's death in God-abandonment."[58] The Holy Spirit functions as the agent of this repetition. On first glance it seems that Congdon's theology seems simply repeating the Pauline emphasis on cocrucifixion with Christ (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20). Yet Congdon rejects the idea of Christ as a corporate personality representing humanity as a whole, which is arguably the position implied in the Pauline texts, in the early church, as well as in Barth. So what significance then does Christ's death have for humanity? Congdon uses the term "cocrucifixion" more literally than do other theological authors. It does not merely mean that individual human beings by believing in Christ share in the benefits of his death. It means instead that I have to be crucified too—i.e., to undergo some experience of my own that is comparable to the experience of cross. I must undergo a kenosis of my own, replicating in my own life what happened in Christ's life. The underlying argument is not a *logic of participation* (despite Congdon's use of that term) but rather a *logic of repetition* (as suggested in the references to Giorgio Agamben and Gilles Deleuze). Congdon's Christ is in no way a representative of humanity but is an exemplar for humanity, and you and I must both suffer as he suffered, in a fashion that Oswald Bayer has aptly termed a "natural theology of the cross."[59]

There is another line of reasoning in *The God Who Saves*, and this is what we might call the apocalyptical-eschatological argument. In short, "the saving event is an existential apocalypse."[60] Congdon attributes to Barth's universal election doctrine a "protological universalism," and then distinguishes this from his own position, which he calls a "universalism effected by God, but effected *eschatologically*."[61] He believes that his own position "giv[es] greater attention the subjective or personal dimension as playing some kind of role."[62] Yet this argument is muddled at this point, because Congdon's eschatological universalism is, as he says, "effected by God," just as any protological universalism. It is

---

[57] Ibid., 97–98.

[58] Ibid., 144, emphasized original. The key discussion of the theme of repetition is on pp. 143–46, referencing Soren Kierkegaard and Giorgio Agamben.

[59] The phrase *theologia crucis naturalis* appears, with ironic undertones, in Oswald Bayer, *Gott als Autor: zu einer poietologischen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 258–59.

[60] Ibid., 138.

[61] Ibid., 11.

[62] Ibid., 12.

not clear what is accomplished if one identifies God's effective action toward humanity as occurring eschatologically rather than protologically. One ends up in either case with the classic theological dilemma of explaining how God's gracious initiative is related to the human response to God, or vice versa.

Congdon's understands God's apocalyptic presence in the world as an "inbreaking," "interruption," or "disruption."[63] These are all positive rather than negative terms. Sometimes the author seems to get carried away with his own rhetoric, as when he declares that "*Christ is the divine anarchist*."[64] God's act both dissolves and reconstitutes the world: "The God who acts is the eschatological God who annuls the world *within* the world and who establishes the new creation *within* the old creation."[65] Following Bultmann and the German liberal tradition generally, Congdon interprets the history of the early church as "the failed parousia," with no return of Christ, thus leaving Christ's followers to "translate the apocalyptic proclamation of Jesus into a sociopolitical message of shalom."[66] So faith itself must become the subjective, inwardized substitute for apocalypse: "The decision of faith is the eschatological event: what Paul still hopes for in the future is now already present to believers. Faith is the ultimate apocalypse."[67] In the New Testament, "both Paul and John … interpret the message of the gospel in a way that no longer depends upon a literal return of the Messiah*.*"[68]

Congdon recognizes his own difference from Barth who wrote of Christ's "future advent" in a way that was "highly minimalist," while he still insisted that it was "essential to the gospel." Yet Barth's "denial of a literal existence beyond death seems to suggest that we should deliteralize the future advent as well."[69] Here Congdon quotes Barth to the effect that the final eschatological moment will be "the eternalizing of our ending life," and "nothing further will follow this happening" and there is "no continuing into an unending future." Barth himself rejects "pagan dreams of all kinds of good times after death."[70] There is an ironic twist in the "Epilogue" to *The God Who Saves*, because here Congdon acknowledges this his version of universalism does not embrace the idea of continuing, conscious experience after death. Everyone is said share the same experience in the present life (i.e., "cocrucifixion" with Christ) but

---

[63] In *The God Who Saves* there are many references to "interrupt" or "interruption"—pp. 83, 129, 145–47, 155, 185, 196, 210, 212, 234, 238. For "disrupt" or "disruption," see pp. 38, 47, 76, 99, 141, 230, 245. Note Congdon's reference (ibid., 230n16) to an essay on "interruptive" ethics: Laurie Zoloth, "Interrupting Your Life: An Ethics for the Coming Storm," *JAAR* 84 (2016) 3–24.

[64] Ibid., 187, emphasis original.

[65] Ibid., 26–27.

[66] Ibid., 67n29. Congdon agrees with Käsemann's view that "this hope [in Jesus's return] proved to be a delusion" (ibid., 68). Citing Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 106. He adds that Käsemann shows, "justification is apocalyptic since it proclaims the truth 'that God is only "for us" when God shatters our illusions'" (*The God Who Saves*, 70). Congdon revels in the paradox of the non-return of Christ that fulfills the promise of Christ's return: "The nonoccurrence of the parousia [i.e., return of Christ] is the fulfillment of the parousia itself, because the purpose of eschatological expectation is the *unsettling* of the believer" (ibid., 127n85).

[67] Ibid., 71.

[68] Ibid., 72.

[69] Ibid., 74n45.

[70] Ibid., citing Barth CD III/2, 624–25, translation revised by Congdon.

not a common experience beyond this present life.[71] So one is forced to ask: Is Congdon teaching a form of universalism, if the outcome for all is the extinction of conscious experience? Or is it a form of annihilationism?

Congdon summarizes his apocalyptic gospel by saying that "to be crucified with Christ is…to share in the cosmos rupturing incursion that took place in the death of Jesus."[72] There is *apocalypse now*—an eschaton immanentized in each believer:

> The imminent advent of Christ … occurs in the existential apprehension of its embarrassing otherness, which is ultimately the otherness of God…. Salvation is not salvation from suffering, from oppression, from the final judgment, from eternal torment, form annihilation, from the devil, from mortality—from any of these traditional threats. It is a salvation *from ourselves…*. The apocalypse of salvation is, in a sense, *our death*—the death of existentially secure world that we build around ourselves.[73]

> We cannot and need not sustain belief in a literal cosmic apocalypse in the chronological future…. The proper starting point is to see the apocalyptic event in Christ as simultaneously and paradoxically *both* a past occurrence in Jesus *and* a present encounter in the believer…. We must say that the apocalypse is *wholly* past, *wholly* present, and *wholly* future…. The apocalypse is necessarily existential and paradoxical…. We come to participate in the apocalypse through our cocrucfixion in faith.[74]

The reference to "faith" at the end of this second quotation is surprising, since Congdon so strongly emphasizes the unconscious rather than conscious aspects of someone's connection with Christ and the of "unconscious faith," though occasionally mentioned, remains unexplained. In the end, Congdon is convinced that "every moment of existence—religious or nonreligious—is potentially the site where God's saving apocalypse invades one's existence."[75]

In one startling passage, Congdon offers his most concrete word-picture of what final salvation might mean for the cosmos as a whole. He uses the image of a sun or star flaming outward, in a supernova event, as his model for the coming consummation:

> Creation reaches its end, its *telos*, in the cross, in the undoing of the cosmos…. The saving event ripples outwards from the cross deep into the invisible, unconscious underside of history, interrupting all creatures, human and nonhuman alike, in its eschatological

---

[71] The "Epilogue" (pp. 260–74) to *The God Who Saves* is devoted to the question of the afterlife. Congdon maintains that the Christian hope "is not a hope for a conscious existence beyond death." For every New Testament statement "about our creaturely future is a statement about Christ" (ibid., 270). Congdon favorably quotes Eberhard Jüngel: "Finite life will be *eternalized* as finite. But not through endless extension—there is no immortality of the soul—but rather through participation in God's own life. Our life is *hidden* in God's life. In this sense the briefest form of resurrection hope is the statement: 'God is my beyond'" (ibid., 273, emphasis original, citing Jüngel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*, trans. Iain and Ute Nicol (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 120). Congdon explains that resurrection means "the *eternalizing* of our lived history" that that "God remembers us for eternity" (*The God Who Saves*, 273).

[72] Ibid., 82.

[73] Ibid., 79–80.

[74] Ibid., 85.

[75] Ibid., 258.

wake until the sun, in the ultimate eccentricity, expands beyond itself and consumes the earth in the conflagration of its cosmic communion with the crucified one, offering itself as a final perishable testament to imperishable grace.[76]

Final salvation is tantamount to final destruction. Is this universal salvation or universal annihilation?

As an exercise in dialectical theology, *The God Who Saves* is an intriguing work, though its proper *Sitz im Leben* might be a German theological seminar in 1956 rather a North American publication in 2016. Congdon's New Testament interpretation seems frozen in time, prior to the newer studies of the historical Jesus, the Jewishness of Jesus and the Gospels, and Second Temple Judaism as the context for understanding early Christianity. Congdon's neglect of contemporary biblical scholarship and his existentializing interpretation of the Bible render his work retrograde rather than avant-garde. This book is a time capsule. It embodies an unfortunate tradition—associated with Bultmann—of interpreting the Bible without due regard to the geography, customs, society, and history of biblical times.[77]

As an exercise in universalist theology, *The God Who Saves* presents an exceptionally weak argument. Congdon announces his commitment to universalism in the second sentence of the prologue—a commitment that drives him to assert a universal experience (i.e., cocrucifixion) that is shared by all persons without exception.[78] Yet he fails to present an argument in his book to justify his key assumption that every human being who has ever lived participates in a common kenotic, ecstatic, or self-transcending experience somehow linking them to the experience of Christ. As if by fiat, Congdon makes a sweeping statement that "we can be confident, based on the logic of the kerygma, that every person has been or will be an unconscious Christian."[79] The critic asks: Why should the Christian gospel be *applicable to everyone*? And does it make any sense to speak of this universal application as *unknowing or unconscious*? There seems to be nothing in scripture or in earlier Christian tradition to support such an idiosyncratic interpretation of the gospel. Beyond this, there is the further question as to why anyone should accept the gospel in the first place—an issue brushed aside with a dismissive remark on apologetics.[80] If Congdon wants to be taken seriously in claiming that the Christian message applies to every human being without exception, then he seemingly must offer some rational or evidential basis for such a claim. Congdon briefly mentions "the uniqueness of Jesus" but does not link this to the church's affirmation of Jesus's sole divinity, and so the significance of the statement remains unclear.[81]

---

[76] Ibid., 239–40.

[77] Bultmann made it his principle not to visit the sites of the Holy Land—in the words of Martin Hengel, "a bad old German tradition with dangerous results." Richard Ostling, "Who Was Jesus?" *Time*, August 15, 1988, 38.

[78] "In 2006 … I came to the realization that universal salvation was the only account of Christianity that I could find credible" (ibid., ix). It is not surprising that this initial statement of Congdon's universalism is not explained in his prologue. Yet it is surprising that, after reading through the book, one still does not know what led Congdon to believe in universal salvation in the first place.

[79] Ibid., 97–98.

[80] Ibid., 50–51.

[81] Ibid., 6. The deeper issue here is a lack of clarity on the question of theological authority. Congdon writes that "heterodoxy is intrinsic to Christian faith. It is an essential dimension of the freedom for which Christ has set us free" (ibid., 58). He proposes "jettisoning the dichotomy between orthodoxy and heterodoxy by speaking instead of an *orthoheterodoxy*" (ibid., 24; cf. 57). For Congdon, "the God revealed in Jesus Christ unsettles our assumptions about what is self-evident and disrupts our self-assured attempts to secure our existence" (ibid., 38). While God is disruptive, the New Testament itself is involved in "protecting and perpetuating a purported

Not least of the problems in *The God Who Saves* is the self-contradiction in its argument, which makes a generalized claim regarding human cocrucifixion with Christ, while equally asserting that "we cannot speak in general and in the abstract about the particular histories of those who are included objectively in Christ."[82] But what is Congdon's argument, if not a "general" and "abstract" claim about what must be the case in the experience of each individual human life? No rationale for universal salvation can effectively be established unless one presses beyond the flux of individual experience and somehow asserts what is true in human experience-in-general. The effort at a demetaphysicized and deontologized "universalism without universals" is ultimately a failure, because the argument for universalism requires Congdon to make generalizations about universal human experience that he himself states that no one can make.

The idea of Christ as a universal human representative seems on its face to be less problematic than the notion that all human beings share any specific experience that is common to all. Congdon may be showing that he is aware of this problem when he speaks of many kinds of experience—identifying with the poor, the experience of one's own death or birth, the enjoyment of beauty, experiencing sex, etc.—as all possible links to Christ in cocrucifixion. Yet the argument at this point becomes exceptionally vague. How is watching a beautiful sunset, seeing a baby born, or having sex tantamount to *being cocrucified with Christ*? On this basis, simply living and breathing as a human being would be enough to connect one with Christ. One may as well reintroduce the rejected notion of the Son of God's "assumption" of "human nature" as a way to explain the universal connection between Jesus Christ and all other human beings. In any case it is clear that the idea *a universal though unconscious experience of cocrucifixion* contains a number of difficulties. Since the words "conscious" and "experience" generally imply one another, the notion of an "unconscious experience" might be self-referentially incoherent, as though one were speaking of "unconscious consciousness." Moreover, as just argued, Congdon's argument has broadened the idea of cocrucifixion with Christ in everyday life to the point where it loses all form and content. When Paul wrote that "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20), he surely had something specific in mind, and was not using the phrase to refer to the everyday experiences that everyone shares.

---

orthodoxy," but Congdon does not see this as "some kind of Christian virtue" (ibid., 55). Citing a number of New Testament passages, he writes that "what we see in these ancient Christian texts is a community deeply concerned about protecting its authority. Here we see a magisterium in the making" (ibid., 55). "There is … something deeply perverse about the way the early Christian community quickly retreated into a fortress mentality" (ibid 57). "The norm is not a fixed set of propositional claims but rather an event irrupting into each new situation, calling for new modes of thinking and speaking about God" (ibid., 57). Congdon says nothing regarding any *continuity* of belief or tradition. His continual stress on discontinuity suggests that for him there is no doctrinal norm properly speaking, though he occasionally speaks of the "gospel"—an undefined norm, derived from scripture, but not identified with scripture. Congdon embraces the idea of a theological plurality of contradictory voices, and writes that Pentecost is "not the overturning of Babel…but rather the *consecration* of Babel" (ibid., 57–58, emphasis original). The outcome of all this would seem to be a theological anarchy that just as surely undermines Congdon's affirmation of universal salvation as it would any affirmation of particularist salvation.

[82] Ibid., xv, n4.

# The Kuyperian Impulse
# of the Benedict Option

## — James D. Clark —

*James Clark is a student at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut.*

*******

**Abstract:** Evangelicals have criticized Rod Dreher's Benedict Option and the idea of strategic withdrawal, with some citing Abraham Kuyper as a model of how Christians should engage the world today. This article argues that the Benedict Option and the Kuyperian tradition harmonize with (rather than contradict) each other in significant ways, including their promotion of cultural engagement in general, their recognition of the need to withdraw from the world in some sense in order to enable the Christian formation that makes robust engagement with the world possible, and their openness to a cultural transformation that is distantly future rather than imminent.

*******

On July 12, 2017, the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) hosted a panel discussion titled, "Responding to the Benedict Option." On this occasion the panelists evaluated the book of the same name written by Rod Dreher, who is a senior editor at *The American Conservative*. In *The Benedict Option* Dreher calls for the "strategic withdrawal" of traditional Christians, who he says need to root themselves more deeply in the historic faith.[1] The impetus for this recommendation is the onslaught of cultural hostility and internal decay—both in doctrine and practice—he believes the Western church faces today.[2] According to Dreher, strategic withdrawal will require Christians to "leap into a truly countercultural way of living Christianity," and in some sense to separate themselves from the larger culture: "If believers don't come out of Babylon and be separate, sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally, their faith will not survive for another generation or two in this culture of death."[3]

Dreher's call for withdrawal was poorly received by many of the panelists. Joseph Capizzi—Professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University of America—accused him of promoting an "ecclesial introversion" unbefitting of Christians, who "know we are called to engage the world"; Cherie Harder—President of the Trinity Forum—advised Christians to "show the love of Christ to our lost neighbors" rather than "heading for the hills whether metaphorically or literally"; and Alison Howard—Director

---

[1] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 2.

[2] Ibid., 9–11.

[3] Ibid., 2 and 18.

of Alliance Relations at Alliance Defending Freedom—asserted that withdrawing is "not an option for believers…. If we retreat, the world will miss us. We need to be there."[4]

The panelists' characterization of the Benedict Option as a retreat from cultural engagement typifies much of the book's critical reception. David Fitch writes in *Christianity Today*, "We cannot … make a choice between living in Christian community or being present in our culture," because we cannot "extract ourselves from the world without losing who we are." Rather, the church must be "both a faithful internal community and a faithful external presence in the world."[5] Also in *Christianity Today*, K. A. Ellis rejects what she takes to be the Benedict Option's solely "inward focus" in favor of communities that are "creatively focused both inward and outward,"[6] and Hannah Anderson cautions, "Retreat could actually exacerbate our individualism by disabling a key piece of our systematic: the call to actively and intentionally work for the good of our neighbor's soul." She exhorts Christians to instead build community "as a form of advance, not retreat."[7] In a *BreakPoint* feature where Christian thinkers were asked about the Benedict Option, Joshua Chatraw—Executive Director of The Center for Apologetics and Cultural Engagement at Liberty University—criticized it for having "an overly inward focus" at odds with "God's mandate given in Genesis 2 [and] Jesus' commission to go to the nations [as well as] the missionary pattern described in Acts." Greg Forster—Director of the Oikonomia Network at Trinity International University—commented, "Transformation is needed, but withdrawal does not transform."[8] At *The Stream*—an ecumenical Christian news site—John Zmirak observes, "The separatist impulse … doesn't solve our problems. It opens itself up to new ones."[9] Michael Brown says that while he appreciates much of what Dreher says, "I feel that now, more than ever, is the time for us to engage—meaning, engaging in personal repentance, engaging in prayer for awakening, engaging in unashamed evangelism, and engaging in confronting the culture."[10]

Given these and other similar comments, the consensus among critics seems to be that the Benedict Option forsakes engagement with the world in favor of withdrawal into a private, pietistic faith. Because such total withdrawal is irreconcilable with orthodox Christianity, these critics conclude that the Benedict Option must be rejected – in effect, they appear to identify the Benedict Option with the model of cultural engagement H. Richard Niebuhr called "Christ against culture." As defined

---

[4] Daniella Royer, "Transcript: 'Responding to the Benedict Option' Panel Discussion," *The Institute on Religion and Democracy*, 24 August 2017, https://juicyecumenism.com/2017/08/24/transcript-responding-benedict-option/.

[5] David Fitch, "The Benedict Option's False Dichotomy," *Christianity Today*, 2 March 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/february-web-only/benedict-options-false-dichotomy.html.

[6] K. A. Ellis, "The Benedict Option's Blind Spots," *Christianity Today*, 2 March 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/february-web-only/benedict-options-blind-spots.html.

[7] Hannah Anderson, "The Benedict Option Isn't an Evangelical Option," *Christianity Today*, 2 March 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/february-web-only/benedict-option-isnt-evangelical-option.html.

[8] John Stonestreet, "Top Christian Thinkers Reflect on 'The Benedict Option': Responding to Rod Dreher's Proposal on Church and Culture," *BreakPoint*, 16 March 2017, http://breakpoint.org/2017/03/symposium-benedict-option/.

[9] John Zmirak, "Three Tough Questions to Ask Yourself Before Signing on to the Benedict Option," *The Stream*, 17 March 2017, https://stream.org/three-tough-questions-to-ask-yourself-before-signing-on-to-the-benedict-option/.

[10] Michael Brown, "Why I Have Mixed Feelings About Rod Dreher's *Benedict Option*," *The Stream*, 17 March 2017, https://stream.org/mixed-feelings-rod-drehers-benedict-option/.

by Niebuhr, this model "uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects culture's claims to loyalty.... Whatever does not belong to the commonwealth of Christ is under the rule of evil."[11] Therefore, "Political life is to be shunned," as are philosophy and the arts.[12] Apparently vindicating critics' assessment of the Benedict Option, Niebuhr identifies the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and the larger monastic tradition as emblematic of the "Christ against culture" model, characterized as this tradition is by "its withdrawal from the institutions and societies of civilization, from family and state, from school and socially established church, from trade and industry." He grants that monasticism did yield some "contributions it eventually made to culture," but downplays them as "incidental byproducts which it did not intend. Its intention was directed to the achievement of a Christian life, apart from civilization, in obedience to the laws of Christ, and in pursuit of a perfection wholly distinct from the aims that men seek in politics and economics, in sciences and arts."[13]

In contrast to this alleged model of hermetic solitude, the approach to culture favored by Benedict Option critics tends to resemble Niebuhr's paradigm of "Christ transforming culture," in which Christians recognize the reality that sin has tainted humanity and all of creation, yet "believe also that ... culture is under God's sovereign rule, and that the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the Lord."[14] For many such critics (especially evangelicals), the epitome of this approach is Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper. Case in point, one of the participants at the IRD panel, Bruce Riley Ashford—Professor of Theology and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary—suggested Kuyper's approach to culture as "an Abrahamic alternative to the Benedict Option." In Kuyper's view, says Ashford, "God designed the world to have different realms of cultural activity and he called those spheres." Because God rules over all these spheres, Christians are called to represent him in each of them, "to bring healing and redirection where there has been corruption and misdirection," be it in politics, the arts, education, or whatever else.[15] Numerous commentators have likewise called for the kind of comprehensive engagement associated with Kuyper's legacy (whether or not he is their inspiration), over and against the supposed quietism of the Benedict Option.[16]

As a response to this pattern of critique, I intend to argue that the Benedict Option does not conflict with the Kuyperian tradition, and moreover has some affinities with it—even if unintentionally—for the Benedict Option does not call for a retreat from conventional politics or cultural engagement more broadly, but affirms both of these things. Consequently, the Benedict Option has been widely misunderstood in two ways: first, "strategic withdrawal" does not mean unmitigated seclusion from the world, but refers to internal spiritual renewal for the purpose of reinvigorating our engagement with the world. This idea is both agreeable to the Kuyperian tradition and a helpful corrective to it. Indeed, at

---

[11] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, reprint ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 45 and 50.

[12] Ibid., 54–55.

[13] Ibid., 56.

[14] Ibid., 191.

[15] Royer, "Transcript: 'Responding to the Benedict Option' Panel Discussion," https://juicyecumenism.com/2017/08/24/transcript-responding-benedict-option/.

[16] See, e.g., J. Daryl Charles, "The Kuyperian Option: Cultural Engagement & Natural Law Ecumenism," *Touchstone*, May/June 2018, http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=31-03-022-f; Jason Lief, "The Francis Option," *The Twelve*, 12 May 2017, https://blog.perspectivesjournal.org/2017/05/12/the-francis-option/; and David Warren, "The Dominic Option," *The Catholic Thing*, 31 March 2017, https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2017/03/31/the-dominic-option/.

least one Kuyperian scholar has called for such habits of spiritual strengthening as a necessary reform to the tradition.

Second, Dreher's comments on the present futility of seeking to reverse the cultural forces of our time should not be understood to mean that such efforts are forever futile. Rather, he believes it will be impossible to thwart adverse cultural trends *for the time being*. As such, the practices of spiritual renewal and engagement that comprise the Benedict Option should be adopted because they are inherently good, and insofar as they are undertaken in the hope of influencing culture, this hope is oriented toward a distant future, when they might finally bear fruit. This position also has precedent in the Kuyperian tradition and lends it balance by emphasizing that we should not expect sweeping cultural transformation in our lifetimes.

My objective in writing this article is to clarify what *The Benedict Option* does and does not say, in the hope that Kuyperians and Benedict Option supporters might recognize their significant common ground. In this aim it is similar to Andrew T. Walker's essay comparing the Benedict Option and Kuyperianism, though I intend to explore the subject in greater depth, having the benefit of writing after Dreher's book was published.[17] Of course, Kuyper is not unique in championing cultural engagement – some, for example, prefer to cite Augustine of Hippo as their inspiration in this regard.[18] Nonetheless, I focus on Kuyper as a point of comparison because many evangelical critics of the Benedict Option align themselves with his public theology and uphold him as an exemplar of public engagement for Christians today.[19] For this reason it is worthwhile to show that the emphases of engagement, spiritual withdrawal, and a hope for future cultural transformation come together in the Benedict Option in a way that is not at odds with the Kuyperian tradition, a fact we can only appreciate by first reviewing the substance of that tradition.

## *1. The Kuyperian Tradition in Brief*

In the Kuyperian tradition, creation is inherently good by virtue of being made by God: "God created the heavens and the earth. He created out of nothing, he shaped what he created, and he called the work of his hands 'good.' At each step along the way, the [Genesis] narrative affirms the goodness of

---

[17] Andrew Walker, "Kuyper v. Benedict? This Is Not an Either/Or," *The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 13 October 2015, https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/kuyper-v-benedict-this-is-not-an-either-or/print.

[18] Stephen Beale, "Benedict Option Is Really the Augustine Option," *Crisis*, 17 May 2017, http://www.crisismagazine.com/2017/benedict-option-really-augustine-option. See also Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Eric Gregory, *Politics & the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[19] Criticism of the Benedict Option from a two-kingdoms perspective has been rare, but as two-kingdoms theology is one of the strongest contenders to Kuyperianism in the realm of Protestant public theology, it would also be interesting to explore whether or to what extent the Benedict Option agrees with that perspective. Such an investigation is beyond the scope of this article, though. For a critique of the Benedict Option from a two-kingdoms perspective, see C. Jay Engel, "The Benedict Option Isn't 'Two Kingdoms' Enough," *Reformed Libertarian Blog*, 21 March 2017, http://blog.reformedlibertarian.com/the-benedict-option-isnt-two-kingdoms-enough/.

God's handiwork."[20] After creating Adam and Eve, God then told them to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28), and Kuyperians refer to this command as the cultural mandate:

> The cultural mandate is a Reformed interpretation of Genesis 1:28–30. The created order requires development, and humans serve as coworkers who carry on the work of the world. While God's creating work is finished, the world is in a state of potentiality, requiring the work of humans (created in the divine image) to develop the earth toward the realization of this latent potential.[21]

Because of the fall, though, sin has infected all of creation, yet creation remains good: "The fall and its consequences do not … make God's creation (or, by implication, human culture) inherently bad. Even though the world is still corrupted by sin, it is still materially good."[22] Despite the power of sin, common grace—understood as God's prevention of the worst excesses of sin, as well as his empowerment of non-Christians to create genuinely good cultural artifacts—makes cultural engagement still possible.[23] In the words of Vincent Bacote, "While the world has been altered and even distorted because of sin, it is not 'lost' in the sense that Christians must escape from rather than engage in the created order and hence the public realm…. Common grace has a constant aspect that not only sustains life but also makes possible a 'good' life."[24]

But while the fundamental goodness of creation remains, it is still tainted by sin. For this reason, God sent Jesus "to redeem the creation, to cleanse it from the depravity that permeates the cosmos. And this redemptive operation is restorative in character. Once again, God is working to fulfill the original purposes of his creating project."[25] In Kuyper's view, to understand that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to redeem creation as well as sinners is to recognize "the supreme Lordship of Jesus Christ over all spheres of social, political, and economic life."[26]

Therefore—based on the goodness of creation, the cultural mandate, the sustaining power of common grace, and Christ's redemption of humanity and creation—Kuyperians hold that we are called to culturally engage in all spheres of life, for "each cultural sphere has its own place in God's plan for the creation, and each is directly under the divine rule."[27] Opportunities to acknowledge and honor God are

---

[20] Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), Kindle edition, ch. 2, "Creation."

[21] Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 17n2. See also Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 6–8, and Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, ch. 2, "Creation": "God gave humans the capacities to create culture and then commanded them to use those capacities."

[22] Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, ch. 2, "Fall." See also Bacote, *Spirit in Public Theology*, 152, and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 69.

[23] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 63 and 68. See also Bacote, *Spirit in Public Theology*, 18 and 127.

[24] Bacote, *Spirit in Public Theology*, 97–98.

[25] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 14. See also Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 38 and 44.

[26] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 4. For more on the cultural implications of Christ's universal lordship, see Vern S. Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ: Serving Our Savior All of the Time, in All of Life, with All of Our Heart* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

[27] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 23.

not confined to "important" spheres such as government and the church, but rather are present in all human enterprises:

> The Kingdom … encompasses the believing community in all of its complex life of participation in a variety of spheres. Wherever followers of Christ are attempting to glorify God in one or another sphere of cultural interaction, they are engaged in Kingdom activity: a Christian art guild gathered for obedience in the sphere of the arts; a Christian farmers' group gathered for obedience in the sphere of agriculture; a Christian college or university gathered for obedience in the world of teaching and research. And so on. It is all the Kingdom.[28]

Indeed, says Mouw, "God cares deeply about culture and its development—*so* deeply that the divine desire that human beings engage in cultural activity was a central motive for God's creating the world."[29] Bacote concurs—failing to publicly engage was not an option in Kuyper's mind, and such engagement is therefore a duty for Christians: "We must recognize that the public theology we find in Kuyper eliminates any excuse for avoiding engagement with the public sphere. If indeed 'every square inch' of creation is under the sovereign God who preserves it by the power of the Spirit, then Christians must winsomely and boldly enter the various areas of public life and undertake their stewardly tasks."[30] Ashford shares this conviction that cultural engagement is not merely salutary, but incumbent on Christians: "Because God (in the beginning) values his good creation and commands humanity to produce culture, and because he promises (in the end) to give us a glorious creation replete with its own culture, we ought to live culturally in a manner consistent with God's designs."[31]

To summarize, the Kuyperian tradition emphasizes comprehensive cultural engagement (which is rooted in the goodness of creation), our divinely mandated role in this cultivation of creation, our continuing capacity to culturally engage despite the power of sin, and God's plan to redeem creation. With this overview in mind, we can now compare the Kuyperian approach to politics and culture with that of the Benedict Option and see whether they are opposed or not.

## 2. *The Benedict Option and Conventional Politics*

Commentators denigrate the Benedict Option for its alleged retreat from engagement in general, but they single out its supposed abandonment of conventional politics in particular. In her criticism of the Benedict Option, K. A. Ellis says we should be "not a-political, but *other-political*."[32] Elizabeth Stoker Bruenig uses identical language, claiming Dreher believes Christians "should become essentially apolitical."[33] John Zmirak suggests Christians might use the Benedict Option "as a reason to 'check out'

---

[28] Ibid., 58.

[29] Ibid., 6, emphasis original.

[30] Bacote, *Spirit in Public Theology*, 63 and 152.

[31] Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, ch. 2, "Redemption and New Creation."

[32] K. A. Ellis, "The Benedict Option's Blind Spots," emphasis original.

[33] Elizabeth Stoker Bruenig, "City of Rod," *Democracy*, 1 March 2017, http://democracyjournal.org/magazine/city-of-rod/.

of fulfilling ordinary civic duties, like voting and advocating for morally crucial causes."[34] Katelyn Beaty reproves Dreher for neglecting those who might benefit from Christian political engagement:

> Vulnerable people need more than charity—they need advocacy. They need not a handout but a hand up toward a life of economic and cultural flourishing. And they need traditional Christians investing in national politics, not just to protect their own rightful freedoms, but also to protect the livelihoods of those who cannot speak up for themselves.... National politics, however imperfect, messy and frustrating, are sometimes the most effective means for loving neighbors on a scalable level.[35]

While such critics do not necessarily identify themselves as Kuyperians, their support for continued political engagement aligns with the Kuyperian tradition's emphasis on cultural engagement in general and conventional politics in particular. Bacote, quoting Reformed philosopher S. U. Zuidema, says this: "Because of common grace, 'no Christian has a legitimate reason for withdrawing from the world of God's creating.... That holds in principle for the whole world of culture, politics included.'"[36] Richard Mouw agrees, writing that in Kuyper's view conventional politics is a perfectly legitimate sphere in which Christians can work and serve.[37] Similarly Ashford says that conventional politics offers Christians opportunities for "promoting the common good and looking for ways to restrain public evil."[38]

This approbation of conventional politics seems antithetical to what Dreher says on the subject:

> Benedict Option politics begin with recognition that Western society is post-Christian and that absent a miracle, there is no hope of reversing this condition in the foreseeable future. This means, in part, that what Orthodox Christians can accomplish through conventional politics has narrowed considerably.... Trying to reclaim our lost influence will be a waste of energy or worse.[39]

He does not think America's post-Christian trajectory could be reversed if only the right people came into power: "No administration in Washington, no matter how ostensibly pro-Christian, is capable of stopping cultural trends toward desacralization and fragmentation that have been building for centuries. To expect any different is to make a false idol of politics."[40] Even if we were not in such an unfavorable cultural moment, Dreher does not believe that political power exercised by Christians in a salutary fashion would have the kind of societal effect wished for: "Will the law as written by a conservative legislature and interpreted by conservative judges overwrite the law of the human heart?

---

[34] John Zmirak, "Three Tough Questions to Ask Yourself Before Signing on to the Benedict Option," https://stream.org/three-tough-questions-to-ask-yourself-before-signing-on-to-the-benedict-option/.

[35] Katelyn Beaty, "Christians have lost the culture wars. Should they withdraw from the mainstream?" *The Washington Post*, 2 March 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/03/02/christians-have-lost-the-culture-wars-should-they-withdraw-from-the-mainstream/?utm_term=.7962041d5f47.

[36] Bacote, *Spirit in Public Theology*, 142. See also Vincent E. Bacote, *The Political Disciple: A Theology of Public Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 30.

[37] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 117–18.

[38] Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, ch. 7, "We should be active in promoting the common good."

[39] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 89.

[40] Ibid., 81.

No, it will not. Politics is no substitute for personal holiness."[41] He thus concludes, "No matter how furious and all-consuming partisan political battles are, Christians have to keep clearly before us the fact that conventional American politics cannot fix what is wrong with our society and culture."[42]

Dreher appears to suggest what many critics charge, that he favors the abandonment of conventional politics. However, although he is dubious about the power of conventional politics to reverse anti-Christian cultural trends, he also says we "cannot afford to vacate the public square entirely."[43] While conventional politics cannot bring about instantaneous cultural transformation, there are still things the church can do in this realm to effect limited, but still real, goods:

> The church must not shrink from its responsibility to pray for political leaders and to speak prophetically to them. Christian concern does not end with fighting abortion and with protecting religious liberty and the traditional family. For example, the new populism on the right may give traditionalist Christians the opportunity to shape a new GOP that on economic issues is about solidarity more with Main Street than Wall Street. Conservative Christians can and should continue working with liberals to combat sex trafficking, poverty, AIDS, and the like.[44]

As we attempt to realize these and other political objectives, Dreher says, the question guiding us should be "how to exercise political power prudently, especially in an unstable political culture. When is it cowardly not to cooperate with secular politicians out of an exaggerated fear of impurity—and when is it corrupting to be complicit?"[45] In framing his approach to conventional politics as a balancing act between the extremes of excessive concern for purity on the one hand and unprincipled compromise on the other, Dreher indicates that while he has low expectations of what Christians can hope to achieve through conventional politics, he still thinks there is a place for such engagement: "The point is not that we should stop voting or being active in conventional politics. The point, rather, is that this is no longer enough."[46]

To illustrate this both/and approach to politics Dreher invokes pro-life activists as an example. When the Supreme Court upheld *Roe v. Wade* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the pro-life movement realized that:

> It was not going to be possible in the short run to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. So it broadened its strategy. The movement retained lobbyists and activists fighting the good fight in Washington and state capitals, but at the local level, creative pro-lifers opened crisis pregnancy centers. These quickly became central to advancing the pro-life cause—and saved countless unborn lives.[47]

In short, Dreher retains conventional politics even as he emphasizes its limitations, a moderate stance in comparison to Christian thinkers who really do dismiss conventional politics.

---

[41] Ibid., 82.

[42] Ibid., 96.

[43] Ibid., 82.

[44] Ibid., 82–83.

[45] Ibid., 83.

[46] Ibid., 98.

[47] Ibid.

To cite a prime example, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon plainly state, "We argue that the political task of Christians is to be the church rather than to transform the world."[48] While they acknowledge that there is some truth in Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, they also criticize it for having codified the ideal of a church that "neither capitulated to culture nor irresponsibly detached itself from the culture," a church that "busied itself with making America a better place in which to live, transforming society into something of which Jesus might approve."[49] Against this beatific vision, Hauerwas and Willimon say the political role of the church is not to improve the world somehow.[50] Rather, the church exerts political influence by faithfully honoring Christ in all that it does, which is its "most credible form of witness (and the most 'effective' thing it can do for the world)."[51] Hauerwas elaborates elsewhere that his understanding of "being the church" as a political act hinges on a definition of the political more expansive than what is assumed by many Christians: "I [refuse] any reduction of politics to statecraft in order to emphasize the political character of the church as a political space in its own right."[52] For Hauerwas, language is "the heart of politics," and we in the church can be political in this broader sense by "attending to our speech. Well-formed sermons may turn out to be the most important contribution Christians can make to a politics that has some ambition to be truthful."[53]

I quote Hauerwas to underscore how Dreher's approach to politics is dissimilar. Granted, like Hauerwas, Dreher believes the church must truly "be the church"[54] in order to thrive, and his understanding of the political also goes beyond "statecraft" (more on this below). But whereas Hauerwas expands the notion of what is political so as to virtually exclude conventional politics,[55] Dreher's broad understanding of the political still includes conventional politics.[56] At worst Dreher is less sanguine than many about the prospect of cultural transformation through traditional politics.

This is not grounds to criticize Dreher from a Kuyperian perspective, though, for Kuyperians themselves acknowledge the limitations of conventional politics. Mouw says of Kuyper, "In his thinking about political life, he was convinced that there are good Christian reasons for trying to accomplish

---

[48] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Expanded 25th Anniversary ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 38.

[49] Ibid., 40.

[50] Ibid., 30.

[51] Ibid., 45–47.

[52] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 182.

[53] Ibid., 186.

[54] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 3 and 101.

[55] Even the acts of conventional politics Hauerwas countenances are not conceded to be "political" in the merely conventional sense: "The confessing church can participate in secular movements against war, against hunger, and against other forms of inhumanity, but it sees this as part of its necessary proclamatory action." Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 47.

[56] Another informative contrast to Dreher's retainment of conventional politics is found in James Davison Hunter, who, like Hauerwas—though for different reasons—suggests that Christians should abstain from conventional politics altogether, at least for a time: "Because the dominant public witness of the church is a political witness, often of the crudest, most manipulative, and arrogant kind, there are good reasons to keep politics at arm's length. Put differently, it would be salutary for the church and its leadership to remain silent for a season until it learns how to engage politics and even talk politics in ways that are non-Nietzschean." *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186.

some good things, even though we know that we are not likely to achieve any major victories."[57] Mouw also shares Dreher's concern that we be engaged without becoming corrupted: "There are limits to the kinds of political compromises that Christians can agree to," but at the same time, "Sometimes those who make much of the dangers of Constantinianism and Christendom place overly strict limits on how Christians can relate to public life."[58] We must therefore continue to be engaged in conventional politics without "forming an unhealthy—and unfaithful—alliance between the church and political power."[59] Ashford cautions against unrealistic expectations of what we can accomplish through conventional politics as well:

> As believers, we should be measured in what we expect from the political realm. After all, we are sinners, our politicians are sinners, and in fact we live in societies full of sinners. However, we also know that Christ Jesus will return to institute a new order in which righteousness will prevail. So we should be neither pessimists who throw up our hands in despair nor utopians who try to force the present era to be the new heavens and earth. Instead, we should be clear-eyed Christian realists, who participate patiently in the public square, seeking to bear witness to Christ and promote the common good.[60]

The upshot is that despite the limitations of conventional politics, "This does not mean we abandon politics. Rather, we labor dutifully, all the while knowing that our ultimate hope comes not through the right political leader but through Christ alone. Good politics won't save us from what ails us most; neither will bad politics take away what matters most."[61]

In sum, Dreher does not differ from the Kuyperian tradition in affirming conventional politics while downplaying what we can expect to accomplish thereby. Yet he also recommends we practice "a Westernized form of 'antipolitical politics,' to use the term coined by Czech political prisoner Václav Havel."[62] As we will now see, antipolitical politics encompasses the sort of cultural engagement that the Kuyperian tradition embodies.

## 3. Antipolitical Politics as Cultural Engagement

Dreher writes that the purpose of antipolitical politics is to publicly engage the world, not to retreat from it, and he distinguishes this "radical new way of doing politics" from conventional politics.[63] In doing so he follows Hauerwas in defining the political as more than statecraft: "When we think about politics we imagine campaigns, elections, activism, lawmaking—all the elements of statecraft in a democracy. In the most basic philosophical sense, though, politics is the process by which we agree on

---

[57] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 106. See also p. 108: "We need to patiently engage the issues in our democratic system, with a willingness to find less-than-perfect solutions."

[58] Ibid., 115.

[59] Ibid., 118.

[60] Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, ch. 7, "We should be realistic in what we expect from the political sphere."

[61] Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo, *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 56–57.

[62] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 78.

[63] Ibid.

how we are going to live together."[64] So while Dreher does not rule out conventional politics carried out at the state, district, or municipal level as a possibility for effective engagement, this is not necessarily what he has in mind when he speaks of antipolitical politics as a kind of localism.[65] Rather, in Dreher's adoption of Havel, antipolitical politics is *antipolitical* in that it defies the conventional understanding of politics—the goal is not to acquire or maintain government power. By the same token, antipolitical politics is *political* insofar as the political is something more than statecraft.

Dreher narrates Havel's story of a greengrocer as an example of antipolitical politics in action:

> Consider, says Havel, the greengrocer living under Communism, who puts a sign in his shop window saying, "Workers of the World, Unite!" He does it not because he believes it, necessarily. He simply doesn't want trouble. And if he doesn't really believe it, he hides the humiliation of his coercion by telling himself, "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" Fear allows the official ideology to retain power—and eventually changes the greengrocer's beliefs. Those who "live within a lie," says Havel, collaborate with the system and compromise their full humanity. Every act that contradicts the official ideology is a denial of the system. What if the greengrocer stops putting the sign up in his window? What if he refuses to go along to get along? "His revolt is an attempt to *live within the truth*"—and it's going to cost him plenty.[66]

In his refusal to accede, the greengrocer has "accomplished something potentially powerful.... He has shown everyone that it *is* possible to live within the truth."[67] Dreher says of the greengrocer's actions, "Because they are public, [they] are inescapably political." For Dreher, then, all public activity is political. Moreover, the political encompasses all of culture: "What kind of politics should we pursue in the Benedict Option? If we broaden our political vision to include culture, we find that opportunities for action and service are boundless."[68] Effectively, in broadening the political to include all of culture, Dreher's call for antipolitical politics is *a call for cultural engagement.*

In order to engage, says Dreher, we should "create and support 'parallel structures' in which the truth can be lived in community."[69] Crucially, Dreher does not think such communities are merely a beacon to be seen by the rest of the world, as evidenced by his invocation of the Catholic Czech dissident Václav Benda: "At serious risk to himself and his family ... Benda rejected ghettoization. He saw no possibility for collaboration with the Communists, but he also rejected quietism, considering it a failure to display proper Christian concern for justice, charity, and bearing evangelical witness to Christ in the public square."[70] Dreher also quotes Havel on this point, saying that if Christian countercultural communities did not "reach out to help others," this too would amount to living within a lie.[71] In short, Dreher's cultural vision is for Christian communities to "live in the truth," not in isolation, but in a way

---

[64] Ibid., 88.

[65] Ibid., 78 and 84.

[66] Ibid., 92, emphasis original.

[67] Ibid., emphasis original.

[68] Ibid., 91.

[69] Ibid., 93.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

that is publicly engaged with the world. A couple examples of such engagement he discusses in the book are evangelism and hospitality.

In Dreher's chapter on church renewal he recommends the recovery of historic theological tradition, liturgical worship, ascetic practices such as fasting and habitual prayer, and church discipline.[72] As good as these things are, though, he does not commend them solely for their own sake – in his view they should also lead to a reinvigorated evangelism: "When churches are properly ordered toward Christ through liturgy, with life maintained through asceticism and discipline, the result is a beauty in sharp contrast to the world. As times get uglier, the church will become brighter and brighter, drawing people to its light. As this happens, we Christians should not be afraid to consider beauty and goodness our best evangelistic tools."[73] Such evangelistic beauty and goodness can be displayed not only in a healthy church, but in all forms of engagement with the world: "For Christians, [pointing to God as the source of all goodness and beauty] might mean witnessing to others through music, theater, or some other form of art. Mostly, though, it will mean showing love to others through building and sustaining genuine friendships and through the example of service to the poor, the weak, and the hungry. As Brother Ignatius of Norcia reminds us, everything is evangelical."[74]

In this same spirit of outreach, hospitality is another practice Dreher lifts up as "a central principle of the Benedictine life."[75] As he puts it, "According to the Rule, we must never turn away someone who needs our love. A church or other Benedict Option community must be open to the world, to share the bounty of God's love with those who lack it."[76] Dreher later recalls the hospitality of his own parents' household, which inspired him and his wife to "[share] our blessings with others and [receive] in turn the blessing of their company."[77]

Evangelism and hospitality obviously do not exhaust the possibilities for engagement, but I am not trying to show that Dreher discusses every possible way Christians can engage the world—my point is merely that it is inaccurate to say the Benedict Option is at odds with the Kuyperian tradition on this score. Antipolitical politics as defined by Dreher is simply another term for engaging the world beyond the realm of conventional politics—though not exclusive of it—in a way that is comparable with the Kuyperian tradition. Dreher may not arrive at his views of engagement by invoking common grace or the universal lordship of Christ, but I believe the conclusions he reaches are consonant with Kuyperianism.[78]

---

[72] Ibid., 102–17.

[73] Ibid., 117. See also p. 119: "In an era in which logical reason is doubted and even dismissed, and the heart's desire is glorified by popular culture, the most effective way to evangelize is by helping people experience beauty and goodness."

[74] Ibid., 119. See p. 57 for the passage on Brother Ignatius Dreher references.

[75] Ibid., 126.

[76] Ibid., 72.

[77] Ibid., 126.

[78] Dreher does, however, develop the view that creation is charged with divine significance by virtue of being made by God, which resonates with the Kuyperian account of Genesis. See ibid., 23–26, 60–62, and 177–79.

## 4. Interlude

It could be objected that my argument depends on selectively highlighting a few key parts of the book while ignoring inconvenient passages. The excerpt I quoted in this article's introduction—believers must "be separate, sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally"[79]—is only one such passage. Others include the following: "Believers … will have to be somewhat cut off from mainstream society for the sake of holding on to the truth"; "The public square has been lost"; and, "Nobody but the most deluded of the old-school Religious Right believes that this cultural revolution can be turned back."[80] But perhaps the passage most likely to be quoted as confirming the Benedict Option's defeatist and isolationist bent is this one: "Could it be that the best way to fight the flood is to…stop fighting the flood? That is, to quit piling up sandbags and to build an ark in which to shelter until the water recedes and we can put our feet on dry land again?"[81] Dreher's question can seem irreconcilable with his statements in support of engagement, and in light of passages such as those cited above, one might ask: how can a project characterized by "strategic withdrawal" be compared with the Kuyperian tradition, which eschews withdrawal?

I answer that when the essence of an idea is to be captured in a two-word summary, there is a lot riding on how those two words are understood. As such, if we do not rightly understand what Dreher means when he speaks of strategic withdrawal we will miss the true import of the Benedict Option. To conclude that strategic withdrawal consists of ceasing to engage with the world altogether is perhaps understandable, given some of Dreher's more dire rhetoric, but ultimately facile, as his unambiguous support for evangelism and hospitality does not permit this simplistic interpretation. What, then, does Dreher have in mind when he speaks of strategic withdrawal? We can gain insight into this question by considering how one scholar within the Kuyperian tradition has issued his own call for withdrawal.

## 5. Withdrawal in the Kuyperian Tradition

In *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition* Craig Bartholomew affirms the goodness and necessity of cultural engagement: "The Christian responsibility is to engage in [cultural] spheres in such a way that they become healthier and directed rightly so that they flourish in the best sense of the word."[82] But he also points out that in our efforts to change the world there is a risk the world will instead change us: "The great danger of the Kuyperian is accommodation to the culture of the day, and I fear that this is well under way, at least in North America."[83] Therefore, Bartholomew says, maintaining strong cultural engagement entails withdrawal: "Withdrawal from the mainstream is often necessary, but *only and always* to reengage more powerfully and more constructively. The church in its institutional and organic sense is *missional* through and through, and mission is rendered ineffective when Christians withdraw without constantly remaining engaged with their culture."[84] Bartholomew's point is that

---

[79] Ibid., 18.

[80] Ibid., 4, 9, and 12.

[81] Ibid., 12.

[82] Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 144.

[83] Ibid., 310.

[84] Ibid., 145, emphasis original.

withdrawal must always be accompanied by continued engagement, but the explicit corollary is that robust engagement hinges on withdrawal of some kind. Yet when Bartholomew speaks of withdrawal he clearly is not thinking of forsaking engagement with the world, for in the same breath that he says withdrawal is often necessary he immediately adds that such withdrawal is always to be for the sake of reengaging more powerfully and constructively. So what is the nature of this withdrawal?

Bartholomew's definition of withdrawal is found in his discussion of Christian spirituality, which he considers "*the* great need of the Kuyperian tradition if it is to be retrieved today and to begin to fulfill its potential."[85] By Christian spirituality Bartholomew means "the sort of practices that over years profoundly form the individual into the likeness of Christ," such as "the ongoing *practice* of prayer," "committed participation in a local church, deep engagement with Scripture, small group community, and engagement with oneself."[86] For Bartholomew, the key feature of such spiritual practices is that they are sustained over a long period of time:

> Spirituality is a practice, a "long obedience in the same direction," and it is normally passed on as an oral tradition. It involves depth transformation over a lifetime, and its practices, rightly, generally remain hidden…. Spirituality is about daily, ongoing, hidden practices that create the space for the Spirit to change and transform us from the inside out, so that more and more we become like the Christ-light that we seek to shine into a dark and needy world.[87]

Bartholomew calls these ongoing spiritual practices that transform us over time the "journey in," and it is on the foundation of the journey in that we become able to remain firm in our faith even as we engage the world. Robust engagement with the world thus requires spiritual withdrawal, a point Bartholomew stresses repeatedly: "I find the language of the journey in and the journey out most helpful. You cannot have the one without the other; the candle needs to burn at both ends. The call to journey out itself emerges from a deep encounter with Christ, the journey in, and can only be sustained in the same way," and, "Amid our journey into the world, we will constantly need to recenter ourselves in Christ, *even as* we journey out. As we seek to spread the fragrance of Christ in his world, we will need to be formed to be like Christ."[88]

The principle of grounding cultural engagement in spiritual withdrawal can be traced to Kuyper's own thought, particularly his views on education:

> [Kuyper] invokes the example of Jesus and his disciples. In order to form his disciples, Jesus did not send them to the academy of the Pharisees or Sadducees! Yes, they needed to be sent out into the world, but only once they were properly formed and ready. It is the same with children and education. Children are called to fight the good fight of faith, and one cannot do that if one remains isolated from the culture. But it is essential that one be properly prepared first.[89]

---

[85] Ibid., 316, emphasis original.

[86] Ibid., 316–17, emphasis original.

[87] Ibid., 319, citing Eugene Peterson.

[88] Ibid., 324, emphasis original.

[89] Ibid., 296.

This principle is not confined to children, but applies to all Christians: "The journey out into the world—which the Kuyperian tradition evokes so powerfully—*only* emerges out of and is sustained by the journey in, as Kuyper stresses in his meditations."[90] Unfortunately, Bartholomew writes, the principle of spiritual withdrawal is absent from the Kuyperian tradition today and needs to be recovered: "What we urgently need is a theology of spirituality and a tradition of practices grounded in that theology. As I have noted in this book, there *are* important resources in Kuyper … for Christian spirituality, but generally neither they nor appropriate practices have been prominent in the tradition as it has developed."[91] The Benedict Option can serve as an additional resource in this regard, for the principle of spiritual withdrawal as a prerequisite to robust cultural engagement lies at the heart of Dreher's project.

## 6. Withdrawal in the Benedict Option

As we have seen, Dreher's call for strategic withdrawal has been roundly criticized by those who take it to be a euphemism for cultural surrender. In truth, however, the withdrawal he speaks of in *The Benedict Option* is akin to Bartholomew's spiritual withdrawal. Those who seize on Dreher's use of the word "withdrawal" and say that the Benedict Option is about retreating from the world distort his argument, for in speaking of withdrawal he seeks not to abandon the world, but to foster spiritual renewal within the church so that its witness to the world might be revitalized. This logic of spiritually withdrawing for the sake of the world is lost if we isolate excerpts where Dreher says the church needs to be separate and consider them apart from the rest of the book. Maintaining the church's integrity is an essential part of Dreher's vision, but he does not stop there—he makes clear that the goal is not merely self-preservation, but self-preservation for the sake of the world:

> This is not just about our own survival. If we are going to be for the world as Christ meant for us to be, we are going to have to spend more time away from the world, in deep prayer and substantial spiritual training—just as Jesus retreated to the desert to pray before ministering to the people. We cannot give the world what we do not have. If the ancient Hebrews had been assimilated by the culture of Babylon, it would have ceased being a light to the world. So it is with the church.[92]

Here and throughout the book Dreher invokes the parable of salt and light (Matt 5:13–16) as an illustration of his vision for the Benedict Option: "If the salt is not to lose its savor, we have to act," and, quoting a Benedictine monk he met while writing the book, "'We pray and watch from the mountainside, thinking of the long three years Saint Benedict spent in the cave before God decided to call him out to become a light to the world.'"[93] This parable is typically cited as a call to engage, and rightly so, but inextricably bound up with the call to be a light to the world is the imperative to retain our saltiness while doing so, lest we be "thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Matt 5:13b ESV).[94] The point is well made by New Testament scholar R. T. France in his commentary on Matthew:

---

[90] Ibid., 317, emphasis original.

[91] Ibid., emphasis original.

[92] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 19.

[93] Ibid., 4 and 244. See also p. 102.

[94] This crucial point tends to be forgotten by commentators who use the phrase "salt and light" as shorthand for the need to engage, without also emphasizing the importance of maintaining our Christian distinctiveness.

> Salt has its effect only because, and for as long as, it has a distinctive saltiness…. But, on the other hand, it is only those who are involved with other people who will be seen to be different and so attract persecution…. Disciples, therefore, must be both distinctive and involved. Neither the indistinguishably assimilated nor the inaccessible hermit will fulfill the mandate of these challenging verses.[95]

Dreher's entire project is informed by this biblical call to maintain our saltiness so we can take our light out into the world, and his concern that we undergo internal spiritual renewal for the sake of the world mirrors Bartholomew's call for Christian spirituality. Indeed, many of the concrete practices Dreher recommends are identical to Bartholomew's own suggestions, such as regular prayer and fasting, family worship and Scripture reading, and committed church membership.[96]

In encouraging such practices Dreher counsels against exactly the sort of fearful retreat many commentators accuse him of advocating:

> The power of popular culture is so overwhelming that faithful orthodox Christians often feel the need to retreat behind defensive lines. But Brother Ignatius, at age fifty-one, warned that Christians must not become so anxious and fearful that they cease to share the Good News, in word and deed, with a world held captive by hatred and darkness. It is prudent to draw reasonable boundaries, but we have to take care not to be like the unfaithful servant in the Parable of the Talents, who was punished by his master for his poor, fearful stewardship of the master's property.[97]

Far from saying we should head for the hills, Dreher approvingly cites monks such as Brother Ignatius (mentioned above) and Father Benedict, who believes that, "Rather than erring on the side of caution … Christians should be as open to the world as they can be without compromise."[98] Dreher invokes this Benedictine example precisely because the monastic tradition was built on spiritual practices that helped its members to better engage the world rather than neglect it, as Bartholomew acknowledges: "We tend to think of monasticism as radical withdrawal from the world, and indeed it has sometimes been so. But as Bosch notes in his *Transforming Mission*, it was the monks in the monasteries who transformed Europe and helped it to recover from the fall of the Roman Empire."[99] Given these considerations, it is untenable to hold that the strategic withdrawal Dreher speaks of

---

See, e.g., Os Guinness's remarks about the Benedict Option in John Sandeman, "Why Donald Trump is not the real issue facing America," *Eternity*, 17 May 2018, https://www.eternitynews.com.au/opinion/why-donald-trump-is-not-the-real-issue-facing-america/.

[95] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 171–72. Other recent commentaries that underscore how salt acts as a metaphor for preserving our distinctiveness, rather than just seasoning the world, include D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition of Matthew 5–7* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 34; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 153; Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*, Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 57; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 105; and Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 175.

[96] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 114–15, 124–25, and 131.

[97] Ibid., 73.

[98] Ibid. See also pp. 94 and 134.

[99] Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 312.

constitutes an abandonment of cultural engagement. Rather, as with Bartholomew, the withdrawal he recommends is a spiritual withdrawal, the purpose of which is to reinvigorate our engagement with the world. Dreher expressed this logic most succinctly when he was asked in an interview whether the Benedict Option is withdrawal or renewal: "It's both. It is withdrawal for the sake of renewal."[100] Again, this principle of withdrawal for the sake of renewal resonates with the Kuyperian tradition and can help curb that tradition's tendency to emphasize engagement at the expense of internal formation.

After we understand that Dreher's withdrawal is a spiritual withdrawal for the sake of the world, there remains one puzzling question: if Dreher thinks we should "stop fighting the flood" of cultural hostility toward Christianity, and if the public square is lost to us—such that we can still act in it, but with little hope for success—to what end do we engage the world? The Kuyperian tradition holds that though we might accomplish little, we should engage nonetheless because to do so is inherently good and we might yet accomplish some good things. Dreher agrees that engagement is good in itself, but goes further by saying that our prospects for cultural transformation are limited at present and will remain so long into the future. As such, our renewed attention to internal spiritual formation is not geared toward the present alone, but also toward a distant future, when the larger culture might be more receptive to the hope we offer.

## 7. The Benedictine Long Game

Although Dreher supports continued Christian engagement rooted in spiritual practices, he does not think such engagement will have any large-scale effects in the near future. Christians should recognize, he says, that "the new order is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be lived with."[101] He dismisses the idea that the Benedict Option will precipitate a dramatic turnabout in our cultural fortunes: "We are not trying to repeal seven hundred years of history, as if that were possible. Nor are we trying to save the West. We are only trying to build a Christian way of life that stands as an island of sanctity and stability amid the high tide of liquid modernity."[102] Moreover, "The Benedict Option is not a technique for reversing the losses, political and otherwise, that Christians have suffered."[103] Nevertheless, the spiritual habits and practices of the Benedict Option are worthwhile, even though they "may not turn our nation around."[104] In other words, these habits and practices are intrinsically good irrespective of what they yield, and when we understand this "we won't have to worry about immediate results—and that's a good thing."[105]

The Kuyperian tradition similarly holds that while God commands us to culturally engage this does not mean we are guaranteed success in our endeavors, yet we are nevertheless called to do such work because it is good in itself. Mouw captures this position well:

---

[100] "Is It Time for 'The Benedict Option?'" *National Review*, 14 March 2017, http://www.nationalreview.com/article/445743/benedict-option-rod-drehers-new-book-christian-faith-world.

[101] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 18.

[102] Ibid., 53–54.

[103] Ibid., 236. See also pp. 237 and 241.

[104] Ibid., 97.

[105] Ibid.

The Kuyperian motive for involvement in public life is not to win the battle for righteousness in the here-and-now. None of us is the Messiah. The world has already been given one supremely excellent Messiah, and he has guaranteed that in the final reckoning everything will be made right. In the meantime, though, we must take advantage of every opportunity available to us to do whatever we can to promote his cause — knowing all the time that the final victory will happen only when the Lord decides that it is ready to happen.[106]

Bacote also says we should have tempered hope. While Kuyperianism "yields a cautious hope for cultivating a 'better' future," we must also "resist triumphalism."[107] Ashford, too, counsels humility in what we can expect from our cultural engagement, while still affirming the goodness and necessity of such engagement: "We realize that we will never 'win' by transforming our culture in such a way that it glorifies Christ comprehensively or enduringly. God never promises victory until Christ returns and secures the victory for himself. But he does command us to obey him and bear witness to him by doing everything within our powers to direct our cultural activities toward Christ."[108] Bartholomew, like Bacote, warns against triumphalism in our cultural engagement:

[The Kuyperian vision] sometimes manifests as a kind of messianic activism and triumphalism, anticipating that we will shortly usher in the kingdom of God. This kind of hubris is very damaging and to be avoided at all costs. At their best, the Reformed and the Kuyperian traditions have a wonderful sense of God's sovereignty, which places our limited and broken-at-best efforts in a healthy, creaturely perspective.[109]

A spirit of tempered expectations is thus evident in both the Kuyperian tradition and the Benedict Option, but Dreher's skepticism about our present prospects for significant cultural change is more pronounced. He thus looks toward the distant future as a time when our efforts might reach fruition.

To reiterate, Dreher believes that "Western society is post-Christian and … absent a miracle, there is no hope of reversing this condition *in the foreseeable future*."[110] Here and elsewhere in the book Dreher indicates that he sees the Benedict Option as a long-term strategy, not something that will redeem the culture in a decade or even a generation: "The Benedict Option is a call to undertaking the long and patient work of reclaiming the real world from the artifice, alienation, and atomization of modern life"; it is a "long resistance" designed to "outwit, outlast, and eventually overcome the occupation" for the

---

[106] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 106.

[107] Bacote, *Spirit in Public Theology*, 153 and 155. See also Bacote, *Political Disciple*, 82.

[108] Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, ch. 1, "Christianity *in* and *for* Culture."

[109] Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 316.

[110] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 89, emphasis added. On a side note, this is why Dreher says the Benedict Option is not about saving the West. If we accept that our present efforts will have little effect now and hope instead that they will reverberate more powerfully in a distant future, then there is at least a chance that in the meantime, as Dreher predicts, "the West" as we know it will not survive, even as we seek to preserve some components of that cultural heritage.

sake of "future generations."[111] What we do might have little effect now, but as Dreher recounts his friend Marco Sermarini saying, "The little things we do might, in time, grow into mighty works."[112]

It is this resolution to practice spiritually rooted engagement—meager though the present fruits of such engagement may be—for the sake of a distant future that makes Dreher's project Benedictine, and it is this legacy of Benedict that he lifts up as an example for us to follow:

> Rome's fall left behind a staggering degree of material poverty, the result of both the disintegration of Rome's complex trade network and the loss of intellectual and technical sophistication. In these miserable conditions, the church was often the strongest—and perhaps the only—government people had. Within the broad embrace of the church, monasticism provided much-needed help and hope to the peasantry, and thanks to Benedict, a renewed focus on spiritual life led many men and women to leave the world and devote themselves wholly to God within the walls of monasteries under the Rule. These monasteries kept faith and learning alive within their walls, evangelized barbarian peoples, and taught them how to pray, to read, to plant crops, and to build things. Over the next few centuries, they prepared the devastated societies of post-Roman Europe for the rebirth of civilization.[113]

Note that even as these men and women submitted themselves to a "renewed focus on spiritual life" they continued to serve the world, and over a period of centuries (not years or decades) their efforts contributed to "the rebirth of civilization." This is Dreher's vision for the Benedict Option in a nutshell: we root ourselves in prayer and other spiritual practices in order to ground our cultural engagement today, which, though it may yield little now, might eventually produce more in the distant future.

Recall that in *Christ and Culture* Niebuhr downplayed the cultural contributions of the monastic (particularly the Benedictine) tradition because they were unintended, "incidental byproducts."[114] In the Benedict Option, however, it is precisely such long-term cultural renewal that Dreher hopes for, and in this hope he defies Niebuhr's categories of engagement: the Benedict Option is "against" culture in that it focuses on internal spiritual renewal and seeks to exclude from Christian communities all elements of culture that will negate our ability to robustly engage the world—that is, our saltiness—yet it still seeks to "transform" culture by shining our light here and now, albeit such transformation (if it ever occurs) will take place over a considerable period of time. To borrow from Hauerwas and Willimon's critique of Niebuhr, Dreher—unlike Niebuhr—does not believe that Christians must be either "a world-affirming 'church' or [a] world-denying 'sect.'"[115]

Although an emphasis on looking toward the distant future for our cultural endeavors to reach fruition is not typically found in the Kuyperian tradition, at least one scholar has recognized the consonance that exists between the tradition and this Benedictine mindset. In *A Free Church, a Holy*

---

[111] Ibid., 12, 47, 89, and 236. It is worth noting that Dreher's view of cultural change accords with James Davison Hunter's observations on the subject: "Change in political systems and economic conditions *can* occur relatively quickly but the most profound changes in culture typically take place over the course of multiple generations." Hunter, *To Change the World*, 45, emphasis original. For more on this see ibid., chs. 4–5.

[112] Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 240.

[113] Ibid., 15.

[114] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 56.

[115] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 40.

*Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology*, John Bolt devotes the final section of the book to "synthesizing Benedict and Kuyper … remembering that both figures were first of all not concerned with saving civilization but with obedience to their Lord."[116] Bolt observes that the Kuyperian approach to culture "presumes the Benedictine practice of creating alternative institutions; it encourages not a retreat from public life but a transforming presence in it through nurturing … associational life."[117] Crucially, Bolt goes on to add that we should not expect this transformation to occur immediately or even in our lifetimes, saying, "Prudence and patience are called for rather than celebrative triumphalism…. Though it is difficult for pragmatic Americans to think in long-range terms, much less to act in accord with them, American Christians need to learn to think in terms of millennia, not in the short-range periods of single presidential or congressional electoral terms."[118] This synthesis of Benedict and Kuyper—rooting ourselves in substantive spiritual practices and alternative institutions so we can robustly engage today, but with an eye toward the distant future—is remarkably similar to what Dreher proposes in the Benedict Option. Bolt closes with these words: "What evangelicals in America need today above all is … the millennial perspective of *hope*."[119] I would venture to say the Benedict Option rightly understood—looking toward a distant future as we work in the present—is defined by this sort of hope.

## 8. Conclusion

I have suggested that the Benedict Option—even if unintentionally—complements and corrects the Kuyperian tradition in some respects. Another book that does something similar is James K. A. Smith's *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, in which Smith says he wants to reform Reformed public theology specifically: "While my proposals for *reforming* Reformed public theology will involve critique, those criticisms are offered in the spirit of reform, with the goal of faithfully extending and revising this tradition."[120] Smith's vision for reform notably contains many ideas found in Dreher: he defines the political more broadly than statecraft—"The political is not synonymous with, or reducible to, the realm of 'government,' even if there is significant overlap"—and urges us to conceive of activities like evangelism as "key components of the church's *political* witness."[121] Insofar as politics *is* statecraft, he recommends we assume a stance of "calculated ambivalence and circumspection tempered by ad hoc evaluations about selective collaborations for the common good" rather than uncritically embracing conventional politics.[122] He also emphasizes the importance of being rooted in the spiritual practices of the church so that we can better engage the world:

---

[116] John Bolt, *A Free Church, a Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 438.

[117] Ibid., 440.

[118] Ibid., 441.

[119] Ibid., emphasis original.

[120] James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 8n16, emphasis original.

[121] Ibid., 9, 11, and 121n57, emphasis original.

[122] Ibid., xiv. See also pp. 16–17, 36, 213, and 216.

> Being centered in the formative disciplines of the heavenly *polis*, we are then *sent* to labor in the contested terrain of creation in the *saeculum*. This isn't about permission; it is about preparation. It's not about sequestering the church from the messiness of "engagement"; it's about intentionality with respect to the church's formation *for* engagement.[123]

But despite these points of commonality, Smith writes off "the so-called Benedict Option" as an example of a deleterious mindset found among some Christian thinkers today, which is characterized by "simplistic demonization of 'the state' per se and withdrawals from the common life of nation-state politics."[124] He also repeatedly and unfavorably alludes to the strategy of "withdrawal" and "retreat."[125]

I mention Smith as a final illustration of why I felt the need to write this article. His project of reforming Reformed public theology harmonizes with the Benedict Option in many ways, not least the emphasis on formation for the sake of engagement, yet he misconstrues the Benedict Option as being fundamentally opposed to a proper public engagement,[126] following many others in misapprehending Dreher's withdrawal as a retreat from the world. We who agree that the church will flourish only if it grounds itself anew in substantive spiritual practices—not in order to grow in sterile piety, but for the sake of better engaging the world—should rather consider ourselves allies in the effort to promote and sustain robust Christian discipleship. Other questions we might disagree on are not unimportant, such as how much we can expect to accomplish in the present, or whether contemporary liberalism's shortcomings are contingent or inherent.[127] Indeed, in deciding how best to live as Christians today it would be helpful to discuss whether liberalism, even though it has historically been shaped and undergirded so extensively by Christianity,[128] can survive if the role of orthodox Christianity in public

---

[123] Ibid., 55, emphasis original. See also pp. 58 and 96.

[124] Ibid., 54n2. See also pp. xii and 212. Smith's dismissiveness is not surprising, considering that he previously leveled the charge of alarmism not only against Dreher's book, but also Anthony Esolen's *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2017) and Archbishop Charles J. Chaput's *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2017), in a stinging piece titled "The new alarmism: How some Christians are stoking fear rather than hope," *The Washington Post*, 10 March 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/03/10/the-new-alarmism-how-some-christians-are-stoking-fear-rather-than-hope/?utm_term=.37cfc38c2ce7.

[125] Ibid., 43, 52, 58, 94–95, 97n14, 192, and 218.

[126] While it is true, as Smith charges, that Dreher suggests the shortcomings of contemporary liberalism are inherent rather than merely contingent (Dreher, *Benedict Option*, 90), it should be noted that this does not prevent Dreher from saying we nonetheless ought to do whatever good through conventional politics that we can.

[127] Concerning the latter debate, recent works arguing that liberalism is inherently flawed include Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* (New York: Encounter Books, 2016); John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016); and Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

[128] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, ch. 3. See also Bruce Ward, *Redeeming the Enlightenment: Christianity and the Liberal Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander, eds., *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Nick Spencer, *The Evolution of the West: How Christianity Has Shaped Our Values* (London: SPCK, 2016).

life continues to shrink despite strenuous efforts to sustain that role.[129] Yet we should put such debates in perspective by remembering our common commitment—shared by self-identified Kuyperians, Benedict Option supporters, and others—that in all circumstances we have a duty to "seek the welfare of the city" (Jer 29:7), and to maintain our saltiness so that our light to the world can shine truly.

---

[129] See Mary Eberstadt's *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies* (New York: Harper, 2016), which argues that the question of whether traditional Christians should continue to play a role in public life is being decided for them—in the negative. Consider also what Adrian Vermeule says about the current relationship between Christianity and liberalism: "Even if liberalism cannot accept … accommodation [between itself and Christianity] in principle, perhaps there can be an indefinite truce, a pragmatic equilibrium of political and social forces. It takes two to make a truce, however, or else a higher third power who restrains unilateral aggression – a *katechon* for the liberal state. In our actual situation, neither condition obtains." Adrian Vermeule, "As secular liberalism attacks the Church, Catholics can't afford to be nostalgic," *Catholic Herald*, 5 January 2018, http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2018/01/05/as-secular-liberalism-attacks-the-church-catholics-cant-afford-to-be-nostalgic/.

# The Rule of Faith and Biblical Interpretation in Evangelical Theological Interpretation of Scripture

— **Adriani Milli Rodrigues** —

*Adriani Rodrigues is assistant professor of systematic theology at the Adventist University Centre of São Paulo in São Paulo, Brazil.*

\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** One of the features of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement is the use of the rule of faith in biblical interpretation. However, a comparison of evangelical scholars in this movement shows that there are significant disagreements on the concept of the rule and its hermeneutical role. The present study attempts to clarify these disagreements and briefly analyze them. This article suggests that an engagement with Cullman's notion of apostolic and post-apostolic traditions and with aspects of Irenaeus's concept of rule of faith might be helpful for the understanding of the concept and role of the rule of faith.

\*\*\*\*\*\*

The last two decades have witnessed the development of a movement that attempts to recover theological interpretation of Scripture.[1] In its appreciation of aspects of patristic exegesis,[2] contemporary Theological Interpretation of Scripture (hereafter TIS) emphasizes the concept of rule of faith,[3] attempting to reflect the practice of the early church (notably Irenaeus and Tertullian) of reading Scripture guided by this rule.[4] In the early church, this rule was "the sum content of apostolic

---

[1] The author recently published a version of this article in Portuguese: "A regra de fé e as Escrituras: uma breve análise da regra de fé na interpretação teológica evangélica contemporânea das Escrituras," *PLURA* 8 (2017): 154–71.

[2] Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 39. For further information about precritical exegesis, see Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Introducing Premodern Scriptural Exegesis," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4 (2010): 1–6.

[3] See Scott R. Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed: The Role of the Church's Confession in Biblical Interpretation," *IJST* 14 (2012): 77.

[4] Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 57.

teaching," a confession that outlined "the authoritative articles of faith."[5]

The fact that written samples of the rule in the early church were not exactly the same does not make its usage a puzzling endeavor that would require a prior selection of one sample as the pattern to the others.[6] In fact, the multiple forms of expression of the rule of faith is a phenomenon consistent with the *regula* (rule) in Roman law around the first and second centuries.[7] As "a short summary of the contents of a statute," a *regula* possessed legally "the same authority as that statute in so far as it faithfully reproduced the spirit of the original."[8] Accordingly, "this neat device made it possible to consult the whole corpus of Roman law without reading every words on each occasion, and it greatly speeded up the conduct of business."[9] In this way, "as long as a *regula* faithfully reflected its original, the jurists of the classical period were not unduly concerned with its precise formulation."[10]

Therefore, the present article assumes a non-problematic view of different forms of expression of the rule in the early church according to the background of *regula* in the Roman law. From this perspective, the specific samples of the rule in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian indicate that the main topics summarized in the rule of faith are the One and Trinitarian God; Creation; Christ's incarnation, passion, resurrection, assumption, and second coming; resurrection of the saints; judgment; and salvation.[11] In fact, the outline of the rule of faith was used as a "hermeneutical key for the interpretation of Scripture."[12]

However, in the context of evangelical TIS, an attentive reading of some of its proponents reveals that there are differences about the concept of the rule of faith and its use in biblical interpretation. The purpose of the present study is to briefly describe and analyze the proposals of this concept in evangelical theological interpretation, as indicated by Robert Wall, Joel Green, Daniel Treier, and Kevin Vanhoozer.[13] My contention is that the discussion of the relationship between the rule of faith and Scripture is enriched by an engagement with two complementary perspectives, one ancient and the other modern, namely, aspects of Irenaeus's concept of rule of faith and Cullman's notion of apostolic and post-apostolic traditions. Therefore, before I outline the proposals of Wall, Green, Treier, and

---

[5] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 703 (hereafter *DTIB*).

[6] For samples of the rule of faith in the early church, see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vols., Bibliotheca Symbolica Ecclesiae Universalis (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 2:11–44.

[7] It is noteworthy that Tertullian and the Latin Fathers employed the concept of *regula* "even more than … their Greek counterparts." Gerald Bray, "Authority in the Early Church," *Churchman* 95 (1981): 50. This point seems to underscore the importance of Roman law as the primary background to the early church use of "rule."

[8] Ibid., 50–51.

[9] Ibid., 51.

[10] Gerald Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 103. See also, Peter Stein, *Regulae Iuris* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 49–73.

[11] See Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1; Tertullian, *Praescr.* 19; *Prax.* 2; *Virg.* 1. See also Tomas Bokedal, "The Rule of Faith: Tracing Its Origins," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7 (2013): 238–39.

[12] Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," 703.

[13] The selection of these four names does not represent an exaustive list of evangelical theologians who deal with the rule of faith, but is rather a sample of these theologians.

Vanhoozer, I will briefly articulate a framework of analysis on the basis of the perspectives of Irenaeus and Cullmann.

## 1. A Framework of Analysis: The Rule of Faith, Scripture, and Traditions

I begin this investigation by describing aspects of the rule of faith in the thought of Irenaeus in conjunction with Oscar Cullmann's conception of apostolic and post-apostolic traditions.

### 1.1. Aspects of the Rule of Faith in Irenaeus

Irenaeus refers to the rule of faith as "the truth," "the canon (or rule) of truth,"[14] which is conceived by him as a hermeneutical framework for a proper interpretation of Scripture.[15] Hence, the rule of faith is "an organic system or framework which constitutes the shape and the meaning of God's revelation. Without the system, God's revelation is not intelligible. Placed within another system, that revelation is distorted and perverted,"[16] and for Irenaeus this is the case of the Valentinians. Their approach is compared to someone rearranging the pieces of a beautiful image of a king in a mosaic, constructed out of precious jewels by a skillful artist, into the image of a dog or a fox. Thus, the Valentinians pull apart the system found in Scripture and use its pieces to create their own system.[17] Nevertheless, Irenaeus emphasizes that those who previously know the correct system of Scripture are capable of recognizing the biblical pieces without being deceived by the false mosaic.[18]

In these considerations, the rule of faith seems to be described as a framework or system that serves as the correct set of presuppositions or preunderstanding for the activity of biblical interpretation.[19]

---

[14] Philip Hefner, "Theological Methodology and St. Irenaeus," *JR* 44 (1964): 299, who explains that Irenaeus also refers to this concept as "the body of truth," and "the hypothesis of Faith." Even though this concept is generally used to describe outline statements of Christian belief that circulated in the second and third century, it is first found in Irenaeus, since he "created his whole theology around scripture and the *regula fidei*." Prosper S. Grech, "The Regula Fidei as a Hermeneutical Principal in Patristic Exegesis," in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia*, ed. Joze Krašovec (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 590. See also Richard Patrick Crosland Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1962), 75; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 76–82. For further information about the concept of Rule of Faith in the second and third century, see Paul Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," *TJ* 28 (2007): 65–86; Grech; Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church*, 75–129.

[15] In terms of canon, Irenaeus "recognized and appealed to the same collection of Christian writings as is listed in the Muratorian fragment, except that he included 1 Peter, which is not mentioned there." However, Bruce argues that we should not ascribe to Irenaeus the idea of "a 'closed' canon by the very fact that it was later added to; but it was envisaged as a coherent *corpus*, comprising twenty-two books—all the books of the final New Testament, indeed, except Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 3 John and Jude." F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 77.

[16] Hefner, "Theological Methodology and St. Irenaeus," 299.

[17] Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.8.1.

[18] Someone "who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognize the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures, but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use which these men make of them." Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.9.4 (*ANF* 1:330).

[19] As David Henderson points out, "what has been termed 'the Rule of Faith' is the set of hermeneutical presuppositions, derived from the canon itself, that have been employed throughout the history of the church in its effort to come to terms with what the church should teach and how it should live." David Henderson, "Irenaeus on

However, this rule does not appear to be distinguished from Scripture. In his criticism of the Valentinians, Irenaeus argues that, by "violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables whenever found," they "disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures," and ultimately "dismember and destroy the truth."[20]

Elsewhere, Irenaeus points out that "the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all."[21] In this sense, one should not "apply expressions which are not clear or evident to interpretations of the parables," because if this is done "no one will possess the rule of truth; but in accordance with the number of persons who explain the parables will be found the various systems of truth, in mutual opposition to each other." On the other hand, if the interpretation is based on what is clear and evident in Scripture, then "the body of truth remains entire, with a harmonious adaptation of its members, and without any collision [of its several parts]."[22]

In short, Irenaeus seems to affirm the identity between the rule of faith and Scripture, and this rule is derived from an evident system in Scripture. I will connect this concept with the notion of apostolic and post-apostolic traditions in Oscar Cullmann.

### 1.2. Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Traditions in Cullmann

In his remarks on the rule of faith and the biblical canon in the first centuries, Cullmann rejects a distinction between oral tradition and written Scripture, where the rule of faith is identified with oral tradition and distinguished from Scripture. In contrast, he proposes a differentiation between "apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical [or post-apostolic] tradition, the former being the foundation of the latter."[23] Following this perspective, "what matters is not whether the apostolic tradition was oral or written,

---

the Rule of Faith," in *Reading the Bible in Faith: Theological Voices from the Pastorate*, ed. William Henry Lazareth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 115.

[20] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.8.1 (*ANF* 1:326). For Irenaeus, their system is derived neither from what "the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered." Rather, "they gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures" and communicate them using the language of "the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support." Ibid. He concludes that this practice of "collecting a set of expressions and names scattered here and there [in Scripture]" twists them "from a natural to a non-natural sense." *Haer.* 1.9.4 (*ANF* 1:330).

[21] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.27.2 (*ANF* 1:398).

[22] Irenaeus, *Haer* 2.27.1 (*ANF* 1:398).

[23] Oscar Cullmann, "The Tradition," in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 129–30. He employs "the term 'apostolic' in its strict historical sense, and not in the extended sense often given to it by Catholic scholars who identify apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition." Ibid., 109. This distinction between apostolic and post-apostolic tradition is based on the notion of the uniqueness of the apostolate: "the apostolate is by definition a unique office which cannot be delegated. According to Acts 1:22 the apostle is a unique, because direct witness of the resurrection … The bishops succeed the apostles but on a completely different level. They succeed them, not as apostles but as bishops, whose office is also important for the church, but quite distinct. The apostles did not appoint other apostles, but bishops." Furthermore, "the Church also bears witness to Christ. But it cannot bear that direct witness which belongs to the apostles. Its witness is a derived witness, because it does not rest on the direct revelation which was the privilege of the apostle alone as an eye-witness." Ibid., 127–28. See also Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 295.

but that it was fixed by the apostles."[24] In other words, there is no dichotomy between the rule of faith (conceived only as a summary of the apostolic teaching) and Scripture, because both of them are in the category of apostolic tradition.

Cullmann argues that this view can be discerned in the formation of the biblical canon. For him, the existence of the canon indicates that the church at one point was "losing the criterion for judging the validity of the claim to apostolicity made by the many traditions in circulation," and then the church realized that "without a superior written norm its teaching-office could not keep pure the apostolic tradition."[25] Cullmann writes, "The fixing of the Christian canon of scripture means that the Church itself, at a given time, traced a clear and definite line of demarcation between the period of the apostles and that of the Church between the time of foundation and that of construction, between the apostolic communion and the Church of the bishops, in other words, between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition. Otherwise the formation of the canon would be meaningless."[26] Therefore, "by establishing the principle of a canon the church … declared implicitly that from that time every subsequent tradition must be submitted to the control of the apostolic tradition."[27]

In fact, the affirmation that the rule of faith historically precedes the Scriptures needs to be properly qualified, because the idea of giving normative authority to the rule of faith "was conceived at the same time as that of giving a normative authority to the canon, that is to say, about the middle of the second century."[28] To put it differently, "the definitive fixing of the apostolic rule of faith corresponded exactly to the same need of codifying the apostolic tradition as did the canonization of the apostolic writings … the two form henceforth one block of apostolic tradition over against the post-apostolic tradition."[29] Further, "by misunderstanding the significance of certain declarations of the Fathers of the second century we are too accustomed to contrast rule of faith and canon."[30]

Therefore, this concept of apostolic tradition, which comprises rule of faith and Scripture, restricts the scope of the rule only to the apostolic tradition, which does not include the post-apostolic creeds and doctrines of the church. In addition, this concept affirms the identity of the rule of faith and Scripture, which is consistent with the position of Irenaeus in the second century.

The idea of identity between the rule of faith and Scripture, within the scope of apostolic tradition, provides a helpful framework of analysis of the rule of faith in evangelical TIS. After I outline the proposals of Wall, Green, Treier, and Vanhoozer, I will briefly analyze them according to this framework.

---

[24] Cullmann, "The Tradition," 138.

[25] Ibid., 140, 142.

[26] Ibid., 139.

[27] Ibid., 140.

[28] Ibid., 144.

[29] Ibid. F. F. Bruce confirms that "the first steps in the formation of a canon of authoritative Christian books, worthy to stand beside the Old Testament canon, which was the Bible of our Lord and His apostles, appear to have been taken about the beginning of the second century." F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 18.

[30] Cullmann, "The Tradition," 144.

## *2. A Brief Description of the Rule of Faith in Evangelical TIS*

I begin this brief description of the rule of faith in evangelical TIS with the interpretation of this concept provided by Robert Wall.

### 2.1. The Rule of Faith according to Robert Wall

Robert Wall defines the rule of faith essentially as "the heart of Christian faith" that constitutes the "theological boundary markers" of Christianity.[31] Following this perspective, he expounds (1) his conception about the rule of faith and the activity of biblical interpretation, (2) his notion of the relationship between the rule of faith and Scripture, and (3) the scope of the rule of faith.

First, "right interpretation is determined by whether the content and consequence of a text's interpretation agree with the church's rule of faith."[32] This means that correct interpretation does not derive from strict application of critical methodology authorized by accredited scholarship, which speculates the "first meanings" of the text, the identity of the author, and the setting of the first recipients.[33] Rather, Wall advocates a hermeneutical shift from the emphasis on authorial intent to "divine meaning," which implies a broadening of the concept of intended audience that is not restricted to the readers originally addressed by the author, but also includes the contemporary church.[34]

Second, Wall's assertion that the rule of faith is necessary to guarantee a proper interpretation of Scripture is further explained by his conception of the relationship between the rule of faith and Scripture. By denying the notion that Scripture interprets itself, Wall concludes that biblical interpretation demands faithful interpreters guided by the rule of faith.[35] Moreover, he rejects the equation of Scripture with the rule of faith.[36] With this distinction, Wall appears to suggest a primacy of the rule of faith over Scripture, which is expressed especially through the historical argument that the biblical canon took shape in the time of Irenaeus on the basis of the agreement of its content with the rule of faith.[37]

Third, Wall's understanding of the scope of the rule of faith is influenced by his conviction that the rule is not only a summary of Christian beliefs produced in the past. Rather,

> the rule exists as various "rules" of faith that bear a striking family resemblance to each other. Each rule conforms, more or less, to the core beliefs and deeper logic of the catholic rule of faith. Yet, each communion's rule of faith is the product of many small changes that have taken place in every fresh attempt to respond faithfully and often courageously to new contingencies and cultural movements the church catholic has

---

[31] Robert W. Wall, "Reading the Bible from within Our Traditions: The 'Rule of Faith' in Theological Hermeneutics," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 89.

[32] Ibid., 99.

[33] Ibid., 99.

[34] Ibid., 93.

[35] Ibid., 97.

[36] Ibid., 99.

[37] Ibid., 98.

encountered, always in creative and open-ended dialogue with the stable truth claims confessed according to the rule.[38]

To put it sharply, the various contemporary traditions and denominations in Christianity represent different appropriations of the ancient rule of faith, with distinct emphases demanded by specific circumstances. In fact, this expanded conception of the scope of the rule of faith implies not only a primacy of this rule over Scripture, but ultimately gives priority of the church over Scripture,[39] since contemporary ecclesiastical traditions function as rule of faith in the process of interpreting Scripture.

## 2.2. The Rule of Faith according to Joel Green

For Joel Green, the relationship between the rule of faith and the Bible raises the question of the status of doctrine in TIS. While he comprehends theology as an "ongoing critical reflection," doctrine designates a "relatively stable" and "authoritative teaching" that is essential to Christianity.[40] In this sense, doctrine refers to the "rule of faith and its codification in the ecumenical creeds of the early church."[41] In contrast to Wall, Green does not believe that additional statements of diverse contemporary ecclesiastical traditions are an extended part of the rule of faith. Rather, he stipulates that these statements are not essential for the identity of Christianity. Notwithstanding, Green seems to agree with Wall in distinguishing the rule of faith and the Bible. In his view, "we cannot argue that the church has simply received its doctrine from the Bible" from a historical perspective. Indeed, "the canon of Christian Scripture was not in place at the very time that the Rule of Faith … was taking shape among early church theologians."[42] Furthermore, he claims that, "taken on their terms and without recourse to a history or community of interpretation," biblical "texts are capable of multiple interpretations, many of which could be understood as 'good readings' (i.e., readings supported by careful analysis of the text), but not all of which are worthy of the name 'Christian.'"[43] Associated with this idea is the notion that 'the diversity of voices and perspectives within Scripture and among the biblical books' finds unity, not in Scripture itself, but in the rule of faith.[44]

Green acknowledges that this view runs the risk of reducing biblical texts "to the role of a marionette attached to doctrinal strings."[45] In order to avoid this risk, he proposes, among other principles, that the rule of faith should not be used to "predetermine the meaning of the Bible or to read later doctrinal

---

[38] Ibid., 102.

[39] Ibid., 104. This can be observed in Wall's statement that the function of Scripture is somehow defined by ecclesial authority. In his words, "ecclesial authority, then, bestows upon Scripture specific roles to perform in forming Christians—nothing more than this, but surely nothing less." Ibid., 104.

[40] Joel B. Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation: Engaging Biblical Texts for Faith and Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 71–72. This notion of doctrine is derived from Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 11–12.

[41] Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 72.

[42] Ibid. Similar to Wall's view, Green claims that "the primary criteria by which" the canonical books "would compose the New Testament was their coherence with the kerygma as this was articulated in the rule of faith." Ibid., 73.

[43] Ibid., 74. For Green, "*Sola Scriptura* can never guarantee that one is Christian." Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 80.

[45] Ibid., 75.

formulations back into the Bible."[46] Another challenge to Green's position is the question of how he is able to allow both church's doctrine and the Bible to speak on their own terms and intentions when there is a disagreement between them.[47] One example of this situation is the tension between the Bible and the creeds of the early church on the issue of anthropology. More specifically, according to Green's understanding of biblical anthropology and its interface with neuroscience, "we do not *possess* souls but simply *are* souls." In other words, "we are characterized by the indivisibility of our embodied human lives. We have no need for recourse to a second entity, such as soul or spirit."[48] In contrast to this monist view of humanity, the Chalcedonian Definition and the Athanasian Creed point out that Jesus has a rational soul and body,[49] implying a dualistic anthropological perspective.[50]

Nevertheless, Green replies that these creedal statements "affirm Jesus' full humanity," and not "body-soul dualism." Even though these "statements employ nonbiblical categories and an erroneous science, with the result that they use the problematic language of 'rational soul and human flesh' in order to secure their affirmation of Jesus' full humanity,"[51] Green believes that "the creedal statements in question are focused on christological arguments and are not concerned with theological anthropology per se."[52] However, in my view, this answer does not seem to deal adequately with the potential challenge that a distorted view of anthropology misconstrues the humanity of Christ.

In short, Green includes the ecumenical creeds of the early church as part of his definition of the rule of faith. Considering that, for him, the rule is not to be identified with the Bible, the affirmation

---

[46] Ibid., 77. Other principles are: the rule of faith is not "the superstructure that has the Scriptures as its substructure;" "ecumenical creeds do not simply summarize the 'stuff' of the Bible;" following early patristic exegesis, "correct interpretation of Scripture must express its overall order of structure" and, according to Karl Barth, the 'whole' within which the parts of the Bible must be comprehended was its unified witness to God." Ibid., 77–78.

[47] Ibid., 75.

[48] Ibid., 81. For further information about these conclusions on biblical anthropology, see idem, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Green contends that his critics did not contest of his conclusions in this anthropological study on exegetical grounds but by arguing that these conclusions disagreed with creedal statements of the Christian church. See idem, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 81. In his review of *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, Scott B. Rae claims that Green's biblical interpretation "is driven by his understanding of advances in the neurosciences." Scott B. Rae, review of *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* by Joel Green, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 61 (2009): 191. Joel Green replies, "What I attempt in this book is not to reread the Bible through a neuroscientific lens. To the contrary, I demonstrate that those views of the human person which are consistent with what we are learning from the natural sciences present no fundamental challenge to biblical faith." In *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 61 (2009): 194.

[49] The Chalcedonian Definition affirms that Christ is "truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body." Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 2:62. Similarly, the Athanasian Creed declares that Christ is "perfect God: and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." Ibid., 2:69.

[50] Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 81.

[51] Ibid., 85. "To articulate their affirmations of Jesus' full humanity, the church fathers turned to the categories of ancient Greek science and philosophy—not the categories of Scripture, but those of the ancient and developing Platonic tradition. Working from within these categories, the church fathers parsed the claim that Jesus is fully human in terms of body-soul dualism, and this claim made its way into these creedal affirmations in these terms: 'of a rational soul and human flesh.'" Ibid., 94.

[52] Ibid., 85.

that the rule of faith is indispensable for a proper theological interpretation of Scripture implies that ecclesiology has priority over Scripture, at least in terms of the early church and its creeds.

### 2.3. The Rule of Faith according to Daniel Treier

According to Daniel Treier, the contention that "truly 'Christian' understanding of Scripture occurs within the boundaries of the rule of faith and even receives helpful guidance from Nicene orthodoxy," raises the question of "the broader use of Christian doctrine in biblical interpretation," especially when the teachings of different traditions disagree.[53] To put it more sharply, "can or should particular theological tradition inform interpretation?"[54] His answer to this question may be described in two steps: (1) the relationship between the rule of faith and contemporary ecclesiastical traditions, and (2) how doctrine informs biblical interpretation. Firstly, Treier considers the doctrines of ecclesiastical traditions that go beyond the basic information of the rule of faith as "extensions of the rule."[55] In this way, he proposes a narrow and a broad concept of rule of faith. Narrowly, the rule refers to "the Trinitarian and Christological heritage of the early church that became formalized in symbols such as the Nicene Creed."[56] However, broadly speaking, it includes the "living tradition" of the church, namely, "confessions or other dogmatic symbols" that "may extend the regulative function of doctrine into more specific churchly contexts."[57] Hence, while Treier distinguishes the rule of faith and ecclesiastical traditions/doctrines, he does make room for them in his concept of rule, at least in an extended sense. As a result, ecclesiastical tradition/doctrines are necessary for guiding biblical interpretation.

Secondly, like Green, Treier rejects the idea that the rule of faith necessarily determines "all of our exegetical decisions," which means that the hermeneutical role of doctrine is not intended to regulate "biblical interpretation arbitrarily."[58] Conversely, he stipulates that "doctrine shapes both the questions we ask of biblical texts and the ways we communicate our answers."[59] In fact, doctrine works at the level of presuppositions in biblical interpretation, especially challenging "cultural assumptions" of interpreters and fostering the revision of these assumptions "in light of how the church has understood Scripture as a whole."[60] Even though presuppositions are often seen negatively in the context of biblical interpretation, being considered a "'baggage' to be set aside as much as humanly possible in a quest for 'objectivity,'" they actually "provide essential points of connection to the true subject matter of Scripture."[61]

Finally, in contrast to Wall and Green, Treier attempts to avoid the idea of ecclesiology having priority over Scripture in biblical interpretation. Being aware of this implication in many proposals

---

[53] Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 64. With regard to the Nicene Creed, Treier highlights that "New Testament passages together can teach the same judgment that we find in the Nicene Creed even if they do not contain the Greek philosophical language developed later." Ibid., 62.

[54] Ibid., 64.

[55] Ibid., 76.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 201.

[58] Ibid., 201, 77.

[59] Ibid., 70.

[60] Ibid., 77.

[61] Ibid., 202.

of contemporary TIS, he highlights that "the essential theme of much literature on theological interpretation of Scripture" appears to be the church.[62] Thus, Treier suggests that the most important subject in theological interpretation is God, and not the church. This suggestion takes into account "the church's weakness and need for biblical correction,"[63] which implies the primacy of Scripture over the church. Furthermore, the recognition of the weakness of the church acknowledges the weaknesses of the interpreters of Scripture. More specifically, "although truth is comprehensive and certain in terms of God's knowledge, human perception" is finite and fallen. Therefore, "at any given time and place we see only partially."[64] In this context, he recommends that interpreters of Scripture need to open themselves to correction as they read the texts, allowing Scripture to rectify their perspectives and presuppositions.[65]

### 2.4. The Rule of Faith according to Kevin Vanhoozer

Like Treier, Kevin Vanhoozer denies the idea of the church having priority over Scripture. He criticizes the argument "of the authority of tradition," namely, the idea that the canon is insufficient for biblical interpretation and that the rule of faith is the hermeneutical key, provided by the Holy Spirit and developed by the Ante-Nicene church fathers, that unlocks the correct meaning of Scripture.[66] Whereas Vanhoozer recognizes that there is room for a positive view of tradition, and even for the acknowledgement of the work of the Spirit in church and tradition, he emphasizes the importance of admitting the weakness of church and tradition. In his words, "tradition, inasmuch as it is a work of the Spirit preserving and prolonging the word, is indeed authoritative…. While tradition may be inevitable, it is also corrigible; we cannot presume that there is always coincidence between the work of the Spirit and what a particular church does."[67] For Vanhoozer, the church fathers did not mean to control the meaning of Scripture by the rule of faith. Instead, their intention was "to confess what Scripture does mean."[68] Thus, "confession" is the best description of the rule of faith, and this coheres with its ancient use "as a baptismal confession."[69]

In addition, he agrees with Treier that the rule of faith works at the level of presuppositions in biblical interpretation. Indeed, "the purpose of the rule is to provide readers of Scripture with the right presuppositions as to its basic subject matter."[70] More concretely, the rule of faith provides the presupposition of "Scripture as a unified narrative," which demands the reading of the OT in conjunction

---

[62] Ibid., 201.

[63] Ibid., 204.

[64] Ibid., 202.

[65] Ibid., 202.

[66] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 203.

[67] Ibid., 208.

[68] Ibid., 206.

[69] Ibid., 206–7, 203. In contrast to this statement, Bray argues that the "proposed link between the *regula fidei* and the batpismal confession has been strongly contested." He adds, "it is now widely accepted that the baptismal confession, though in many respects similar to the *regula fidei*, cannot be identified with it." Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 99.

[70] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 203. See also idem, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 287.

with the NT, and the identification of "God the Creator with God the Father of Jesus Christ."[71] Hence, the rule of faith presupposes the unity of Scripture, which contrasts with the view that "the disparate biblical texts would not be unified Scripture apart from their use in the rule-governed community of faith."[72] While in the argument of the authority of tradition the principle of unity in biblical interpretation resides in the rule of faith, for Vanhoozer, the principle of unity is in Scripture itself, and the rule of faith only makes it explicit.[73] Whereas in the former the rule is an "'extratextual' control"[74] of interpretation, in the latter "the rule of faith is actually a servant of intratextuality."[75] In this sense, "the authority of the rule depends on its conforming to the Scriptures,"[76] and "the ultimate purpose of the rule of faith is to let Scripture interpret Scripture."[77]

The notion of the rule of faith working at the level of presuppositions in biblical interpretation clarifies the statements that the rule comes from Scripture, allowing Scripture to interpret itself. Vanhoozer emphasizes that "all exegesis presupposes some theology or other."[78] In fact, the belief that "'Scripture interprets Scripture' never meant that interpretation could take place without interpreters making presuppositions, only that these presuppositions should themselves be drawn from Scripture."[79] Hence, the rule of faith allows Scripture to interpret itself by providing presuppositions that come from Scripture itself.

Moreover, Vanhoozer seems to concur with Treier's affirmation of the weakness of the interpreters of Scripture and their need of constant correction, particularly at the level of presuppositions. For him, the process of biblical "interpretation provides us with an opportunity to refine, or even correct, our prior theological understanding."[80]

## 3. A Brief Analysis of the Rule of Faith in Evangelical TIS

The foregoing description seems to suggest that these four theologians can be largely divided in two main groups on the basis of the hermeneutical use of the rule of faith. One group tends to emphasize the role of the church while the other tends to underline the role of the biblical text itself.

---

[71] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 204; see also idem, *First Theology*, 286.

[72] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 205.

[73] The "rule of faith makes explicit what is already *implicit* in the canonical Scriptures." Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 294.

[74] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 205.

[75] Ibid., 206.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 207.

[78] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 287n23.

[79] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 206.

[80] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 287. Arguably, Vanhoozer uses the terms *presupposition* and *preunderstanding* interchangeably. Referring to the rule of faith, in *First Theology* he employs the terminology of *preunderstanding* (see pp. 287, 293), while in *The Drama of Doctrine* he uses the term *presupposition* (see pp. 203, 206). Thus, a prior theological understanding functions as presupposition for interpreting Scripture.

### 3.1. Emphasis on the Rule of Faith and the Church

In the first group, Wall and Green maintain two basic ideas about the rule of faith. First, the rule cannot be identified with Scripture because the former is historically prior to the latter, and the biblical canon took shape having the rule as its criterion. Likewise, one's interpretation of Scripture is valid (in the sense of being Christian) inasmuch as it concurs with the rule of faith. Associated with this argument is the notion that it is not enough to use Scripture to interpret itself and, therefore, the rule is needed for biblical interpretation. Second, the rule of faith includes creeds and doctrines of the church. Green seems to include only the creeds of the early church, while for Wall the rule of faith comprises also the doctrines of contemporary ecclesiastical traditions.

Green's argumentation exposes major implications for this conception of rule of faith as deriving from creeds of the church. For instance, he attempts to show that the hermeneutical use of the rule does not represent imposition of doctrine on Scripture. However, if the rule of faith and Scripture are not the same, and if a proper Christian interpretation of Scripture is largely dependent on the use of the rule, then it is not clear how the imposition of extra-biblical doctrine (even from the early church) can be avoided.

In addition, there is a problematic case of disagreement between the creeds and biblical anthropology, if his account of the nature of humanity in the Bible is considered. It appears that a key point of Green's approach is his distinction of theology as an ongoing reflection, and doctrine as essentially stable and authoritative. Because in his view doctrine is not open to correction and his definition of rule of faith includes the doctrine of the creeds of the early church, Green does not conclude that the creeds should be corrected by his understanding of biblical anthropology. Thus, from a systematic perspective, Green does not acknowledge that the anthropology of the creeds and his understanding of biblical anthropology ultimately lead to distinctive Christologies, in the sense that different anthropologies imply distinctive views on the humanity of Christ.[81]

### 3.2. Emphasis on the Rule of Faith and the Biblical Text

In the second group, Treier and Vanhoozer affirm the identity of the rule of faith with biblical text itself.[82] They avoid the notion of the rule of faith that emphasizes the church because both of them highlight the weakness of the church and tradition, and their need of biblical correction. Moreover, these theologians stress a conception of rule of faith that works at the level of the theological presuppositions of the interpreter. Since the rule is identified with Scripture, they underscore that these presuppositions must come from Scripture itself. In other words, the authority of the rule of faith for hermeneutical purposes depends on its conformity to Scripture. This discussion about presuppositions includes two main aspects, namely, the fact that the interpreter has presuppositions and the content of these presuppositions. With regard to the first aspect, Vanhoozer and Treier underline the weakness of the interpreter (just as the church), specifically in terms of his/her finite, fallen, and partial perception, which reveals the constant need of correction and refinement of presuppositions as he/she reads Scripture.

---

[81] I am not convinced that my point here is invalidated by the challenge of a Barthian approach that only reflects on anthropology from Christology, and not from the other way around. While I do recognize that the study of Christ's humanity is certainly necessary for a proper understanding of anthropology, I resist to the idea that a study on the nature of humanity in the Bible does not have any bearing on the comprehension of Christ's humanity.

[82] Vanhoozer seems to be more explicit on that.

Concerning the second aspect, Vanhoozer believes that the main presupposition of the rule of faith is the acknowledgment of the unity of Scripture, which allows Scripture to interpret itself.

This group emphasizes the weakness of the church and the interpreter, and the notion of the rule of faith as a theological presupposition. Nevertheless, two points are unclear in this approach. Firstly, in Treier's twofold definition of the rule of faith, the narrow definition appears to agree with Green's (a summary of the apostolic teaching and the ecumenical creeds of the early church), and the broad definition seems to concur with Wall's (it includes the doctrinal extensions of contemporary ecclesiastical traditions). In fact, his belief that these ecclesiastical traditions and doctrines are necessary for biblical interpretation raises the following questions: how would Treier answer Green's example of disagreement between Scripture and the early creeds? Are the creeds in need of biblical correction in the area of anthropology? If so, could they serve as hermeneutical presuppositions for the interpretation of Scripture? In this case, is it appropriate to consider the creeds rule of faith? Secondly, in the discussion of the identity between the rule of faith and Scripture, Vanhoozer and Treier do not seem to answer, at least not explicitly, the argument used by Wall and Green that the rule of faith precedes historically the Bible as a canon and, thus, that the rule has priority over Scripture.

## 4. Conclusion

The basic contribution of this study is the identification and clarification of the main issues involved in the discussion of the use of the rule of faith in evangelical TIS. With this contribution in mind, I conclude this article by highlighting two principal points. First, from the perspective of Cullmann's distinction between apostolic and post-apostolic traditions, there is a general tendency in evangelical TIS of defining the rule of faith in a large scope that goes beyond a summary of the apostolic teaching. While Green adds the creeds of the early church, Wall and Treier tend to include also extensions of contemporary ecclesiastical doctrines and traditions. Hence, the large scope of the definitions of rule of faith encompasses the post-apostolic tradition. But this raises the question of the historical and theological rationale for sustaining a large scope for the rule of faith. In contrast, I suggest that contemporary evangelical definitions of the rule should be more cautious regarding its scope. In other words, the rule should be situated within the boundaries of the apostolic tradition. This caution does not deny, however, that the study of post-apostolic tradition may be helpful for understanding the rule of faith. Indeed, the investigation of post-apostolic tradition may reveal expansions or appropriations of the rule that can enhance our contemporary comprehension of it. But when the distinction of apostolic and post-apostolic traditions is blurred, the clarity needed for detecting distortions of or additions to the rule of faith in the context of post-apostolic traditions is strikingly reduced.

Second, Irenaeus's conception of the identity between the rule of faith and Scripture seems to presuppose the clarity and unity of Scripture. The description above indicated that Green avoids these presuppositions while Vanhoozer appears to affirm them. In light of the TIS goal of a critical recovery of patristic hermeneutics,[83] evangelical engagement with the rule could benefit from a critical assessment

---

[83] Green argues that this recovery does not simply mean "turning the clock backward," but "a *ressourcement* … that takes seriously how locating Scripture in relation to the church might remold the craft of critical biblical studies." Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 4, emphasis original. Similarly, Vanhoozer claims that "although so-called precritical interpretations took biblical authority seriously and sought to read for the church's edification, they may be vulnerable at three points: They may fail to take the text seriously in its historical context.

of similarities and differences between evangelical TIS and aspects of Irenaeus's conception of the rule of faith and its presuppositions. One important aspect to be addressed is the systematic nature of the forms of expression of the rule of faith, which according to Irenaeus derive its formulation from the clarity and unity of concepts in Scripture. To be sure, this systematic nature does not imply a modern understanding of system,[84] but minimally highlights an organized and coherent formulation of ideas. Furthermore, the affirmation of the unity of Scripture does not need to deny the diversity of emphases found in the biblical canon. But the systematic nature of the rule of faith, which derives its content from Scripture (induction) and then provides a basic preunderstanding for subsequent biblical interpretation (deduction), does underscore a hermeneutical spiral movement of induction and deduction[85] that presupposes a harmonious view of the teachings of Scripture.

These two points regarding the scope of the rule of faith and its hermeneutical role from a systematic standpoint represent areas in which further elaboration could enrich the reflection on biblical interpretation in evangelical TIS.

---

They may fail to integrate the text into the theology of the OT or NT as a whole. They may be insufficiently critical or aware of their own presuppositions and standpoints." Vanhoozer, introduction to *DTIB*, 19.

[84] For a helpful account of the development of system in theology, see Gale Heide, *Timeless Truth in the Hands of History: A Short History of System in Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 178 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

[85] For a balanced view of induction and deduction in biblical hermeneutics, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 385.

# Book Reviews

## — OLD TESTAMENT —

## — NEW TESTAMENT —

## — HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

## — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

## — ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

## — MISSION AND CULTURE —

## — *Old Testament* —

T. Desmond Alexander. *Exodus*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary 2. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017. xx + 764 pp. £39.99/$45.00.

T. Desmond Alexander is the Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Union Theological College in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Alexander is known for his biblical-theological approach to Scripture and for his expertise on the Pentateuch. A distinctive strength of *Exodus* is his ability to combine these two areas of expertise.

The Apollos Old Testament Commentary series is intended for "preachers, teachers, and students of the Bible" (p. ix). I believe scholars, too, will benefit from Alexander's work. The introductory material is an up-to-date scholarly analysis of various historical and exegetical issues surrounding Exodus. In his lengthiest introductory section (pp. 16–30), Alexander surveys the main historical positions on the date of Israel's exodus from Egypt. He reviews extensively the evidence for the thirteenth- and fifteenth-century positions from Egyptian literary texts, archeological evidence, and biblical chronology; he views the 1447 B.C. date as the most compelling at present.
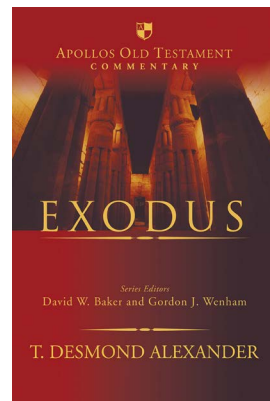
Readers may find helpful the explanation of different exegetical approaches to Exodus. There is tension in scholarship between source-oriented approaches, which are diachronic and focus on the development of the literature, and discourse-oriented approaches, which are synchronic and focus on its final form (pp. 11–12). Alexander exemplifies the latter approach, yet he interacts with source-criticism by taking "note of source-analysis proposals … to caution readers against the exaggerated claims of critics who rely overly on these to exegete the text" (p. 13).

Throughout his commentary, Alexander elucidates not only the meaning and significance of Exodus but also the wider canonical implications of the exodus event and Sinai narratives. He reads Exodus as a narrative flowing out of Genesis, while engaging critical views that dissociate the patriarchal and exodus traditions (pp. 5, 35–40). Leviticus is viewed as the proper sequel, which presupposes the building of YHWH's tabernacle and the intention of consecrating priests for its service (Exod 29; cf. Lev 8). On a grander scale, Alexander advocates for a metanarrative reading that includes the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History (Genesis–2 Kings). As such, YHWH's glory dwelling amidst his people (Exod 40:34) may be viewed as "an important step towards the fulfillment of God's aspirations for Eden" (p. 673).

In terms of the structure and design of this commentary, many sections of Exodus have their own special introductions, which frame their respective verse-by-verse comments. These sections are: "1:1–2:25: The Israelites in Egypt" (pp. 33–35); "Exodus 7:8–11:10: Signs and Wonders in Egypt" (pp. 145–57); "Exodus 15:22–18:27: The Wilderness Journey of the Israelites to Sinai" (pp. 309–10); "Exodus 19:1–40:38: The Sinai Narrative" (pp. 355–58); and "The 'Book of the Covenant'" (pp. 437–51).

All of the individual partitions of Exodus—whether after special introductions or not—begin with Alexander's fresh translation of the Masoretic Text. His translation brings out rhetorical connections and wordplays that would otherwise remain undetected by the English reader. For instance, the reference to "Jacob's hip" in Exod 1:5 recalls Jacob's wrestling match with YHWH at Peniel in Gen 32:30–32 (p. 38). On the basis of previous studies, the MT is held to preserve with astounding accuracy the most

authentic and original text of Exodus over and above the LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch. The places where the LXX seems to preserve a more authentic reading *prima facie* are discussed in turn and found to be largely inconsequential to Alexander's exposition (pp. 30–32).

The translation sections are followed by the "Notes on the Text," which feature philological and textual-critical evaluations. Next, the "Form and Structure" sections place each smaller section within its wider context, interact with source-critical positions, and review its literary history. This is followed by the "Comment" sections, which feature close exegetical and historical evaluations. Lastly, we have the "Explanation" sections, which shed light on the theological implications of the text and include points of application. The commentary also contains two detailed excurses: "The Strengthening of Pharaoh's Heart" (pp. 163–71) and "The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread" (pp. 217–22).

When comparing Alexander's commentary with others, a cautious and logical approach to the form and content of Exodus is evident. For instance, the position that elements of the text are derived from, say, the *Chaoskampf* motif of the ancient Near East, are found to be "highly questionable" (e.g., pp. 294–96 on Exod 15). This idea seems central to commentaries such as that of T. E. Fretheim (*Exodus*, IBC [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991]). On the other hand, interpretations that focus on the text's prehistory, often with conjectures about dating and the *Sitz im Leben*, are found wanting in their exegetical value (e.g., Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, ECC [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009]; for further comparisons, see p. 16). In accordance with Alexander's discourse-oriented approach, the final literary context tempers possible extraneous interpretations. This is not to say that Alexander always adopts traditional readings (see his interpretation of יַם סוּף as "Lake of Reeds" rather than the traditional "Red Sea" [LXX: ἡ ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα]; pp. 263–64).

Overall, *Exodus* is suitable for its intended audience. Given its size, it may prove difficult to assign at the undergraduate level, apart from, say, a specialized elective on Exodus. It is excellent, however, as a reference work for academic research and for teaching preparation—as the massive bibliography bears witness (pp. 675–723), along with the indices of Scripture references (pp. 725–46), authors (pp. 747–56), and subjects (pp. 757–64). I highly recommend *Exodus* to pastors and teachers who are teaching a series through the Book of Exodus and to any students who have a special interest in its history and theology.

Joseph C. Triolo
Arizona Christian University
Phoenix, Arizona, USA

C. Hassell Bullock. *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 73–150*. Teach the Text Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2017. xviii + 622 pp. £24.99/$39.99.

This commentary, following the same author's volume on Psalms 1–72, is in a new series edited by John Walton and Mark Strauss. The series aims to serve pastors and teachers not only by minimising technical discussions (these are placed in endnotes, along with reference to specialist commentaries) but also by being more than merely a devotional commentary. So, the style and structure of the commentary aims to give preachers ready access to what they need for preparing a sermon. To a large degree, the commentary succeeds in this aim.

Each psalm is introduced with a summary 'Big Idea' (following Haddon Robinson's emphasis in his books on preaching). Sometimes the Big Idea is a bit long and cumbersome, e.g., for Ps 94: "God's blessing is his primary mode of relating to humanity, and lest we misunderstand God's judgment, when we are disobedient, his judgment is the secondary mode, not the preferred" (p. 164). I also wondered if the Big Idea might come later in the section because it runs the risk of giving an 'answer' before the detail is digested by the preacher. Nonetheless, the Big Idea, with key themes, helps keep clarity through each section.

Sections on 'Understanding the Text' and 'Text in Context' were very helpful and concise in orienting the reader to the text. Particularly useful was seeing the flow of psalms, common phrases, and words and ideas often expressed in a table which added to clarity. Where psalms quoted or referred to earlier Old Testament texts, or were quoted in the New Testament were included here. This again was a useful section on the whole.

Then followed a summary outline of the psalm. Often these were too complicated to fit into a sermon outline, e.g., the outline of Ps 106 has six main points, all of which have sub-points, and in three of the sub-points, there are sub-sub-points (pp. 257–58). Nonetheless, the summary outlines remained helpful, and often were pithy.

The historical and cultural background section attempted to see each psalm in the light of the history of Israel and the psalm's use in Jewish practice. Titles of psalms were usually dealt with here if they referred to something historical.

Then follows a concise commentary on major words and phrases in the psalm verse by verse, though not every verse is commented on. Never does the commentary get bogged down in technical matters. Biblical cross-references of phrases and words were frequent and useful. This section dealt mostly with the meaning of phrases and words and only rarely was Hebrew quoted. A reader does not at all need Hebrew to use this commentary effectively.

A weakness of this section, however, is in addressing the use and impact of language. Given that psalms are poetry, to be sung, and to stir emotion and heart, there was unfortunately very little about the style of language, its rhetorical purpose and impact and the value of singing the psalm. Given that the series is aimed to help people teach and communicate the text effectively, I fear that sermons by preachers simply using this commentary might be tempted to be dull, lacking emotion and passion.

Then follow two sections, on 'Theological Insights' and on 'Teaching the Text'. These draw out issues of theology in the text and then pointers to approaching a sermon on the text. Overall these
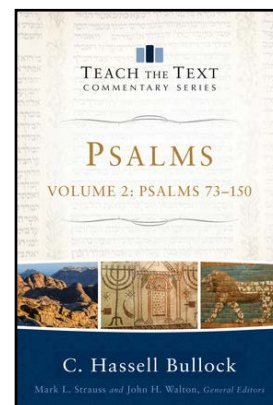
sections were useful, helping deepen reflections on some of the theological issues in the light of the whole of scripture.

There was no section specifically on links to Christ or the New Testament, but that was not a weakness as appropriate references were made here and there. Perhaps not every psalm has a New Testament reference, so I was pleased that the psalms were allowed to speak for themselves and not merely packaged into a tight Christian mould. For example, Bullock suggests that Psalm 100 celebrates the gospel given for the world and links the psalm with the Great Commission. He helpfully states that in the OT the gospel is represented by God's covenant with Israel and mentions Jesus's reference to this in John 8:56. He then says, 'The nuances change, and the covenant assumes various forms, but the substance is the same: the character of the one self-revealing God' (p. 209). Bullock has a good sense of the Bible's unity leading to Christ.

The final section on each psalm was the weakest, 'Illustrating the Text'. The illustrations were average, on the whole, and perhaps limited in their origins. A biography of a missionary to Algeria and the novels of George MacDonald featured very prominently in this section throughout. Personally, I find such illustrations occasionally useful but often remote. I realise, however, that such a section in the book can hardly remain contemporary for readers in years to come. For me, this section could largely have been omitted.

Finally, there was no direct section on applying the text. That might have been more useful than illustrating the text. Application in preaching is often a weak point, as the literature on sermon preparation keeps saying. The New International Version Application Commentary series attempts to address this issue, but this series could also be of more benefit in doing likewise.

I'll be preaching on a psalm soon. Will I use this commentary (and the first volume which I have not yet read)? Yes, I will. While the volume was around six hundred pages, substantial in itself, on average each psalm is less than ten easy-to-follow pages. That is not too long, and not to brief, to be of great value for pastors and preachers. I would supplement it, where possible, with a commentary that engages more in the language and rhetorical impact of the psalm, so that as I preach I attempt to create the same impact in preaching the psalm as the psalm itself sought to do to those who read or sang it.

Paul Barker
Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Peter J. Gentry. *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 136 pp. £13.53/$17.99.

The writings of the biblical prophets have been neglected, to a large degree, by the contemporary Church. I suspect that this is true because believers today have not understood the message in these books and hence are unsure about how the message(s) ought to be applied. This suspicion is supported by Peter Gentry, Professor of Old Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who argues that the contemporary audience has not understood the message because it has not appreciated how these books should be read. Gentry's primary concern is "to describe and spell out the communicative methods used by the biblical prophets" so that the misunderstanding is overcome (p. 124).

This helpful book is organized into two parts. The first section (chapters 1–4, pp. 15–70) answers the questions: *What? Why? How?* and *Why? What* is the basic premise and purpose of the prophetic message? Gentry answers that the message of the prophets is derived from the Pentateuch, especially the book of Deuteronomy. He rightly highlights that Deuteronomy is primarily concerned with the establishment and continuance of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the children of Israel. Since a careful reading of the prophets confirms this premise, chapter 2 asks the question, *Why*, then, do the prophets include so many predictive elements in their messages? He offers five reasons that work to validate the message(s) of the prophet(s), which, in turn, underscore their call to covenant fidelity. Chapter 3 introduces the reader to the basic hermeneutical principle that will address the central concern of the book, that is, *How* should one read and understand the biblical prophets? Gentry contends that since the ancient authors used repetition to convey the essential message of the text (seen primarily in the overall structure of the prophetic books but also evidenced through poetic devices, pp. 41–51), the interpreter must be aware of and identify this rhetorical device. Chapter 4 concludes the first section of the book and answers the question, *Why* are there so many prophecies directed toward the nations? Underscoring the connection between Israel and the nations in Deut 32, Gentry maintains that the oracles *concerning* the nations essentially serve the purpose of demonstrating that Yahweh is sovereign over nations and history (p. 70).

The titles in the second section of the book (chapters 5–7, pp. 71–124) all begin with "Describing the Future." Herein Gentry explains the employment of typology by the prophets (pp. 71–91), the principles for interpreting apocalyptic language (pp. 93–115), and the idea of inaugurated eschatology (pp. 117–22).

Much of the book consists of illustrations of the detailed principles that are drawn primarily from Isaiah. The final chapter demonstrates how the New Testament appropriated the prophecies of the Old Testament to point to the greater fulfillment in Christ and in the eschaton. Finally, Gentry includes an appendix on the literary structure of the book of Revelation (pp. 125–32).

The strength of this book, and that which is new (or at least underemphasized elsewhere), is found in the third chapter where Gentry demonstrates for the reader principles necessary for discerning the message of the prophets. He advocates three tools or skills that are needed to unlock the prophetic message: (1) perceptive reading of the poetic expressions (in contrast to a literalistic reading, pp. 84–85); (2) identification of repeated word pairs (e.g., kindness-faithfulness, chiasms); and (3) recognition of repetitive patterns that extend across large sections. Unfortunately, for the novice, this book does
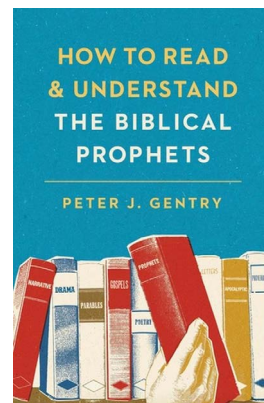
not offer a step-by-step guide for recognizing these larger structural features that span large portions of a prophetic book. In Gentry's defense, however, he does offer examples of his own structural analysis throughout the book.

Without forcing the Stendahlian distinction too far, this book does well in helping the believer read and understand what the biblical prophets *meant*. But for the Christian reader and interpreter, one cannot stop short of what the text *means*, and by extension how the ancient word applies today. Gentry desires to give the contemporary reader "cues the first readers had for reading these texts" (p. 14). However, he fails to articulate how "what it *meant*" then translates into "what it *means*" today. For instance, in chapter 1, Gentry demonstrates how the prophetic ministry called people to faithful adherence to Torah principles and loyalty to Yahweh, but he does not bridge the gap and help us read and understand how the prophets would have us apply Torah to the Christian experience.

Since this aspect is beyond the stated aim of this book, a reader could consult Willem VanGemeren's fine work: *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). VanGemeren's volume is an introduction and is thus more thorough (offering three chapters on the development, tradition, and perspectives on prophecy before engaging in a prophet-by-prophet analysis and offering a summary of the prophetic motifs). VanGemeren, not unlike Gentry, is sensitive to the literary form and structure, as evidenced by his including a subheading for the same for every prophetic book. VanGemeren's final chapter, "Living the Prophetic Word," does take that important final step of aiding the reader to apply the prophetic message today. I would argue that *application* is the true measure of whether an individual has truly read and understood the biblical prophets.

Having said this, I do believe that rightly reading and understanding the biblical prophets ("what it meant") is an important first step in the process of deriving right application. For this reason, I affirm that this easily-read handbook would be a valuable addition to the pastor's library and tool kit. The message of the Prophets, rightly understood, should bring revival to the Church today and would inform the Church's mission in the world. Moreover, this book would serve as a great supplementary text to an Old Testament Introduction course, or as a text for an elective course on the Old Testament Prophets.

Steven W. Guest
South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies
Bangalore, India

Ernest C. Lucas. *Proverbs*. The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. pp. xiv + 407 pp. £20.99/$28.00.

As a biblical scholar and a former research biochemist, Ernest Lucas brings a unique perspective to his interpretation of Proverbs. This volume is part of The Two Horizons Commentary series, which features theological exegesis and theological reflection. This series aims to uncover the theological meaning of biblical books, and to reflect on relevant theological issues within the context of the canon of Scripture. Lucas's commentary thus contributes to the burgeoning field of Theological Interpretation of Scripture.

This commentary divides into three parts: introduction, commentary, and the theological horizons of Proverbs. The introduction summarizes key topics concerning the book of Proverbs. These include defining wisdom, individual proverbs, the book's structure, authorship, date, as well as defining the various literary forms that are found within the book of Proverbs. The introduction also covers ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, the origin of Proverbs, and a discussion of texts and versions.

In the second part (commentary), Lucas exegetes the text of Proverbs. He conservatively interprets the text, focusing on grammatical and historical observations. His occasional discussion of individual proverbs in relation to the New Testament shows that his work also engages the book of Proverbs within the canon of Scripture. For example, Lucas draws a connection between Proverbs 4, which speaks of light and darkness, and the New Testament, which contrasts light with darkness (pp. 67–68).

The third part (theological horizons) is the core of Lucas's work (pp. 199–382), and the section that specifically accomplishes the purpose of The Two Horizons series. This section discusses topics found within Proverbs. The topics are: (1) "acts and consequences in Proverbs," (2) "characters in Proverbs," (3) "family, friends, and neighbours in Proverbs," (4) "God and Proverbs," (5) "the personification of wisdom in Proverbs," (6) "the spirituality of Proverbs," (7) "wealth and poverty in Proverbs," (8) "wisdom and Christology," (9) "wisdom and creation," and (10) "words in Proverbs and the New Testament."

Lucas provides a thorough analysis of Proverbs, but his work contains certain weaknesses. For example, Lucas's commentary (part two) tends to exclude pre-modern or early Christian readings of Proverbs. As an illustration, his discussion of Proverbs 8 does not cite early Christian texts, nor does he discuss the Christological implications of the text. In fact, Lucas seems critical of early Christian exegesis (p. 320). He discusses the theological debates surrounding Proverbs 8 later in his commentary (pp. 335–38), but it is more of a historical reflection on the reception history of Proverbs 8 than an engagement with early Christian interpretation of the chapter.

His non-reliance on early Christian interpretation is confirmed by the sources he uses. Within the commentary section (part two), he primarily cites other contemporary commentaries (e.g., Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation*, AB 18A [New York: Doubleday, 2000]; *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009]; William McKane, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970]) or dictionaries (e.g., *NIDOTTE*). For a self-consciously theological commentary, it seems odd that Lucas relies so much on contemporary exegetical and theological sources. Because he excludes pre-modern exegesis and theological judgments, his commentary lacks important theological voices.
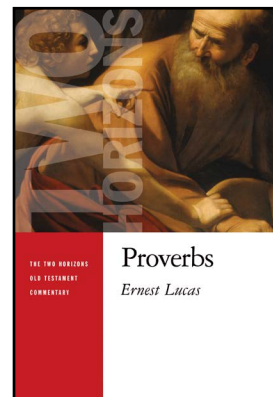
Lucas nevertheless skillfully summarizes the commentaries on the book of Proverbs and provides a high-level overview. His introduction (part one) and commentary (part two) generally do not add anything new to the field of Proverbs studies because they focus on summary rather than arguing for a particular position. The effect is that his commentary is a valuable reference work; he rarely presents original arguments (one exception, however, is his proposal for a conscious editorial strategy in Proverbs; pp. 21–22).

The strongest contribution that Lucas makes is his theological horizons essays (part three). For example, Lucas provides helpful insight into how Proverbs understands both acts and consequences. He shows how many of the proverbs communicate general truths, which nevertheless are not absolute. For instance, Prov 17:17–18 says that a "friend loves at all times" but finishes by saying that you cannot trust some friends (v. 18). The sages thus knew that proverbial wisdom was only that—proverbial. The seemingly contradictory nature of certain proverbs actually proves that sages understood the difficulties of the human experience: "The fact that the sages created or collected such 'contradictory' proverbs shows that they were well aware of the complexities of life" (p. 206).

Teachers and preachers will find Lucas's theological essays to be helpful guides as they prepare lessons or sermons. He excels in clearly summarizing and presenting what others have said. His theological essays, consequently, represent well-reasoned and safe conclusions for those who minister the Word. The exclusion of pre-modern interpretation, however, unfortunately weakens the theological value of this book. I would recommend it to those who do not own a commentary on the book of Proverbs, and to those who desire to read contemporary theological reflections on the text.

Wyatt Graham
The Gospel Coalition Canada
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

---

Iain Provan. *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception*. Discovering Biblical Texts. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ix + 224 pp. £19.99/$22.00.

Like the writer of Genesis and using his words, Provan drops the reader of his book into the book of Genesis in his first sentence. His opening paragraph simply sets the scene by raising the issues to which the book will seek to provide some perspective. The first four chapters then provide the context for reading Genesis before seven chapters on the content of the major sections of Genesis.

Chapter 1 is an introduction that, for this reader, is a highlight of the book. It provides a sweeping, grand, informative overview that raises more questions than it provides answers for. Nonetheless, it helps give perspective on the whole through demonstrating structural markers that frame the book, an outline of the overall story, and a description of its distinctiveness.

Chapters 2 and 3 give helpful surveys of the ways in which the Old Testament in general and Genesis in particular was read both before and after the Renaissance. The survey is relatively short but informative and would provide a very helpful introduction for those first approaching serious study of the Old Testament (although it surprisingly downplays the importance and impact of the biblical theology movement).
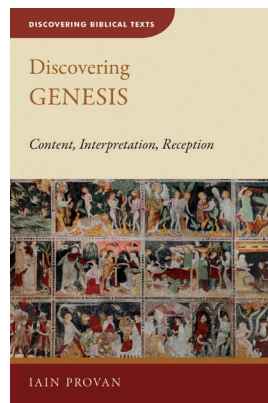
In chapter 4 ("The World of Genesis: Locating the Text in Its Time and Place"), Provan reiterates his conviction stated elsewhere that the literal sense of a text is of primary importance. This literal sense is bound up with the historical, social, and religious context in which it came to be, which Provan argues is during the time of revolt that happened throughout the world during the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Although the literal sense of the text is of primary importance, that sense is invariably bound up with the historical, social and religious context of this period, particularly that of the ancient Near Eastern religion. It represents Mosaic Yahwists wrestling "with questions of faith and identity in a newly emerging world" (p. 55).

Provan seeks to demonstrate the benefits of such a reading in a case study of cosmology in Genesis 1 and 2 under the title, "Mosaic Yahwism and the Religion in the Ancient Near East" (pp. 55–58). This reading shows the positive benefits of such an approach but also demonstrates the risks associated with it, not least that of succumbing to the temptation to allow it to dominate the reading of the details and whatever prehistory and use it may have had in other contexts. Further questions also then arise in relation to how the text might then be used in a context very different from that posited by the author and how authoritative it is in those contexts.

The remaining seven chapters survey the major "acts" of Genesis, with significant weight given to Genesis 1:1—2:25 (followed by chapters on 3:1–24; 4:1—6:8; 6:9—11:26; 12:1—25:18; 25:19—37:1; and 37:2—50:26). The goal of each is to offer "a close reading of the text highlighting key interpretative issues, and weaving in (selectively) consideration of how that section of Genesis has been read historically" (p. 59). Although some of these sections are not as exegetically tight as they might be (e.g., Genesis 2 and 3 and the concept of rest), they do provide a helpful way into the book and open up matters of interpretation that are important to address. A particularly helpful addition is Provan's constant interaction with other historical interpreters including commentators ancient and modern, artists, novelists, and even composers.

Provan's book will be helpful for students and others looking for an overview of Genesis. Preachers who have already done their exegesis of the text and others interested in the history of interpretation of Genesis will find it valuable for its variety of perspectives. As a reading of the text it is thorough and well-informed, sometimes speculative, always interesting and stimulating, and not without presuppositions that are open for contention.

Andrew Reid
Evangelical Theological College of Asia
Republic of Singapore

Christopher J. H. Wright. *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 288 pp. £11.99/$18.99.

Pastor Andy Stanley in Atlanta recently preached that the New Testament apostles "elected to unhitch the Christian faith from the Jewish Scriptures. And my friends, we must as well." Why? Because we must not "make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19 NIV). The faith of the next generation, Stanley said, may depend on our willingness and ability to be liberated from "the whole worldview" of the Old Testament. I disagree. Jesus taught that the Old Testament bears witness about him (John 5:39). Moreover, Christian history has already shown us where churches go, once they diminish the Bible in order to make it less difficult for people to turn to our Lord.

But my purpose in starting this review with a reference to Stanley's sermon is to highlight the relevance, urgency and timeliness of this excellent book by Christopher Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth*. No one who understands and appropriates the wisdom here in Wright's book could make the assertion that Pastor Stanley made. Instead, any pastor who does receive instruction from this wonderful book will, far from making it more difficult for people to turn to God, make that step of faith more obvious, persuasive and satisfying.

The reasoning throughout this book is consistent with the broader trend we all have been benefiting from in recent decades. Wright, Edmund Clowney, Graeme Goldsworthy, Sidney Greidanus and others have been helping pastors, especially, read the Old Testament in a more Christ-aware and gospel-sensitive way. A properly biblical-theological perception of the Old Testament has finally been established in its authentic and rightful place between the minute scrutinies of exegesis, on the one hand, and the atemporal mega-categories of systematic theology, on the other. What sets this book apart for our special attention is the wisdom Wright shows in making gospel-centered hermeneutics directly useable to anyone who might be new to this way of reading the Bible.

The book is divided into two major parts: "Why should we preach and teach from the Old Testament?" and "How can we preach and teach from the Old Testament?" Within this framework, Wright guides the reader through the unfolding plot of the Old Testament flowing into the New Testament in six stages, the right questions to ask when reading an Old Testament story, the fallacies to avoid when reading an Old Testament story, the perennial question of law and gospel, and the correct hermeneutical strategies for reading the various literary genres found within the Old Testament.

This book is impressive in various ways. But for this review I will point out the one thing I most appreciated. Embedded throughout the book is a wealth of responsible and careful scholarly thinking; but the help it offers is explained, time after time, with remarkable clarity and simplicity. Moreover, the book offers many concrete illustrations of how the reader can put Wright's proposals to practical use in study, preaching and teaching. Another way to say it is this: *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth* is fully prepared and easily ready for the reader's immediate benefit. The steps that might otherwise have to be taken between this book and your ministry are minimized to a remarkable degree. There is a quality of thoughtfulness and servanthood and usability in this book that stands out, while also upholding high academic standards.
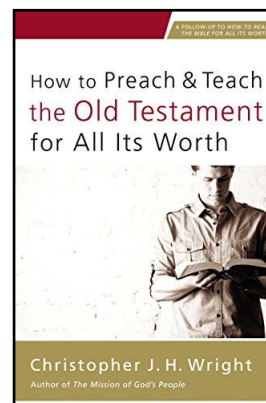
One illustration of such clarity is Wright's explanation of typology—a topic often made more obscure than it needs to be. Wright puts it this way:

> When somebody we know does something that we recognize as the way they always act, something very characteristic of them, we smile and say, "That's just typical!" Or, "Typical John!" They are acting "true to type." It's what we've come to expect from that person. Once you get to know somebody well, you can see patterns and similarities in the way they behave…. God certainly acts in typical ways, so that those who knew him well in Bible times began to recognize God's ways. They saw the patterns and similarities between how God acted at one time and then another…. Now those who encountered Jesus in the New Testament … point out significant correspondences between things in the Old Testament and what God had now done in and through Jesus Christ. And they used those Old Testament things in order to explain many aspects of the meaning of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. (p. 69)

Any beginner can make a subject difficult to understand. It takes a mature scholar to achieve simplicity and accessibility.

To sum up: *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth* has come to us at just the right time. It can both stabilize our confidence in the enduring authority and richness of the Old Testament and, even more, equip us with both the insights and the instincts we preachers of the gospel need in order to help more and more people turn to God.

Ray Ortlund
Immanuel
Nashville, Tennessee, USA

## — NEW TESTAMENT —

Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn, eds. *Composite Citations in Antiquity. Volume One: Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and Early Christian Uses.* Library of New Testament Studies 525. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016. xiii + 242 pp. £90.00/$122.00.

This volume is the first of two collections of essays dedicated to exploring the literary phenomenon of composite citations in writings from antiquity. Composite citations are defined as a clearly marked citation "when literary borrowing occurs in a manner that includes two or more passages (from same or different authors) fused together and conveyed as though they were only one" (p. 4). As noted by the editors, Sean Adams and Seth Ehorn, there are very few studies in composite citations and limited in detail, lacking in clarity of definition, and assumed to be either the result of faulty memory or deriving from a *testimonia* source (pp. 7–8). This book is a welcome scholarly contribution to the study of composite citations, which not only challenges earlier presuppositions but also investigates methodology, form, and function of composite citations across a wide spectrum of literature from antiquity.
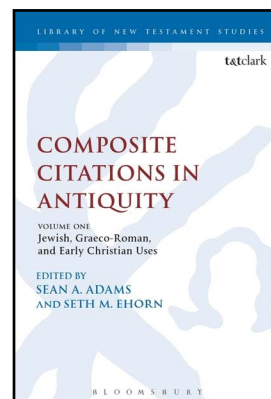
The scope of this first volume includes works from 350 BCE to 150 CE written by authors across Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian backgrounds (excluding the authors of the New Testament). This provides a social and religious dynamic to the overall inquiry where previous studies have been exclusively textually based. It has previously been assumed that composite citations were a Jewish or early Christian practice; however, chapters written by Adams, Ehorn, and Margret Williams on the use of Homer, citations in Plutarch, and letters of Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny respectively, demonstrate that composite citations also occurred in Graeco-Roman writings, although less frequently than in their Jewish counterparts. Furthermore, these chapters demonstrate that composite citations are "intentional literary constructions" (p. 33). They exhibit functions of thematically and linguistically condensing large portions of text, uniting multiple texts into a single referent, and omitting, adding, and replacing words within a citation for literary effect. Adams investigates how Graeco-Roman writers were educated in the practice of formulating and reading composite citations. Although the evidence that composite citations were taught in schools is inconclusive, Adams is persuaded that students would have encountered composite citation practices as they advanced in their scholarly education (p. 34). Similarly, Williams highlights that it was only elite males who practiced composite citations in Roman epistolary writings and attributes the use of such complex techniques to the author's need to feel superior and clever (p. 58). It was deemed inappropriate for women or commoners to receive "citation-enriched discourse" as it was not expected they would understand (ibid.).

The question of whether an audience would have recognised the texts fused into a composite citation is also relevant to Jewish texts. Johnathan Norton, in his chapter on "Composite Quotations in the Damascus Document," proposes that composite citations should be placed closer to what is commonly called "allusion" (p. 92). An introduction to a citation is not usually indicative of its source; nor does it mean that the citation has borrowed from elsewhere. Therefore, it requires an audience to identify those texts and contexts. Norton demonstrates that this task is not straightforward and that even modern scholars have misidentified citation sources and compositions (pp. 98–99). In the case of the Damascus Document, Norton envisages that it was written by scribes for scribes and that the composite citations would have been appreciated (p. 118). Garrick Allen, in his chapter on pseudepigraphical literature, argues that readers in antiquity may not have cared to engage with the original contexts of the various components of the composite citation to "reverse-engineer" them (p. 155). Allen notes that this is a modern conception and that ancient readers view Scripture as "polysemic divine utterances that can and ought to be reformulated and reworked" (ibid.).

There are two chapters that investigate composite citations in early Christianity. The first, by Philippe Bobichon, focuses on citations in the works of Justin Martyr. Composite citations appear much more frequently in early Christian literature compared to Graeco-Roman and Jewish writings. Some interesting features occur in Justin Martyr's citations, such as his use of New Testament text forms amalgamated with the Old Testament text form (pp. 175–76). Bobichon writes, "In many cases, Justin's scriptural citations are composite only in terms of their deviances from textual traditions of the Old and New Testaments" (p. 181). Bobichon also notes that Justin used "second hand" citations (for example, from a Christian *testimonia* collection). Martin Albl's chapter exclusively deals with the *testimonia* hypothesis and composite citations in early Christian literature. Albl assess earlier *testimonia* hypotheses and criteria in the works of C. H. Dodd and J. Rendel Harris, before presenting a test case from the Epistle of Barnabas. Albl then identifies a common core of quotations in Clement and Irenaeus, which indicates a common source, and argues (1) that this source was in written form and (2) that the context of the compilation of citations was polemic and apologetic (pp. 200–1). Early Christian

writings also exhibited variations in the way that common quotations were combined, indicating that a *testimonia* source is not the exclusive reason for a composite citation, but rather that the writers had exercised discretion in combining texts to suit their discourse. Albl provides a list of criteria that will equip scholars to distinguish inherited sources from authorial construction in future research.

This volume concludes with Christopher Stanley's chapter, "Composite Citations: Retrospect and Prospects." Stanley summarizes some of the common features highlighted throughout the book with the view to provide a framework of questions for the second volume on composite citations in the New Testament. These questions explore the frequency, types, origins, sources, formations, adaptations, purposes, and audiences of the citations. Stanley also highlights two distinct modes of engagement composite citations have with their source(s); combined (where two or more texts are joined back to back within a single citation) and conflated (the insertion of a word or phrase from a subsidiary text in to a citation of a primary text), and challenges future scholarship to inquire whether the difference in construction indicates differing rhetorical purposes (pp. 204–5). The observations and questions proposed by Stanley will aid further scholarship in composite citations.

This first volume is a valuable resource for students and scholars engaging with citation practices from antiquity, and for future research in how ancient readers interpreted and valued inherited texts. Adams and Ehorn have amassed a rigorously structured and unified collection of essays that have revigorated a frequently neglected field of study, offering inspiration to both classical and New Testament scholars.

Anthony Royle
King's Evangelical Divinity School
Broadstairs, Kent, UK

---

Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn, eds. *Composite Citations in Antiquity. Volume Two: New Testament Uses.* Library of New Testament Studies 593. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018. xiii + 270 pp. £85.00/$114.00.

---

This is the second in a two-volume investigation of composite citations in literature from antiquity. The first volume focussed on Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian uses between 350 BCE and 150 CE while excluding the use of composite citations in the New Testament, which is now explored in this second volume. Sean Adams and Seth Ehorn, who also edited the first volume, have gathered together an exciting ensemble of leading scholars. Some of the essays in this book, including the late Maarten Menken's chapter on composite citations in Matthew, were presented at the Hawarden Seminar on the Old Testament in the New. This volume also includes chapters by Steve Moyise (Mark), Stanley Porter (Luke-Acts), Catrin Williams (Gospel of John), Mark Reasoner (Romans), Roy Ciampa (1–2 Corinthians and Galatians), and Susan Docherty (Hebrews). Each chapter is methodically structured around identifying and analysing each citation the author believes to be in composite form, which provides a heavier exegetical approach compared to the social and religious perspective of the first volume. This volume builds upon the investigations of its predecessor, especially Christopher Stanley's concluding chapter which observed varying modes of composite citations. Adams and Ehorn highlight this second
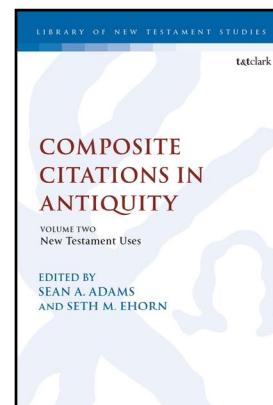
volume will make further distinctions between combined, conflated, and condensed citations (pp. 1–5); therefore, the authors of this volume section their study of composite citations into these categories. Docherty provides another category, "summarizing citations," that offer an abridged version of the authoritative texts, which differs from amalgamation of the text in condensed citations (p. 203).

Reasoner provides a detailed comparison between composite citations and linked citations, where the author strings together two or more citations but are not presented a one single citation. Linked citations are a common feature in the New Testament and are distinct in their function to composite citations. Reasoner argues that a linked citation "expects exegetical energy from implied audience" and "asks [the] audience to make interpretive steps by explicitly juxtaposing different quotations" (p. 157). A composite citation, however, "presents a pre-mixed combination as Scripture, so less exegetical energy is asked of the readers/hearers" (ibid.). Reasoner's distinction between the two modes of citation sheds helpful light on how and why the New Testament authors opt to use composite citations.

The approach to independently analysing individual citations provides an overlap by contributors regarding the same or similar composite citations used by different NT authors. For example, the three chapters dedicated to the synoptic gospels discuss parallel passages such as the use of composite citation of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 in Mark 1:2–3 (with Isaiah 40:3), Matthew 11:10, and Luke 7:27. Similar discussions also occur in relation to Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the Temple, and Jesus's defence before the Sanhedrin. This provides Adams and Ehorn with a test case that highlights some of the blurred boundaries between composite citations and the varying perspectives of each author (pp. 233–36). It is clear the editors of this volume wished to provide a comparison to highlight the importance of reception history to the study of composite citations, as it is frequently discussed throughout this book.

The question of a composite citation's source(s) is important to this volume. Each contributor comments on whether a composite citation should be attributed to the New Testament writer or an inherited source. Some of the authors rely on Martin Albl's criteria from the previous volume for making decisions about the possible use of *testimonia* sources for composite citations; however, in some cases it appears the attribution of a composite citation to author or source rests upon whether the composite is used elsewhere in similar form or not. The book highlights the difficulty in attributing a composite citation to either author or source, with need for further methodological reflection due to the ambiguous origin of some citations.

Although this volume responds to most of Stanley's challenges of exploring sources, origins, formations, and purposes, there is a lack of investigation of the New Testament "audience." Volume one questioned whether audiences would understand or unpack the composite citations; however, except for a short section on audience expectation in the concluding chapter (pp. 229–31), this volume is less concerned with the social and religious implications of composite citations. Adams and Ehorn note the difficulties in associating the level of education of the audience to know whether they would identify the citation or even able to interpret the subsidiary texts within the citation; however, this study may have benefitted from current research in social memory and explore how communities read and recite texts.

Adams and Ehorn conclude this book with a chapter that harmonizes the major contributions and discussions of the two volumes. Firstly, they provide some quantitative findings of the number of citations and the percentile of composite citations in each New Testament book. Furthermore, they supply a detailed table numbering the types of composites in each book. Secondly, they summarize the qualitative findings in this volume. They briefly discuss the issue of inherited sources raised by

the contributors and comment on the use of composite citation by a character or a narrator within a narrative. The summation of the study is that "Christian readers were actively associating and combining scriptural texts early in the interpretive process" and that "this practice pre-dates any of the New Testament works" (p. 214) and may have even been used by Jesus, which "might have influenced the practices of his followers" (p. 215). Thirdly, Adams and Ehorn present a detailed explanation of their refined definition of composite citations, which uses criteria of both form and function to distinguish composite citations from other similar phenomena. Finally, Adams and Ehorn propose avenues for future research. These avenues include areas that the editors decided to exclude from the two-volume study to limit the scope of the research. Most notable is the study of composite allusions, which has briefly received some attention in both volumes. Overall, Adams and Ehorn have contributed an exciting dynamic to the field of New Testament studies that will impact areas of research for students and scholars.

Anthony Royle
King's Evangelical Divinity School
Broadstairs, England, UK

---

Darrell L. Bock with Benjamin I. Simpson. *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. £37.59/$49.99.

*Jesus according to Scripture* is a revised and expanded version of a text that Darrell Bock originally published in 2002. Like the first edition, the book is designed "for students taking classes on the Gospels or on the life of Christ, and for pastors who wish to study the life and teaching of Jesus" (preface to the first edition, p. xxvi). The book treats the historical questions of dating and authorship, but focusses on explaining the Gospels' presentation of Jesus by means of a passage-by-passage commentary. The new edition includes three new chapters, which extend the scope of the book by providing an excellent discussion of "how we got the Gospels." The major commentary section has also been significantly expanded and updated.

Part 1 (pp. 1–108) treats "The Four Gospels: Distinctive Voices and How We Got Them." This part retains and updates Bock's original chapter giving an overview of each of the four Gospels, including questions of structure, themes, authorship, setting, and date (ch. 4). It has, however, been significantly enhanced by three new introductory chapters on "Witnessing the Gospel," "Remembering the Gospel," and "Retelling the Gospel." These three chapters on testimony, memory, and orality, were substantially the contribution of Benjamin I. Simpson, Bock's colleague at Dallas Theological Seminary. They bring the volume up to date with the most recent scholarship on the origins of the Gospels, and provide an excellent, concise, and insightful discussion of the relationship between the written Gospels and eyewitness testimony to Jesus (ch. 1), early Christian memories of Jesus (ch. 2), and oral tradition about Jesus (ch. 3). These chapters provide the most recent and reliable introduction to these three questions currently available and are, even on their own, well worth the price of the book.

Part 2 (pp. 109–516) and Part 3 (pp. 517–688) present, respectively, "Jesus according to the Synoptists" and "Jesus according to John." This major section of the book retains the incisive passage-by-passage commentary which was the major contribution of its first edition. The commentary has,
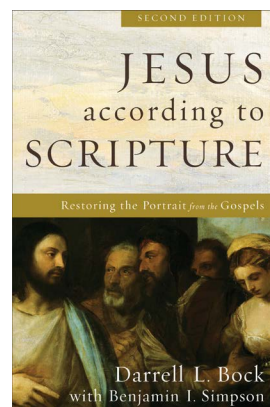
however, been significantly updated and now interacts with the major commentaries published on the Gospels since 2002. It has also been significantly expanded, and now includes an extra 100 pages of commentary beyond that provided in the first edition. The decision to treat the Synoptic Gospels in parallel is a unique contribution of this volume. The authors certainly respect the distinctive voice of each of the three Synoptic Gospels, but provide a real service by showing how the three Synoptists provide mutually complementary portraits of Jesus. In the preface they explain that "By working with a synopsis and juxtaposing one Gospel with another, we hoped to highlight the similarities and differences in a way that handling each Gospel separately could not achieve" (pp. xv–xvi.). The result is a detailed demonstration of the symphonic harmony that we have in the Synoptic Gospels. The decision to treat the Gospel of John separately represents a wise recognition of the Fourth Gospel's distinctive portrait of Jesus. Of course, not every reader will agree with every exegetical decision, but the volume provides a consistently evangelical commentary on all four Gospels and, as such, is a resource unparalleled in recent evangelical Gospel scholarship.

The volume also provides a number of useful aids that enhance its utility as a reference work, including a select bibliography and indices of subjects, modern authors, and references to Scripture and other ancient sources. Particularly helpful is a detailed chart listing "Gospel References by Unit" (pp. vii–xiv), which allows readers to easily locate the discussion of any given Gospel passage. One loss in the second edition is the synthetic "Theological Portrait of Jesus," which formed the final part of the first edition. This is understandable, given the constraints of space, and the fact that it has now become its own book (D. L. Bock with B. I. Simpson, *Jesus the God-Man: The Unity and Diversity of the Gospel Portrayals* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016]). All in all, the second edition of *Jesus according to Scripture* provides an excellent, up to date, and solidly evangelical introduction to the Gospels and their testimony to Jesus.

Murray Smith
Christ College
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

---

Abner Chou. *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018. 251 pp. £19.43/$23.99.

---

Troubling. Weird. Random. Creative. Misguided. Terms such as these characterize the apostles' use of the OT, according to some Bible interpreters. Abner Chou, on the other hand, depicts the apostolic use of the OT in other terms: brilliant, sophisticated, careful, logical, and rational.

Chou serves as the John F. MacArthur Endowed Fellow at The Master's University in Santa Clarita, California. He has written a commentary on the book of Lamentations in the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), as well as the monograph, *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

The thesis of the book is that we ought to interpret the Scriptures in the same way that the apostles and prophets did, because they always honored the authorial intent of prior revelation (p. 22). They never attempted to alter the original and fixed meaning
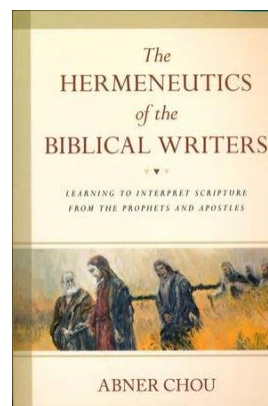
of Scripture, therefore Christians can and should imitate their hermeneutic. The apostles and prophets did not play fast and loose with the OT—they handled it contextually. Put another way, the authors of Scripture used grammatical-historical hermeneutics: "Literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics is not a modern formulation but how the biblical writers read Scripture" (p. 23). Expressed as an equation: the prophetic hermeneutic = the apostolic hermeneutic = the Christian hermeneutic. Chou says, "my thesis resonates with Beale, Kaiser, Carson, Hamilton, Caneday, and Bock" (p. 23).

The author defends three presuppositions that should govern our interpretive approach to the Bible, especially regarding the NT use of the OT (ch. 2). First, our job as Bible readers is to seek the author's intent (pp. 26–30). Postmodernism, deconstructionism, and skepticism mitigate this endeavor. More specifically, Chou argues from Scripture that no distinction exists between the human author's intent and the divine author's intent (*contra* the *sensus plenior* theory).

Second, a distinction does exist between the meaning of a passage (illocution) and its significance (perlocution) (pp. 30–34). If an apostle drew upon an OT significance rather than an OT meaning, and we fail to observe the distinction, we might wrongly accuse him of violating the original OT context.

And third, later biblical writers used earlier texts (or a network of texts), a literary technique known as intertextuality (pp. 35–40). Every book of the Bible contains intertextual connections (p. 51). If we miss a connection, we miss the author's full intent. The reader can detect intertextual connections by observing intentionally-chosen linguistic triggers, and by applying Richard Hays's classic criteria for identifying literary allusions and echoes (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], pp. 29–32).

Chapter 3 contends that the OT prophets excelled as masterful exegetes and theologians. As scholars, they were intimately acquainted with previous revelation, and they handled it with impeccable accuracy and precision. This supposition sets up chapter 4, which addresses the question, "Did the prophets speak better than they knew, or better than we give them credit for?" Chou maintains the latter, suggesting that the prophets understood their own place in redemptive history. When God used their mouths, he did not bypass their minds.

The apostles, like their prophetic predecessors, handled the OT contextually (ch. 5). In other words, no hermeneutical shift occurred at the Christ event, or in the move from OT to NT. Hence, the *sensus plenior* theory constitutes a failed attempt to explain the relationship between the Testaments. Having established this principle of continuity, chapter 6 explores the rationale of the NT writers in their use of the OT.

The treatise exhibits many obvious strengths. For one, the author builds his case in a logical and step-by-step manner. He shows a willingness to discuss presuppositions that affect biblical interpretation. Moreover, the writer devotes a generous amount of space to addressing common objections to his own viewpoint. He does not dodge controversy; instead, he deals with the most disputed passages, such as the use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15, the use of Jeremiah 31:15 in Matthew 2:18, the use of Zechariah 11:4–9 in Matthew 27:6–10, the use of Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:15–17, and so forth. The copious documentation in the footnotes enables the reader to see how the author's ideas fit within the field of study. He interacts with leading hermeneuticians, exegetes, and theologians.

Obviously, readers may at times explain perplexing texts differently. In a helpful way, the author invites his readers to consider whether "Edom" in Amos 9:12 represents all the nations, as he suggests (p. 147). In addition, he recognizes the presence of an interpretive device known as "corporate solidarity," in which an individual (e.g., Messiah) represents a people group. According to the author, this device

occurs in texts such as Genesis 3:15 and Hosea 11:1 (pp. 84, 107). Proposals such as these inform the audience of various interpretive options.

The absence of indexes stifles the usefulness of the book, and it discourages other researchers from interacting with the book in their own writings. The omission of a Scripture index especially devalues a book of this nature—a book in which the choice of biblical excerpts plays an important role. For example, where, if anywhere, does the author discuss Paul's "allegorical" treatment of the OT (Gal 4:24)? Without an index, who knows?

Does the author prove his thesis? Absolutely. As one of the promotional blurbs puts it, "Whether Chou's explanations of how the Bible's writers use earlier Scriptures [convince] readers to embrace his understanding of difficult texts, his most central thesis ought to convince readers" (p. 1). Without hesitation, I eagerly commend this book to serious Bible students who have an interest in the interrelatedness of the Scriptures. Professors could adopt the volume as a textbook for undergraduate- or graduate-level courses in hermeneutics, biblical theology, or the NT use of the OT.

Mark A. Hassler
Virginia Beach Theological Seminary
Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA

---

Richard J. Gibson and Constantine R. Campbell. *Reading Biblical Greek: A Grammar for Students*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. xiii + 129 pp. £22.99/$34.99.

---

One of the newest additions to the expanding market of Greek grammars is *Reading Biblical Greek*, an innovative first-year grammar written by Richard Gibson and Constantine Campbell. The main hallmarks of the textbook, Gibson explains, are "clarity, convenience, and currency…. The quest for clarity is reflected in the visual layout…. Convenience accounts for the apparent minimalism of the material…. In terms of currency, the material also seeks to reflect the latest developments in verbal aspect, middle lexical forms, and other issues without burdening the beginner with detailed discussions better suited to intermediate-level study" (p. vii).
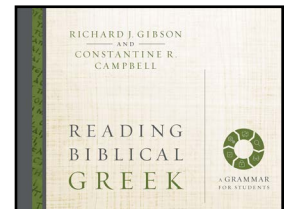
In addition to the textbook, Zondervan has also published a corresponding DVD set containing a brief overview of each lesson as well as a workbook designed to be used alongside of the grammar. Rather than students translating an eclectic assortment of New Testament passages or sentences that have been invented by the authors, the workbook divides the Greek text of Mark 1–4 into small units which students systematically translate as they make their way through the main textbook. In addition to the text of a portion of Mark's Gospel, each section in the workbook provides grammatical helps and a list of vocabulary words that have not been previously introduced.

The volume is organized in a noticeably different fashion than the majority of grammars currently in print. Rather than a single chapter designated for each major grammatical subject, Gibson and Campbell divide the material into 83 short lessons, the majority of which are placed on a single, extra-wide page (some lessons are divided and placed on two pages). For most lessons, the material is divided into three columns, though some contain only two. In the first column the authors introduce the selected subject with a short explanation of key concepts and the fundamental grammatical rules. The objective of this column is to provide the reader with essential information relating to a specific grammatical

topic (e.g., periphrastic participles) rather than a general subject (e.g., participles). The second column includes information that should be memorized such as essential grammatical rules or the paradigms of verbs and nouns. The third column contains example sentences designed to illustrate the selected topic and/or exercises intended to improve comprehension. The exercises are varied but often include brief translation assignments, parsing, or the formation of various word forms.

Roughly 450 vocabulary words are introduced and divided into 30 lists designed to be introduced at specific points in the book. Because the textbook is structured in such a way so as to enable students to begin translating the text of Mark 1–4 as quickly as possible, much of the vocabulary was selected due to its placement in Mark's Gospel or because it relates in one way or another to a particular grammatical subject. Rather than interspersing the vocabulary throughout the main text, the vocabulary lists are placed in one section at the end of the book along with answer keys to the exercises and several helpful tables that contain summaries of the pertinent grammatical information introduced throughout the volume.

What might be considered the strengths and weaknesses of the textbook is of course a matter of personal perspective. The book's innovative approach, layout, and organization, however, should be apparent to all readers. The work is clearly not a simple repackaging of existing grammars. Rather, Gibson and Campbell have produced a unique grammar that allows students to engage with the Greek text at an impressively early stage in their studies. Each lesson is clearly-written, well-organized, and user-friendly. Another strength of the volume is that it is up-to-date on current debates relating to linguistic and grammatical matters within the field of Greek studies (e.g., verbal aspect and the middle voice).

Although the volume is perhaps less intimidating than many other first-year grammars, some may find that at times it could have offered a more substantive explanation of a given topic or that it could have provided more example sentences. In several lessons, only a few example sentences were offered to illustrate grammatical subjects that are foundational and/or known for their complexity. Instructors, of course, may certainly supplement the material found in the textbook during classroom sessions. However, some readers, particularly those studying independently, may find the number of illustrations and examples to be a bit limited.

One of the more unique features of the volume is the large number of chapter divisions, or what the textbook refers to as lessons. Most introductory grammars tend to contain between 20–35 chapters, far fewer than the 83 individual lessons in this volume. Some readers may find this feature of the book to be helpful, given that it makes each lesson more manageable and less formidable. Others, however, may conclude that it is more effective and/or efficient to introduce major grammatical subjects in a single chapter, given that it allows the reader to learn a new topic in a less fragmented manner. Rather than a single dedicated chapter on a particular subject such as infinitives or the subjunctive mood, the volume introduces specific components of the subject as they become pertinent to the student's study of Mark 1–4. Participles, for example, are introduced in Lesson 40 and are developed more fully in Lessons 54, 59, 78, and 79.

Although the structure and methodology of the volume may not appeal to all readers, many will undoubtedly find *Reading Biblical Greek* to be a helpful and valuable introduction to the study of the Greek language. The authors are to be commended for developing a unique approach that allows

students to engage the text of the New Testament remarkably early in their studies while learning the various components of the language in an accessible format.

Benjamin Laird
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia, USA

Joel B. Green. *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. xii + 195 pp. £16.00/$25.00.

Joel Green is one of the most outstanding Lukan scholars of our time, and with this book he has again put us in his debt. In recent years he has engaged thoughtfully and creatively at the interface of neurobiology and biblical studies, not least in his very fine study of the nature of humans as embodied beings, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). This compact book continues that trend by looking at the theme of conversion in Luke-Acts in dialogue with neurobiology.

Green begins (ch. 1) by noticing how much our present thinking about conversion has its agenda set by William James's study, *The Varieties of Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985 [1902]), mediated in biblical studies by A. D. Nock in his influential study, *Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). James's understanding places the focus on the interior life of individual humans. In this James is following in the footsteps of Descartes, as Green later notes (pp. 43, 161–62), in separating mind from body and regarding mind as superior. Green rejects the (impossible) view that one can study conversion without scientific "interference," and argues cogently that the only question is "*which* science(s) will be allowed to speak" (p. 12, his italics). He then sets himself eight questions to explore: whether conversion is a cognitive or moral category (or both); whether repentance and conversion are distinct, notably in relation to Jews and gentiles in Luke-Acts; the degree to which conversion entails rejecting a previous way of life or a fuller engagement with a life already chosen; the relationship of conversion as change of mind (*metanoia*) and as transformation of lifestyle; whether conversion is event or process; whether conversion is the result of divine initiative or of human self-correction; whether Luke's double work supports a particular "pattern" of conversion; and what acts as catalyst(s) for conversion. This is quite an agenda, and it is impressive that by the end of the book, Green has accomplished it.

Chapter 2 outlines some key relevant themes and ideas from the cognitive sciences, particularly urging that conversion—as all human life—must be understood as embodied; that is, the "interior" model will not do, for humans are to be understood as psycho-somatic unities. Nave's important study (*Repentance in Luke-Acts* [Leiden: Brill, 2002]) leads Green to reflect that what makes a conversion "religious" is that it is understood within a community's traditions (p. 39). The combination of these factors produces Green's claim that conversion is rightly understood as involving change at the level of "bodily existence," including "dispositions and behavior" (p. 43).

In chapter 3 Green first surveys various claims for a "pattern" of conversion in Luke-Acts and finds them inconsistent with each other. He then argues strongly that conversion and repentance should
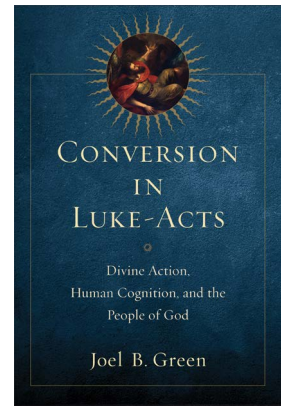
not be seen as distinct, or even overlapping, categories: rather, he will use them interchangeably (pp. 49–53). His first full engagement with the biblical text follows, reading Luke 3:1–14 for its "images of embodied transformation." In this, the first extended discussion of conversion in Luke-Acts, Green observes that the wilderness setting of John the baptizer's ministry echoes motifs from the exodus story and the Isaianic new exodus. This leads him to identify conversion as journey as a key theme, drawing here on cognitive linguistics as a valuable perspective on Luke's use of language and imagery. The embodied nature of conversion is seen in the requirements John gives to various groups who ask what their baptism implies (vv. 10–14). There is a "conversionary life" entailed in baptism, which life necessarily is communal, based on shared practices. Green adopts the perspective of discourse analysis to see this passage as "framing" how Luke's readers are to see conversion, that is, constraining how they should read later stories and material on conversion.

Chapter 4 then engages with further passages (Luke 5:1–11; Acts 9:32–11:18; Luke 5:29–32; 15; 19:1–10) to "thicken" the description of conversion from that found in Luke 3:1–14. Four key elements come in his provisional definition (pp. 87–88): conversion as journey implies "directionality"; conversion involves a life-orientation to God's eschatological purposes; conversion, although personal, is not individualistic; and conversion cannot be separated from the practices of the people of God. This chapter contains masterful exegesis as Green explores the changes of Peter and Cornelius in the Gospel and Acts, and then material on entering the kingdom in the Gospel. Readers of Paul will notice the absence of the theme of "faith" in this chapter, largely because it is absent from the Third Gospel, although Green notes a number of places where converted people exercise trust and commitment, such as by leaving everything to follow Jesus.

Chapter 5 then addresses three questions consequent on the study so far. First: what can we see of the nature of the new community entailed in conversion to follow Jesus? Green explores this through a careful and well-argued study of the earliest believers (Acts 2:42–47) (pp. 124–32). Second, the question of agency: are people or God the agents of conversion? In a careful discussion, Green gives a both/and answer which challenges both human-will-centred views which would be most at home in his Methodist background, and divine-action-alone views which more Reformed Christians would support (pp. 132–42). Everyone has much to learn from Green's work here. Thirdly, what about *de*conversion? What of people who turn away from following Jesus and belonging to his people? Green responds by an excellent study of the parable of the soils (Luke 8:4–8), followed by a series of studies of those who exemplify the characteristics of the different kinds of soil. Judas embodies "diabolical intervention" (p. 149); Ananias and Sapphira model those drawn away by the cares of this life; and Simon Magus's is the story of a "conversion interrupted" (p. 152), showing that for a person to be baptized does not mean that their old life is entirely left behind—all too easily they can slip back into the old patterns of embodied life, the old ways of living. Green puts it well: "he may have transferred his allegiance to the Lord Jesus, but he seems still to think like a magician" (p. 155).

A brief epilogue concludes the discussion, closing with a very valuable developed definition drawn from Luke-Acts:

> Converts are those who, enabled by God, have undergone a redirectional shift and now persist along the Way with the community of those faithfully serving God's eschatological purpose as this is evident in the life, death, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who lives are continually being formed through the Spirit at work in and through practices constitutive of this community. (p. 163)

There is a good set of indices to help readers refer to particular discussions, and I shall certainly make use of those in my future work. The only slightly disappointing (and surprising) feature is that quite a few footnotes refer only to whole works—books or articles—rather than giving more precise pages for those who want to follow up Green's argument in more detail.

In sum, I warmly recommend this book. It would be hard to think of a student of Luke-Acts or of Christian conversion who would not benefit greatly from it.

Steve Walton
Trinity College
Bristol, England, UK

## — HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Curtis W. Freeman. *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017. xviii + 269 pp. $29.95

Curtis Freeman's new book is a sort of cross-over between theology, church history and the history of literature. Through an exploration of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and William Blake's *Jerusalem* (1804–1820), Freeman builds an argument to understand the relationship between democracy as political constellation and religious nonconformity of the Dissenter tradition as "symbiotic": "Democracy demands dissent, dissent defends democracy" (backflap). Hence, Freeman claims: nonconformity is a democratic virtue.

In the introductory chapter, Freeman draws a genealogical line to picture his idea of the Dissenter tradition. Although he allows for reasonable variation, he clearly emphasizes the similarities by three identity markers. First, he notes the obvious refusal to make church and faith dependent on the likings of the civil government. Second, he recognizes a joint sense of what he indicates as "apocalyptic imagination" (pp. 15–26). Even though Freeman does not offer a clear-cut definition, it becomes gradually apparent that this denotes the eschatological framing of current events and figures through the vocabulary of the apocalyptic literature of Scripture. Third, they share disapproval from the political rulers of their day and age who in turn aim to domesticate these groups. "Domestication" is the tendency of those in power to perpetrate control and keep social order, either by violent oppression (prison, public execution), or a controlled and moderated incorporation of radical ideas (viz. the King James Bible), or by social exclusion. In this way, dissenters were prohibited from university, civil service, and—important for Freeman's storyline— from being buried on the ecclesial burial grounds. For this reason, Bunyan, Defoe, and Blake—though years apart—were buried in the same place, namely, the special dissenter-graveyard known as Bunhill Fields. Freeman takes his departure from Bunhill Fields to tell the story of English dissent in three acts.

The first act (ch. 2) opens with an analysis of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, demonstrating the "slumbering dissent" of the mid-seventeenth century. A period in which dissenters faced heavy suppression to enforce conformism. Bunyan, accordingly, invites his readers to mirror their lives to the pilgrimage of the main characters, Christian and Faithful, and withstand the temptation of evil.
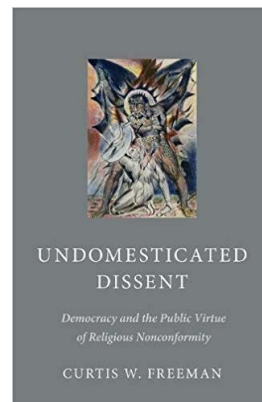
He writes, "In the *Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan provided dissenters with an apocalyptic narrative, albeit a quietly subversive one, which held out the promise of the crown of life to those who resisted the powers and proved faithful unto death" (p. 52). Fascinating is Freeman's sketch of the reception history of Bunyan's book among various peoples, who also paid the cost of martyrdom for their dissent (pp. 70–83).

In the second act (ch. 3), Freeman discusses Defoe's adventure novel *Robinson Crusoe*, characteristic of what he terms "prosperous dissent." In short, the Toleration Act of 1688 provided nonconformity with new liberties so that dissenters suddenly found themselves in better socio-economic circumstances. Those liberties also challenged their nonconformist convictions. Wrestling with his dissenter-background, Defoe expressed his dissatisfaction with society's postulated toleration and called his fellow combatants to maintain vigilant and persistent in their cause. Freeman believes that *Robinson Crusoe* should be interpreted against this background of reconfiguring nonconformist identity. The "first modern novel" (p. 101) is actually a retelling of the "Prodigal Son": "It is his struggle to come to terms with his vocation" (p. 104).

In the third act (ch. 4), Freeman continues his story of dissent through the work of William Blake, representing "apocalyptic dissent" and ushering in a new phase in dissenter history—the age of revolution. Of course, it was Blake who also made the famous watercolor-paintings for Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Blake's dissent never found an ecclesial community befitting his anti-rationalism and anti-nominalism. Thus, Freeman argues, *Jerusalem* exhibits the poetic manifestation of Blake's hope for a new Christianity: "an apocalyptic vision of a dissenting Christian who believed that only a complete transformation of thinking could return Christianity to the religion of Jesus" (p. 174). Freeman closes his book with reflective remarks in which several related themes and historical figures are involved. Freeman concludes that the dissenter tradition still challenges the United States not to interpret their liberties through the lens of individualistic freedom of choice, but as the "freedom to be a new humanity reconciled with Christ" (p. 225).

Untamable dissent toward the government is in many ways a typical American issue. Since the concern for freedom, democracy and the distrust of political power is strongly connected with the history of English Separatists, known as the Pilgrim Fathers, whose convictions are said to have born "the land of the free." However, this self-evident link between dissent and democracy is for many Christians in the European context less obvious. Reformed, Lutherans, and Anglicans share the fundamental conviction that the state is a gift of God demanding obedience rather than dissent (Rom 13). Free Church perspectives have only played a marginal role in the establishment of democracy in Europe. Nonconformity in Europe largely remained devoid of power and political influence; it has never been at home. This is also the irony. Since Freeman's book is concerned with English authors, whose legacy inspired the founding of a new country (a new home!), and hence, in one way or the other, became associated with power itself: the power of the individual will. So how would European nonconformists read these stories without the immediate connotation that dissent is a good thing for society? Politics aside, this book offers to those interested in the history of the Free Church tradition a recognizable and stimulating narrative. Especially Freeman's inclusion of reception history makes this book worthwhile. This is also the force of argument that underlies Freeman's entire discourse and theological methodology:

stories convey convictions and generate identity. It is a fine example of theology in the McClendonian tradition.

Jan Martijn Abrahamse
Ede Christian University for Applied Sciences/Amsterdam Baptist Seminary
Ede/Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Andrew Fuller. *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce*. The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller, Volume 4. Edited by Michael Haykin. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017. 148 pp. £67.99/$126.00.

This volume offers Andrew Fuller's reflections on the life and ministry of Samuel Pearce. Fuller, a Particular Baptist minister who assisted in the creation of the Baptist Missionary Society, defended the Christian tradition through influential apologetic writings and shifted Particular Baptist life in an overtly evangelical direction through constructive theological proposals. Samuel Pearce, one of Fuller's associates, served as an effective Baptist minister in Birmingham and died at the young age of thirty-three.

Fuller's *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel Pearce* operates on two levels. On the surface, the work represents Fuller's desire to honor his deceased friend. Fuller presents Pearce as a recipient of divine grace, grace that motivated Pearce to action and service. Fuller calls his readers to a posture of thankfulness for this grace as he recounts Pearce's ministry labors, evangelistic passion, and steadfastness in the face of suffering.

At a deeper level, *Memoirs* serves to advance Fuller's missionary agenda. The creation of the Baptist Missionary Society represented a pivotal moment in the history of Western missionary activity; the small band of nonconformists who met in Northamptonshire to create the Society embarked on a courageous and, in their context, unparalleled action. Fuller, the Baptist Missionary Society's first leader, wanted to provide his readers with a model of how a missionary's life might look. He chose Pearce as his exemplar.

Fuller's decision to highlight Pearce becomes interesting when one considers that Pearce never left Britain as a recognized missionary. Though he performed some evangelistic work in Ireland, he spent much of his life either training for ministry at Bristol Baptist Academy or serving his congregation in Birmingham. Pearce was not like William Carey, a man who famously left his home to start pioneer work in India.

What attracted Fuller was Pearce's desire to serve as a missionary. Pearce prayed earnestly for an opportunity to work in India alongside Carey. He spent time learning the relevant languages. He studied maps of foreign locals. He was willing even to consider forsaking his family obligations to perform missionary labor. What prevented Pearce from joining Carey was not a lack of willingness; it was the Baptist Missionary Society. The leadership team of the Society concluded that Pearce could serve the kingdom better by staying in his pastorate in Birmingham.

Pearce's missionary zeal during suffering offers Fuller a model of healthy evangelical piety. Throughout his struggle with the physical ailments that would eventually take his life, Pearce never lost his holy love for God or the missionary endeavor.
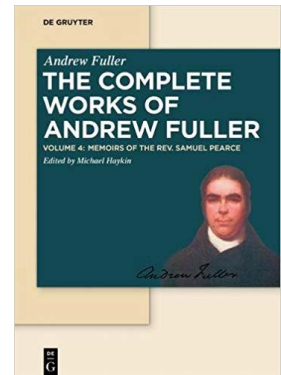
On this point, Fuller followed the steps of his theological mentor, the American theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards's *The Life of David Brainerd* presented Brainerd as a passionate missionary who also was willing to endure suffering to fulfill his missionary calling. Indeed, Edwards offered Brainerd as an example of the kind of person whom he hoped his theology would create. Fuller used the life of Pearce for the same illustrative purposes.

This edition of Fuller's text receives an introduction and helpful commentary from Michael Haykin, Director of the Andrew Fuller Center at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Haykin helpfully outlines Pearce's life and documents the context in which Fuller composed *Memoirs*. While Haykin relies on the third edition of Fuller's work (this was likely the last edition to which Fuller offered input), extensive notations detail the manuscript's textual transmission.

Recent years have witnessed fresh interest in the writings of Fuller. Haykin is presently overseeing the publication of the first critical edition of Fuller's collected works, and this volume represents a contribution to that project. Fuller's works receive attention due to their historical significance (*Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*) or their relevance to contemporary debates. For instance, Fuller's *Strictures on Sandemanianism* has significance for modern discussions over Lordship Salvation. *Memoirs* was the most successful work released during Fuller's lifetime. Its return under the skilled hand of Haykin is most welcome.

*Memoirs* merits interest from several audiences. Historians of evangelical history should appreciate the fact that Fuller's treatment of Pearce constitutes one of the first missionary biographies written from an explicitly evangelical persuasion. Scholars of Jonathan Edwards may wish to see how Fuller appropriates Edwards's work on David Brainerd. Pastors can benefit from Fuller's perceptive comments about the nature of Christian ministry. Readers who are searching for devotional material will find the piety of Pearce's life rich and challenging.

David Mark Rathel
University of St. Andrews
St. Andrews, Scotland, UK

---

Martin I. Klauber, ed. *Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henry IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014. 432 pp. £18.80/$25.00.

In *Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, Martin Klauber aims to resurrect the "theological richness rarely remembered even among Reformed believers in the centuries following their labor" (Introduction). Contributors to this volume accomplish this. Believers from a Reformed background will make many discoveries as they read the book and undoubtedly gain insight into the thought, shape, practice, and difficulties of the French Reformed churches.

The book is a collection of essays divided into two main sections: the historical background and the most important theologians with their thoughts and teachings in historical context, covering the history of protestant churches from the Edict of Nantes (1598), signed during the reign of Henry IV, to its revocation through the Edict of Fontainebleau (1685).
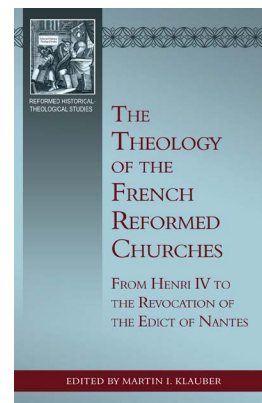
The first essay focuses on the historical and political background between Catholics and Protestants during the lead up to the Edict of Nantes. Jeannine Olson, the chapter's author, acknowledges that Farrell, rather than Calvin, exerted the most influence in France during this early period.

Olson questions the sincerity of the protestant conversion of King Henry IV since he still embraced Catholicism. Nevertheless, the people of France loved Henry, at least in part due to the Edict of Nantes (1598) which granted freedom of conscience and freedom of worship to Huguenots while still demanding some compromise. The edict manifested some religious tolerations but required the Reformed believers to observe Catholic holidays and pay the tithe to the Catholic church. Additionally, the edict allowed the Reformed churches to maintain their discipline and organizational structures.

The chapter on Beza, written by Scott Manetsch, stands out as particularly well-documented as it details Beza's connection to Catholic France and his process of publicly embracing Protestantism. Beza wrote the *Confession of the Christian Faith* (1559), which gives a "forceful articulation of Reformed Christianity in seven chapters, ranging from the doctrine of the Trinity to the last judgment" (Beza in Laussane) with a heavy emphasis on the authority of Scripture. Beza, under a commission by Calvin, finished the translation of the French Psalter after the death of the poet, Clément Marot. That Psalter (1562) became a best seller, reaching more than sixty editions in the first four years.

Thereafter, Manetsch meticulously narrates how Calvin's Geneva successfully planted some 1240 reformed churches in France. The Company of Pastors recruited, trained, and sent more than two hundred pastors. Despite those efforts, Beza noted the continued need for more qualified Protestant pastors. Manetsch describes Beza's persecution, including several death threats made by Catholic France, as he directly or indirectly witnessed the murder of hundreds of Huguenots. Persecution in France meant that Geneva became a refuge for Protestant believers and that the academy was filled with France's best theologians. This educational foundation alone, however, could not guarantee a firm future for the French church.

The following chapters describe the structure of the Reformed churches and the organization of their synods. There were fifteen synods while the Edict of Nantes was in effect. Protestants carefully structured and consciously represented their churches during that time. "Whereas the consistory 'ruled over' and 'governed' the congregation under its care with a mandate and authority given in Scripture, the colloquies and synods derived their authority from the agreement of the federated churches" (Federation). Furthermore, these chapters show how these churches distinguished themselves from the Catholic structures, not only pragmatically but also theologically. Theodore G. Van Raalte, in his contribution, concludes that French Reformed churches survived a long time because of their non-hierarchical government and because of the unique synodical system—the first of its kind for a national Reformed church.

Donald Sinnema, then, turns his attention to the Calvinist-Arminian controversy and the desire for unity amongst Reformed churches. Sinnema begins by recounting Pierre du Moulin's (1568–1658) proposal for a two-stage strategy to achieve Protestant unity. The first stage was to establish a common Reformed confession where Arminian views were considered non-essential matters that could be tolerated. The second stage was another conference where Lutherans could be included "to explore areas of agreement and mutual toleration to seek a broader accord with the Reformed" (du Moulin's Plan for Protestant Unity). Despite the initial optimism, du Moulin later shifted his position: He thought that Arminianism "undermined the very foundations of the Christian faith" (Conclusion).

The first section finishes by narrating the Catholic efforts to bring Protestants back to the mother church. They did this mainly by limiting the Edict of Nantes's protection over Reformed believers. Luis XIV enforced the politics of legal persecution. These peaceful and legal tactics accomplished the conversion of Protestant leaders and Reformed pastors back to the Catholic church. Thenceforth, from 1679, the Edict of Nantes itself was enforced to diminish the power of Reformed churches. Even before the revocation of the edict, about 250 churches were suppressed, their buildings were torn down, and Protestants were left out of civil and professional positions. These tactics achieved about thirty-eight thousand abjurations in one year (1681), and Huguenots started emigrating to other countries.

By 1685, the Edict of Nantes was effectively useless. The French King finally revoked it when he signed the Edict of Fontainebleau in October 1685. This new edict enforced, among other things, the expulsion of Protestant pastors and the baptism of children in the Catholic church. If children up to the age of 17 did not show up for catechism, they were removed from their parents' authority and assigned to Catholic parents or Catholic institutions. Despite the prohibition to emigrate, many families and villages fled to the Netherlands, Germany, England, Geneva and Switzerland between 1685 and 1687.

Section two gives the biographical accounts and the theological thoughts of several theologians. First, Albert Gootjes argues that the most influential figure in the period was the Scottish theologian, John Cameron (1579–1625). After recounting the posthumous publication of his writings, Gootjes explains Cameron's views on universalism and its reception and propagation by his disciples Amyraut, La Place, and Cappel.

The remaining chapters provide detailed descriptions of the life and contribution of Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664), Pierre du Moulin (1568–1658), Jean Daillé (1594–1670), Andreas Rivetus (1572–1651), Charles Drelincourt (1595–1669), Claude Pajon (1626–1685), Jean Claude (1619–1687), and Pierre Jurieu (1637–1713). Their contributions center on a variety of subjects. The authors introduce the reader to names and teachings from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century not widely treated in other publications. These themes range from theology to political life, from apologetics and the doctrine of God to pastoral theology and exegesis.

Lastly, the book includes valuable appendices with translated excerpts of the Edict of Nantes and the Edict of Fontainebleau, giving the reader introductory access to primary sources and confirming the documentation of the aforementioned chapters.

Each chapter not only accounts for the history and thought of French Reformed churches but also excellently considers the historical context that surrounded the Edict of Nantes. The book's structure evidences this emphasis and establishes the historical background before diving into the particular contributions of the leading theologians in France. One issue that arises is the somewhat repetitious chord of historical facts which—though a product of the format involving numerous authors—could have been avoided.

All in all, this book allows the reader to see not only how the European Reformation impacted France, but also how French Reformed churches with their thought and practice influenced the church elsewhere. Church leaders and academicians should consider these authors' perspectives since they show the theological pillars in which French Reformed churches established their national church.

Felipe Chamy
Centro de Estudios Pastorales
Anglican Church of Chile

Richard A. Muller. *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 329 pp. £33.88/$45.00.

In *Divine Will and Human Choice*, Richard Muller continues his life-long project of providing a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the post-Reformation Reformed tradition. He looks back to ancient philosophy and medieval scholasticism to demonstrate the continuity and development thesis prevalent throughout his work. As readers have come to expect, Muller's presentation of the primary sources reveals a variegated, rather than monolithic, group of Reformed Orthodox thinkers. In his own words, his "main thesis" is as follows:

> Early modern Reformed theologians and philosophers developed a robust doctrine of creaturely contingency and human freedom built on a series of traditional scholastic distinctions, including those associated with what has come to be called "synchronic contingency," and did so for the sake of respecting the underlying premise of Reformed thought that God eternally and freely decrees the entire order of the universe, past, present, and future, including all events and acts, whether necessary, contingent, or free. (p. 34)

Muller does not address the soteriological issue of monergism versus synergism. Neither does he evaluate whether those he examines solve the perennial problem of divine sovereignty and human freedom. What he does do is articulate a pre-Edwardsian Reformed formulation of the solution. Yet he seeks to accomplish considerably more than this.

The book moves a preexisting debate over freedom and necessity, specifically synchronic contingency, in Reformed thought significantly forward by critiquing the main players on both sides. Part one is devoted to framing the debate, though the critiques are sustained throughout the work.

Part two examines Aristotle, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, an examination from which Muller concludes that there was not a Scotist revolution in thinking on freedom and necessity that the scholastics of the seventeenth century picked up on. The point that both Aquinas and Scotus fit comfortably within Western Christian Aristotelianism, a stream of thought that included Reformed theologians, is a primary contention over which Muller parts ways with the position represented by Reformed Thought on Freedom. The language of synchronism or simultaneity of potencies represents a meaningful development, but not a break.

The third and final part of the book traces early modern reformed perspectives on contingency, necessity, and freedom. The modern language and dichotomy of compatibilism and libertarianism, which Helm and others adopt, is anachronist and simply does not fit this time period. Muller demonstrates this by presenting the understandings of numerous Reformers and Reformed scholastics, including thinkers like Calvin, Vermigli, Zanchi, Ursinus, Junius, Gomarus, Twisse, Owen, Voetius, and Turretin, among others. He explores the concepts of divine power and concurrence, possibility, actuality, and contingency, noting the fact that the scholastic definitions and distinctions are explanatory tools functioning in a seventeenth-century Reformed context, with a certain understanding of God and the world.
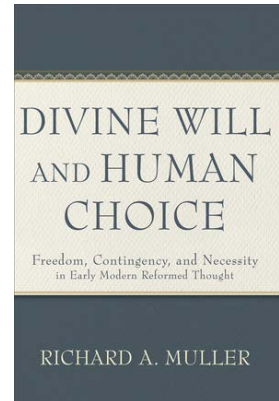
What emerges is a picture of how early modern Reformed thinkers made sense of the divine determination of all things and genuine human freedom, not an Edwardsian freedom from compulsion. In the nearest he comes to a summary statement, Muller writes,

> The point is that both God and A, as rational beings, have potencies to more than one effect—and that God, at his primary level of causality, volitionally and ontologically concurs with the willing of A, so that the real or actual order in which A exists is constituted, as future contingencies are actualized, by both divine and human willing. The divine and the human willing are both free and both capable of alternativity; both are necessary and together are sufficient for the act to take place. (p. 308)

Synchronicity or simultaneity of potencies presents "the retention of the alternative or contrary potency as the genuine identifier of freely willed acts" (p. 308). All of this assumes that God alone has the power to actualize possibilities in the ultimate sense and that God is utterly free in his willing. It assumes that the creation of the contingent world order established an ontologically and causally two-tiered universe. It assumes that divine concurrence is necessary to the operation of all secondary causes, and the law of non-contradiction. In other words, concurrent divine willing enables genuine human freedom and "a contingent world order in which choices, events, and all things could be otherwise" (p. 324).

Muller does not disappoint in either the breadth of his research or his insightful analysis. His thesis is bold in its various critiques of established scholarship, yet persuasive. The volume is a scholarly monograph, and one not easily accessible, even by the standards of its genre. It is a wealth of information, though, and essential for specialists to labor through. That said, it will also be of interest to all those considering the question of divine sovereignty and human freedom. The seventeenth century was the capstone to an era that did indeed give way to something new in the eighteenth on this question. The answer represented by Jonathan Edwards will be much more familiar to readers, but part of the inherent importance of this book is the alternative solution it offers.

Andrew S. Ballitch
Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

---

E. Jerome Van Kuiken. *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017. 224 pp. £85.00/$114.00.

The question of whether Christ assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation has captured the attention of many at least since the time of Karl Barth, and that interest shows no signs of declining with a recent stream of published monographs and scholarly articles bearing witness to the continued focus. E. Jerome Van Kuiken's volume stands out from the crowd by providing a decidedly conciliar contribution. The author proffers his aim as a desire "to move this crucial debate [regarding Christ's humanity] one step closer toward resolution" (p. 2).

Van Kuiken argues that the modern fallen view "was raised in Great Britain, revived in Germany (and Switzerland), returned to Britain, and received in
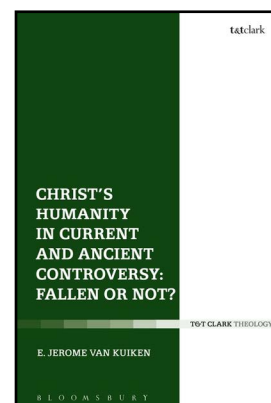
America" (p. 13). This geographic movement corresponds to the five fallen proponents under view, namely, Edward Irving (1792–1834), Karl Barth (1886–1968), Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007), Colin Gunton (1941–2003), and, Thomas Weinandy (b. 1946). Edward Irving was found guilty of heresy in 1830 and 1833 for his advocacy of Christ's "'fallen,' indeed 'sinful,'" human nature; a charge which Irving returned to his opponents. He argued for three types of sin—original, constitutive, and actual—in order to reconcile Christ's "personal sinlessness" with "his sinful human substance" (p. 16), and he drew support for his doctrine from "scripture, church tradition, and theological reasoning" (p. 19).

In his discussion of the four remaining fallenness proponents, Van Kuiken continues by offering a summary of their distinct articulation as well as noting how they were influenced toward their position. Karl Barth, while mentioning Irving briefly as a precedent, "singles out … Gregory Nyssen and … Pope Honorius I," seeing himself as taking a minority stance relative to the tradition (p. 22). Thus, Barth sees himself at odds with the very tradition to which Irving appeals. This discussion brings the reader to Thomas F. Torrance, whom Van Kuiken sees as taking a mediating position between Irving and Barth regarding tradition. Torrance draws upon "Eastern patristic theology" for support and, thus, critiques "much of the Western tradition" as being unnecessarily against the fallenness view (p. 31).

Torrance also drew from Barth, by way of his professor H. R. Mackintosh (1870–1936), for his view that "Christ bore a fallen yet sinless human nature"; in fact, so important was this assertion for Torrance that he considered it a matter of orthodoxy (p. 31; cf. p. 41). Notably, Torrance distinguishes his view from Irving (p. 33). In contrast, Colin Gunton's view is clearly influenced by the latter (p. 44). The advocacy of the fallenness view by Thomas G. Weinandy marks, for Van Kuiken, the broadening of the view as the prior advocates were "European and Reformed," whereas Weinandy is an American Catholic (pp. 49–50). With some qualification, Weinandy goes beyond Torrance by retrieving Latin theologians in support of his position (p. 55), a practice which raises the question: whose understanding of the historic church's stance on the fallenness of Christ's humanity is the correct one (p. 56)?

Of the five unfallenness proponents surveyed in chapter 2, only one, Philip Hughes (1915–1990), is not a Scot, a fact which is "indicative of the depth of Irving's impact upon his compatriots" (p. 60). Marcus Dods (1786–1838), a contemporary opponent of Irving, argued that, within "the first four-centuries … neither the orthodox nor heretics" advocated such a view as Irving's with the exception of two relatively obscure exceptions (p. 63). A. B. Bruce (1831–1899), though a generation later, argued forcibly against Irving; yet, he did not find much coherence within the tradition, considering "the fathers' own record" as "relatively better" than that of Apollinaris (pp. 66–67).

H. R. Mackintosh is an ironic figure for, despite his opposition to the fallenness view, he actually served to buttress it. Mackintosh cited Irving in *Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913). This work influenced Barth's one reference to Irving, which according to Van Kuiken, served to recover Irving, "bringing him to the attention of Colin Gunton and, through Gunton, to Thomas Weinandy" (p. 73). Mackintosh appeals to the fathers for "his kenotic concerns" rather than in support of the fallenness view contra Torrance (p. 74). The last two defenders of the unfallen view—Phillip Hughes and Donald Macleod (b. 1940)—also deny that tradition supports the fallenness view; rather, "all five theologians find the contention that Christ's humanity was *real* and *full*, not *fallen*" in Scripture as well as Latin and Greek fathers (p. 90). Van Kuiken's survey of both fallen and unfallen proponents demonstrates that there are considerable differences of articulation even amongst those who agree regarding the question at hand; thus, their views resist reduction to simple categories of fallen and unfallen.

In chapters three and four, Van Kuiken chooses five Greek and Latin fathers to survey based on breadth of citation by both those who affirm and those who deny that Christ assumed a fallen human nature. After surveying, from the Greeks, Irenaeus (ca. 130–202), Athanasius (ca. 296–373), Gregory Nazianzen (ca. 329–390), Gregory Nyssen (ca. 335–395), and Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376–444), he concludes that they considered Christ's humanity "fallen" (Irenaeus, Cyril) and "sinful" (Nyssen), yet they generally insisted on Christ's sinlessness (p. 126). Taken conceptually, these fathers were convinced that "in the virginal conception, [Christ] heals and hallows … a human nature otherwise" captive to sin, yet, in "his earthy life Christ bears the consequences of sin." Tertullian (ca. 155–240), Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 310–367), Ambrose (ca. 340–397), Augustine (354–430), and Leo the Great (ca. 400–461) are surveyed for the Latin fathers and are shown to be in essential agreement with the Greek fathers (p. 154).

The fifth chapter pulls together the previous chapters. In the main, the complex picture of the fathers is often missed by both fallen and unfallen advocates. While Torrance may have the clearest picture at this point, these different understandings are "mutually corrective." Hence, regarding the question of orthodoxy: Irving has plausible Gnostic and Nestorian tendencies; an extreme form of Monophysitism in Dods is possible; but, other charges of heretical tendencies on either side are improbable (pp. 162–63). Drawing from and correcting two taxonomies related to the debate, Van Kuiken demonstrates that all but Irving (with some nuance) come to basically the same position (p. 165–66). This demonstration is followed by a helpful discussion of terminology (e.g., "unfallen," "fallen") as well as areas that fallen and unfallen proponents could discuss given their common ground (e.g., Mariology, Sanctification). Finally, an appendix attempts to locate the sources of Irving's patristic citations.

Van Kuiken's contribution to the debate is essential for those interested. His clear and careful reading of the ten modern and ancient theologians as well as his prolific engagement with secondary literature makes his account quite compelling not to mention even-handed. While some may wonder if his approach to original sin is too broad and others may quibble with some of his readings of the fathers, all interested in this ongoing debate will greatly benefit from this incisive and judicious book.

Thomas Haviland-Pabst
Asheville, North Carolina, USA

---

Jonathan M. Yeager. *Jonathan Edwards and Transatlantic Print Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xix + 234 pp. £56.00/$78.00.

---

Interest in print culture history begins with the *Annaliste* movement, which traces the *longue durée* by finding "tracks" left from material culture and epigraphy, while understanding humanity's *mentalité* by working at the cross-section of multiple social science disciplines. The heritage of print culture monographs begins with Lucien Febvre and Henry-Jean Martin's, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*. In the spirit of this kind of historiography, Jonathan M. Yeager, Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, has contributed a new study on print culture.

Yeager aims to "fill an important lacuna in the history of the book and early American religious history" by studying the print history of Colonial America's
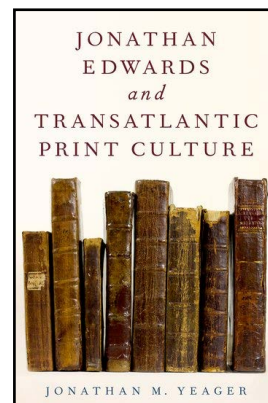
most important 18th century theologian, pastor, and writer—Jonathan Edwards (p. i). A vital component of Yeager's thesis is that historians have overlooked the multiple players who assisted in disseminating Jonathan Edwards's ideas and kept them alive and in print throughout the 18th century. Yeager boldly asserts: "If it had not been for their efforts, we might never have heard of Jonathan Edwards" (p. 26). Furthermore, the material quality of Edwards's books—paper size, quality, binding—along with price, subscription records, and print runs evidence the popularity and reception of Edwards's writings. This study spans the print life of Edwards first publications to the end of the 18th century.

Most of Jonathan Edwards's first editions (20 of 28) were printed from Boston by Samuel Kneeland. Chapter two fills the dearth of knowledge on Boston printing and Samuel Kneeland in order to illuminate our cognizance of Edwards, his readership, and how he was understood. Historical moments like the revivals and theological controversies like the communion controversy were of interest to readers. Edwards's publications stimulated conversation on these issues and mitigated these controversies, all of which he accomplished from the remote location of Northampton. Nonetheless, his evangelical relationships in Boston, like Samuel Kneeland, helped bring his ideas to print. Kneeland, though a supporter of evangelicalism, was not a profitable businessman. He died in poverty and insolvent, a story perhaps set against Benjamin Franklin's opportunistic approach to printing (p. 49), and suggestive that Kneeland valued spreading piety more than accruing profit (p. 50–52). Valuable elements in this chapter include reflection on the role of newspaper advertisements, pricing, paper selection, and binding—influential factors for creating a desirable print product for readers. Samuel Kneeland, with Edwards's input, controlled these factors and "helped create the image that readers formed" of Edwards (p. 52).

Authors and printers cannot print without funding. Chapter three recovers the contribution of Daniel Henchman, a wealthy merchant and bookseller in Boston. Henchman appeared to be a principled publisher, who "patronized the writings of evangelicals and catered to orthodox Calvinists" (p. 61). However, he could only fund projects that garnered substantial subscriptions. Henchman funded Edwards's most successful publication, *The Life of David Brainerd*, an inexpensive octavo yielding the interest of 2,000 subscriptions. Besides Henchman's backing, Edwards relationship with prominent clergy and particular congregations was decisive for the spread of his thought. According to Yeager, "Relationship formed the backbone of the book trade" (p. 146). Bostonian clergy, Thomas Prince and William Cooper, recommended *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption* in its preface. Members of the Northampton congregation sponsored the sermon, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*. Hatfield community members likewise sponsored the funeral sermon, *The Resort and Remedy*. Yeager proposes that "in the case of Edwards, most of the people involved with his publications can be linked by their religious interests" (p. 74). This is so on both sides of the Atlantic. The printing of *A Faithful Narrative* in London, which advanced Edwards's reputation in Europe, is credited to John Guyse's and Isaac Watts's interest in seeing London revival akin to Edwards's recount of Northampton's revival.

Chapter four recognizes the indispensable role that literary agents and editors played in the publication process. These people provided advocacy and quality control. Benjamin Colman acted as a literary agent, who put *A Faithful Narrative* in front of Guyse and Watts, without which Edwards "would have achieved anything beyond a fleeting regional fame" (p. 99). However, after seeing his work edited and published irresponsibly by others (notably Guyse and Watts in London and Yohann Adam Steinmetz in Germany), Edwards kept his publications close to home in Boston and in the hands of trustworthy associates. In a correspondence letter with Thomas Foxcroft, Edwards says that he could not trust anyone else to see *Freedom of the Will* to the press. Foxcroft, both carefully proofed Edwards's

publications, and represented his interests to the printer, particularly concerning paper size and quality. Edwards appreciated wide margins for marginalia and quality paper. Foxcroft negotiated these matters with Kneeland on Edwards's behalf.

Chapter five relates how Edwards's books stayed in print. This chapter discusses Samuel Hopkins's and Joseph Bellamy's challenge to bring *The Two Dissertations* into print, how John Erskine kept Edwards's works in print in London and his partnership with William and Margaret Gray to do so, the obsession of John Collett Ryland to have Jonathan Edwards Jr. bring new works from his father's sermons and notebooks to publication, and translation of Edwards writing into Dutch by Cornelis Brem. Without the efforts of these people behind the scenes, Edwards's Reformed theology might not have ensured the endurance of the New Divinity movement and Edwards might have been a historical footnote. Yeager concludes that the material evidence and the stories of Edwards's supporters suggest that profit was secondary and religious interest was the primary motivation for propagating Edwards' thought.

This work includes images for readers to see the physical quality of Edwards print publications. Appendices contain records of each work, its print run, price, format, and a subscription record of *The Life of Brainerd*. Similar to other print culture studies, page 134 provides a geographical scatter plot; this one comparing print subscriptions for *The History of the Work of Redemption* in 1786 and *Religious Affections* in 1787. Ultimately, this work demonstrates the positive contribution that social history and print culture studies provide to the construction of evangelical history.

Joseph T. Cochran
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois, USA

# — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

Joshua Farris. *The Soul of Theological Anthropology: A Cartesian Exploration.* New York: Routledge, 2017. xiv + 198 pp. £121.01/$149.95.

In recent years the field of theological anthropology has witnessed a flurry of books, journal articles, and even conferences dedicated to making sense of non-dualist accounts of the mind. This increased attention is a reflection of the state of various academic fields; non-dualist accounts of the human person are the dominant accounts among scientists and philosophers alike. In a sense, this may not be too surprising. However, what some readers of this journal may find surprising is that a growing number of theologians and biblical scholars also advocate for non-dualist theological anthropologies of various sorts (See, for example, Nancey Murphy, Warren Brown, and Newton Malony, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998]; Veli-Matti Karkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity, vol. 3, A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015]; Michael Welker, ed., *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014]). In fact, such a view is the predominant and even default
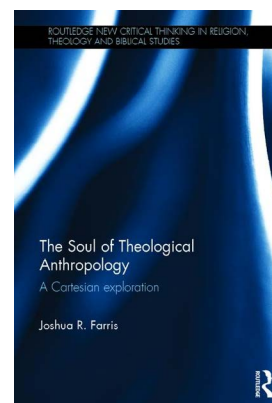
view at certain institutions (A significant number of faculty members at Fuller Seminary are non-reductive physicalists, including: Warren Brown, Joel Green, Nancey Murphy, and Brad Strawn). Given the growing popularity of non-dualist accounts, *The Soul of Theological Anthropology: A Cartesian Exploration*, by Joshua Farris (Assistant Professor of Theology at Houston Baptist University), delivers a breath of fresh air.

That Farris has written a philosophically sophisticated defense of dualism about human composition is not necessarily novel. After all, good work on the subject has been done by other philosophers, including J. P. Moreland, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and William Hasker. What is novel about Farris's approach is his attempt to build his defense of dualism on three pillars: philosophy, Scripture, and tradition. Those who hold to a high view of the Bible will appreciate Farris's understanding of Scripture as the norming norm for theological reflection. Those who hold to a high view of tradition will also appreciate Farris's view that "tradition is a guard and guide in constructive theology" (p. 8). Another novel aspect of Farris's monograph is that he approaches his work using the methods of analytic theology. Thus, this book is best seen as theology governing philosophy, rather than philosophy governing theology.

Beginning in chapter 1, Farris defends Cartesian substance dualism, the view according to which "an individual human is identical to the soul or the core of the human is the soul, which also has a body or functions interactively with a body" (p. 17). In chapter two he argues that Cartesian dualist accounts (elsewhere called person-body-substance dualism accounts) provide a convincing account of the biblical metanarrative of creation, fall, rescue, and restoration. Chapter three attempts to answer the question, "What views on origins are available and how do they relate to particular varieties of substance dualism" (p. 55)? In answering this question, he explores how versions of pure dualism, compound dualism, and composite dualism comport with theories about the origin of the soul including: traditional traducianism, special creationism, and emergent substance dualism. In the following chapter Farris provides his own proposal: emergent creationism (EC). This view bears some similarities to Hasker's emergent substance dualism and special creationism. Chapter five addresses how various species of person-body-substance dualism satisfy or fail to satisfy desiderata concerning human origins, embodiment, and recent scientific findings. Naturally, Farris believes that EC does the best job of satisfying the desiderata laid down in this chapter. Readers might disagree with some of his particular conclusions, but still find his overall argument for dualism convincing. The final four chapters of the book turn to the implications of EC for a number of dogmatic issues, including original sin, Christology, the interim state, and the beatific vision. Farris concludes with a call for further reflection on virtue, sexuality, gender, race, and free will, among other subjects in relation to EC.

In this work, Farris investigates a wide expanse of theological and philosophical issues, and in so doing, makes a number of significant claims. However, Farris's greatest contribution is his detailed account of EC. This view, according to which "souls are created by God but that souls only come into existence in conjunction with their bodies in time as emergent souls or as a distinct emergent nature; where bodies, having their own properties/powers, become causally necessary for souls and vice versa," has a number of advantages over other versions of dualism (p. 76). These advantages include, (1) EC is a version of creationism, (2) it posits a strong relationship between the body and soul, (3) it ascribes a strong causal role to the parents in the procreative act, (4) it comports with recent scientific findings about the mind, and (5) it accounts for the transmission of original sin. Despite these strengths of EC, one strange and arguably unnecessary feature of the view concerns the intermediate state. According

to EC, souls need a "personal hunk of matter" (p. 59) to operate appropriately. The intermediate state, however, is traditionally understood as a disembodied state. Farris suggests that perhaps what happens in the intermediate state is that souls "may not have their own personal body to act with, but they can act through and with Christ's body as a new corporate entity" (p. 164).

In the wake of recent non-dualist accounts of human composition offered by a number of scientists, philosophers, and even theologians, Farris makes a welcome contribution to the defense of traditional views about the soul. While likely being too technical to serve as an introduction to the topic, *The Soul of Theological Anthropology* arguably offers the best comprehensive defense and construction of a dualist anthropology published in recent years, primarily because of its robust engagement with philosophical, theological, and biblical material.

Christopher G. Woznicki
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, California, USA

---

J. P. Moreland, Stephen Meyer, Chris Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 1008 pp. £43.00/$60.00.

This weighty, wide-ranging, and often fascinating collection of thirty-one essays succeeds at the goal stated in the book's subtitle. My remarks below will focus on the theological contribution that the book makes. Some three-fourths of the book is dedicated to scientific and philosophical matters. But the editors recognize that for Christians who acknowledge Jesus's lordship in ways that Scripture seems to commend, a strong foundation of hermeneutics, exegesis, theology, and even history of interpretation is called for.

As far as history of interpretation, John G. West contributes "Darwin in the Dock: C. S. Lewis on Evolution." West clarifies the extent to which Lewis can be claimed as a supporter of theistic evolution. In West's reading, Lewis was ultimately more critical of modern evolutionary theory than not. He was certainly not blindly affirming of Darwinian accounts of the origin of humans, society, or morals.

Complementing West on Lewis is Fred G. Zaspel on B. B. Warfield, who has been heralded by some as a supporter of evolutionary theory. Zaspel cites primary sources both published and unpublished to document that Warfield displayed guarded openness to "the possibility of evolution *if* it could be established with a reasonable degree of certainty" (p. 953; Zaspel's italics). But Warfield consistently and repeatedly denied that it had been so established. He clearly affirmed the Bible's account of origins over against the contentions of current theistic evolution proponents (pp. 966–68 for a helpful summary).

The core of the book's theological case is found in essays by Wayne Grudem and Gregg R. Allison. Grudem contributes an introductory chapter that documents the distance between the early chapters of Genesis "understood as a *historical narrative* in the sense of *reporting events that the author wants readers to believe actually happened*" (pp. 63–64; Grudem's italics), on the one hand, and how theistic evolutionists understand the biblical narrative, on the other. It is not easy to see how some current
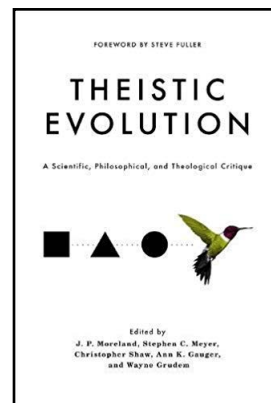
interpreters (like Denis Alexander and John Walton) can claim any support in the Bible for their interpretations at all.

Grudem's important summation (including clarification that the book does not take a position in the age of the earth, does not call for "literal" interpretation because the word is too ambiguous, and leaves open the meaning of creation "days") is augmented by C. John Collins's chapter "How to Think about God's Action in the World." Although Collins's remarks appear in the philosophical section of the book, they are important hermeneutically in asserting rightly that responsible critical thought calls for caution "*both* about appealing to miracle to cover our ignorance" when it comes to origins, "*and* about excluding, before we even begin our study, the possibility of extra help from outside the natural process" (p. 659; Collins's italics). Biblically-based arguments may too quickly violate the first rule, while "scientific" arguments in the throes of methodological naturalism may violate the second.

Grudem, after laying down twelve points at which the Bible and theistic evolution seem to be in clear conflict (pp. 72–73; see also p. 785), goes on to refute those twelve points (pp. 788–821). He also surveys important Christian teachings that theistic evolution weakens or denies. These include the Bible's truthfulness, creation by God's word/s as affirmed in Scripture, and God's signature or discernible imprint in physical matter and human moral consciousness. Grudem also shows how theistic evolution imperils Christian teaching on God's wisdom, goodness, and justice. Moreover, it calls in question the doctrines of human equality, the atonement, and the resurrection. For these reasons and more, theistic evolution is "incompatible" with historic Christian confession (p. 837).

John Currid in his chapter "Theistic Evolution Is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament" provides additional exegetical basis for Grudem's contentions. He also shows how certain evangelical leaders are paving the way for more widespread acceptance of (unverifiable) claims made by BioLogos and its allies who affirm theistic evolution at least to a considerable extent. These leaders include Bruce Waltke, Peter Enns, John Walton, Tremper Longman, and N. T. Wright (pp. 842–43). Currid argues vigorously for historic, not revisionist, understanding of Genesis's early chapters and concludes on an optimistic note: "new interpretations of Scripture will appear" (as they already have in the current climate), "but I also think it is likely that the more traditional interpretations will increasingly prevail in the church" (p. 878).

Mirroring Currid on the Old Testament is Guy Prentiss Waters on the New. He covers specific New Testament passages that refer to Adam and Eve and then theological arguments involving Adam found in key texts (1 Cor 15; Rom 5). Waters interacts vigorously with the views on Adam advanced by Denis Alexander (and Scot McKnight), John Walton, and Peter Enns. He concludes that "the New Testament writings cannot be accommodated to theistic evolution apart from transforming their teachings in a fundamental fashion" (p. 926).

Gregg Allison presents evidence for the proposition that "theistic evolution is incompatible with doctrinal standards that have been required for church leadership, as those doctrinal standards have been developed throughout church history" (p. 927). He surveys key statements from the patristic era up through Origen, views from Aquinas through the Reformation and beyond, and the positions found in current denominational statements by Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and others.

Allison refers (pp. 949–51) to leaders like John Stott, Tim Keller, Derek Kidner, C. S. Lewis, and B. B. Warfield who have been claimed as supporters of evolution. Allison observes, "None of them explicitly embraced theistic evolution as this book defines it" (p. 951).

As far as its biblical and theological coverage, this book must be adjudged a notable success in analyzing what is at stake, and what Scripture and Christian teaching continue to affirm, in the face of an important current debate.

Robert W. Yarbrough
Covenant Theological Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri, USA

---

J. P. Moreland, Stephen Meyer, Chris Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 1008 pp. £43.00/$60.00.

*Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique* is the latest contribution to the ongoing conversation on origins: thirty-one chapters, twenty-five authors, spanning 1,007 pages. The critiques of its moniker are divided into three sections: scientific, philosophical, and theological. It is not possible to review every article in depth. Instead, I hope to summarize the significance of this work, and explore a constructive response to move us all forward.

This book is a product of the Intelligent Design (ID) movement, centered at the Discovery Institute. This movement is influential in the church and often appears to be motivated by Christian theological concerns. The contributors include Stephen Meyer, Doug Axe, Ann Gauger, Paul Nelson, Casey Luskin, and a host of other ID proponents. By positioning themselves as a non-sectarian science voice, however, only rarely are these theological concerns articulated. Breaking this pattern, *Theistic Evolution* brings the theology of the ID movement to the surface much more clearly and visibly than prior contributions (such as, for example, Jay W. Richards, *God and Evolution: Protestants, Catholics, and Jews Explore Darwin's Challenge to Faith* [Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2010]).

*Theistic Evolution* is a critique of its moniker, as defined by its editors in a specific way: "God created matter and after that did not guide or intervene or act directly to cause any empirically detectable change in the natural behavior of matter until all living things had evolved by purely natural processes" (p. 67). As a Christian who affirms evolutionary science alongside the doctrine of creation, I join the editors and authors of this volume in opposing any view of origins that denies God's action.

A non-intervention understanding of evolution, however, is a minority position among Christians that affirm evolutionary science. The non-intervention definition applies to Ken Miller, Thomas Oord, and possibly to John Polkinghorne and Karl Giberson. However, it is not accurately applied to Francis Collins, or the vast majority of Christians in science, or the vast majority of Christians I met when I worked with BioLogos. Most allow for God's action in origins, while doubting science's ability to elucidate the details. The official response to this volume by BioLogos says the same. Thankfully, the salient disagreement is merely about the limits of modern science, not the reality of God's action in origins.

Alongside the science, the theological disclosures are surprising. In advocating a "confrontation" approach to science, Doug Axe explains that Jesus charged the disciples with "guarding" the "truth" with their lives (p. 103). Axe applies this teaching not to the confession of the resurrection but to arguments
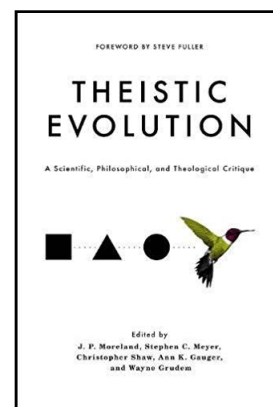
for design. Is that really what Jesus taught? Why, then, did he command Peter to "lay down his sword," when he leapt to defend the Truth itself incarnate?

The scientific arguments, however, are not convincing. They talk past the mainstream account of our origins without ever actually engaging it (pp. 503–22). Those hoping to understand the strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary science should look elsewhere.

For example, consider the critique of genome similarity as evidence for common ancestry of humans and the great apes (pp. 479–82, 492–93). Human and chimpanzee genomes are very similar, about 98% similar by some measures. The author does not explain, however, there are ten times *less* differences between humans and chimpanzee genomes than there are between mice and rat genomes (e.g., see The Chimpanzee Sequencing and Analysis Consortium, "Initial Sequence of the Chimpanzee Genome and Comparison with the Human Genome," *Nature* 437 [2005]: 69). Even with different measures, mice and rats are much more different than chimpanzees and humans. Why? Humans and chimpanzees mutate slower and diverged more recently. Likewise, human and chimpanzee Y-chromosomes are more different than the rest of the genome. Why? For the same reason; Y-chromosomes mutate more quickly than the rest of the genome. Remarkably, the increased divergence of Y-chromosomes is presented as evidence against common descent, rather than what it is: clear and quantitative evidence for common descent. It is not just that humans are similar to chimpanzees, the pattern of similarity and differences is readily explained by the empirically verifiable mathematics of evolutionary science. This does not at all demonstrate God never intervened in our origins, but most scientists find this convincing evidence for common descent. A scientifically viable alternative to common descent must offer a better explanation with similar mathematical rigor. However, no such explanation is offered here.

One hopeful deviation from this pattern of non-engagement is found in chapter 16 (by Ola Hössjer, Ann Gauger, and Colin Reeves). Tacitly affirming the evidence is strongly against a recent population bottleneck in the last 100,000 years, the authors hope to test for more ancient bottlenecks, as far back as two million years. There are no results to report and this has little to do with disproving evolution. The plans to build and test quantitative models with genetic data, nonetheless, is a promising development. This effort may help clarify what the genetic evidence does and does not tell us about Adam and Eve.

Another exception is James Tour's chapter on the Origin of Life. Ironically, his parable about a "dream team" of scientists clarifies that life is not like any human design, and in this sense does not appear designed (p. 190). It is, nonetheless, widely accepted that we do not know how the first life arose. Many theistic evolutionists think that God directly created the first cell. As a leading chemist, Tour is confronted with what science can and cannot tell us. In light of science's limits, Tour does not argue for ID.

In the philosophical section, a primary goal is pressing the case for the detectability of God's action by modern science. An entire chapter is devoted to explaining why scientists need to listen more to philosophers. I wonder if theologians could help the philosophers.

The theological assumption that God's action is "detectable" by human inquiry defines most of this section. For example, the possibility that God's action could be undetectable from a human point of view is specifically discredited and identified with "theistic evolution" by Stephen Meyer (p. 47). This philosophical stance begs a theological question. We affirm that God providentially governs all things, but how much can we know about the details independent of revelation?

At least two authors are not ID proponents. Their contributions are corrective. C. John Collins emphasizes the non-scientific and personal way we come to a knowledge of God's action; he writes of

"discerning" God's "providence," rather than "detecting" his "guidance." Collins also urges for epistemic humility by quoting Stephen Barr, a theistic evolutionist, "We would all be better off if more scientists simply admitted that there are things we don't understand about the hows and whys of evolution" (p. 681).

The encouragement to epistemic humility and theology of providence is wise. Science, after all, only offers an incomplete view of the world, even when it is correct. If God providentially governs all things, including the random cast of lots, he also providentially governs evolution. Still, science remains silent about God's action. This silence, however, is because science is limited. This is why James Tour refrains from arguing for ID. Much like a theistic evolutionist, he explains on his website, "I do not know how to use science to prove intelligent design although some others might" (see https://www.jmtour.com/personal-topics/evolution-creation/).

The ID movement wants more than an affirmation of providence. They want to detect God's action in science. Is this theologically grounded? Independent of discernment and revelation, is God's action well described as "design," or reliably "detected" by any human process? If the mechanistic details of God's providential work are usually hidden, why would we expect anything different in origins?

The theological critique is edited by Wayne Grudem, who lays out twelve theological claims in Scripture that he argues are entirely inconsistent with evolution. Almost all these twelve points directly reference Adam and Eve. This may be the most concise and coherent explanation available of the key reasons why so many Christians are troubled by evolution.

Here, also, the critique of theistic evolution is the strongest. For example, Wayne Grudem aptly explains how poorly historical Adam theology was represented in a recent book by theistic evolutionists (p. 793). It is a strawman, for example, to link historical Adam theology with transmission of original sin by DNA itself. Grudem is correct; theistic evolutionists have not been sensitive to the theological concerns presented here.

All too often, evolutionary science is *incorrectly* understood to overturn the traditional theology of Adam. Certainly, evolutionary science allows for no-Adam theology, but it also allows for historical Adam theology too (e.g., see C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?: Who They Were and Why You Should Care* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011]). Regrettably, Collins, one of the contributors to the philosophical section, was not invited to explore how theology can fit with evolutionary science. This year, also, there was a surprising advance in our understanding of how evolutionary science interacts with theology (e.g., S. Joshua Swamidass, "The Overlooked Science of Genealogical Ancestry," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 70 [2018]: 19–35). We find that Adam and Eve could be genealogical ancestors of us all, less than 10,000 years ago in the Middle East, *de novo* created, without parents. As surprising as this may sound, these confessions are entirely consistent with evolutionary science. With this correction in mind, it is not clear if any of the theological claims Grudem lays out are in conflict with evolutionary science.

Like most books on origins, *Theistic Evolution* is more a description of the views of those who write it than it is of those whom they critique. Read this book to understand how the ID movement imagines theistic evolution, but not to understand theistic evolution itself. Thankfully, most theistic evolutionists join in opposing theistic evolution as it is defined here.

Still, this book leaves me with a burning question. As a scientist in the church and a Christian in science, I see firsthand the strength of evolutionary science. *What version of theistic evolution could*

*be theologically sound?* This question, I hope, can be received with empathy by a new generation of theologians. Help us find a better way.

S. Joshua Swamidass
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri, USA

---

J. P. Moreland, Stephen Meyer, Chris Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 1008 pp. £43.00/$60.00.

*Theistic Evolution,* no matter what its detractors may say, is clearly an important book, one that everyone with a serious interest in the evolution/intelligent design debate should read. As its subtitle indicates, it is a tome that brings together a broad collection of essays on many aspects of the debate by well-known scholars associated with the intelligent design movement. After years of weighty attacks against creationism and intelligent design, and years of similarly weighty attacks against atheistic evolutionism, this volume brings forth a coherent and comprehensive attack on a viewpoint that has largely escaped focused criticism until now, namely the purported middle way of theistic evolution.

While not all the articles are equally significant or uniformly interesting, the book has plenty of solid arguments that address up-to-date issues. Right off the bat, the introductory article by Stephen Meyer shows that the book is not attacking a straw man. Theistic evolutionists sometimes follow the "no true Scotsman" approach, denying that any of a number of versions are the real thing. Meyer carefully delineates a wide range of conceptions of theistic evolution, giving examples and citations of each, and the aspects of each that lie open to critique. This chapter is well worth reading even if one does not have the time to read the rest of the book.

Section II surveys the present state of the scientific arguments, addressing very recent work. Part 1 of this scientific section provides a good overview of the seemingly insurmountable problems for a spontaneous origin of life. The intelligent design argument is sometimes criticized for this type of argument because it is purely negative—it only shows the absence of a good quantitative model and does not provide an alternative; therefore, it is not science. As someone who has practiced experimental science for over three decades, I can testify that this critique is nonsense; negative arguments occur all the time in science. I and others in my field often point out the flaws in each other's theories without any idea what the correct replacement should be. I've often heard, "I don't know what the right theory is, but I know that one is not it!"

Stephen Meyer's chapter in this section is the first work I have seen that directly addresses the proposal of many theistic evolutionists, including intelligent design proponent Michael Behe, that God could have "front loaded" the universe with exactly the right initial conditions to bring about the origin of life, with no need for later intervention. Meyer shows that this proposal is problematic, but this chapter feels like an opening shot; much more thought deserves to go into the physics of this scenario. At first blush, his argument seems sound. Physical law has many information-erasing mechanisms, so
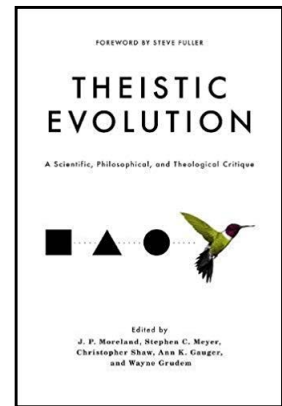
that without miraculous preservation, any impressive fine tuning of the initial conditions of the cosmos would normally be washed away.

Part 2 of Section II discusses the surprisingly strong case against universal common descent. For example, the evidence of many life forms that arose and disappeared over millions of years is overwhelming, which is why most of the authors of this volume (and I) are old earth creationists. But the evidence that all these life forms arose by gradual transition from one into another is still very weak. For every gene that looks shared between two species, there is an example of two genes that look shared but cannot be, because they appear on two non-overlapping branches of a larger tree, so that the similarity must be accidental, a "convergent evolution"; for every example of a gene that looks inherited, there is another example of a whole gene appearing *de novo*, fully formed with no precursors. Contributor Günter Bechly, a new voice in this field, does not easily fit into most people's preconceptions. Starting as an atheist, he came to believe in intelligent design late in life through scientific arguments, including his own scientific work on paleoentomology at the German State Museum of Natural History in Stuttgart, and eventually became a theist and then a Catholic. I had the privilege of meeting him personally some years ago before he was a Christian, and it was clear that the science issues drove his thinking.

Sections III and IV of the book present philosophical and theological critiques of theistic evolution. The chapter by Stephen Dilley makes the notable argument that theistic evolutionists cannot claim to adhere to methodological naturalism and also make critiques of intelligent design arguments on the basis of science—if God is not allowed in the picture at all, then one cannot use scientific data to argue either for or against his intervention in the world. Yet the scientific and theistic evolutionist literature is full of arguments that God would not have done such-and-such, starting with a theological premise of how God would have done something (perfectly efficiently, for example, or uniquely for each species) and then showing that the data show otherwise (See, e.g. C. G. Hunter, *Darwin's God* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001]). Such arguments are not methodological naturalism; they take seriously the scientific nature of a theory of divine intervention and attempt to refute it on the basis of theological premises and evidence.

Overall, whether or not one agrees with any or all of the book, one must agree that theistic evolution is not an obvious or easy default position for Christians; it has its own strengths and weaknesses, which deserve to be examined under the microscope like any other theological and philosophical position. This book takes that task seriously.

David Snoke
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## — ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Gregory C. Cochran. *Christians in the Crosshairs: Persecution in the Bible and around the World Today*. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2016. 208 pp. £11.99/$14.99.

The week I received this book, large bombs exploded in two nearby Coptic churches where I was living in Egypt, killing upwards of 45 worshippers. A book offering a biblical perspective on the persecution of Christians had my undivided attention. Though such events occur daily and all over the world, author Gregory Cochran contends that Christian persecution has yet to be biblically defined. Furthermore, Cochran notes that the tendency in the West when discussing persecution is often to speak of it as something that occurs elsewhere, and not something that is occurring in America (p. 5). If persecution is not occurring in America, however, Cochran asks how the church is to interpret 2 Timothy 3:16, which promises that all who desire godliness will face persecution. In light of these realities, Cochran writes *Christians in the Crosshairs* as an attempt to define persecution biblically and to awaken Christian leaders to the reality of present persecution (pp. 2–3).
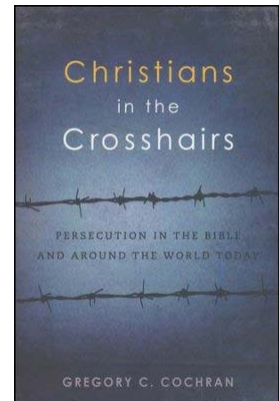
In presenting his argument, Cochran divides this work into three parts. The first section (chapters 1–2) presents the reader with the problem: since the missions conference of Lausanne 1974, the evangelical world has been searching for a biblical definition of persecution (p. 15). While Cochran makes the reader wait until chapter 11 to flesh out his proposed definition, he provides Nik Ripkin's (*The Insanity of Obedience: Walking with Jesus in Tough Places* [Nashville: B&H, 2014], 38) definition as a starting point: Christian persecution is, "A negative reaction to the incarnate presence of Jesus" (p. 16–17). One might be forgiven for being underwhelmed by the clarity provided by this initial definition. Yet it allows Cochran to distinguish Christian persecution from other kinds of suffering, as he concludes, "Christian suffering is persecution only when it occurs because of the presence of Jesus Christ" (p. 17).

For Cochran, such persecution can be further divided into two kinds: individual and institutional persecution. Institutional persecution occurs when governments or organizations align themselves against Christians through policies and regulations pertaining only to Christians and churches. Individual persecution, then, is less systemic and more interpersonal in nature. Beyond these *kinds* of persecution, Cochran groups what he considers to be the most prevalent *forms* of persecution into six categories: bias, slander, discrimination, incarceration, violence, and oppression (p. 17). Cochran reinforces some of these forms with Scripture (cf. Matthew 5:10–12; Acts 22:4–5; 1 Corinthians 15:9), however his decision to include bias among the forms of persecution remains in want of a clear biblical reference point. Regardless, Cochran intends to broaden the definition of persecution to encourage believers everywhere to recognize the presence of persecution in their lives because they exhibit the presence of Jesus Christ. This broadening of the category of persecution is clear as he notes, "The fact that I have never been thrown into prison on account of Christ is a lack of degree of persecution, not a lack of kind" (p. 5).

The second part (chapters 3–10) comprises the bulk of the book wherein Cochran traces persecution throughout the Bible. While he begins building a doctrine of persecution with Abel and Cain, much of his treatment of the topic of *Christian* persecution naturally leads him to the New Testament. Cochran

draws on Jesus's teaching from the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5:10–12 to show that Jesus establishes the expectation that his followers will be persecuted for following him, and that it would result in their blessing (p. 43). Following this trajectory of expected persecution, Cochran takes the reader on an exegetical tour of the rest of the NT, demonstrating that each of the NT writers considered suffering to be an inescapable part of the Christian experience.

Readers will appreciate the breadth of Cochran's exegetical work, though perhaps most helpful is his treatment of John's epistles and Peter's writings. He argues convincingly that Peter and John see the presence of Christ as both the cause of and comfort in persecution (p. 146). What greater comfort might be given to those suffering persecution for Christ's name than the promise that He who suffered on their behalf is present with them in the midst of the persecution they are currently undergoing? Cochran highlights the fact that Jesus's presence with the persecuted is to be the source of their joy despite their circumstances. Thus, when Peter speaks of suffering and persecution, he commands his audience to respond in joy. Cochran does well to demonstrate that Peter does not expect suffering to generate joy, but rather Christ's presence with the believer provides the basis for the persecuted to choose joy. He writes, "Strictly speaking, the suffering itself does not produce the joy. The joy is a responsive action. Peter commands his readers to rejoice. Rejoicing is the ethic—how the Christian ought to respond to the fiery trial of persecution" (p. 120). Such attention to the source of the persecuted Christian's joy helps Cochran to achieve his stated goal of providing a structure of response to persecution.

While Cochran's exegesis is helpful overall, readers may find themselves curious about his treatment of the book of Hebrews. Cochran admits that he takes a minority reading of Hebrews 13:3, seeing the reference to suffering in "body" as the "Body of Christ" and therefore a call to the church to suffer empathetically with those in persecution (p. 111). This reading overshadows the idea of the physical, embodied condition in which humans undergo persecution. Furthermore, the fact that the persecuted suffer in bodies has already been highlighted by Hebrews 2:14–18 in conjunction with the rationale for the incarnation. Thus, is seems more likely that Hebrews 13:3 also appeals to the empathy available to those vulnerable to physical persecution based upon their common embodied condition. Likewise, as Cochran himself admits, it may be anachronistic to import contemporary familiarity with the imagery of the church as a body into the discussion in Hebrews (p. 109). Regardless, in the context of his larger exegetical work one might excuse this questionable treatment of Hebrews as an anomaly and move on to his concluding section.

Having traced the biblical teaching on persecution, Cochran's third section draws conclusions, returning to the original concern of the book: a proposal for a definition of Christian persecution. On page 146, Cochran offers the reader his long-awaited definition: "Persecution is a retaliatory action against the revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ, which is represented or proclaimed by the faithful followers of Jesus." This definition intends itself as a corrective to what he sees as a fault in Lausanne's attempts to define persecution: they begin with the intentions of the persecutors in their assessment of what counts as persecution (p. 155).

Cochran, on the other hand, prefers to define persecution in terms of the righteousness of Christ exhibited by believers and churches (p. 152). His primary concern with persecutor-based definitions is that the motives of persecutors are notoriously difficult to determine. While difficulty certainly exists in assessing the motivations of persecutors, the reader is left wondering if Cochran's shift of focus successfully avoids the same dilemma as he contends, "Definitions of persecution ought primarily to follow the persecuted and ask whether Christians were acting righteously on account of Christ when

the negative, hostile action took place" (p. 157). For instance, in the church bombings I referenced at the beginning of this review, one encounters the same interpretive problem as with interpreting the motives of the offenders: were these churches revealing the righteousness of Christ, or where they merely cultural artifacts representing the antithesis to the Muslim majority around them? Cochran's point is well-taken that we must be careful to discuss martyrdom and Christian persecution in terms that make the manifest presence of Christ the explicit cause of the persecution. However, the quandary remains for those attempting to determine whether or not it was Christ's righteousness on display that caused the persecution. Yet, even if Cochran's shift of focus does not resolve the difficulty in accurately recording incidents of Christian persecution, perhaps it could prompt believers undergoing suffering to reflect on the cause of their suffering, convicted when their suffering is not because of their demonstration of Christ and comforted with the presence of the Lord in their suffering when his manifest presence is the cause of persecution (p. 154).

Overall, Cochran's attempt to raise Christian awareness and expectation that persecution will attend Christian living is successful. Whether the proposed definition helps the evangelical world to more accurately present statistics for occurrences of persecution around the world, remains uncertain. At the very least, I commend this book for its ability to demonstrate biblically that Christians should anticipate the ubiquity of persecution we see today rather than respond with surprise. In the midst of such persecution, however, Cochran rightly exhorts us to take solace in the comforting presence of the one who first suffered for us.

Matthew Bennett
Cedarville University
Cedarville, Ohio, USA

---

Brad House and Gregg Allison. *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. 240 pp. £13.44/$17.99.

While advocates and critics have written much on the subject of the multisite church as it has risen in prominence over the past 20 years, Brad House and Gregg Allison believe that we are now able to see the intended and unintended consequences of the movement and thus evaluate it. As such, this book offers an overview of the movement and advances a model they label as "multichurch" that they feel addresses issues within the multisite movement. House and Allison appear to be well-qualified to write on the subject, as both serve at Sojourn Community Church (a church with four campuses around the Louisville, Kentucky area) and have other relevant areas of experience and expertise; House previously served at Mars Hill Church (Seattle, Washington), and Allison is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The frame of the book is Sojourn's experience in becoming a multisite church, facing numerous challenges, which led to the church developing the model described in this work.

The book adopts a navigating metaphor, entitling the opening section "Scouting" as it gives the reader the "lay of the land" and what can be learned from past adventures. Chapter 2 offers a history of the multisite church movement, noting its roots in the NT, precursors found in the 1970s and 1980s, and then its proliferation in the 1990s and 2000s. The next chapter ("Landmarks") enumerates, explains,
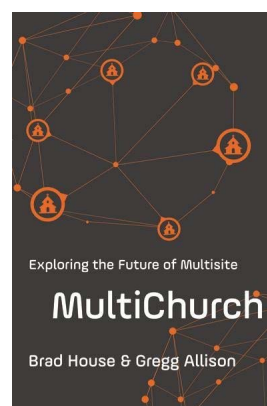
and evaluates a spectrum of church models: pillar (one church with one service), gallery (a church with multiple services or venues), franchise (a church that clones itself in multiple sites), federation (a church contextualized in different locations), cooperative (one church with multiple interdependent churches), collective (a collection of churches collaborating with each other), and network (individual churches working together). The authors classify gallery, franchise, and federation as multisite churches while collective and cooperative are multichurch models. This chapter reminds readers that not all multisite churches are the same and that some common critiques of multisite church are really of one model (franchise). The fourth chapter, dubbed "Landmines," examines criticisms of multisite church, with the authors agreeing with some of the arguments against video preaching (noting that it should be viewed as an "irregular" practice) but also showing that many of the critiques of multisite churches, such as a focus on one teacher or an inability to develop leaders, are also potential problems in other models. The final chapter of this opening section ("The Future") argues that the multichurch model is the future of multisite as it reflects—and at times will reflect *better* than other models—biblical and theological principles about the church such as unity, collaboration, diversity, and multiplication.

The second section (Orienteering) describes in more detail what their model looks like in practice. They first discuss the undergirding principles (chapter 6) and then explain how polity (chapter 7), ministry structures (chapter 8), finances (chapter 9), and membership (chapter 10) work within the model. Their model focuses on helping ministry happen at the local level rather than supporting a central organization, offering freedom while also having clear boundaries and places of unity, with multiplication as its primary goal. The polity of the multichurch is a mixture of local (micropolity) and central (macropolity) leadership that features trust in local leadership while also having checks and balance through a central structure. Collaboration rather than control is the key principle of this model. Of note, however, is that the "macropolity" of the multichurch features more staff than lay people on the highest board (called Leadership Council), as it features the pastors of the local churches, "executive elders" (who are pastoral staff), and two non-staff elders. The multichurch model gives flexibility within a defined spectrum of ministry approach and delineates foundational ministries that every church must have, core ministries that all churches should have as they grow to certain levels, and particular ministries that reflect the unique context of the local church. The chapter on finances notes that multisite is not more efficient, as is often claimed, but that this is okay since God does not always use the most efficient means. The multichurch model does not centralize control of money but rather creates ownership and empowerment by pushing financial decisions to the local churches. Finally, the multichurch model has its members under the care of local leaders while also placing them within something bigger so they can use their unique gifts in a way less likely to happen in a single location church.

The book concludes ("Setting Out") by noting how to transition to this model (chapter 11), describing Sojourn's shift from a federation model to the cooperative model (chapter 12). The book also features appendices that contain Sojourn's grievance policy and more details of Sojourn's "micropolity." There is no bibliography, but there are endnotes, which include citations of a several dissertations on the multisite movement, showing the subject is now being evaluated in the academy.

The authors present a thoughtful analysis of the movement and offer a theological justification for their model. They do not say that all churches need to be multisite churches, but rather that it is a model that can be used; just as there are a variety of church government structures drawn from various principles of polity found in Scripture, so there can be various models in terms of whether a church is a single site or multisite. Even if one does not adopt all elements of their model, a multisite church (or

a church thinking of becoming multisite) can gain some clarity in terms of the choices it needs to make and potential options in structure through reading this book.

The biggest critique I would offer is that their model of "multichurch" does not seem as fully developed as readers might hope. For example, the authors repeatedly talk about being "interdependent" churches, but it is unclear exactly what is meant by interdependent. They discuss how collaboration happens, how unity is maintained, and how there are checks and balances within the system, but this reader was not able to detect what makes the churches truly *interdependent*. There are also practical issues that are not fully addressed, such as what happens when one of the churches is struggling financially—do the other churches "bail out" this church, and, if so, for how long and who decides? Are there limits in terms of the number of local churches or geographic proximity that can work well within this model? Of course, these may be issues that can only be addressed as churches enact this new model.

Advocates and critics of the multisite church movement would benefit from reading this volume to gain a greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of the movement, as well as considering its theological foundations. This book is an important one, but it is by no means the final work on the subject since it invites further reflection on the model House and Allison propose and notes that it will take time to see the effects of any new approach.

Brian C. Dennert
Faith Church
Dyer, Indiana, USA

---

John F. Kilner, ed. *Why People Matter: A Christian Engagement with Rival Views of Human Significance*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. x + 223 pp. £21.97/$26.99.

*Why People Matter* is a book that attempts to encourage discussion as to how a view of human significance affects one's overall moral thinking. John Kilner has assembled a strong set of scholars to discuss, in a survey fashion, the manner in which a Christian perspective on human dignity and rights sets a more defensible foundation for speaking to ethical topics than many other influential contemporary theories. The book argues that in a world where there is frequent disagreement about moral judgments, certain values appear to underlie said arguments, especially the idea that humans have some sort of worth. Kilner perhaps sets the stage best, writing: "However, a closer look at their arguments reveals that there is substantial common ground after all. Opposing 'sides' in so many disagreements argue that people matter—that how people are viewed and treated is crucially important" (p. 3).
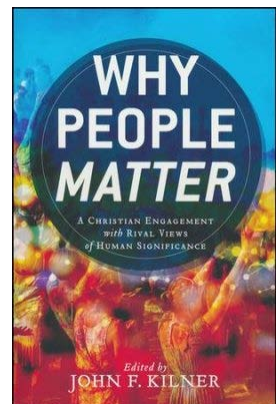
After an introductory chapter that briefly explains why human significance is foundational to ethics, the book proceeds with five chapters (pp. 17–132), each representing a rival theory of human value that has seen recent popularity. These five theories—or "isms" (p. 11)—include utilitarianism, collectivism, individualism, naturalism, and transhumanism. Each chapter attempts to show the internal incoherence of its particular "ism" of discussion, either by arguing that they do violence to the idea that people matter or because they oversimplify the question of human value. Each then proceeds by demonstrating the

preferability of a distinctly Christian view of anthropological worth, specifically by showing the manner in which it does not fall under the same criticism as the opposing perspectives.

The book then continues with two chapters that argue that a biblical perspective on human dignity, based in the image of God and recognition of divine activities towards and for humanity, should be entertained as a plausible, if not superior, theory. In these chapters, the worth of an individual is understood as relational (pp. 141–44) and rooted in God's action (pp. 161–66). Thus, it reinforces the criticisms of the earlier chapters by arguing for individual significance against utilitarianism and collectivism and for human worth deriving from God's work against individualism, naturalism, and transhumanism. The book concludes with a helpful summary chapter which thematizes and contextualizes the main arguments set forth.

A book's effectiveness is indexed to its purpose, with *Why People Matter* being no different. It attempts to fill a gap in Christian philosophical literature on how human value should relate to ethics. It does not attempt to end a debate, but begin one, by surveying the contemporary efforts in the field and providing just enough criticism to show why the Christian perspective should be recognized as both viable and, likely, preferable. For this reason, its lack of depth in any particular area should be excused, since it is setting the stage and not finishing the production. In this way, if it is read as a foundational piece as to why human dignity is significant to ethical debates, *Why People Matter* is successful. It is not written in a highly technical manner, neither does it seem to be written only for the layperson. Instead, it appears to be written for educated readers, such as seminary students and professors, who have yet to do extensive work in normative ethics or metaethical theory. Consequently, as a call to action for scholars to begin to direct their energies towards value theory in relation to Christian theology, it is indispensable.

There are many ways in which the book is useful, but length limits me to mention only four. First, it promotes a healthy humility that is often wanting in philosophical endeavors, including Christian ones (pp. 26–33, 51–53, 79–80, etc.). It encourages a sort of epistemic humility that questions whether humans are ultimately able to answer questions of worth and a doxological humility as the questions that are broached are understood in the context of relationship to the divine. Second, the book provides sufficient reasons to believe that the "isms" are internally inconsistent (e.g., they require absolute value yet attack it; they assume the dignity of humanity while removing its foundations, etc.). It does not attempt to sound the death knell to any given position, but gives a number of examples in each chapter that would cause one to question whether any of the competing theories can actually provide a coherent theory of human value that could undergird a practicable normative ethic. Third, it recognizes the significance of the other positions, retrieving those aspects of them that are correct and should be heeded. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, this book performs its function from a distinctively biblical view. Whereas, in Christendom, "mere Christianity" has passed into "mere theism," the authors of *Why People Matter* do not fall into the modern myth of neutrality nor the postmodern myth of relativism. Instead, they recognize that they can only argue for the Christian perspective as Christians. In this way, the argument is, at times, unabashedly exegetical and theological. Such a practice is especially refreshing in a book that addresses philosophical issues.

There are, however, a few areas where the book might have been improved. First, there is a structural issue in that the first major examination of the image of God does not happen until chapter 7, even though three of the previous chapters rely heavily upon the notion. Were the chapters on the biblical perspective moved forward, it may have been helpful in reading the "ism" chapters. Furthermore, some

of the analyses of the language used in the debate do not happen until relatively late in the book (e.g., "dignity" on pp. 118–21). Though it would be unrealistic to believe that perfect clarity is necessary before anything helpful can be said, in a philosophical debate, such clarity may be necessary to sort out some of the conceptual difficulties. Second, there are a few times where the arguments of a chapter rely upon controversial topics, without explicit mention of their contentious nature. Of particular note is the editor's understanding of the "image of God" and the employment of liberation theology in the later chapters. Third, there are a few unusual statements that aim to simplify the discussion for the audience and are likely inaccurate. For example, the phrase "If the moral law (on the utilitarian picture)" (p. 70) would represent a very idiomatic version of utilitarianism, especially since it is frequently employed to attack the static nature of ethics that "law" would seem to imply. Last, there appears to be at least one missed opportunity, which may have been a function of the length of time it took to gather the material for this book. Race is addressed in this issue, but infrequently and only in the later chapters (primarily in terms of historical slavery). Yet, it is an important test-case, particularly in the light of recent events, as to one's view of human value. However, that these criticisms of the book are relatively minor, shows the strength and overall importance of the work. If one desires to begin delving into questions of axiology and ethics, it is a valuable primer.

Joshua Kira
Cedarville University
Cedarville, Ohio, USA

---

Matthew D. Kim. *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. xvi + 269 pp. £13.99/$22.99.

---

Preachers face culturally diverse congregations. Churches increasingly gather listeners from multiple ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Preachers feel stretched by the demands of ministry and fear insensitive responses to the pressing cultural challenges confronting the church. Matthew Kim urges preachers to aim not only for the insiders of the majority culture, but also for the outsiders who are usually forced to conform to the majority. Kim, a professor of preaching and ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, writes as an ethnic Korean who was born and raised in the United States living with the cultural tensions of an outsider. With this helpful book, he introduces the concept of cultural intelligence from the business world. Preachers must develop the ability to communicate to people with whom they do not have a shared cultural background. Preaching is bridge building that takes the main idea of the biblical text into the listeners' hearts. An explanation of cultural intelligence as a tool for understanding our listeners and ourselves (Part 1) provides the framework for homiletical practice within varied cultural contexts (Part 2).

Cultural intelligence requires understanding listeners' ways of living, ways of thinking, and ways of behaving as the preacher considers how his listeners will respond to the biblical text (chapter 1). The plan for preaching with cultural intelligence follows three stages, each developed by an acronym (chapter 2). Hermeneutics, stage one of the homiletical template, encourages preachers to follow the HABIT of engaging with the Historical, grammatical, and literary context, Author's cultural context,
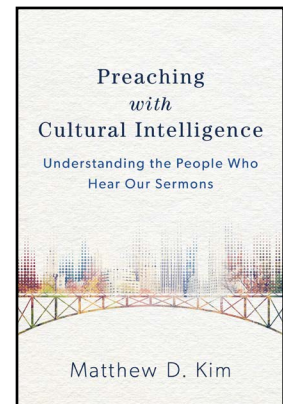
Big idea of the text, Interpreted in your context, and aware of your Theological presuppositions. Stage 2, the homiletical BRIDGE, examines Beliefs, Rituals, Idols, Dreams, God, and Experiences of listeners. Stage 3 of homiletics offers a DIALECT of Delivery, Illustrations, Application, Language, Embrace, Content, and Trust. Seasoned preachers who have developed shortcuts in their preparation will no doubt benefit from a review of the homiletical template Kim offers, even if the somewhat cumbersome acronyms are left unutilized.

Exegesis requires a cultural understanding of the world of the biblical text as well as a cultural exegesis of the various cultures represented in the congregation. The preacher's first task is to understand the biblical author's culture in order to uncover the Big Idea of the text (chapter 3). In using this language, Kim reveals his debt to the former professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell, Haddon Robinson. Pastors will also benefit from the practical homiletical reminders to be sensitive and varied in illustrations. Applications, likewise, should show balance between individual and corporate applications as well as balance between "*being* versus *doing* applications" (p. 27). The admonition to exegete one's own cultural assumptions is particularly timely for majority culture preachers who long to move from cultural stereotypes to cultural empathy (chapter 4).

The homiletical template—cultural understanding in hermeneutics, consideration of the listeners, and culturally sensitive homiletical delivery—is applied to the cultural diversity found between denominations (chapter 5), ethnicities (chapter 6), genders (chapter 7), locations of urban, suburban, and rural congregations (chapter 8), and world religions (chapter 9). The format of the chapters, tied to the acronyms of the homiletical template, lends to repetition but Kim's insights into ethnicities forces Anglo-American preachers to prayerfully consider the needs of their listeners as the church makes a meaningful contribution to the cultural challenges of the twenty-first century.

The preacher must understand his denominational context to expose the assumptions in theology and ministry practice that can undermine meaningful communication. Perhaps the most helpful chapters, given their timeliness and Kim's own pastoral experience, discuss ethnicities and gender. "Members of the dominant culture would be well served to realize that ethnic minorities live under a cloud of shame because we are continually reminded that we are different and do not blend in" (p. 112). Kim's insights into preaching with cultural intelligence across ethnicities alone makes the book an essential addition to the homiletical literature. Consideration of gender impacts not only preparation, by forcing the preacher to consider the different kinds of questions men and women are likely to ask, but also requires sensitivity in tone and application. Kim suggests, "Ask real and meaningful questions, listen without interrupting, refrain from offering immediate solutions, develop focus groups" (p. 153). Developing cultural intelligence requires continual work, and Kim acknowledges his efforts represent only the beginning of a conversation. As the conversation continues it will aid preachers to draw from texts that do not appear to raise immediate cultural challenges. Kim chooses sample texts that directly address the highlighted cultural issues. Even the less culturally sensitive will consider issues of location when preaching from Jeremiah's call to seek the welfare of the city, but cultural intelligence requires such sensitivity when preaching any text of Scripture. Cultural intelligence is required not only when preaching on the inclusion of Gentiles in Acts 15, but also when making applications from other texts that do not directly raise the issue of insiders and outsiders.

Loving our neighbors requires cultural intelligence. Kim offers a clear challenge, maintains an evangelical commitment to the authority of the text, and provides pastoral examples of cultural sensitivity. The conversations, in print but more importantly in pastoral ministry, deserve continued

attention. Kim offers a clear, practical, and culturally intelligent introduction to the discussion. Christian discipleship demands such intelligence and this book offers encouragement in this journey.

Kevin D. Koslowsky
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

---

Michael Lawrence. *Conversion: How God Creates a People*. 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 144 pp. £9.99/$14.99.

Everyone wants to be nice. Well, almost everyone. But it takes a miraculous work of God to make someone new. This, in brief, is the main argument of Michael Lawrence's new contribution to Crossway's 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches series, *Conversion: How God Creates a People.*

The miraculous work of God in conversion is particularly emphasized in the first three chapters of the book. Lawrence describes the biblical picture of conversion, explaining that it is a special work of God that results in a "new deepest loyalty of the heart" (p. 53). He argues clearly and effectively against the "decisionism" mindset that plagues evangelicalism and demonstrates that faith and repentance are necessary for true conversion.

True conversion, Lawrence argues, should lead to church membership. "Church membership, at its biblical core, is our affirmation and oversight of one another's professions of faith and discipleship to Christ, which we make through baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper. When we baptize people, therefore, it should be the norm that we then take them into membership in our church" (p. 60). The connection between conversion and church membership demonstrates one of the strengths of this book. Lawrence has an unrelenting focus on conversion as a key doctrine for the church, not simply for individuals. While this book is a helpful guide to any Christian wrestling with the doctrine, its particular usefulness, as has been the case in all of the Building Healthy Churches series, is as a tool for a church or church leaders.

In the second half of the book, Lawrence considers how a right doctrine of conversion should affect the lives of church members individually and the church as a whole. In chapters four, five, and six, Lawrence describes how a right understanding of this doctrine corrects common misunderstandings in the modern evangelical church. In chapter four, he argues that conversion should result in greater holiness, not simply therapeutic, Oprah-style healing. Chapters five explains that a church full of converted Christians is a distinct community, not a "designer church" built around a particular ethnic or social identity. In chapter six, Lawrence demonstrates that a correct understanding of conversion is closely tied to our practice of evangelism. If conversion is truly a miraculous work of God, then it is not a sales pitch. Instead, evangelism is "God's summons of love to sinners" (p. 97).

In the last two chapters, Lawrence paints a picture of assessing conversion in a church that is neither too loose (chapter seven) nor too strict (chapter eight). This last part of the book will be of great value to many pastors and church leaders. The admonitions against attempting to create an overly pure church in chapter eight are a needed warning against a form of legalism that can easily be fallen into. Chapter seven includes a section on assessing true conversion that is one of the most helpful in
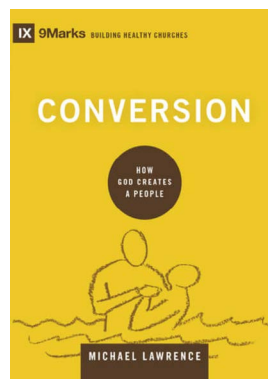
the book. Rather than relying on a prayer or a simple verbal affirmation when considering whether a conversion is genuine, Lawrence points us to the example of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:7–10). Paul pointed to evidence of their faith, hope, and love along with a pattern of active growth. This picture of biblical conversion should shape the way we determine whether someone is truly converted or not. While not every church may end up with the same practices, any pastor or group of pastors would be helped by giving careful consideration to Lawrence's list of eight steps a church should implement when trying to discern true conversions in this chapter.

As has been the case with the previous contributions to this series that I have reviewed for *Themelios*, *Conversion* is a tremendous gift to the church. I highly commend it for any pastor or any Christian who is serious about understanding how a correct doctrine of conversion should shape the life of the church. The only real quibble I have with the book is over some of Lawrence's terms. First, while most agree with his connection between holiness and being "set apart" in chapter four, Peter Gentry has convincingly argued that the meaning of "holy" is primarily "devoted" not "set apart" (Peter J. Gentry, "The Meaning of 'Holy' in the Old Testament," *BibSac* 170 [2013]: 400–17). However, this admittedly minor adjustment only strengthens Lawrence's overall argument.

Also, Lawrence has creatively alliterated all of his chapter titles ("New, Not Nice, "Holy, Not Healed," "Summon, Don't Sell," etc.). These are on the whole helpful, but, as is usually the case when any biblical or theological content is shaped around a preconceived structure, they are sometimes distracting. It may be that Lawrence uses alliteration to great effect in his teaching and preaching, but in this format, I found the abundance of alliteration to be amusing, sometimes addling, but not always advantageous.

However, any quibbles I have with the book are minor and do not detract from the overall quality of the book. I will undoubtedly recommend this volume in my church and in my classroom for years to come as a faithful, accessible, and useful tool for considering how to understand and apply the doctrine of conversion in the church.

Chris Bruno
Bethlehem College & Seminary
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

---

Brett McCracken. *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017. 219 pp. £9.99/$15.99

---

Being uncomfortable in the church is good, right? Brett McCracken argues that discomfort in the Christian community is not merely good, but *intrinsic* to the Christian faith and her community. To introduce the reader to this idea he begins *Uncomfortable* in his most comfortable place: the idealized dream church, custom designed for himself. Who would not want to indulge in a stream-of-consciousness masterpiece of his or her "perfect church"? Quickly, however, McCracken confesses how annoying, disgusting, and chronically dissatisfying this subjective exercise is (p. 23). Later, he identifies this exercise as "flat-out gospel denial" (p. 38). His stated goal in the book is to "debunk and destroy this toxic consumeristic approach" (p. 23).
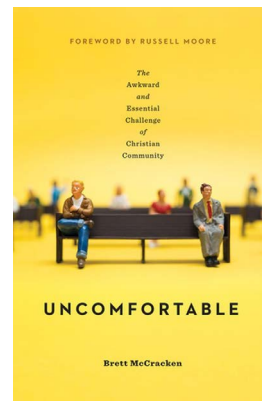
In two parts, the author outlines the foundation of Christianity itself, "uncomfortable faith," then the embodiment of that uncomfortable faith, "uncomfortable church." Within these two parts, each chapter explores uncomfortable aspects of becoming the church Jesus wants us to be. His challenge is that we would embrace the discomfort of the difficult aspects of following Jesus: cross, holiness, truths, love, comforter, mission, people, diversity, worship, authority, unity, commitment, countercultural comfort.

As cultural Christianity's husk blows away in the wind, the true essence of uncomfortable Christianity remains. True Christianity destabilizes our comfort zones and jostles "us awake from the dead-eye stupor of a culture of comfort-worship that impedes our growth" (p. 38). This awakening of the church happens not through infusion of marketplace logic or through obsession over newness and relevance (p. 186). This revival redefines comfort, so that in the final analysis "Christianity announces that true, transcendent, lasting comfort is available to anyone, but not on the terms we might prefer, and not as a reward for our tireless efforts to earn it" (p. 189). Gloriously, "on the other side of discomfort is delight in Christ" (p. 27).

*Uncomfortable*'s message fed me richly with several vital and relevant reminders. Just because I pastor a church in which the median age is twice my own age does not mean I have arrived. Though I am uncomfortable in some ways I am not exempt from enticement to be my own boss, and to gain power, coolness, and cultural respectability. I feel this temptation personally and I witness the tug of narcissism and consumerism on a regularly basis in my church.

This book was helpful because in many ways my church has succumbed to our fleshly inclinations to be comfortable together; we are nearly monolithic in our ethnicity, socio-economics and skin color. Though much work remains, my church is already benefiting from applying the gospel–realities that McCracken fleshes out into practical advice. (For some of this wisdom see "six ways to prioritize diversity in church life" [pp. 138–43]).

McCracken is successful in accomplishing his stated goal in part because he could not have followed a more sound structure. Though community is McCracken's primary focus, he first demonstrates that it is uncomfortable *because* the gospel itself runs uncomfortably counter to our flesh. The uncomfortable gospel isn't merely the beginning of the Christian life, but its continuation.

McCracken writes winsomely, convincing the reader that uncomfortable Christianity is what God really requires and what we truly need. He quotes a diverse range of authors throughout the book. As a senior editor of The Gospel Coalition he may be expected to quote from TGC Council members such as Tim Keller, Kevin DeYoung, and David Platt. But when he regularly and warmly cites those outside of his camp (such as Rachel Held Evans [pp. 73–74] and atheist celebrity Penn Jillette [p. 114]) we witness the wheels of uncomfortable diversity in motion.

McCracken's message is vital, and Christians young and old should read this book. However, two criticisms stand out as cautions for the reader: 1) gratuitous references to alcohol and 2) an unhelpful focus on the intramural debate regarding the gifts of tongues, healing, and prophecy.

As to the first, the author robs himself of persuasive capital when he consistently and positively mentions alcohol. Unfortunately, this is a trigger topic for many Christians, and not without good reason (addiction, abuse, etc). Yet the author appears insentive to this. In his hypothetical "dream church" he advocates for a church group that samples rare scotch, bourbon, rum, and other spirits (p. 22), community dinners with wine (p. 20), and a collection of single-malt scotches made available for consumption (p. 20). While alcohol consumption is a matter of Christian liberty, it also calls for Christian

wisdom. In my view, *Uncomfortable* would be a better book without these gratuitous references to such an emotionally charged issue.

My second criticism relates to the discussion of cessationism and continuationism in chapter 6 ("Uncomfortable Comforter"). While McCracken begins by making his case for continuationism softly, he offers a rather uncharitable interpretation of the motives behind the cessationist view. For example, in his discussion of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit (p. 99), he hints that cessationists simply do not want to relinquish control (p. 100), are too proud to fully tap into the Spirit's power and are unwilling to risk a bit of discomfort (pp. 102–7). He does not seem to allow that many cessationists stand not on their pride or a desire for control, but humbly and on biblically plausible grounds. Had the author provided a more empathetic space for those who disagree with him, his book would likely reach a wider audience and deliver a stronger appeal.

Despite these points of critique, *Uncomfortable* challenges, clarifies and inspires. May we embrace McCracken's clear call to lay aside our consumer fantasies and accept the uncomfortable pursuit of Jesus in community. May we count every comfort as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Phil 3:8).

James Risner
Brantwood Baptist Church
Dayton, Ohio, USA

---

Joe E. Trull and R. Robert Creech. *Ethics for Christian Ministry: Moral Formation for 21st Century Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 275 pp. £23.99/$26.99.

The biblical prerequisite for virtue and moral excellence in ministry challenges every individual who aspires to serve God in vocational Christian ministry. Such a calling is daunting enough without the practical challenges in crafting a tangible, measurable standard for ministerial ethics. Thankfully, Joe E. Trull and R. Robert Creech's *Ethics for Christian Ministry* offers a wonderful resource for crafting a Christian vision of ministerial integrity as well as a guidebook to practical steps in implementing ministerial ethics.

Joe E. Trull is retired but previously served as professor of Christian ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. R. Robert Creech is Huber H. and Gladys S. Raborn Professor of Pastoral Leadership and director of pastoral ministries at Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University. Trull and Creech offer a resource intended to convince and equip pastors to embody their holy calling to serve God's flock and to bear witness to God's grace to the world. *Ethics for Christian Ministry* seeks to teach Christian ministry students the unique moral role of the minister, provide clear statements of their moral obligations in personal and professional life, and offer applicable strategies for ministerial ethics in contemporary society (p. x).

*Ethics for Christian Ministry* develops through four distinct yet interconnected concepts expanded across all seven chapters and five appendices. First, Trull and Creech use chapter one to point to the minister as professional for the launching point and validating principle for what is developed throughout this text. Embracing the role of professional married to a rich sense of vocation encourages ministers
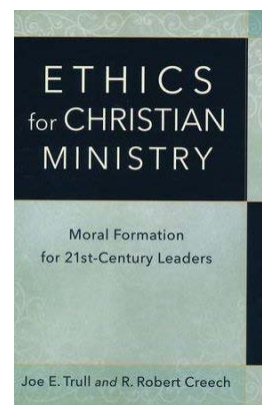
to rise up to the moral demands of ministry as more than but also not less than a professional (pp. 18–23). Second, chapters two through six expand on the moral requirements of ministry which present an opportunity to develop an integrated approach to ethics for all of life. Examining the minister's responsibilities to self, church, peers, and community provides the framework for the largest section of this book. Third, chapter seven attempts to encourage the minister to move beyond mere intellectual or philosophical commitments to ethics and toward addressing specific issues in ministry. For Trull and Creech, clergy sexual abuse is a primary area of concern and application. Finally, chapter eight and the appendices outline actionable suggestions and several resources with worksheets in order to supply essential tools for actually crafting a personal code of ethics.

The scope and structure of this work represents both a strength and a weakness. When taken alone, each respective section flows well, developing essential elements of Christian ministry such as balancing ministry and personal life (pp. 59–72) or dealing with pastoral leadership transitions (pp. 109–13, 122–26). Few would argue with the broad needs for personal morality (pp. 55–59), ethical integrity (pp. 41–46), or prophetic witness (pp. 141–49) from ministers and church leaders. Furthermore, Trull and Creech should be complimented for offering simplified terminology and broad research sufficient to cut across denominational distinctions. Some might take pause at the lack of clarity and specificity on gender in ministerial calling, but such a discussion would certainly have felt out of place in *Ethics for Christian Ministry.*

That said, there are times when there was a felt disconnect between the stated foundational commitment to marrying professionalism and vocation outlined in chapter 1 (pp. 22–23) and the largest section of the book outlined in chapters two through six. While the internal discussions of each chapter are not harmed, the book would benefit from a more explicit integration of foundational arguments established in the beginning stages with some of the more practical elements explored throughout the text.

For example, Trull and Creech point to competency and service as foundational principles of the minister as professional (p. 22). However, the authors do not directly connect competency, service, or any other core principle to subsequent sections on the daily practices of ministry. Indeed, the insightful section on integrity in the practice of pastoral care, proclamation, and leadership and administration (pp. 78–101) would benefit from a more explicit connection to competency and service. Sadly, the entire book lacks any close integration of the foundational ideas developed in chapter one through subsequent sections.

Moreover, there was also an overall feeling that Trull and Creech offered more questions than answers for those searching for help in crafting a ministerial code of ethics. While the first few chapters rightly point out the hurdles to constructing, implementing, and enforcing ministerial ethics, chapter eight leaves no doubt regarding the immense difficulty of the entire endeavor. In fact, much of chapter eight revolves around the problem of a uniform ministerial ethic within the fractured world of American Christianity. Taken in light of the difficulties so plainly outlined in chapter eight, the devastating reality of clergy sexual abuse detailed in chapter seven feels like a case study emphasizing not simply the realities of moral failings in modern clergy but the desperate state of ministerial ethics in general. Consequently, the reader might be left feeling deep discouragement rather than hope for sustaining ministerial integrity.

Overall, Trull and Creech offer an excellent addition to ministerial ethics through their emphasis on the importance of character in Christian ministry. The integrated morality emphasized within *Ethics*

*for Christian Ministry* as well as the call for greater clarity in ministerial ethics couples well with the practical tools found in this work. Such contributions position this book as a sound resource to pastors and clergy alike despite the issues in connecting some sections together. Furthermore, the call for interdenominational unity and ecumensim in the development and enforcement of ministerial ethics presents a compelling possibility for a vibrant Christian moral witness in the 21st century and beyond.

Peter M. Anderson
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, North Carolina, USA

---

Andrew T. Walker. *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity?* Epsom, UK: Good Book, 2017. 144 pp. £7.99/$14.99.

In *God and the Transgender Debate* (hereafter, GTD), Andrew Walker makes a compelling case for how Christians must engage in the debate over gender identity. Steeped in a deep reverence for and belief in the sufficiency of Scripture, Walker illustrates what thoughtful, compassionate, Christian engagement with a contemporary issue should look like in our culture.

GTD begins with a foreword from R. Albert Mohler, who situates the debate in the present culture before Walker introduces his audience to the Bible's perspective on gender identity. The first chapter sets the tone for the work. Walker cares little about merely winning a debate about gender identity. Instead, God's compassion as demonstrated in Jesus Christ motivates Walker's book. If evangelicals win a debate while the souls of the broken are lost, Walker recognizes that nothing of eternal value is gained. Walker understands this dynamic well. He writes, "Using Jesus as my example and my guide, I hope to offer in this book a compassionate way forward; a way that is different and, I believe, offers greater hope than many of the other voices in this debate" (p. 18). Christ's compassion compels Walker to enter the fray of transgender debate.

In chapter 2, readers find a helpful survey of the ideologies that precipitated the confusion of transgenderism. Transgenderism did not emerge in a vacuum. On the contrary, transgenderism is the heir of the sexual revolution, which was built on the foundation of relativism and radical individualism. With the decline of the Christian worldview in the public square, Walker notes that a gnostic worldview is shaping the culture. To equip the reader to engage with such a worldview in the transgender debate, Walker dedicates an entire chapter to defining terms. Chapter 3 is indispensable for those who are not well acquainted with the debate. Walker clarifies the difference between the following terms: sex, gender, gender identity, gender dysphoria, and transgender. There is also a glossary in the back of the book that defines several other terms in the debate. For the sake of clarity, chapter 3 alone is worth more than the price of the book. Walker returns to the topic of worldview in chapter 4. Following the guidance of James W. Sire's book, *The Universe Next Door*, Walker explains that everyone has a worldview, even if they are not conscious of it. Three questions (p. 39) frame this important chapter: "Who has the right to tell me what to do? Who knows what is best for me to do? Who loves me and wants what is best for me?" These three questions of authority, knowledge, and trustworthiness structure the chapter.
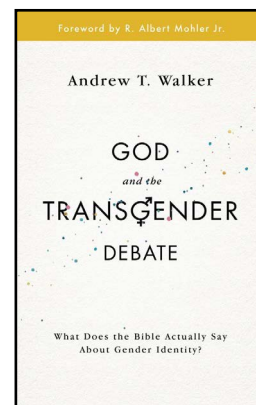
A conscientious reader will recognize the gospel pattern of chapters 5 through 8. Chapter 5 guides the reader down the gospel road by starting with God's good design in creation. Chapter 6 explores the effects of humanity's rebellion against God. Although God's good design for human gender is damaged by the fall of man, it is not destroyed. The goodness and beauty of gender persist, despite the brokenness that sin has brought into the world. At times, Walker notes, such brokenness will result in confusion and distortion of God's intention for gender. An example of such brokenness is found in the experience of gender dysphoria. Walker states that, much like a struggle with same-sex attraction, the experience of gender dysphoria is not itself sinful. In other words, while gender dysphoria part of life in a broken world, where sin has infected everything to one degree or another, it is not a matter of personal sin. The liability for sin occurs when one embraces the gender that is contrary to their biological sex.

In chapter 7, Walker continues to walk his audience down the road of redemption by pointing to the day when all the brokenness is mended forever in Christ. Walker writes, "So the answer to the person struggling with gender dysphoria is the same as the person struggling with any other product of the fall—there is hope, there can be change, and there will one day be total transformation" (p. 90). In chapter 8, Walker addresses love for one's neighbor. The question of what it mean to love one's neighbor is vital for the transgender debate, and Walker gets to the heart of the issue. Just as he mentioned the importance of defining the source of authority in previous chapters, Walker highlights the importance of understanding love from a biblical perspective. If God is love, he must have the final say in defining the terms. Walker convincingly demonstrates that neighbor love will promote dignity, express empathy, share truth, produce compassion, and be patient, especially with those who are living contrary to God's Word. Love does not require an affirmation of destructive behavior. In fact, such an affirmation would be the complete opposite of love. Hence, Christians cannot proceed in this debate without a clear, biblical understanding of love as defined by God.

Chapter 9 focuses the reader's attention on what it will mean to follow Jesus as someone who struggles with same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria. The embrace of these fallen affections is not a Christian option. Repentance instead of capitulation to sinful desire is necessary for following Jesus. In Chapter 10, Walker considers how the church can respond to the current challenges of the transgender debate with compassionate, gracious, convictional, patient, attentive gospel ministry. Chapter 11 attempts to offer guidance for parents and children navigating transgender issues, and Chapter 12 answers a series of difficult questions related to the transgender debate. In chapter 13, Walker concludes where he began, offering the hope found in Christ's outstretched hands.

GTD serves as an excellent introduction to the crucial issue of gender identity. This book is imminently accessible without being simplistic. Walker wrestles with the issues in a fair manner that reflects mature, compassionate and critical thinking. My only caution is for the reader who would dare to wade into the transgender debate without taking the time to digest Walker's careful argument. GTD is not a handbook for how to win a cultural debate. Instead, GTD is a guide for understanding how the gospel of Christ is relevant and sufficient for the current discussion about gender in the church and the world. Do not forget your own need for Christ as you seek to help others find him. Walker is a good and faithful guide in this discussion. Read this book carefully and thoughtfully as you seek to imitate Christ in this debate.

Casey B. Hough
First Baptist Church of Camden
Camden, Arkansas, USA

# ─ MISSION AND CULTURE ─

Mark Beaumont. *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018. 232 pp. £21.00/$29.00.

They say, "You can't judge a book by its cover." Once again, I learned this lesson the hard way. When I received Mark Beaumont's book *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation*, I naturally read the back-cover description. Two words that appear in that description and in the author's Preface set me on edge. The first word was that Jesus is "central" to Islam, juxtaposed (correctly) with Jesus being "the very center of the Christian faith" (p. ix). While Jesus indeed is an important figure in Islam, he merely plays supporting actor to Muhammad's lead.

Second, the back-cover features two fictional conversationalists, identifying them as the "representative" voices of Islam and Christianity (p. ix). *Themelios* readers can imagine the challenge of finding a "representative" voice for all of Christianity. From whence could such a voice emerge? Would it be an American Evangelical? A Korean Presbyterian? An African Pentecostal? A scholar? A layperson? The same daunting challenge exists in finding a truly representative voice for a world religion as diverse as that of Islam.

Despite these challenges, Mark Beaumont, an expert in the field of Islam, provides a brief work that is chocked full of important theological information. In a world of lamentable syncretism, his treatment of the interfaith Christological discussion is accurate and something biblically-conservative Christian readers will find to include a trustworthy presentation of the biblical Christology. Here are four of the book's main merits.

First and foremost, the christological question is critically important. Both Islam and Christianity have a role for Jesus, though his identity is contested. Is he merely a great prophet as Islam teaches? Or is he Lord, Savior, and the Son of God as Christianity teaches? This is a most important question for each individual heart, as eternity hangs in the balance.

Second, Beaumont selects fictional "representative" conversationalists that are indeed champion figures. Christians and Muslims comprise over half the world's population, with 2.4 billion of the former and 1.8 billion of the latter. Thus, there are *today* 4.32 x $10^{18}$ possible conversations between an individual Muslim and an individual Christian. (Of course, language and gender barriers would need to be overlooked.) Typed out, the possible number of Muslim-Christian interactions is 4,320,000,000,000,000,000!

Beaumont's well-informed scholars interact respectfully in these conversations, responding back-and-forth to each other's best points and arguments. Beaumont concedes that "Paul," the Christian representative, an American evangelical who has lived and taught in the Middle East, is similar but not identical to himself. "Ibrahim" is the Muslim conversationalist, a Sufi who follows this more mystical bent of Islam. Yet, Ibrahim is still a scriptural literalist when it comes to Islam, as is Paul regarding the Bible. Both readily cite their own and the others' scriptures in addition to pertinent secondary sources, including Augustine and the *Hadith*, sayings of Muhammad.

Third, Beaumont has the conversationalists, Paul and Ibrahim, present virtually every theological angle related to the following christological subtopics: Jesus's birth, miracles, teachings, divine sonship,
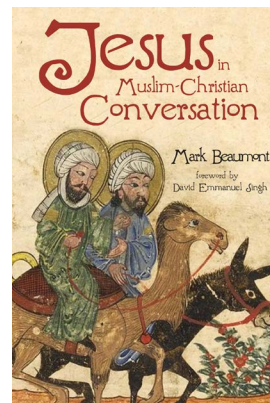
messianic claims, redemptive work, and second coming. This alone makes the book an instructive read for students of Christology. Though not overly combative, Beaumont's conversationalists do not gloss over their differences.

Fourth, Paul and Ibrahim provide excellent interaction with modern scholarship. For example, Beaumont has Ibrahim enlist the support of modern liberal Christian scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann (pp. 32, 199), John Hick (pp. 36, 208), Stanley Samartha (p. 208), as well as John Dominic Crossan of the Jesus Seminar (pp. 161, 199). Their skepticisms assail the high Christology of the Bible, mirroring the Islamic Christology on many points. Also, regarding the 2007 "Yale Response" to the Islamic Common Word inter-faith overture, the Christian conversationalist Paul provides an astute warning: "Some Christians responded to the *Common Word* document by saying that they were being invited by the Muslim scholars to enter Islam by accepting a Muslim version of Jesus" (p. 141).

What is left unaddressed? The book concludes somewhat abruptly with material concerning Christ's second coming. It ends with no summary statements, final arguments or overall conclusions offered by the conversationalists Paul and Ibrahim.

One lingering question is whether this Islamic Jesus and the biblical Jesus indeed point to the same actual historical figure. Ibrahim merely protests to Paul, "We are discussing different conceptions of Jesus and how they related to one another" (p. 113). Yet this does not resolve the main theological question. By analogy, suppose we asked, "What do you think of Thomas Jefferson?" Person A might respond, "President Thomas Jefferson was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and the main author of its Declaration of Independence. Quite a man!" Person B may counter, "This may be true, but Thomas Jefferson was also a slave owner." Person C may yet respond, "I don't like Thomas Jefferson. He parks his Ford in a way that sometimes blocks my driveway." In this discussion, Person A and Person B offer different opinions about former president Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), while Person C clearly talks about another person with the same name.

In Islam, Jesus is explicitly not divine. In the Bible, Jesus the Son of God is an inviolable part of the Godhead. Given these "mutually exclusive" options, Beaumont's conversationalists leave the reader still wondering if Christians and Muslims talk about the same Jesus. Perhaps this final pondering is intentionally left for the readers of this commendable, theologically-robust work. *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation* ranks in usefulness with Jeff Morton's creative *2 Messiahs*, in which the Islamic Jesus and the biblical Jesus find themselves talking to each other as they walk down the road together!

Fred Farrokh
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary
Springfield, Missouri, USA

Moyra Dale. *Shifting Allegiances: Networks of Kinship and of Faith: The Women's Program in a Syrian Mosque*. Australian College of Theology Monograph. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. xxv + 245 pp. £24.50/$33.00.

Moyra Dale presents the findings of her Melbourne School of Theology doctoral thesis in *Shifting Allegiances: Networks of Kinship and Faith: The Women's Program in a Syrian Mosque*. She provides a detailed ethnography of a particular women's mosque movement in Damascus, Syria. It serves as a periscope into the wider mosque movement among women within contemporary Islam. Through participant observation, note-taking, and recorded interviews, she collected data while attending events that were part of a women's program at a Sunni mosque in Syria from 2005–2007, just a few years prior to the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011.

Women scholars are not new in Islam. In recent decades, worldwide growth in women's education and access to religious materials have empowered women to redefine their personal identity. Traditionally, Islamic virtues are passed on within family and kinship networks. As Dale states, "Family, rather than friends, are the principal arbitrators of behavior and values (for women)" (p. 3). Her work asks two primary questions. First, what is the nature of an allegiance shift strong enough to move women away from traditional loyalties to kin, obedience to government, and conventional norms concerning female piety and docility? Second, how might this new allegiance reshape one's community, the ideal leader, gendered ways of being and doing, reading and understanding of religious texts, and a person's understanding of God?

The early chapters provide a basic understanding of research context and methods used. The remaining chapters examine three primary elements: the movement of women into what has traditionally been men's space, women's ability to read and teach sacred Islamic texts, and the learning and personal application of those texts to their lives. Dale's research is meticulous and well-supported. In addition to performing all research in Arabic, she invited feedback from the program's founder and leader, Anisah Huda, as well as input from attendees. She also draws widely from other scholars familiar with the Islamic revival among women. Her bibliography is a rich resource to readers.

Dale's ethnography offers fascinating insights into a shift in honor paradigms among Muslim women. Modernity has allowed women to disentangle themselves from the constraints of traditionally dictated honor within the family. Therefore, women take risks to find honor from a different source: the *ummah*, or imaginary larger religious community, made physical and real in the mosque space. Women shamed by their families for attending night classes at the mosque have found new honor as readers and interpreters of sacred texts in the women's mosque programs. In the kinship tradition, honor practices and behaviors are gendered: women bear the burden of honor bodily and socially. However, in the mosque community, honor practices and behaviors are more closely tied to the prophet Muhammed. He becomes the standard by which they interpret personal honor and apply it to their family and social roles.

Historically, men typically conduct mosque lectures and teaching involving women, family, and marriage. They use texts interpreted by men. In Huda's mosque program, women teach other women, interpret sacred texts, and applying it to their lives. This gendered shift is one of the most striking observations found in Dale's work. Faith has previously been primarily defined in male terms by male
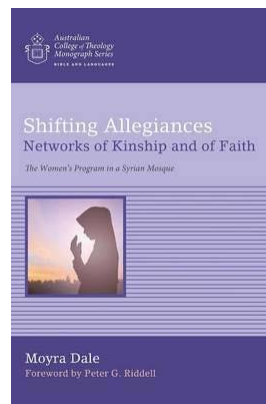
authority. In the Garden Mosque of Damascus, women redefined their faith in the context of their everyday lives and relationships. Huda's teaching continually emphasized the importance of knowledge. She states, "Muhammad said learning is better than worship" (p. 155). Huda taught that when students learn their rights and responsibilities as Muslim women, they are no longer just members of their extended family but also of their greater ethnic groups. Through self-examination and knowledge, women are in a stronger position to handle life issues.

At one point, the students controversially and courageously released a CD of women singing religious songs. In a group, one voice could not be discerned above the rest. Traditionally, women's voices are part of their *'awrah*, that which is indecent to reveal, as they can evoke temptation for men. By creating a female choir recording, the women exhibited astute manipulation of traditional piety rules so that their voices might still be heard while simultaneously masking individual voices. The book says little about the response of men and the wider community to the women's program. Did the women's reinterpretation and application of texts effect change? How did the women's program impact the community? Did it help them within the contexts of kinship and family?

*Shifting Allegiances* is not for the faint at heart. The use of specialized anthropological language and paradigms makes the reading laborious at times for non-specialists. However, Dale's conscientious and thorough study of the Islamic revival among women is an invaluable contribution to understanding the wider mosque movement within contemporary Islam. Given the extreme changes in Syria since the time of Dale's research, her findings leave us with many questions. How did those years of learning impact the women who were later displaced? Have they found it easier to survive spiritually in the greater *ummah* after being torn from their communities of kinship and family? And, notably, how does this movement place these women in a posture of preparedness for hearing the gospel of Christ?

Dale does not provide direct applications for the Christian working among Muslims, but much can be drawn from her observations. Muslim women are seeking community outside traditional kinship and family groups, increasing their knowledge of sacred texts, and pursuing a greater understanding of God. Christians can invite them to find connection in Bible study groups, Christian women's fellowship groups, and church. We can engage women in studying biblical texts and examine how they apply to life issues of life. Of course, we should share how Jesus restores honor to women and acknowledges their value. Dale's work shows us women who want to know God for themselves and ways we can help them find him.

Audrey Frank
Vision 5:9
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Steve Sang-Cheol Moon. *The Korean Missionary Movement: Dynamics and Trends, 1988–2013*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016. xxiii + 320 pp. £17.79/$24.99.

Steve Moon has been a researcher with the Korea Research Institute for Mission (KRIM) since 1990 and has served as its executive director since 1998. After receiving a doctorate at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he is now a World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission associate and contributing editor of the *International Bulletin of Mission Research.*

*The Korean Missionary Movement* is a collection of Moon's previously written articles and book chapters concerning the Korean mission movement. The book covers topics such as the Korean church's explosive growth, eventual plateauing, finances, missionary kids, leadership, a hostage incident, contextualization, ministering to Muslims, partnership, accountability, and missionary families. Each chapter offers extensive statistics as well as practical analysis of those statistics.
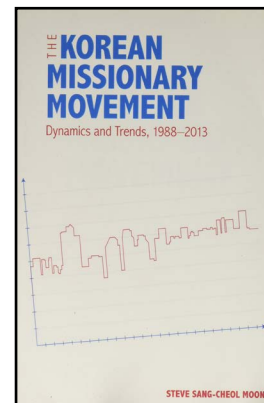
The Korean mission movement is the largest majority world mission movement in the world. The number of Korean missionaries has increased dramatically, particularly between 1980 and 2013. For instance, there were 100 missionaries in 1980, 1,000 in 1989, 10,000 in 2002, and 20,000 in 2013 (p. 8). The purpose of Moon's book is to examine the Korean mission movement in greater detail. Moon not only focuses on the successes of the Korean mission movement; he also looks at its low points, weaknesses, and challenges.

Moon explains the various kinds of ministries by which Korean missionaries serve (p. 38). He identifies the locations where Korean missionaries serve (pp. 4–5). Moon recounts how the Korean mission movement was born out of a large spiritual revival in Korea in the 1960s and 1970s (pp. 6–7). Korea's economic development aided the mushrooming of the Korean mission movement. Korean churches had more money and thus were able to send more missionaries (pp. 6–7).

Moon is a meticulous researcher. He has gathered his data on Korean missions over multiple decades, doing research projects for the KRIM at least every other year from 1990 to the present (p. xviii). The KRIM includes in their "missionary" count only those who belong to mission agencies and reach non-Koreans outside of Korea (p. xviii). Moon receives his data from Korean mission agencies who send him their agency's information annually or every other year. The data is gathered through questionnaire surveys, interviews, and "direct observation" (p. xxii). The KRIM research team is rigorous to confirm the reliability of the statistics from the mission agencies (p. xxii).

Moon at present is the primary expert of the Korean mission movement. His research over the years has assisted Korean mission leaders in better understanding their own mission agencies and how to improve their effectiveness and fruitfulness. Chapter 9 illustrates the practical importance of Moon's research. The entire chapter concerns Korean missionary kids (MKs), of which there are over 18,000 Korean MKs. These Korean MKs have unique situations and challenges that merit research and are important to the Korean mission movement. Mission agencies and researchers around the world would do well to follow Moon's example.

The one drawback of this book is that it is a collection of articles written over a twenty-year period. Consequently, some material inevitably will be outdated or irrelevant. Nevertheless, many of the

principles that Moon highlight are still pertinent today. The majority of the book's chapters were written in the last five or ten years and are apropos for the present-day situation.

*The Korean Missionary Movement* is certainly the most thorough and best-researched book on Korean missions and about any particular majority world mission movement. Because Korea is the largest and best studied majority world mission movement, this book could help other majority world mission leaders around the world. The Korean movement is not without weakness and error; yet, its exponential growth in a comparatively short period is noteworthy. Having begun in the 1970s, the movement has been continued for almost fifty years. At present, the Korean mission movement has over 20,000 missionaries serving all over the world. The next largest majority world mission movement is that of COMIBAM in Latin America with approximately 10,000 missionaries, less than half the missionaries in the Korean mission movement. This book can benefit anyone interested in the study of majority world missions or the Korean mission movement specifically.

Tabor Laughlin
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois, USA

---

Rick Sessoms. *Leading with Story: Cultivating Christ-centered Leaders in a Storycentric Generation*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016. 270 pp. £16.42/$17.99.

---

In *Leading with Story*, Rick Sessoms addresses "three factors related to Christian leaders that are hindering the healthy advance of the gospel in the twenty-first century" (p. xxi). First, according to Sessoms, 80% of the world, including 70% of Americans are storycentric learners; that is, they prefer to learn through non-literate means. Second, Christian leadership development lacks a comprehensive approach and suffers from a lack of validated methods for effectiveness. Third, Christian leaders around the world tend to lead according to a power structure respective of their culture rather than functioning as servant-leaders like Jesus. In sum, Sessoms claims to provide "a foundation for Christ-centered leadership in today's world" (p. xxi).

The book targets a wide range of readers, including mission and church leaders, leadership development trainers, and those without a designated leadership role but find themselves serving in story-centric communities. Sessoms views his work as "a comprehensive model with a proven development process to become an effective Christ-centered leader" (p. xxiii).

*Leading with Story* breaks down into four sections. Part one defines and describes story-centric learning, which is essentially built on principles based on what is also called the orality movement. Part two describes leadership development in general within the Christian community. It makes the case that a comprehensive scope is essential for holistic development of Christ-centered leaders. Part three focuses specifically on Christ-centered leadership. This includes leading with a long-term perspective, being virtue-centered rather than power-centered, and leading others toward their full potential as Christian leaders within their communities. Part four is a case study describing how Sessoms's model can work in an overseas setting.
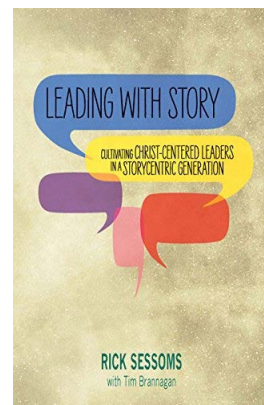
The book is helpful in many regards. The core of the "storycentric" approach draws from orality principles that have been utilized in evangelism and church planting for several decades. Sessoms attempts to transfer those principles to leadership development. He writes, "our use of the term *story* refers to the 'scaffolding' that aids in communication, retention, and application" (p. 35). Story contains characters, plots, and lessons with which emerging leaders can identify and immerse themselves. Storytelling is already a part of the teaching and learning styles of story-centric peoples around the world. It is also something to which emerging millennials are especially drawn (p. 48). The author recognizes a cultural shift in leadership style and perception among younger generations in the West who are drawn to relational components of leadership like apprenticing and relational feedback.

Parts two and three are helpful for moving leadership development away from power, pride, and position, and toward humility and service. Millennials respond to feedback, challenge, and support, Sessoms writes, when done under the umbrella of humility (pp. 89–94). Authentic relationships are more powerful than hierarchical leadership structures for the younger generation (p. 187). No one leadership style is best. More effective is a situational approach rooted in the relational dynamic between leader and apprentice (pp. 205–6). Sessoms does well to include biblical competency as an equal component alongside leadership skill, which is sometimes lacking in Christian agencies.

The book, however, seems disjointed overall, as though two books were meshed together. The introduction and part one present a case for orality methods in pre-literate and non-western contexts, including stories from India and Indonesia. The remainder of the book seems highly Western-centric, focusing on leadership models and styles foreign to the very story-centric cultures for which the book purports to be written (e.g., efficiency, strategic planning, long-term planning, and orientation to life). I see the book primarily as a leadership development book (for which it excels), which is then cast unfittingly into a "storycentric" mold.

Additionally, the book overstates the ability of orality to maintain pure doctrine while claiming support from validated research. Many of its statistics and examples are anecdotal. For example, one story describes how literacy-based discipleship led to heretical doctrine in an Asian church whereas storycentric training fostered biblical truth (p. 48). No footnote is provided to support this story. Furthermore, books on orality tend to recycle these same stories with no effort to discern the reliability and nature of the original research. Another story tells of an oral seminary in Africa that produced students with "far superior" theological understanding compared to a literacy-based school. The reference Sessoms provides on page 49 is incorrect when I attempted to look it up in *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lima, NY: International Orality Network, 2005). Although many regard this primer on orality as the gold standard in orality research and practice, it too has problems with accuracy and reliability, as I found in my dissertation research.

Furthermore, in an effort to show how the world and Americans are "storycentric," Sessoms quotes several figures from orality expert Grant Lovejoy (p. xxi). Lovejoy referenced a study on literacy by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. Having seen these figures many times, I looked up the original study. Sessoms writes that 80% of the world's people and 70% of Americans are storycentric learners. However, according to the original literacy assessment itself, 57% of the American population are sufficiently literate for moderately challenging activities, and a full 86% are literate enough to perform everyday literacy activities. Where the 70% comes from, based on this study, is a mystery to me. The study also makes no mention of world statistics, so where does the 80% figure originate? Sessoms does not attempt to demonstrate how these figures translate to someone being "storycentric."

Despite my concerns, *Leading with Story* is an excellent book on Christ-centered leadership development and has much to offer, especially for those working in Western contexts. I recommend this book to those wanting a fresh perspective on Christian leadership. This is a leadership book, not a storycentric leadership book, and in that regard, it succeeds.

Anthony Casey
William Carey University
Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA

---

Jarvis J. Williams and Kevin M. Jones, eds. *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention*. Nashville: B&H Academic. lx + 179 pp. £18.79/$24.99.

The image of a "stain" is used in the title of the recent book *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention.* A stain, after all, is dirty, damaging, and can be quite difficult to clean. For several African-Americans in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the stain of racism is too deep for any hope of cleansing. But for the African-American contributors in this book and their white co-contributors, "The gospel of Jesus Christ requires and demands all Southern Baptists to do their parts to erase this stain from the SBC—or at least to make the stain less apparent" (p. xxv).

Each contributor represents a particular segment of Southern Baptist Convention life and influence. Two writers are SBC seminary presidents, and one is a college dean. Several authors serve as Southern Baptist seminary professors, while two serve in other schools related to the SBC. Two serve on the state convention levels, and two serve as pastors in SBC churches. One works at Lifeway, the SBC's products and services ministry.

Such an interdisciplinary lineup produces a work that can analyze the complexities of racism from multiple angles and perspectives. Doing so reinforces the contention that racism, if it will be "erased" or at least "less apparent," must be addressed across the board. Mohler (pp. 1–6) and Hall (pp. 7–14) consider the historical roots of SBC racism, from its birth over the issue of slavery to the Jim Crow era. Williams (pp. 15–51) and Strickland (pp. 53–60) consider biblical and theological grounds for racial harmony.

The next five chapters address practical steps toward progress. Mitchell (pp. 61–70) addresses the anti-racism contributions of SBC ethicists and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC. Other contexts include pastoral (Smith, pp. 71–79), administration (Croston, pp. 81–87), education (Jones, pp. 89–103), and publishing (Jennings, pp. 105–11). The book concludes with a summary from Woods (pp. 113–29), personal testimonies from McKissic (pp. 131–35) and Akin (pp. 137–41), and a postscript from Walker (pp. 143–47). The book also includes a catalog of the race-related resolutions adopted at past SBC Annual Meetings (pp. xxxv–lix), a reading list for further research (pp. 149–58), and a sample syllabus for an introduction to African-American history (pp. 159–64).

Several features make this a useful resource. First, the book's brevity makes it easy to hand to anyone interested in an introduction to the subject matter. Second, the authors, as Southern Baptists, are candid about the history of their denomination. Both African-American and Caucasian writers are
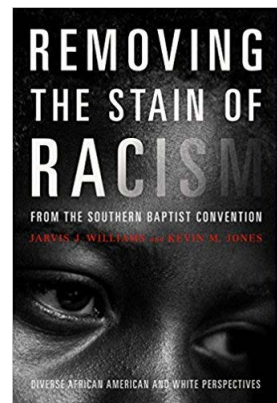
additionally candid about their own experiences of racism. Williams speaks of his experience as the first black member of an all-white Kentucky SBC church (pp. 17–20). Smith discusses his experiences growing up in predominately black non-SBC churches and spending his adult years in predominately SBC institutions (pp. 73–74). Woods recounts his experiences as a minority in a ministry moving toward diversity (pp. 115–19). Akin shares his perspective as a lifelong Southerner grappling with the racial sins of the past and present (pp. 139–41).

Third, the writers give intentional steps towards removing the stain. They speak of individual steps, like developing personal relationships beyond one's personal ethnic group (p. 47) and providing opportunities for the voiceless to speak out (pp. 59–60). They also speak of institutional steps, like more minority leadership representation (pp. 46–47), incorporating diverse cultural expressions like music into local church gatherings (p. 79), disconnecting political alliances (pp. 85–86), and adjusting academic curricula for better representation (pp. 89–103).

Several features would make this work better. First, while several writers mention the need for diversity among SBC ranks, expanding the list of contributors from other ethnic groups would help broaden the conversation beyond the two ethnic groups currently represented. Second, while the book's size makes it easily accessible, some chapters could be lengthened. For instance, direct quotes from Southern Baptist leaders of the past would help to reinforce the claims of racism. Williams's 38-page chapter, the longest in the book, only has eighteen pages of actual lexical/exegetical study. In addition, Hall's account of the history of the SBC is helpful (pp. 7–14); nonetheless, the SBC's racist history is puzzling given the catalog of resolutions also included in the book. Is there an explanation to reconcile both realities? Further exploration into matters like this may give deeper insight into the complexities of the Southern Baptist story.

Third, while several SBC entities are represented, one notable omission is the International Mission Board (IMB). How does the issue of race affect the SBC missionary movement? What are the ethnic demographics of the IMB? Does the very nature of international missions help to curb racist ideologies and behaviors? If racism exists on the field, what are practical ways to address it?

The fourth improvement is a minor one regarding format. Woods's chapter seems meant to conclude the book, but he references a quote from Akin (p. 122), which does not come until the second epilogue later in the book (p. 139). Future versions of this book may want to put Woods's chapter later in the book to serve as a better conclusion.

There is promise in this book. The forthrightness of the title is matched with straightforward content and clarity throughout the book. The individual and institutional steps recommended in this book may prove prudent for the Southern Baptists who take up and read. May it further the internal discussions toward action, lest the stain linger for another generation.

Ronjour M. Locke
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, North Carolina, USA